

**THE MISSION OF THE
AMERICAN BOARD TO
WEST CENTRAL AFRICA:
PIONEER WORK, 1881**

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The Mission of the American Board to West Central Africa: Pioneer Work, 1881 by Various

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VARIOUS

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PIONEER WORK, 1881.

BOSTON:

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THE WEST CENTRAL AFRICAN MISSION.

At the annual meeting of the American Board in October, 1879, the Prudential Committee was directed to open a mission, if practicable, in West Central Africa. The region selected was that of "Bihé and the Coanza, an elevated plateau, or rolling country, some two hundred and fifty miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean at Benguela, in about 12° south latitude."

At the annual meeting in October, 1880, the Committee reported the arrangements in progress. Rev. Walter W. Bagster, Rev. William H. Sanders, and Mr. Samuel T. Miller, whose offers of service had been accepted, sailed from Lisbon on the 5th of October, the day of the annual meeting. After a pleasant voyage of thirty-nine days, touching at the Cape Verde and other islands, they landed safely November 10, in St. Philip, the port of Benguela.

This town, called also in common speech simply *Benguela*, contains about two hundred whites and four hundred blacks; has a fort, custom-house, and governor's residence, a bank, and a few store-houses. In slave-trading days it was one of the principal shipping ports of Angola. Thousands of slaves, chiefly brought in by the natives of Bihé, were sent off to Brazil and Cuba. The last shipments were within ten or twelve years. "I saw a thousand slaves in one caravan," says Monteiro, who was there in 1870. Now business has largely gone from Benguela to Catumbella, which is ten or twelve miles distant, and on the road to Bihé. The caravans from the interior stop at Catumbella.

The first thing to be arranged at Benguela was for the trans-

portation inland. The Catumbella River is not navigable. There are no beasts of burden and no roads on which they can travel. Merchandise is carried by porters. Travelers either walk or are carried in the *tepoia*, which is a kind of palanquin, or cot, suspended from a pole which is borne by porters. Six porters are the complement for a *tepoia*; two carry it a few moments, and without stopping transfer it to two others, and so onward. By sending two hundred miles down the coast to Mossámedes, a riding ox was procured, which proved serviceable.

Our missionaries were treated very civilly by the Portuguese authorities, and received many favors from merchants. But all the facilities given them could not overcome the difficulties of transportation without long and tedious delay, vexation, and expense. In 1877, the Portuguese government sent a scientific expedition to Bihé, comprising three army and navy officers. After they reached Benguela, with all the resources of the government at their disposal nearly three months were spent in procuring porters; and then it was more than six months after leaving the coast when they reached Bihé. Mr. Bagster and his associates fared better than Serpa Pinto and the other members of this Portuguese expedition. Though several times closing a bargain for guides and porters only to find it thrown up and everything to be done over again, and being once compelled, after fairly starting, to return when a few miles out, on the discovery of what seemed treachery in the porters, they at last got away from Benguela March 9, 1881. Having stopped at several places, on March 28 they reached Bailunda, where they are forming a station of the mission. Bailunda is but a short distance from Bihé.

This enforced delay has not been lost time, but rather directly helpful to the missionary work. They have made a wise distribution of Portuguese Bibles and New Testaments, which have been received in a way that gives promise of a future harvest. They have occupied themselves in learning the language. The

same dialect, the Ambunda, is spoken with slight variations by negroes on the coast and in the interior. Messrs. Sanders and Miller made such progress in their studies, that when they reached Bailunda they could understand conversations fairly. This knowledge they already find of essential advantage, as it enables them to know what the people say in their talks one with another about the missionaries, and it affords a check upon their guides and interpreters who, not infrequently, as they discovered, represented the strangers as saying, not what they meant, but what their guides thought they ought to mean.

What is more important, by this delay the people have become accustomed to the presence of the missionaries, an essential thing in dealing with Africans; they are learning to trust them, and to believe that they are what they claim to be, and are not secretly aiming to monopolize the trade of the country, and especially that they are not the advance guard of an American colony with designs of ultimate annexation of the country. From this last notion it has been hard to dislodge some of the men of intelligence. "England always sends missionaries to make way for colonists," it was said; "and England and America are for all practical purposes one."

