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DICTIONARY AND GRAMMAR  
OF THE  
KONGO LANGUAGE,

*As spoken at San Salvador, the Ancient Capital of the Old  
Kongo Empire, West Africa.*

COMPILED AND PREPARED FOR THE BAPTIST MISSION ON THE  
KONGO RIVER, WEST AFRICA,

BY THE

REV. W. HOLMAN BENTLEY,

*Missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society on the Kongo.*

(Separate issue, dated one year earlier than  
the Dictionary.)

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THIS WORK,  
UNDERTAKEN SOLELY IN THE SERVICE  
OF THE  
KING OF KINGS,  
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO  
HIS MAJESTY  
LEOPOLD II.,  
KING OF THE BELGIANS,  
AND  
SOVEREIGN OF THE CONGO FREE STATE,  
BY HIS MAJESTY'S GRACIOUS PERMISSION.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

KING OF KINGS

BY THE REV. DR. J. H. W. B. ...

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## PREFACE.

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THE Kongo River, and the Country from which it has received its name, have of late so attracted public attention, that much geographical description will be scarcely necessary. It will be sufficient to mention that the basin of the Kongo River includes nearly all the western half of Equatorial Africa from 5° of N. Lat. to 12° S. Lat., and from 30° E. Long., to within about 100 to 150 miles from the Atlantic coast.

Nearly the whole of this vast region is drained by one river, which pours into the South Atlantic in 6° S. Lat., about 400 miles south of the Equator, on the south-west coast of Africa.

The river itself is called by the natives *Nzadi*, or some equivalent term, which can only be translated as "the Great River," and is corrupted by Europeans into *Zaire*. The *Zaire* or *Congo* River is the name which appears on the map of Africa. The name *Zaire* is fast dropping out of use, that of *Congo* becoming more general.\*

The name of the *Kongo* River is derived from *Kongo* or *Ekongo*, the name of an ancient and once powerful kingdom, the seat of government being *Mbanza Ekongo* (appearing on old maps as *Ambassi*), situated about 150 miles east of the mouth of the river. As for the derivation of the name itself, it is not possible to speak with certainty. The verb *konga* means, to gather large fruit; *nkongo* means, a hunter; *kiakongo*, hunting skill. In *Herero*, *konga* implies, to hunt, to reconnoitre.

The people are called *Mwixi-Kongo*,† pl. *Exi-Kongo*, "people of Kongo." The language is called *Kixi-Kongo* (the *-xi-* is derived from *nxi*, a country). *Pioti* has been spoken of by some as the name of the language, but that is a mistake. *Pioti* is a corruption of *mfioti*, black, and means, "black-man's speech."

The *Bakoongo* referred to elsewhere in this work, are the independent *Kongos* living east of the *Kwilu* River. The prefix *Ba* used to distinguish them is applied by them to all plural nouns which are the names of persons; hence its appearance in their tribal name.

The people of *Kongo* belong to the great *Bantu* race, who, with the exception of the *Hottentot-Bushmen* of the *Cape*, inhabit all Africa south of the fifth parallel of North Latitude: a line drawn across Africa, parallel to the Equator, from the *Cameroon's Mountain* to the *East Coast*, will serve, to all practical purposes, to mark the northern boundary of the *Bantu* race.

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\* Since it is necessary to adopt a uniform phonetic spelling in such a work as this, **K** must take the place of **C**, to avoid confusion, and *Coongo* is always spelt *Kongo*. The **C** is too fixed as a spelling in newspapers, etc., to expect it to yield to the more correct **K**, but **K** must be used in this book.

† **X** is pronounced *sh*.

Dr. Cust, in his most valuable work on "The Modern Languages of Africa," gives information as to the territorial distribution of the great races of Africa, and to that work the student must be referred for details. It must suffice to state that, although the Bantu peoples present to the casual observer, no appreciable physical difference from what is known as the Negro race, being similar in colour, hair, &c., and sharing the same superstitions as to witchcraft, &c., &c., they are in language as widely distinct as it is possible to conceive. It is a recognised fact, that the Bantu and Negro families of languages are as far apart from each other as from the Aryan, Semitic, or Ural-Altaiic. Indeed, the natives of the Cameroons, and those on the Niger River, although living so near together, have no more in common, as far as language is concerned, than they have with English or Chinese. While the family likeness in radical, grammatical, and syllabic construction is easily distinguished in Bantu tribes, however remote from each other, there cannot be found a trace of such resemblance between the two frontier peoples above referred to, either in roots, in general grammatical rules, or even in construction of syllables; and these two samples of the two great races, taken from places so near to each other, may be, without hesitation, regarded as types.

