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1831

AMOS CHIMBU

Congo Mystic and Saint



By JOHN M. SPRINGER

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A sound of singing wafted over the high fence that surrounded the harem of Mwata Yamvo, the King of the Aluunda tribe in the Belgian Congo in Central Africa, and fell upon the ears of two young lads who were playing a game something like shinny with two bamboo sticks cut so that part of the roots left on made knobs, and some nuts answering for balls.

The two boys stopped their play and listened. They were guiltless of clothes except for a string around the loins and a tiny rag in front. They were dirty and unkempt—certainly neither was attractive. One of them, named Chimbu, was a leper.

“Ovanyi, ovanyi,
Ovanyi mazhu ma Nzambi;
Ovanyi, ovanyi,
Tukuya munganda mulu.”

They dropped their sticks and ran as the singing continued to the tune which is familiarly known to us as “The Sweet By-and-By.” But the words set to it in the Luunda meant,

“Listen, listen,
Listen to the words of God;
Listen, listen,
Let us set out for the King’s town above.”

“Let’s see what is going on and what these strange white folks are doing,” said Chimbu, as they hurried on and stepped through the opening into a large section or yard where a part of the King’s 200 wives were living.

Here they saw the King, Mwata Yamvo, surrounded with a crowd of some of his head men and courtiers, and his wives and children. The white man was sitting with his back to the fence, facing them. A group of his Christian Natives were around him and next to him his wife sat on a chair by his side. Chimbu noticed this in particular. Aluunda women do not sit on chairs by the side of their husbands.

The white man was talking and explaining and the Chief was asking questions. The Chief was curious and perplexed to know why this particular white man had come to his town. Many white men had come before and they always wanted some gain or favor. Most of them wanted rubber or ivory. The Bula Matadi, *i. e.*, the Belgians, wanted to buy rubber, ivory and beeswax; recently

This is the service held with Mwata Yamvo at Kapanga in 1912, by Dr. Springer, when Chimbu and his friend "listened in."



some of them had built a boma at Kapanga, near by, and had begun to collect taxes. Some of these white men wanted also to be furnished with native women for an indefinite period.

But this white man said that he did not want to buy rubber, he did not want ivory, he had no wish for native women and he did not collect taxes. What axe did he have to grind? It was true that he *said* that he had come to tell them about Nzambi, the great and good Spirit who had made heaven and earth, but surely he must be on some other errand.

"No," emphatically asserted the white man as he detected the veiled suspicion of the King. "We have not come to *get* something but to *give* something. This

Nzambi who made the heavens and the earth and who made you, loves you. He loves you so much that He gave His son to come down to the earth to live, to teach, to heal, and at last to die for you and for all men and He has sent us to tell you the Good News. We have come with Good Words this day from the loving Father of the spirits of all men, and here is His Book in which He has told us many wonderful things about his love. And we have already put some of these words into your own language."

The King bowed his head gravely. "Those are good words, indeed, that you have spoken, but we will not be able to remember them," he said at last. "We want you to sit, *kushakama*, in our midst and tell us the same good words every day, for our heads are hard."

The missionary shook his head sadly, "We cannot stay now," he said. "It will take us one moon to return to Lukoshi to the kraal of your sub-Chief Kazembe, where we abide. I cannot stay now but I will come again and if I cannot come myself, I will send someone else. *Ovani?* Do you hear?"

"*Namva*, I hear," was the grave reply.

"And remember," continued the missionary, "Nzambi loves you and He is your Father. I have brought you good words that should make your hearts glad this day."

"Ah! Those are good words, indeed!" repeated Chimbu as he and his friend crawled out through the fence, "but we know that they cannot be true. We cannot believe that Nzambi loves *us*. It has never been so told us by our fathers. Those *chindele*, white men, are awful liars. But those *are* good words and I wish they were true."

So these two pickanins passed out unseen and unnoticed by the two white people and for the most part by the crowd of Natives. They were only small boys. They picked up their bamboo sticks and were soon at play as if nothing unusual had happened, but the message that they had just heard was like new seed planted in the good ground of their eager hearts and destined, because tended and cared for, to bear fruit many hundredfold.

