

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

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

PEACE AND GOODWILL

George Grenfell on the Congo - I

Some thirteen years ago in Gateshead, I was shown a small rectangular piece of iron a few inches square. The owner, Miss Peggy McKercher, proudly told me it was a fragment of the BMS ship, Peace. My interest caught, I have since pursued the largely forgotten story of determination and dedication to Christ. Modern Zaire is very different from the land and peoples that the first BMS missionaries encountered so I have kept to the old name of Congo to describe situations and events of the past.

Beginnings

Written European history of the Congo begins in 1485-6, when the Portuguese navigator, Diego Cam, reached the mouth of the Congo river (also called the Nzadi, from which the name Zaire derives). He sailed to Matadi, the highest navigable point from the Atlantic, and proceeded overland to the capital of the King of Congo, now the Angolan town of Mbanza Kongo (under Portuguese rule, San Salvador). In 1491 another Portuguese expedition came to the area and the King and Queen of Congo were baptized, taking the Christian names of John and Leonora. In the reign of the next king, Alphonso (1492-1525), Portuguese dominance was established, and with it a veneer of Roman Catholic Christianity. There is a reasonable history of Congo up to 1670 by the Catholic missionary, Father Cavazzi. This suggests a somewhat chaotic relationship: the Portuguese priests and monks sent to Congo were not of high calibre. King Diogo (1532-1540) was so disillusioned with them that he ordered all immoral and unruly clerics and monks to be tied up and shipped back to São Tomé. A raid by the cannibal Giagaswas eventually repulsed with Portuguese help. After this the Portuguese built walls at San Salvador which survived as ruins when the first BMS missionaries arrived long after. The first Englishman to reach the Congo was a shipwrecked sailor, Andrew Battell. He eventually returned home via the West Indies. The Portuguese encountered other problems, including famine and plague. In 1610 the Dutch seized Loanda and maintained a foothold there for some years: later the BMS were to have considerable help from the Dutch Trading House at the mouth of the Congo. In 1663 there was a temporary resurgence of paganism, when the king killed many princes to establish his succession.

After 1670 information is even more sparse. Throughout the next 150 years there were sporadic contacts with Roman Catholic missionaries and a vague Portuguese suzerainty. It is unlikely that they ever reached Stanley Pool, although rumours of the upper Congo may have reached San Salvador and Loanda. The priests were usually naval chaplains based on the coast. A cathedral was built at San Salvador (Holman Bentley saw the ruins in the 1880s). Christianity had some vague influence on the Congolese animism. The King of Congo had a crucifix among his regalia. Some Congolese, like the uncle of Bentley's first convert, worshipped a brass crucifix. The 'santu' fetish, shaped like a cross, was widely believed to give good luck with hunting, provided the owner was sexually moral.

Unfortunately Portuguese missionaries were often accompanied by Portuguese slave-traders. This trade, along with the enthusiasm for hunting down 'witches', caused serious depopulation in many areas. By 1817 the slave-trade was officially banned by all European nations yet still continued: in the late 1860s the yacht *Wanderer* managed some slaving right under the nose of the British Navy. In the interior Arabs continued the slave-trade, and the Congolese themselves often dealt in slaves in exchange for ivory. Moreover, some of the African workmen hired by Europeans from Liberia and Sierra Leone (the 'Krumanos') were treated little better than slaves. The African climate and attendant diseases took a great toll of Europeans, but ivory was still an attraction. The eventual abolition of slavery in the USA brought a new interest in Africa to resettle freed slaves. Liberia and Sierra Leone were founded for this purpose, and hopes were entertained of similar settlements further south around Fernando Po and the Cameroon coast. Here the Baptist Missionary Society was first involved.

From 1827 Fernando Po was a British naval base, whence Royal Navy ships patrolled against the slave-trade. The bad climate forced them to leave in 1845, but the BMS work, begun here in 1843, continued under Spanish rule until 1858. The pioneers were Saker and Merrick. Merrick, a West Indian and a considerable linguist, died in 1849. Alfred Saker (1814-1880) worked in Fernando Po and the neighbouring Cameroons until 1876. Towards the end of his life, he enrolled the young George Grenfell as one of his helpers.

Born at Borough Green, Kent, the son of a millwright, Saker worked at Woolwich Arsenal and Deptford dockyard before joining the BMS in 1843. The Spaniards, although ready to use the medical skills of Saker's colleague, Dr Prince, put obstacles in the way of Protestant missionary work. Eventually the Baptists were expelled. They then began work at Victoria and Bimbia on the Cameroon coast. Saker was an explorer and a practical man. He made several inland trips to climb mountains in the Cameroons. Finding that termites were a menace, eating not only furniture but wooden houses too, he introduced brick-making to provide lasting homes. Harassed by slave-traders and by some local people, he persevered with school-work and preaching.

In 1864-9 there was friction between Saker and some of his younger colleagues, who thought him not spiritual enough, spending too much time on building and exploring. The BMS sent Dr Underhill out to investigate. In spite of his wife's death from fever during the visit, Dr Underhill fully vindicated Saker and no more criticism was heard. David Livingstone's declared: 'Take it for all in all, specially having regard to its many-sided character, the work of Alfred Saker at Cameroons and Victoria is, in my judgement, the most remarkable on the African coast.'

Home on furlough in 1874, Alfred Saker recruited George Grenfell. Together they used the little launch, *Helen Saker*, to explore the rivers of the Cameroon mainland. In 1876 Thomas Comber joined them, and later that year Saker finally returned to England. BMS work in the Cameroons continued ten years more. In 1882 the Duala chiefs of the Cameroon coast sought British annexation, but the

Foreign Office bungled it. British representatives came and went but gave no definite reply to the chiefs. A British gunboat came in 1884, promising that within a week a British consul would arrive to sign a treaty. No consul appeared, but the Germans arrived in a gunboat of their own and promptly signed a treaty with the Duala chiefs. Protracted negotiations followed but by 1887 all the Cameroons were under German rule and the imposition of the German language brought BMS work to an end. During a local revolt that year most of the BMS buildings were destroyed. Baptist work there was handed over to the German-speaking Swiss of the Basel Mission.