The actual traveling time to Bailunda was about twenty days. Mr. Bagster rode the ox, Mr. Sanders and Mr. Miller started in tepoias, but walked much of the way. There were seven donkeys, and about sixty men carrying packages of sixty pounds each. Camp followers included, there were ninety-five persons in the company. The road, for a short distance skirting the shallow Catumbella River, soon began to climb mountains and wind through wild gorges. Numerous rivulets were crossed. As they advanced, the scenery became grand. "Majestic cañons opened between towering summits, gulches were filled with masses of wild vegetation, the trees struggled to lift their heads above the climbing plants." "On either side the views called for constant admiration. The grandeur of the rocky heights gave a feeling of littleness to the beholder." As they

reached the broken country of the elevated table-land, "the vegetation, instead of that of the tropics, appeared much like that of New England, and the scenery was such as would excite no surprise in the latitude of Boston." No perilous adventures were encountered, but the journey was a severer strain upon their patience and powers of endurance than they anticipated. Mr. Bagster gained relief from his fever, while Mr. Sanders and Mr. Miller had slight attacks, for which "quinine proved a sovereign remedy."

Bailunda is an important region. It is elevated and populous. The king, *Kwikwi*, has given a cordial reception to our brethren, and seems anxious to have them become permanent "children" of his. As this place lies on the direct road to Bihé, and is a few miles nearer the coast, a station there will be essential, and will be a hopeful opening for work beyond.

It is possible that a better road to the ocean may be found than the direct one from Bailunda down the mountains by way of Kassange and Catumbella to Benguela. Loanda, the capital of the whole Portuguese province, lies two hundred miles north of Benguela, and is the largest city on the West Coast south of Gibraltar. It would be much the best base of supplies. From Loanda there is transportation in steamers up the Coanza River sixty miles inland. From the falls on the Coanza it is thought a road less rugged and mountainous may be found to Bailunda and Bihé. Our missionaries propose to make explorations to ascertain about this. Even though the distance is greater, if the road proves easier, this, with the other advantages of St. Paul de Loanda — or simply Loanda, as it is usually called — would make that city most desirable for our seaport.

During the month of July, Messrs. Sanders and Miller were quietly settled down in comfortable quarters in Bailunda, acquainting themselves with the people and the people with themselves. Mr. Bagster returned to Benguela to hasten forward cloths needed for presents and for purchases, as the stock they took in at first would not long suffice. On his downward

trip he obtained photographic views and made important examinations of routes and modes of transport for the future.

When he had rejoined his associates in Bailunda, it was determined to go on to Bihé and inspect that country before deciding where to make the first permanent station of the mission. The "Ambassador" of Kwikwi took them in charge for the journey to Bihé. Just as they reached the border he declared that they must wait to learn the king's pleasure before going further, and intimated that they would be in danger unless they first heard again from the king. Finding that if they went forward it would be against the remonstrances of the guides, and unwilling to give occasion to any complaint of violating African etiquette, although they had no fear how they would be received by the king of Bihé, they thought best to return for the present to their old quarters in Bailunda.

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Frederick A. Walter, who left Bridgeport, Connecticut, April 7, 1881, and Lisbon July 5, landed in Benguela September 5, where they were welcomed by Mr. Bagster. Dr. Francis O. Nichols and Mrs. Nichols, who left Haverhill, Massachusetts, August 5, and Lisbon September 7, joined them in Benguela, October 6; and November 12 the newcomers left the coast for Bailunda under escort of Mr. Bagster.

As our friends are missionary explorers, there is not only special interest in the accounts they give of their movements, and in their pictures of the land and people, but these particulars need to be put on record for the wise conduct of missionary operations hereafter. We present copious extracts from their letters as the first contribution to the history of this Christian undertaking.

SAFE ARRIVAL ON THE COAST.

From St. Paul de Loanda—called simply *Loanda*, as St. Philip de Benguela is called generally *Benguela*—Mr. Bagster wrote November 9, 1880: