

**A MASTER BUILDER ON THE
CONGO: A MEMORIAL TO THE
SERVICE AND DEVOTION OF
ROBERT RAY ELDRED AND
LILLIAN BYERS ELDRED**

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A Master Builder on the Congo: A Memorial to the Service and Devotion of Robert Ray Eldred and Lillian Byers Eldred by Andrew F. Hensey

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ANDREW F. HENSEY

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MR. AND MRS. ELDRED, WITH BABY MPELA AND SOME
OF THE ORPHANS. (BOLENGE, 1904)

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A Memorial
to the
Service and Devotion
of
ROBERT RAY ELDRED
and
LILLIAN BYERS ELDRED

BY
ANDREW F. HENSEY
Author of "Opals from Africa"

ILLUSTRATED

With an Introduction by
ARCHIBALD McLEAN



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INTRODUCTION

ROBERT RAY and Edith Byers Eldred, the hero and heroine of this book, gave their lives for the redemption of Africa as truly as did Melville B. Cox or Alexander Mackay. They lived sacrificial lives and rejoiced that to them was this grace given, that they should preach among primitive and pagan people the unsearchable riches of Christ. Like Livingstone, they were ready for any movement, provided it was a forward movement. Like Paul, they made it their aim so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that they might not build upon another man's foundation. Like the Moravians, their desire was to give to the Lamb that was slain the reward of His sufferings.

Both laid down their lives in Africa and for Africa. Mrs. Eldred died on the Bussira with no other white woman near to wipe the death-damp from her brow or to speak words of comfort and hope in her last moments. Mr. Eldred died while pioneering in a part of the field far beyond where any other missionary had ever been.

It was because of the heroism and unselfish devotion and nobleness of their lives and the fruitfulness of their services that this book was written. The writer is a graduate of the same school as Mr. Eldred—The College of The Bible, of Transylvania University, and was associated with him and his wife in their work as missionaries. Mr. Hensey has written with the fullest knowledge of the facts re-

INTRODUCTION

lating to the character and ministry of Mr. and Mrs. Eldred, and, because he has, his book will be read with profound interest and with genuine admiration for the hero and heroine.

ARCHIBALD McLEAN.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

FOREWORD

"RAY ELDRED drowned. Reinforcements imperative."

When the above message was flashed under the seas and across the lands in September of 1913 it brought to the Disciples of Christ a sorrow that was almost pain. There were few churches among that people in which the name of Robert Ray Eldred was not known and his devotion appreciated. Many, as they read the startling news, remembered having heard him plead with passionate enthusiasm for Congo's evangelization. As they recalled his massive frame and evident strength, it seemed difficult to believe that the sad news was really true.

Two months had to ensue before the details of his passing could come by mail. When these arrived and were read in the papers, the story of his tragic death and forest burial passed into the household life of the Disciples and his lonely grave on the banks of the Lokolo is coming to be counted among their choice heritages.

But the friends of Ray Eldred feel that the life and labours of this man of God ought to be as well known as the story of his heroic death. His comrades in the African field would have the churches know some of the things which made this leader so large a part of the life of the Congo Mission that, when he had fallen, it seemed imperative that reinforcements should be sent at once to take his place.

Can a real man's place be filled? Aye, the workers fall, and God fills up the ranks, for His work must go on till the last man hear the Good Tidings of the Son of God. And His work on the Congo goes on, mayhap with more of impetus and surely in deeper

spiritual currents. For the spirit of sacrifice and of apostolic evangelism has been written large in the history of the Congo Mission. Yet sometimes in the councils of the missionaries, when simple faith and wise decision are needed; oftentimes, when one sits beneath roof-trees made sacred by the labour of those hands now still in death, and hears appeals from distant villages for the Gospel he loved so well to preach; each time,

"Whenever the weak and weary are ridden down by the strong,

Whenever the right pleads clearly while the lords of life are dumb,"

all those who knew the spirit of Ray Eldred feel a pang of loneliness and of longing, and realize that such a man's place is never entirely filled.

Therefore, for all he was and is, these pages are written, as a loving memorial to the devotion of Ray Eldred, missionary, pioneer, and friend. As the modest work of Mrs. Eldred has been less known than that of her husband, many friends of the Congo work will be glad to learn more of this gifted woman, and of her service.

Yet not alone as a memorial is this life story told. He who builded in such heroic fashion would care little to be remembered unless his faith and deeds should appeal to the latent heroism of the Church. So we may well believe that this Master Builder of the Congo would like to have his life sound out some such challenge as is breathed in the poet's prayer:

"Loud rings on sea and land today
The challenge of a work to do
As in the furnace of time
God moulds this worn-out world anew.
Oh, strip us of our love of ease,
Send full on us Thy challenge clear,
And let us catch the far-off glow
Of Thy great walls—then let us go
And build their splendour here!"

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