By then, however, the BMS was heavily committed in the Congo. Within a year of Saker's departure, the Congo was in the news. In 1877 Stanley was fighting his way down the Congo river, and Robert Arthington proposed BMS work there. The men Saker had taken to the Cameroons took up that challenge.

Stanley, Arthington and Grenfell

Before his famous meeting with Stanley at Ujiji in 1871, David Livingstone had discovered the river Lualaba at Nyangwe during his explorations from the east coast. He thought it might be the headwaters of the Nile, others suggested it might flow into the Niger. From its northward flow there, either suggestion was plausible. While Stanley sought him from the east, others tried to reach Livingstone from the Atlantic coast. In 1872 Lieutenant Grandy reached San Salvador, where the King of Congo was quite interested in the party holding services in English. Stanley returned to Africa in 1874, and by 1876 had travelled as far as Lake Tanganyika before coming to Nyangwe. Accompanied by a party of some 150, mostly Zanzibaris, he tried to follow the Lualaba river down, helped by an Arab merchant and slave-trader, Tipu-Tib. Reaching the rapids later known as 'Stanley Falls', he was provided with boats and, saying goodbye to his Arab friend, set off downstream into the unknown. His epic journey included several fights with cannibals. The river turned first west, then south-west, until at last Stanley reached the end of navigable waters at 'Stanley Pool' (where the modern capital, Kinshasa, stands). Abandoning their boats, they had a difficult journey via the Isangila Falls before reaching the coast at Boma. Stanley published the story in the *Daily Telegraph* in September 1877. A month earlier the BMS Committee had accepted a proposal for work in Congo, including a steamship on the river.

Robert Arthington, 'the miser of Headingley Lane', came from a wealthy Quaker family. His father, who had voluntarily ceased from his highly profitable brewing business as a matter of conscience, left his son some £200,000. Robert Arthington lived frugally and devoted much of his wealth to charitable causes. Almost a millionaire, he left nine-tenths of his estate between the Baptist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society. Although officially a Quaker, he also attended local Baptist churches. This strange, reclusive man was a key figure. On 4 May 1877 he wrote to the BMS, referring to Lt Grandy's visit in 1873 and the interest shown by the King of Congo, and offered £1000 towards a scheme to begin missionary work there, with a view to extending right across Africa, suggesting:

By and by, possibly, we may be able to extend the mission eastwards on the Congo at a point above the rapids. But, however that may be, I hope that soon we shall have a steamer on the Congo, if it should be found requisite, and carry the gospel eastwards, and south and north of the river, as the way may open as far as Nyangwe.

The BMS accepted his offer in July. A few weeks later, all Britain was reading of Stanley's exploits, proving beyond all doubt that the Lualaba and the Congo were one river. Making resolutions in committee was one thing; carrying them out in nineteenth-century Africa was another, but in God's providence the right people were within reach. Peace had been secured along the West African coast, since Admiral Hewitt had finally put down the pirates in 1875. So the BMS wrote to Grenfell and Comber, asking them to go and assess the situation in the Congo.

George Grenfell was born in Cornwall at Sancreed, near Penzance, but his parents moved to Birmingham in 1852 when he was only three. After his father died, his mother returned to her Cornish relatives, and George's children were to spend much time in the family home there. In Birmingham George joined Heneage Street Baptist Sunday School. He was converted and baptized in 1865, and soon showed particular interest in overseas missionary work. He followed Livingstone's adventures with interest and founded the Birmingham Young Men's Baptist Missionary Society to promote concern for evangelism overseas. He started work in the office of an engineering factory, where he dealt with orders. As a result of an accident in the factory he lost an eye. After hearing Alfred Saker in Birmingham, he went to Bristol Baptist College in 1873. His stay there was neither long nor distinguished. Fascinated by the Bristol docks, he found the academic work hard. In December 1874 he set off with Saker, already a sick man, for Africa. His luggage included a special stock of glass eyes, which probably gave rise to his Congolese nickname, 'Tala tala' - 'Look, look'. In 1876 he returned to England and married Mary Hawkes. Together they went back to work in Congo.

Thomas Comber had been born in 1852, the son of a manufacturing jeweller in Camberwell, London. He grew up in a loving Christian family. His elder sister, Carrie, and younger brothers, Sidney and Percy, were all to give their lives in Christ's service in Africa. When Thomas was twelve, their mother died but the father kept the family together, taking Thomas to work for him. The family attended the Baptist chapel in Denmark Place, where Thomas was baptized in 1868. He went to evening classes at Spurgeon's College, then studied at Regent's Park College, assisted by Sunday School collections. From 1874 he took Wednesday night children's services at Camden Road Chapel, where he worked with John Hartland, who later joined him in Africa. Accepted for service with the BMS in 1875, he spent a year in medical training. The Camden Road children raised funds to hire him an African servant, who was called 'Camden Road' or 'Cam' for short and proved a great help to Comber.

Just as Grenfell and Comber were being asked to explore the possibilities in Congo, Grenfell's wife died in childbirth in early January 1878. Nevertheless, they

set off from the Cameroons on 23 January, taking the opportunity offered by the small steamer that supplied the 'Dutch House' at the river mouth. The steamer unloaded at Banana Point, whence a 30-ton steamer, the *Zaire*, ferried goods up to Boma and Matadi. Beyond this the river was impassable. The trading settlements at Banana Point and Boma held a mixture of traders, especially Dutch and Portuguese trading in ivory from the interior. John Scott, a half-caste, on the run from the British authorities for slave-trading, proved a useful friend to the missionaries in the early years.

Making a second attempt, Grenfell and Comber hired local porters and on 30 July set off on foot inland from Boma for San Salvador. They arrived on 8 August, and had an audience with the king, Don Pedro V, Ntotela Ntinu Nekongo, who ruled a fairly small area around San Salvador, owing nominal allegiance to the Portuguese rulers at Loanda, some two hundred miles away. He received the missionaries in state. Through an interpreter they sought permission to live in his town. He was quite welcoming, although somewhat puzzled by his visitors. Other chiefs were less sympathetic: after hearing the Christian message of salvation and resurrection, the chief of Tungwa responded, 'If they want to tell us about dying, go away. There is too much dying here already.' Many were puzzled because Grenfell and Comber had not come to buy ivory. Before leaving, Grenfell and Comber added their initials to Lt Grandy's on a large baobab tree. They had the approval of the king; now they must find the necessary workers.