A year passed and then another missionary man came, Mr. Heinkel, who told the same Good News. There were with him two sturdy sons of Africa; one was Kayeka from Mwata Yamvo's own tribe, who had been taken as a slave to Angola and had been converted there, and whose twelve years of praying had brought us finally as missionaries to his tribe, and the other was Jacob Maweni, a Zulu, who had come from the far south as a missionary to this tribe. These Natives also preached that God loves people and that they knew His love in their own hearts.

The yearning that had been stirred in those young hearts for the living God was greatly deepened.

A year after Mr. Heinkel had to leave on account of his health, Dr. Piper came with healing for their diseased bodies as another evidence that God loved them. They were compelled to believe the testimonials they heard and they entered into this love of God for themselves. O what a wonderful light and peace came into their hearts! It was glory!

The Pipers were joined by the Brintons and Miss Jensen, all of them with the same Good News of Jesus and His love. Chimbu worked for and with them all, beginning as a goat herd for Dr. Piper. He learned English rapidly while helping them to learn the Luunda. He became Mr. Brinton's teacher in the vernacular and assisted him during the next five years to translate the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts and to write many hymns in his native tongue.

But a dark shadow hung over Chimbu's life. Four years before we arrived as the first missionaries at Mwata Yamvo's he had evidence that he was a leper. The Natives have discovered some herb that is very potent, if not in effecting a cure, at least in staying this dread disease. He had been taking his fourth of the five annual treatments at the very time that he had heard that strange, "Ovanyi, ovanyi."

After the treatment the year that Mr. Heinkel was there building the missionary residence, Chimbu was pronounced as permanently cured. He did not mention the subject of his leprosy to any of the missionaries and went on with his work, the joys of salvation flooding his life.

When, thirteen years after our first visit, we came to Mwata Yamvo's in 1925, Chimbu and his friend, who is also a pastor teacher, told us that the beginning of their spiritual life began at the time of our first visit, as then the Gospel seed first found lodgment in their hearts. But they also recognized the very necessary part played by others in their spiritual life and development. When the Pipers were leaving for their first furlough in 1919, Chimbu accompanied them for some miles and then said, "Now I must turn back but first I want to thank you with all my heart for you were the ones who gave me birth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Without that follow up work by these other missionaries and workers the tender plant that sprang from that seed sowed in 1912 would surely have been choked to death.

One wonders how many still born souls there are or have been in the villages of Africa and elsewhere who have died without coming into spiritual birth, youth and maturity because there was no missionary or other Christian at hand to give the help needed.

Early in 1923, Chimbu realized that his cure from leprosy had not been per-

manent. His friends and family all urged him to go again to the *nganga*, or witch doctor, who had some knowledge of herbs and yet used much witchcraft in the process. He considered the matter seriously and decided that, let the consequences be what they would, he could not now as a Christian subject himself to the evil practices of the exorcism of demons, etc., that accompanied the native treatment. But he began treatment with Dr. Piper, who had only a small amount of the crudest form of the chaulmoogra oil which was almost worse than death to take, for it kept him fearfully nauseated whether he took it by mouth or by injections.

The doctor had no funds to buy the more expensive kind and so it was a time of deep testing. Here were all his friends on the one side urging him to go to the *nganga* and the horrible medicine on the other. He had made greater advance than any other pupil that had attended the school and now he was the native pastor of the main station church, the largest one in the district. He was also the most beloved and esteemed of all the pastor-teachers.

But he came out of his Gethsemane with his face aglow, facing the cross. He voiced the faith of the tried and tested man of old who said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." He committed himself, soul and body, to his Maker and walked in the valley of blessing with Him. And on his face was the "light that ne'er was on land or sea."

We will never forget that shining countenance as we saw him in 1925 when he made that prayer we can never forget, "Lord, give us a passion for Jesus Christ." That was the whole of his prayer at that meeting, just the one sentence, but how much there is to it!

After reaching the U. S. A., as we have had sums of money handed to us that we could use for that purpose, we have sent out medicine such as our government has used most successfully for leprosy in the Philippines, and I wrote to him and asked him to take it faithfully and in faith, and he has done so.

A few weeks ago, a woman asked us if it were possible for these raw savages to understand and receive the Gospel. Did we not need to educate two or three generations before they were able to comprehend the Gospel message at all? The answer to this is to be found in a letter recently received from Chimbu. Remember that only thirteen years have elapsed since he heard from us on the first visit any missionary had ever made to his people, the "wonderful words of life." This letter was neatly typed by him on a Corona typewriter in English, and we give it as he himself wrote it, putting in a few words in brackets to make the meaning plain.