In 1484 the mouth of the Kongo River was discovered by a Portuguese navigator, Diogo Cam; and in 1491 an expedition reached the Mbanza, or chief town of Kongo, which is now known to Europeans as San Salvador. Roman Catholic Missions were established there, and San Salvador was the seat of a Bishop. The ruins of its cathedral, of many churches, and of the stone wall surrounding the town, attest its importance in the past.

About 120 years ago the religious orders were expelled by the Governor of Angola; and from that time, with the exception of a short occupation in 1860, and an occasional visit from a priest, no white men lived for any length of time in Kongo, until, in 1879, the Baptist Missionary Society made San Salvador the base of their operations. In 1881 a Portuguese Mission followed, and now trading factories have been established.

The old Roman Catholic missionaries explored the country to a distance of about 250 miles from the coast. They appear to have kept away from the river, for their records give no information concerning it.

The slave trade flourished on the coast and in the mouth of the Kongo, but beyond the first cataract encountered, the course of the river remained unknown. In 1816 Captain Tuckey was commissioned by the British Admiralty to explore the river. His unfortunate expedition penetrated to a distance of about 150 miles (a little above Isangila).

Nothing further was known of the interior until Mr. Stanley's memorable journey across the Dark Continent in 1874-77.

Since 1879 the Baptist missionaries have travelled much in the interior of the old Kongo kingdom; and the roads past the cataract region are now constantly traversed by caravans of the Free State Government, and the Missions.

Wonderful stories are told in Portuguese and Italian books, of the former magnificence of the city and kings of Kongo; but when we reached San Salvador we found only mouldering ruins. The King, Ntotela,—who is styled Dom Pedro V., Rei Catholico do Congo e as suas dependencias,—exercised

a nominal authority over a district extending in no direction more than 40 miles from his town. Even in those narrow limits there were many independent and unfriendly towns and districts. The fact that the Portuguese had assisted him to assume his position as king had rendered him very unpopular, while slaving raids in past times had created blood feuds; so that not only was his power very limited, but his people were unable to travel in safety for any great distance from his town. They were able, however, to keep open a road to the coast, and to the river, along the ordinary trade routes.

This then was all that remained of the once powerful kingdom of Kongo, which, until 1879, was slowly and surely retrograding. There still lingered traces of a departed style and dignity, in the empty greatness of the name of the King of Kongo, in forms and ceremonies in his court, and the traditions of his relations with the royal families of Ngoyo (Kabinda) and Luango (Loango).

Duarte Lopez, in the account written in Italian by Pigafetta, in 1591, gives a list of the provinces of the old kingdom of Kongo. Bamba, which we recognise to-day as Mbamba; Sonio, a corruption of San Antonio at the mouth of the river; Sundi, or rather Nsundi, the country and chief town which we know to-day, lies about 70 miles west from Stanley Pool. Pango, or, as it should be spelt, Mpangu, is so common a name that it would be rash to decide on any town as the old capital. Batta we hear spoken of to-day as a district, Mbata, in the position described by Lopez. Pemba is recognised as Mpemba east of the Arthington falls of the Mbidiji (Ambrize) River.

One fact is important to note, that from Loango to the border land of Angola, and from the coast to within 15 miles west of Stanley Pool, I had little difficulty in understanding, and in being understood when I spoke the pure Kongo of the capital. Indeed, it is more difficult for me to understand broad Scotch than the dialect in that region. The Kongo language, as spoken at San Salvador, is the best medium of speech over the whole of the district as far as Stanley Pool, being the language of the old capital.

In our early studies of the language we had literally nothing at hand to aid us. Bishop Steere's "Handbook of Swahili" was the most helpful work we had, although the languages differ very considerably. We have since become acquainted with some books and vocabularies which would have been interesting, but of little real aid.

The priests at the court of Kongo translated, with the aid of Fr. Matheus Cardoso (Jesuit), a Portuguese treatise on Christian Doctrine by Fr. Jorge. This was published in Lisbon in 1624.\* Fr. Bernardo Maria de Cannecattim, the author of the Bunda Grammar (1804), says that the above was "the first work printed in the Kongo language."

In 1650 Fr. Hyacinth Brusciotto de Vetralla, a Capuchin missionary to Kongo, published in Rome a vocabulary in four columns, Kongo, Portuguese, Latin, and Italian.

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\* I have just seen (Sept. 4th, 1886,) two copies of this treatise in Kongo with Portuguese interlined in the Bibliotheca Nacional Lisbon. (Catalogue number: — Marco Jorge: "Doutrina Christã," 12., Repartição: Reservada, A.4.)