Comber returned to England to report to the BMS and recruit workers. Grenfell left the service of the BMS for a while and seems to have contemplated some kind of commercial enterprise. In the Cameroons in 1879 he married Rose Patience Edgerley, who was of West Indian descent, her family belonging to the community established as a mission colony first at Port Clarence in 1827 and later settled by Saker at Victoria, Ambas Bay. This second marriage was a great success. Mrs Grenfell was to accompany him to Congo and be his lifelong helper although she was never recognized by the BMS as a missionary.

Comber recruited H. E. Crudgington, Holman Bentley, and his old friend, John Hartland. Crudgington had studied at Rawdon College and Leeds Infirmary. Bentley was the son of an eminent Hebrew scholar and was to become a noted linguist himself. His *Pioneering in the Congo*, in two volumes, is a mine of information for the period up to 1900. Meanwhile Comber lectured to the Royal Geographical Society, of which he was made a Fellow. He married Minnie Rickards, the daughter of his old Sunday School Superintendent. When the party set out from Liverpool in April 1879, they were accompanied by Richards and Vickers of the Livingstone Inland Mission. They hoped to settle on the Lower Congo river at Palabala, near Matadi. Later the BMS were to receive considerable help from Dr Sims of that mission. On the voyage they all studied Portuguese, the trade language of the lower Congo. Holman Bentley noted that in English 'nigger' was offensive, but at that time 'negro' was not. In Portuguese, however, 'negro' was not acceptable and the word 'preto' ('black') had to be used.

As the ship made its leisurely way down the West African coast, they recruited African servants from various ports of call. Kru servants from Sierra Leone and Liberia were preferred, but they also recruited from Accra and Lagos. They proved reliable porters, and some could interpret. Misilina, an Angolan ex-slave, who could speak English, Portuguese, and Kikongo, was Bentley's interpreter. The contribution to the mission of these African workers has never been properly acknowledged. Without them the Europeans would have found the initial stages impossible. In the mission story they remain mainly in the shadows, only surfacing during occasional sensational incidents, like fights with crocodiles. There were a few lapses, due to superstition or plain fear, but these indentured servants gave fine service.

After a passing visit to J. J. Fuller, the Jamaican Baptist working in the Cameroons, they eventually came to sea-water coloured brown - a sign that they were off the mouth of the Congo river. They disembarked at the sandy spit of Banana Point. Their stores were unloaded, including donkeys for transport. That day, 7 June 1879, marked the real beginning of BMS work in the Congo.

San Salvador and the road to Stanley Pool

Getting to San Salvador, let alone Stanley Pool, was not easy. Years after, when the 230 miles long, Matadi-Kinshasa railway had been built, Grenfell remarked that the joys of 'a tramp in the tropics' were highly over-rated. The country was broken by many steep-sided valleys, covered with dense vegetation. Grass grew to eighteen feet high. The missionaries had to hire many local carriers, whom they normally paid in yards of calico cloth. The carriers often struck for more pay. According to Livingstone, the Africans thought the white man 'rich, strong, very funny, and to be used withal.'

On the way up from the coast the party stopped with some Portuguese traders at Porta de Lenha, and that night one of their hosts, with his small daughter, was eaten by a crocodile which upset his canoe as he was returning home. In spite of such unsettling experiences, Crudgington and Bentley reached San Salvador, followed soon after by Mr and Mrs Comber and John Hartland. A member of the king's court, Mateko, who later became a Christian, lent them part of his house until they could build their own of wood and grass.

Then tragedy struck. Mrs Comber, who had taken the whole adventure splendidly in her stride, suddenly developed meningitis. On 24 August she died. The Congolese saw how their new friends faced grief, as Crudgington and Hartland conducted the funeral. Thomas Comber set out immediately after with Hartland to try to find a way to Stanley Pool. They were soon turned back by suspicious and hostile tribes, for the King of Congo's power did not extend far. Bentley and Crudgington remained at San Salvador, holding services in English at first, with a sermon in Portuguese. The old king attended and Dom Garcia, one of his ministers, translated the teaching. The missionaries also tried to start a school. The ruins of the stone walls and cathedral at San Salvador suggested to Hartland that they might be able to build stone houses, more weatherproof than the usual local dwellings. There was stone to quarry and

outcrops of limestone for cement. Congolese gunpowder was unpredictable: Hartland burnt off his beard and whiskers while quarrying. By March 1880, the lower part of a house had been built with stone; the upper part was made of wood, thatched with local grass.

Roman Catholic missionaries from France had settled on the lower reaches of the river at Boma, and Père Carrié, their superior, wrote a long letter to the King of the Congo, warning him to beware of the Protestant missionaries. The letter was so weird and inaccurate as to be laughable, but the poor old king was terribly puzzled. Later Bentley visited Père Carrié and they got on quite well, but at this stage the missionaries could have done without the complication.

Christmas 1879 was celebrated with Christian services, followed by sports. The Congolese were baffled by the idea of winners in the various races, but viewed the ways of the missionaries with benevolent tolerance. After Christmas, Comber was off again, earning his local name, 'Vianga-vianga' (hurry, hurry). First he and Crudginton sought the still-elusive trail to Stanley Pool, and then in March he had to go down to the coast, for their former friend, John Scott, had fled to Spain, leaving debts, some of which the BMS eventually met.

Meanwhile Bentley was very busy at San Salvador. Already he was getting to grips with the local language. Misilina did his best as translator, but occasionally let his imagination run away with him. Once Bentley was preaching on the Holy Spirit to the king, who became excited. Bentley found Misilina was telling him how the Roman Catholic bishop on the coast had been seized by the devil when he died! Apparently some Portuguese ships had fired rockets after the funeral, giving rise to this interpretation. The Congolese attributed almost every death to witchcraft and spent much time hunting down 'witches' alleged to have caused deaths. Spiritual fireworks interested them far more than the moral demands of the gospel, Misilina explained to Bentley, and faithful translations would not hold large congregations!

Missionary example made more impression than their preaching. Slave-owning was still common throughout the Congo area and slaves were of little value. One day Bentley found a slave-boy, called Tembe, abandoned by his master because he was ill. Bentley took care of the boy, who became his servant for a while, but then went missing, to be found dying of a fever. It was the local custom to bury the dead in a roll of cloth, the more important the deceased, the bigger the roll. Bentley buried little Tembe in fifty yards of cloth, a princely funeral. This, following his care for the child impressed everyone from the king down and did much to commend Christianity.