Amos Chimbu
Kapanga, Katanga, Lulua Dist.
Congo Belge, Africa, via Capetown.
August 12, 1927.

MR. J. M. SPRINGER:

To day I want to ansear your comfort letter which you was wrotte to me in June 1; 1927. first of all I want to thank you two thousand times and five hundred moyo [greetings]; and rejoji I canot count it.

I have never never never find or see the love as such as it is in God, never, never. Now I think that I shoul fly in spirit and come to your spiritual love and kiss you in love because you have fresh my heart with good letter.

And the day which I was received your nice letter, I was in Musumba [the capital] in the frant of Mwata Yamvo, for he was calling all his chiefs to be witness when he was giving the kingdom to the one of his chiefs, his name is Chishidila, because the first was died. And I was there, and I read it there, and many of them see it, and heard when I was reading that you like to know the villages which are the teachers, and that you like to know about the news out of here, and how you sent your greetings to the chief. And they was glad also.

But about the work; God is with us, and in the last year we were in Judgement by new Administrateur; and he not like our Mission and mission's people. So he was telling the chiefs to hat us and our work (this is unusual on the part of an official) and some of us was to go to prisson, and we were going to his judge ment to judge about Malala, that mean about the Idol's custom, but we were not afraid to ansear him, and still now he is on the ungod's side, he wants the people to do to their dead things as they can. (This is evidently in essence a form of emperor worship, not only of the living kings but also of the dead.) Buta you know that the power of God is like the ground, and the power of man is like the rain. For the rain thinks it have power over the ground, but the rain will go away, and the ground remain forever. And so it is with the power of man.

But my work now I going to visit the brethren. And some of the chiefs now believing to God, now the church is going forwad on every month and weeks. But all these things is we winning or gaining by your praying, and your helping. for no man can win himself without Faith's Prayer; and the faith coming from trust.

We thank God, and his Spiritu which is in you, because we heard that Mr. Brastrup is Coming back with the other Missionary (the Longfields); we thank God who was carrng you out and Mama Springer like the little bird was flying with the seed in its mouth, and throw it down on the unseed place, and that ground was fille with good seeds which was carried by the little bird.

And so when you eat and drink and work and pray, please remember us in your praying, or in your dream, I like that you should pray in your dream also, about here, that God may send His Spirit's Power to fight with the power of Satan.

About myself; God is with me, and I will take the Medicine with faith; if it will please God he will [heal me]; but if not, it is no matter, because I filing [feeling] in my heart that God he do not wants me to proud in body; because to proud in body, is to fall in sin; for God was know everythings in bigining of a man, when he was creat him, and if God he like to save person, he co'nt give good body to all he likis to give; He can give to some, good body, but to other, he can let them have what kind of bodies bad, or good, because he will not save the body, but the souls only. Even if I sick or well or weak or strong or poor or rich, I am of the Lord's; for the Lord hav not respect some and spise the other. All are his.

I say again, pray for Africa; because your name is known to every tribes in (this part of) Africa. for they were know you alon in biginis. So pray for them that they can know God as they know you.

I ask my picture which you was take us my wife and may self I want them if you have it send to me, and big thing, send me the other letter [another letter] also, that I will tell you also all things, it is all I finish to speak. Salute Mama Springer and all our fathers in the Lord.

I am your first son in Lu-unda's trib

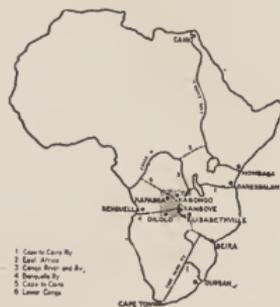
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No other words or appeal seem fitting to add to this letter than the words of One who spoke with authority. He said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are already white unto the harvest. The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." And to those who obey, He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

JOHN M. SPRINGER,

150 Fifth Avenue, New York.



Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained free from the writer, or from the Board of Foreign Missions, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York.

A fuller account of the work in the Congo is given in *Christian Conquests in the Congo*, by John M. Springer, \$1, postage paid, published by The Methodist Book Concern, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York.