

Letter Gives Details Of Native Life In The African Belgian Congo

Following is the text of a letter received by Fay A. Puckett from Banda, Africa Inland Mission, Niangara, Congo Belege under date of Aug. 14, 1937. The letter is from Mr. and Mrs. Earl Dix who are friends of Mr. Puckett and missionaries in Africa. It contains some interesting facts about the life of the natives in the Congo region. The letter is as follows:

I have often thought of writing up a few of the reasons why the natives would not be better if we left them alone. In America it is often said that they would be better if we left them alone. I well remember one Sunday morning in a Bible class in a large church at Platteville, Wis. Almost every member of the class, if not everyone, felt that the natives were working among would be better off if we left them alone. One man spoke up and said, "They are happy in their ignorance. Even their work is accompanied by a song. Why not let them remain happy?" This is often heard even among Christian people. I will try and show why they are not better off left alone. Other well-meaning friends often told us that we had spent five years out here, they reasoned that we had done our part, and advised us to remain at home and rear our family. We started our work but it is far from completed.

We read in God's word that if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. These people certainly have no hope except in this life. Therefore they are of all people most miserable. I will not tell of their religious customs. I will tell of the more apparent reasons which are the result of their spiritual darkness.

It is true that the native does his work to the rhythm of a song. They carry their loads over a hot stony path to the rhythm of a song. "Song" has a very prominent place in their life but it does not always mean happiness; it is often used to cover a very heavy heart, or forget the weight of the load they are carrying. Yes, they appear happy, content and carefree, but these are some of the things they face.

One hundred per cent of the people believe that some among them have evil spirits, which dwell in their inward parts. They are so positive that this is true that they declare that they can show you the house in which this spirit dwells; this house is like your thumb growing on the intestines. This evil spirit is the cause of all sickness, failure, grief, death; causes hunting and fishing to be fruitless, or anything undesirable. Chief Mboeli lived about five miles from us until his death three years ago, had according to official census 325 wives. One of my Christian workmen had a sister that was a wife of the chief. She tells of some of the things she witnessed. When a person that was associated with the chief or the chief himself was sick, a crude method of divining was used to find the person that was causing the grief by their evil spirit. When the divining claimed it to be one of the chief's wives he sometimes asked her about it. If she denied having any knowledge of an evil spirit, he sometimes tied her to a

tree and opened her abdomen with his knife. If he could find a piece that looked like a thumb he would show it to her and say, "So you do not know anything about an evil spirit? Look at this." Of course she lived only a very short time after that.

Keke, a son of chief Mboeli burned his own mother to death in an open fire, while the old chief sat leisurely by, eating bananas. He did it because the spirit of divination said that it was his mother that was causing the sickness of his young brother, by her evil spirit.

Several people were sometimes gathered together in a house and fire set to the grass roof of the house. These were burned to death, because they believed there was an evil spirit dwelling in them.

You no doubt wonder how it is possible for anyone to be so cruel. From their point of view it is justifiable, the same as we justify murder in time of war; it is in self defense. They think that unless these are dealt with they will kill them sooner or later with their evil spirit. This belief is held by 100 per cent of the people. They have been taught this from childhood for generations. Neither governments nor missionaries can remove this belief. Using the Bible term they "Must be born again." They must become "new creatures in Christ Jesus." They must have their old beliefs replaced by a living faith in God thru Christ. They must come to believe "that God is, and is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him."

The government is doing everything in its power to suppress such things as I have described, and they have been successful to a very large extent, but the natives often say, "If the white man leaves it will be the same as it was before he came."

Some time ago a native living near my station came to me saying, "There are buffalo in my garden." I went with him and succeeded in killing a buffalo. After my workmen had carried it in I gave a front leg to this man. As he carried his meat home, he cut off a piece in every village he passed. He was not so gracious as all that, but he was afraid that some one would envy him his meat, and cause him to become sick by their evil spirits. By giving each of them a piece they would think that he was a good fellow and he would escape in that way.

Last evening one of my workmen, a new man, came to me asking me to punish his wife for being untrue to him. I questioned him about it. He had been away for about a week and while he was away he dreamed that she was untrue. The dream was not clear enough to reveal the person with who she was untrue, therefore he wanted me to punish her until she revealed his name. The reason he came to me is that I do not permit the men on the station to beat their wives. He said, "I have bought her, she is mine. Why shouldn't she be whipped until she reveals him. It must be true, how could I be way out there and dream about her in that manner unless it was true." I did not punish his wife.

This evening I heard that there was a native here with a strangulated hernia. I went down to see him, they had given up all hopes of reducing it. They were divining to see who was the cause of it. After about half an hour I was successful in reducing it and saved his life.

They think the only way to cure measles is to give them to someone else. These are only a few of the things that the gospel can and does change. Our work is started, but far from finished. I wonder how many there are in America who say, "They would be better off if we left them alone . . ."

BRIEFLY STATED

Mrs. Mattie Soukup drove to Lincoln last Wednesday morning and returned that evening bringing her son, Francis, back so that he could spend the Thanksgiving with the home folks.

Leo Swanson of Lincoln, commissioner of public lands and buildings for the state of Nebraska, was in the city last Thursday night on his way to Keya Paha county on a business trip.

Miss Jane Mains, who is attending the state university at Lincoln, came up last Wednesday evening and spent Thanksgiving vacation with the home folks, returning to her school duties Sunday.

Mrs. J. A. Devine and sister, Miss Grace Campbell, came down from Cheyene, Wyo., last Wednesday evening to spend Thanksgiving with relatives and old friends here. They left for home Sunday morning.

Miss Ruth Harris, who is attending Morningside college at Sioux City, Iowa, came home last Wednesday evening to spend the holidays at the home of her mother, Mrs. Esther Ccl: Harris. She returned to her school duties Monday morning.

Members of the State Patrol have been active the past week many have been stopped and warned to have their lights adjusted and tail lights installed. Auto accessory dealers in the city say that last Saturday they had the biggest day in history in that particular line of goods. Let the good work continue.

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