Comber and Hartland set out again for Stanley Pool, accompanied by their Kru servants. This time they nearly met with disaster. At Makuta, the local chief and people were hostile and had old muskets loaded with slugs of iron ore. All the Krus except Comber's personal servant, Cam, ran away. Next day the missionaries were fired on, and Comber was hit in the back. Hartland and Cam insisted on dragging him away with them, covering some eighty miles in three and a half days. On the way a woman gave the fugitives water and a little food, refusing payment. Later she

became a Christian, one of the early members of the San Salvador church. Back at San Salvador, Crudgington prized the slug from Comber's back - mercifully it had not damaged spine or lungs. The people of San Salvador were outraged at such treatment and would have launched an immediate reprisal raid, but the chief and sub-chief of the Makuta area both died suddenly of disease, and smallpox ravaged their territory. The word went round that it was desperately unlucky to attack missionaries. Thereafter little or no violence against missionaries was recorded in the Congo area. The missionaries were encouraged by news of a new colleague, Herbert Dixon, and in the new year 1881 by the return of Grenfell with his wife.

The great powers were accelerating the scramble for West Africa. The Portuguese still had links with the kingdom of Congo and areas further south along the coast round Loanda. The British were still interested in the Cameroons, although this was soon to become a German colony. The French were busy between the Cameroons and Banana Point. One of their greatest explorers was actually an Italian, de Brazza. Setting out from Gabon, he became the second European to reach Stanley Pool. Coming to the north bank, he claimed the land for France and left a few native soldiers to maintain this claim. His name is perpetuated in Brazzaville. News of his success reached the missionaries at San Salvador, and Bentley and Crudgington decided to try the route along the northern bank, since there seemed no way through on the south. Stanley was also working on this route; having managed to pull a small steam launch around the rapids above Matadi, he had reached the falls at Isangila, some ninety miles further on.

Bentley and Crudgington set off to Vivi and Isangila, finding the local people very scared of Europeans after experiences with the soldiers of Stanley and de Brazza. After various adventures, they reached Stanley Pool in February 1881. The people there did not know whose side they were supposed to be on: de Brazza had told them to oppose other Europeans who might come after him. One local chief, Nga Liema, demanded more and more gifts. Eventually the missionaries hired a local canoe and explored the wide waters of the Pool (18 by 14 miles in extent), getting as far as the white mud cliffs upstream, later optimistically called 'the white cliffs of Dover'. They might look like chalk, but anyone landing on them could be pulled down in the sticky mud. Having established a way to Stanley Pool, Bentley and Crudgington returned down river, meeting some missionaries of the Livingstone Inland Mission and Stanley, who was planning a route up to the Pool and an international state to look after the interests of this part of Africa. At Musuku, they met up with Grenfell, who began building a mission station there, while Comber and Hartland went to recruit more servants from the Cameroons and Loanda. Misilina left them at this time, since his wife wanted to return home to the Cameroons.

Back in Britain fund-raising was well under way. Robert Arthington had given £1000 for a boat, plus £3000 to be invested for maintenance and running costs. In addition, a small steel vessel of whale-boat design and constructed in sections, was ordered to work between Isangila and Manyanga. A Plymouth lady paid for this little craft, so it was named *Plymouth*. Later it was used on the upper river, as a lighter

behind the *Peace*. All the Baptist churches in Britain were busy raising money. The Congo Mission had caught Baptist imagination, inspiring sacrificial giving.

Ecumenical relations among the Protestant missionaries were good, but the Roman Catholic hierarchy, on the offensive after the pronouncement of Papal Infallibility at the Vatican Council of 1870, planned to counter Protestant missions in Africa with French and Portuguese priests. Three Portuguese priests arrived at San Salvador with rich gifts for the king, The two sets of missionaries actually remained on reasonably good terms, but old King Pedro was utterly bewildered and uncertain which service to attend. Short and very stout, he found all the kneeling and rising in the Latin mass very uncomfortable, and his subjects vacillated between the Protestant and Catholic services. There was some rivalry over who could manage the largest school.

Witchcraft accusations were still common, making the Congolese wary of innovation. A better crop could bring an accusation of witchcraft, which was a capital offence. The accused might be summarily executed, or forced to drink a noxious potion, the strength varying to kill or merely cause vomiting, according to the judge's wish. Slaving continued in the area, but around the kingdom of Congo there was no cannibalism. Law and order was sketchy, although the Congolese were strict about keeping peace at the markets, held every four or eight days. Anyone appearing at market with a gun was likely to be buried alive. Burial alive was also the fate of a dead chief's wives. Their arms and legs would be broken and they would be thrown into the chief's grave. Slaves were also bought for this purpose. The missionaries could detail such ills to rebut accusations from armchair critics at home that they were interfering with harmless, local customs.

In November 1881 Crudgington returned from Britain with Dixon and the *Plymouth*, which was soon assembled and at work. Loads were then carried from Matadi to Isangila by porters, went by boat to Manyanga, with a further 160 miles portorage up to Stanley Pool. As they arrived, Grenfell sailed back to Britain to superintend the building of a steam launch.

The building of the *Peace*

Thornycroft's shipyard at Chiswick was already famous for the construction of motor torpedo-boats. The little missionary steamer was put together as 'yard number 155', next to a torpedo-boat for the Italian navy. The specifications for the *Peace* were unusual. She had to be wood-burning, since coal would be unobtainable in the Congo. Although her length was seventy feet, and her beam ten feet six inches, her draught was only twelve inches! This precaution was needed because of submerged rocks, sandbanks and sunken trees. Lastly, the ship had to be packed up into parcels of not more than 60 lbs weight, that could be carried by African porters. Grenfell spent much time at the yard. The owner's son, Sir John Thornycroft, remembered how his father summoned him to the yard one day to see 'one of our greatest missionaries'.

The hull, built of galvanized Bessemer steel, was divided into seven watertight compartments. There were two propellers, driven by separate engines, with a single

vertical boiler (from photos it seems that this upright boiler was later replaced by a horizontal one). The boiler was specially designed, with individually replaceable tubes: Grenfell had had some experience in replacing tubes in the boiler of Saker's little paddle-steamer in the Cameroons. The propellers and their setting were unusual and 'state of the art' design. Because of the shallow draught, two tunnels were set into the hull, sloping gently first upward and then back. The propellers were set in these tunnels, five inches above the water level, and drew water into the tunnel by a partial vacuum when in motion. Each tunnel had a watertight door, so that weeds and other obstructions could be removed from the propellers without having to go over the side.

The two engines had unusually large bearing surfaces, to reduce the wear and tear out in Africa. When both were running, the ship could travel at twelve miles per hour: she needed sufficient speed to outrun hostile war-canoes. As Grenfell put it, remembering Stanley's battles with cannibals in the upper reaches of the river, 'I have no wish to carry arms or to end up in a native hot-pot'. Her normal cruising speed was 7 to 8 mph and she could achieve 6 mph on one engine alone. She could carry enough fuel for 100 miles at full speed, or 250 more slowly.

Her superstructure was more conventional, but had its unusual features. The mahogany sun-deck had a painted canvas cover to keep off sun and rain, and curtains along the sides to prevent rain blowing inboard. Special screens of wire network covered the midship section where the captain and helmsman would be, as protection against hostile spears, arrows or primitive bullets. The engine-room was amidships, and fore and aft of it were two cabins, each with two berths. Further sleeping accommodation was available on top of the cabins, surrounded by the curtains - a position Grenfell himself was to find very comfortable. A straight, white funnel rose amidships, and there were various flagpoles. The stern flag, donated by the Bloomsbury Baptist Sunday School, bore the word *Peace*.

Most of 1882 was spent building the *Peace*. Work was slowed down by a strike of boilermakers at the yard. She was eventually launched in September, having cost £1760, plus £150 for spare parts. Her unloaded displacement was 9¼ tons. Thorneycrofts had given the BMS a very good deal, but were able to profit from their experience soon after, when they built five larger steamers of similar design for the British government to use on the Nile.

The *Peace* attracted considerable interest. She was on view at Westminster, and ran various trials on the Thames. General Sir Arthur Cotton, Mr Randall (one of the Lords of the Admiralty), and Mr Barnaby (Chief Constructor to the Royal Navy) were among her visitors. Then she was dismantled and parcelled up ready for the trip to Africa. With her went William Doke, a missionary and engineer who intended to reassemble her at Stanley Pool.

Back in Congo, the other missionaries had been busy. Several stations had been built. Wathen, above Manyanga, was named after Sir Charles Wathen of Bristol. Underhill, just below Matadi, was to be the point of entry for all missionaries coming to the Congo. At Kintembu on Stanley Pool, Comber and Bentley leased a site for

a station called Arthington. Payment was in brass rods, thirty inches long and one-seventh of an inch in diameter, which was local currency. Elsewhere in Congo glass beads, white-handled knives, or metal axe-heads were all 'legal tender', as well as the rolls of calico cloth much used in the kingdom of Congo itself.

So far the BMS had been fortunate in the health of the missionaries. The Livingstone Inland Mission had lost eight, with a further fourteen invalided home. Stanley's European expedition had lost eleven, with fourteen returned ill. So far the BMS had only lost Mrs Comber, but the next few years were to see a heavy toll of deaths, mainly due to blackwater fever. Mr Doke helped Grenfell to get the *Peace* packages as far as Underhill, where Grenfell was reunited with his wife, but then Doke died of fever, and the Grenfells lost a baby daughter also from fever.

Porters carried the *Peace* from Underhill to Bayneston, whence she was shipped to Manyanga, and then carried on to Stanley Pool. Grenfell had estimated that this would take eighteen months, but with up to four hundred porters at work the first pieces reached the Pool on 20 June 1883. Before then, John Hartland died of fever on 12 May. With Crudgington back in England getting married, the band was sorely depleted.

Miraculously, hardly anything from the *Peace* was lost during its jungle journey. The hugh steam-separator, weighing 250 lbs and carried on a trolley by eight men, was delayed, temporarily impounded by a local chief, after the bearers had burned down some grass to clear a way, but they returned after dark and liberated the machinery. Every case was numbered. Grenfell suffered some sleepless nights when P.111 (one of the crankshafts) was missing, but it turned up late, having been 'resting' in someone's hut. Grenfell wrote, 'I sang the doxology'. Having lost his engineer, Grenfell did not fancy assembling the *Peace*, but put the launch together himself. Comber, Bentley and Dr Sims of the Livingstone Inland Mission circumnavigated Stanley Pool to try her out, seeing the cliffs at the far end and encountering a hostile crocodile which Comber shot. The river was quite dangerous. Lt Kallina, one of Stanley's men, drowned when his canoe capsized upstream from the Pool, and was commemorated in the name Kalina Point at the Pool's upper exit. A little further upstream, Abbé Guyot was drowned on the river Kwa.

Life at Stanley Pool was by no means idyllic. Mr Crudgington had returned with his wife, while Mr Ross and Dr Sidney Comber, Thomas' brother, joined the team, but Butcher died at Wathen and Dixon was forced home by illness (he later recovered and served with the BMS in China). Food was generally short: often the main diet was Epps cocoa, made with goat's milk, and Huntley & Palmers biscuits, yet the missionaries were good hosts and many travellers and sick Europeans were glad of their care and nursing skills. Among these was Sir Harry Johnston, a British diplomat who later wrote a two-volume biography of Grenfell.

The local people were mainly the Bateke, with a language very different from Kikongo. Eventually friction with incomers from further south caused a wholesale migration of the Bateke northwards across the river into what later became French territory. Apart from tribal fighting, pythons and leopards were an occasional

menace, but the real trouble on land came from elephants. They ate the local crops and trampled anything in their way, including huts and their occupants. The primitive muskets of the Congolese were little use against them. A missionary of the Livingstone Inland Mission, Mr Ingham, became a local hero when, with his better rifle, he shot several marauding elephants, causing the herd to move off elsewhere. The Congolese were delighted and from then on the area was open to missionary work.

Stanley had made one trip up river, establishing a number of government stations along the banks. No other European had explored the upper river. Early in 1884 George Grenfell set out from Stanley Pool in the *Peace's* boat to explore the river, leaving the *Peace* itself laid out like a construction kit on the shore. They reached the mouth of the Kwa and went on to Bolobo. Grenfell was not impressed by the people there: 'The chief characteristics of Bolobo people', he wrote, 'appear to be drunkenness, immorality and cruelty, out of each of which vices spring actions almost too fearful to describe. In hearing of these, one living out here almost gets to feeling like calling the people terrible brutes and wretches rather than poor miserable heathen.' Grenfell and his crew also had trouble with hippopotami, shooting two that invaded their camp on the river-bank. They reached Stanley's Lukolela post, and continued north as far as the equator and the mouth of the Mobangi, before returning to Stanley Pool to find that a new missionary, John Hartley, and two more engineers for the *Peace* had all died on the way up from the coast. Ross and Whitley were so ill they had to return home. Mrs Crudginton was also ill and in May she and her husband left Africa for good, although they later worked with the BMS in Delhi. At home doubts were seriously expressed in BMS committees as to whether it was advisable for Congo missionaries to marry. From the Congo Holman Bentley declared that a single man was far less likely to look after himself properly. In the end the BMS Home Committee did not decree celibacy for its Congo missionaries, but recommended a forward move, towards which Robert Arthington provided a further £2000.

Grenfell was already looking forward to the day when there would be a railway round the lower river rapids: 'To find ourselves after so much trouble and difficulty "booking through" to Stanley Pool will indeed be a change. Then goodbye to all the charming incident of a "tramp in the tropics". But personally I'm prepared to forgo all these.' Writing home, he observed,

Someone said at the May meetings, Christ's command "Go into all the world" is as binding as the Decalogue. Perhaps so, but apparently we Baptists don't believe it, or at least some of us don't. I think our denomination spends somewhere about 5 shillings per head per year [25p]. Now, nobody will allow that a penny a week or so is anything like a respectable compound for a whole commandment. Who would not be a very respectable Pharisee if the Decalogue could be arranged for at that rate?

Sidney Comber had joined his brother at Stanley Pool, and the steel boat, *Plymouth*, had been brought up to be towed behind the *Peace*, but for lack of

engineers the *Peace* had still not been assembled. Eventually Grenfell decided he would have to do the job himself, with the help of nine African workmen. From Sierra Leone came Shaw, the carpenter, and three labourers. Another carpenter hailed from Accra, as did a blacksmith called Allen. John Greenhough, Hanbury Hill and Jonathan Scott all came from the Cameroons Mission. Later they were joined by James Showers, also from Cameroon. They had to handle the ship's plates with great care to avoid buckling the steel. The work was done on the beach protected by a coffer-dam, from which the water had been baled out. It took three months. On 13 June 1884 they slid the ship down a rough ramp into the waters of the Congo at Stanley Pool, to shouts of 'Master, she lives!'

That year the European powers settled the boundaries in that part of West Africa. Henry Stanley had left the Congo, and he was almost succeeded by General Gordon, but trouble in the Sudan took him instead to Khartoum and his death. The Congo Free State came under the sovereignty of King Leopold of the Belgians. Germany had annexed the Cameroons, while France and Portugal were competing for power along the rest of the coast. At one stage it seemed that the new Congo state might be totally landlocked, but eventually France and Portugal agreed to allow to the new state some thirty-seven kilometres of coastline around Banana Point. Inland boundaries were left to be decided later.

Meanwhile Thomas Comber and Grenfell were rejoicing in the launching of the *Peace*. A short trial run showed that things were generally satisfactory. The ship's boiler could raise steam from cold in ten minutes and was so powerful that the safety valves were in considerable use before Grenfell finally got them adjusted. On 7 July, three weeks after completion, the *Peace* was ready for her first voyage.

The voyages of exploration

The first steam-powered vessel on the upper Congo was Stanley's little launch, the *En Avant*, but this was much smaller than the *Peace*. It had made one trip up river, establishing a few government stations, but that left many tributaries unexplored; even the course of the main Congo river was imperfectly known. One of Grenfell's great achievements was to map the river, on a scale of approximately one inch to the mile: this served as the basis for all future map-making. The *Peace* frequently carried passengers, including diplomats and explorers. On the first voyage Grenfell and Comber had Sir Francis de Winton, a British diplomat, on board. A keen Christian, he joined in the services the missionaries conducted. He also took his turn at steering, bread-making and wood-cutting, not usual tasks for Foreign Office representatives! The first job every morning was to cut wood to heat the boiler that day.

On that first voyage they explored some of the tributaries that turned south-east and south. The Kwa river did not look particularly significant at its confluence with the Congo, yet it was formed by several big rivers, including the Kasai. The party made its way cautiously up the Kwa, avoiding shallows and sandbanks. They met various village leaders, including a chieftainess, Wabuma, whom Grenfell found

particularly impressive. Returning to the main river, they pushed on upstream, encountering dense forest as they came to Bolobo and Lukolela, later to become BMS stations. They set up a temporary post at Lukolela, leaving three men from the Cameroons there. The local chief, Mangaba, was one of the first to whom they tried to talk about the Gospel, but he was not very impressed. Grenfell, always on the lookout for local helpers, recruited a Mongata man called Bapulula on this voyage, who eventually became the *Peace's* pilot.

The Bolobo area was the home of the Bobangi, a savage tribe compared with those around San Salvador. Inter-tribal warfare was the norm: the eventual mission site was chosen because it was a kind of no-man's-land between two warring tribes. When the Bobangi were introduced to the Ten Commandments, they thought such rules good for other tribes, but did not see why a God in heaven should worry how they themselves lived. The missionaries were horrified to find them beating people to death, or beheading them, or, even more barbaric, giving the victim a start and then the whole tribe, armed with spears and clubs, would chase him into the jungle. He would be hunted down and speared to death, which they considered great sport. They would speak of people who had 'given a good run'.

After sailing almost to the equator, the *Peace* returned to base. She had travelled over five hundred miles. Thomas Comber then returned to England on furlough, taking little Pattie Grenfell to be educated in England. Two new missionaries, Darling and Cruikshank, had arrived. With them had come another engineer, Mims, but he died at Wathen, another victim of blackwater fever. One of the African crew of the *Peace* was badly mauled by a crocodile in Stanley Pool. They were to have many encounters with crocodiles near the river banks, while hippos were a danger in the main stream.

Grenfell was eager to set out again. On his next trip he was accompanied by his wife and baby, and six boys and two girls from their school at Stanley Pool. Dr Sims went too. His mission was in the process of getting their own boat, *Henry Reed*, on to the river at Stanley Pool. Grenfell found the children quite a worry on this trip. In the morning cold they would huddle round the boiler, getting burned. Later in the day he was constantly afraid of them falling in. The *Peace* visited many places where Europeans were unknown. Local reaction varied from panic to dangerous hostility. Once terrified villagers took them for ghosts. They explored several tributaries, including the Mubangi, but had difficulty buying food there. They encountered a new peril - floating islands. These dense agglomerations of brushwood, trees and other floating debris, drift slowly but inexorably downstream. The *Peace* got tangled with one above Bolobo and they had to hack her free.

One of the workmen at Lukolela had died, but the other two had cleared a fair-sized plot. Proceeding northwards they found the people near the equator were wary, one shooting an arrow at Dr Sims. On 18 November the *Peace* suffered her first Congolese tornado, but only lost a few curtains. At Bangala Grenfell's party had their first meeting with cannibals. Hitherto, each tribe they met had maintained that not they but the next tribe practised cannibalism. Grenfell had doubted whether the

practice was still extant, but as he walked down the path to the chief's stockade at Bangala he saw many human skulls on posts. From what the missionaries could discover, they usually ate slaves purchased for that purpose; it seemed the practice had no religious significance - they just liked the taste.

At Bopoto there was iron-working and rough axes served as currency. The exchange rate seemed to be one axe = two brass rods = one goat. They made a detour up the Luki or Loika river as far as it was navigable. Here a village chief and his retinue were invited on board. One of the crew was adjusting a steam valve which suddenly came off, emitting a violent burst of steam. The terrified chief and his men all dived overboard. It took some time and some judicious presents to reassure them that these Europeans were harmless. Upstream at Basoko the International Expedition had established a post, manned by Hausa soldiers from Nigeria. Grenfell was horrified to find two of them had been killed and eaten by local people, who feared reprisals when they saw the *Peace*.

Steaming upstream and eastwards they met terrible evidence of war. Floating down the river came broken canoes, pieces of huts, matting, household goods, and corpses. Smoke rose from burning villages ahead and soon they encountered fugitives. This was the work of Arab slave-traders from the east, seven hundred strong and led by Stanley's old friend, Tipu-Tib. Grenfell's later admiration for the Belgians was partly due to their success in overcoming the Arab peril. The Arabs threatened him with their guns, but eventually allowed the *Peace* to pass and at Stanley Falls he was received courteously by Tipu-Tib, who offered to forward his letters to Britain via the east coast. Grenfell then explored up the Lomami. An attempt to go up the Mobangi river when it was in flood managed to hole the *Peace* but the crew were able to patch her and return safely.

In early 1885 disease threatened to curtail or even end the BMS mission in Congo. Sidney Comber died, as did four newly arrived missionaries, including Andrew Cruikshank whose fiancée, Lily de Hailes, was later to serve with distinction in Congo. Thomas Comber spent seven months in England. He lectured on the explorations of the *Peace* to the Royal Geographical Society, but people were more struck by the ravages of the African climate upon him.

Sir Harry Johnston gave a horrifying list of the perils faced by Congo missionaries at this time. Malaria, blackwater (haemoglobinuric or haematuric) fever and dysentery headed the diseases. Grenfell's digestion was ruined and he felt that anyone in Africa was 'over the hill' at forty. Nourishing food was hard to come by. There were horrendous stories of blackened smoked meat from which the maggots had to be knocked out prior to soaking in boiling water for hours before it was soft enough to be chewed. Eventually food became so hard to find at Arthington, that the station had to be moved further along the shore of Stanley Pool to Nshasa (later Kinshasa). As well as hippos and crocodiles, there was occasional trouble from leopards, elephants and pythons. There were mosquitoes, tsetse-flies which carried sleeping-sickness, sand-midges and small blackflies with a nasty bite, ants, cockroaches, wasps, locusts, poisonous caterpillars, may-flies, hippo-flies and the imported jigger,

a small flea that burrowed under skin or toe-nails to lay its eggs. Bentley worked at translations within his mosquito-net, while Grenfell wore a long-sleeved shirt and long trousers tucked into high top-boots to try to keep out the insects. He tried washing his hands in dilute carbolic acid, among other schemes to ward off mosquitoes, but it was not very effective. Added to all these were dangers from tornadoes, hailstorms and lightning. One can only marvel at the heroism of the many volunteers who came forward for missionary service in Congo, knowing it was likely to be a one-way ticket to an early grave.

The Congo Free State was now formally instituted, with King Leopold of the Belgians the official overlord. The capital was at Boma, below the cataracts, which helped in contact with Europe, but meant the authorities were out of touch with the interior. Mr Baynes, the Secretary of the BMS, had an audience with King Leopold. Grenfell and many others had great hopes that the mistakes of earlier colonialism would be avoided.

Grenfell set out again in the *Peace* in August 1885, taking his wife and baby and eight boys. He also gave a lift to the explorer, von Francois. Exploring tributaries, the *Peace* sometimes met local canoes, full of ivory and slaves for sale. Elsewhere Africans who had not previously seen Europeans treated them with great suspicion and the *Peace* received several showers of arrows. Grenfell noted calmly that these were the first *poisoned* arrows he had met. Up the Juapa river a tribe that bought slaves to eat offered Grenfell a wife in exchange for a fat boatman whom they fancied, believing coastal people had particularly sweet flesh. Grenfell also met pygmies for the first time, the Batwa people, their skins reddened with dye. They struck Grenfell as intelligent, with great skill and cunning, and he noted that the full-height Congolese treated them with respect.

Back at Stanley Pool, Grenfell had a disagreement with Sir Francis de Winton over his reports. Sir Francis thought these should go first to the State, while Grenfell felt the BMS should be informed first, though was happy to give the State complete copies afterwards. More worrying was the rumour that the Administrator-General was to consider the whole matter of missionary allotments. Grenfell was happy for the Congo to be divided up into spheres of influence for the various missionary societies, even including the Roman Catholics, but was afraid that the Catholics would not respect such demarcation. The question was still academic, for the Congo State was weak. It had had to abandon several stations up river and was afraid of the growing Arab influence there.

Thomas Comber returned in October 1885, with new recruits including his younger brother, Percy. Their sister, Carrie, also a missionary, had just died in the Cameroons. Grenfell was eager to set off on his travels again. The explorers, Wissman and von Nimpitsch, were passengers this time, and four Africans returning to the American Baptist Missionary station at Equator. The *Peace* ran aground on a sunken reef and was barely refloated when she was hit by a tornado. Beached for repairs, they could not get off. The American Baptists' steamer, *Henry Reed*, tried to pull them off, but eventually the crew had to dig the *Peace* out. They took the

explorers up the Kasai, where von Nimpitsch suffered a small cut on the arm which alarmingly turned septic, but Grenfell treated him successfully. They were able to help the *En Avant* which was in difficulties, on their way to Stanley Falls, where they found Tipu-Tib in power. The Congo State's representative there, Lt Deane, with seventy soldiers and two guns, was holding a precarious peace with the Arabs.

Back in England some BMS supporters were getting restive over Grenfell's exploring trips, feeling this was not 'real' missionary work. In March 1886 Thomas Comber had presided over the first baptisms at San Salvador and a small church had been formed. Home supporters could hear of that with enthusiasm. Grenfell believed the exploring had to be done. Later he lamented that he had to do so much travelling when he would rather have settled down at one particular station. However, his charts proved invaluable. At a scale of 1/16 inch to 100 yards, they eventually stretched over some 125 feet, giving a comprehensive map of the whole Congo river from Stanley Pool to Stanley Falls.

On 25 June Grenfell returned to Stanley Pool to calamity. The previous day an accidental fire had destroyed most of the mission station. The dwelling houses had been saved, but the stores, including goods for stations up-river and spares for the **Peace*, had gone, along with many of the missionaries' personal possessions. Grenfell wrote to his friend, Mr Hawkes:

we shall have to pull along as best we can. Some of us will, in the native idiom, 'see trouble', but we seem pretty jolly notwithstanding. There's a sort of desperate 'Mark Tapleyism' abroad, as we consider the last bar of soap and the last packet of candles, and the who-knows-how-many months before our orders are filled. These personal matters are only things to laugh about; it is the throwing back of our work which hurts us all. Our forward plans have had a most emphatic check, for it will be impossible to occupy a new post while the base itself is in difficulties. It seems very strange that just as the men are coming up country the door should be barred in this way. We don't understand it; but it's all right nevertheless.

That last sentence is revealing. Grenfell was not a man to write reams of pious prose but his faith was deeply rooted. He was not ready to blame God, though he told Mr Hawkes that the losses were valued at between £3000-£4000. Instead, he blessed God for the good reception they had received up river, thanked his friends in Birmingham for a new chronometer, and got on with the job. *[to be continued]*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this has only been possible because of generous help from those who answered my call for help through the *Baptist Times*. My greatest thanks

are due to Mr Robert West, for the loan of rare books on the Congo. Mrs Eileen Byde and Mr Michael Quantick also lent books. The Revd Mark

* A character from Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*, who accompanied Martin in a disastrous expedition to the swamps of the southern USA and nursed him when desperately ill of a fever. Tapley was unfailingly cheerful and optimistic.

Rudall lent copies of the plans of the *Peace* acquired from the Royal Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and article on 'Old Glory' explained many mechanical details. My thanks also go to Mrs Susan Mills, archivist at Regent's Park College, and to the BMS staff, especially for a copy of the recently discovered letter from Grenfell to the King of the Belgians.

Other help came from the Revd W. Bottoms, Dr Dorothy Medway, Revd Walter Fancutt, Mr Roger Knight, Mrs Barbara Grenfell Scott, Mrs Jennifer

Mackey, Mr N. W. Johns, Mrs Eileen Acres, Mr Lesley Silk and Mr Norman Tate. I was also helped by Miss Edna Staple's chapter on Lily de Hailes in *Great Baptist Women*, and the Revd Sidney Clark's *Baptist Times* article on Robert Arthington. To these, and any others whom I have omitted, my sincere thanks.

Extracts from letters are taken from the books by Johnstone, Bentley, etc., except for the recently-discovered letter from the BMS safe.

M. A. SMITH *Minister, Golcar Baptist Church, Huddersfield*

* * * * *

Mark A. Noll (ed.), *Confessions and Catechisms of the reformation*, Apollos, Leicester 1991, pp.232.

Mark Noll, Professor of Church History at Wheaton College, has brought together ten of the most important confessions and catechisms of the first two generations (sixty years) of the Reformation: Luther's *Ninety-Five theses* (1517). and *Small Catechism* (1529); Zwingli's *Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523); the Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession* (1527); the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* (1530); Calvin's (or possibly William Farel's) *Genevan Confession* (1536); Olevianus and Ursinus's *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563); the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1545-1563); the *Profession of the Tridentine Faith* (1564); and *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (1571). Each is ordered chronologically, with a brief introduction setting it in historical and theological context, ending with a select bibliography. These are not new translations, but occasional editorial insertions are helpful. Noll defines 'confessions' as personal or group statements of churches or denominations, and 'catechisms' as structured declarations of faith written in the question-answer form (p.14). Noll's purpose is not to add to the scholarly debate, but 'to introduce the vital documents themselves' (p.12).

Those he has selected address the central questions of human existence: Who am I? Who is God? How does God reveal himself and inform us about our world? What institutions has he given and how are they - church, government, family and the economy - to function? These became the very issues of contention over which the Reformation's protagonists fought. Since 'some of those who addressed these issues possessed minds and hearts of extraordinary profundity', their answers are 'as important for understanding the course of Western history since the sixteenth century as for probing the nature of the Christian faith' (p.12). This collection will allow the reader to compare and contrast the convictions of the different Reformation parties: Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Roman Catholic and Anglican, and so gain greater understanding of the Reformation era, and a deeper appreciation and respect for the convictions of other Christian traditions. These documents will not only provide information for a more thorough understanding of the historical and theological legacy of the sixteenth century, but will also speak to the modern reader. They show how each tradition has based its beliefs and practices on Scripture, yet how they have at times been led to opposing positions.