In 1659 the Propaganda at Rome published in Latin a work modestly entitled, "Some rules for the more easy understanding of the most difficult idiom of the people of the Congo, brought into the form of a grammar by Fr. Hyacinth Brusciotto de Vetralla, Prefect of the Apostolic Mission of the Catholic Church to the Kingdom of Congo." We are much indebted to Mr. H. Grattan Guinness for the translation which he has printed and published of a copy of this work, which he found in the British Museum.

I have carefully examined these "Rules," and am convinced that the dialect to which they refer is not that of the coast of Kongo, but that of Sonyo or St. Antonio, on the left bank at the mouth of the river, now spoken by the Osolongo (or Mu-Sorongo or Mu-shi-Rongo). The use of the verb *zitisa*, to love; the constant employment of the letter **R** instead of **D**, with other points, accord fully with the vocabulary of Cannecattim (which will be noted shortly), and which he describes as the Sonho dialect. Further, Cannecattim declares that the use of **D** instead of **R** is characteristic of the old translation made at the court of Kongo in 1624; we find the same to be the case to-day.

I am therefore confirmed in my opinion that the differences between Vetralla's work, and the language as spoken in Kongo to-day, do not point to great changes in the language, but to the fact that his work, like Cannecattim's, concerns the Solongo dialect; while the peculiarities of court Kongo pointed out by Cannecattim as existing in 1624, characterize it to-day. We have therefore no proof of serious change. Vetralla's work is very imperfect, being little more than he so modestly asserts.

At the suggestion of Dr. Cust, I have examined a French-Congo (?) Dictionary MS. of 990 pp., in the Grenville Library of the British Museum, it is about 100 years old, and nothing is known as to its authorship. I believe it to be of the Kakongo or Kabinda dialect. Unfortunately I cannot speak positively, because I am not sufficiently acquainted with the language. It is not Loango, for the natives of that district have worked for us, and I know something of their dialect. Some peculiarities which I had noticed in Kabinda accord with some found in the Dictionary. The compiler has been careless over his nasals; and while the production is interesting, it is far from correct. I have also examined the vocabularies of Barbot, and Merolla, and that in Douville's Voyages; beyond the fact of their being very short, there is little to comment upon; most of the words can be recognised, in spite of careless and quaint spelling.

In 1804 Fr. Bernardo Maria de Cannecattim, a Capuchin missionary, published a Portuguese and Latin Vocabulary of Kongo compared with Bunda (Angola). In his preface he tells us that the 1,000 words he gives are of the Sonho dialect. There are many mistakes, and many words which it is impossible to trace; but as he acknowledges his imperfect acquaintance with Kongo, and only gives his list as a philological study, we must not criticize, but be thankful for his contribution.

Just as the proofs of this Preface were being finally passed for the press, my attention was directed to a notice in "Les Missions Catholiques," of 20th Aug., announcing that the R.P. Duparquet, préfet apostolique of Cimbebasie, had discovered in the Museum of the Propaganda, at Rome, some documents of the highest value, amongst others, a precious manuscript of a Capuchin father, late

missionary of San Antonio di Sogno, bearing this title: "Missione in practica dei P.P. capuccini italiani ne regni di Congo, Angola et adjacenti, brevemente espota per lume e guida dei missionari aquelle Ste. Missioni destinati."

This work contains 134 pages, and is embellished by paintings in water-colour, representing various scenes of his work on the Kongo. M. Duparquet has continued these researches, and has lighted upon the archives of the old Loango mission, bound in a strong volume, which includes also the three following manuscripts:—

1. *Essay d'une grammaire Congo suivant l'accent Kakongo ou Malemba.* 48 pp., in 4to.

2. *Dictionnaire Congo-français.* This is complete, and contains 17 cahiers, from the letter A to Z.

3. *Le registre des baptêmes, mariages, et décès pendant les deux années 1774 et 1775.* It contains no less than 35 pages, and is signed by M. Descouvières, then Prefect of the Loango Mission.

These interesting discoveries stir the hope that other documents may still be found, perhaps even translations which may give us examples of the language as then spoken.

Captain Tuckey, the commander of the English Expedition in 1816, gives us a vocabulary of the Malemba and Mboma dialects (about 500 words). He is right in believing that it is not free from mistakes; but by far the greater portion of words given are easily recognised, in spite of the quaint spelling.

A year or two ago, Mr. H. Grattan Guinness published a Grammar of the Dialect spoken at Mpalabala, on the south bank of the River, opposite Vivi, based on a study of the language, by the aid of two lads who were staying in England for awhile with the late Rev. Henry Craven, of the Livingstone Inland Mission. At the same time Mr. Craven prepared a Dictionary,\* with the help of Mr. J. Barfield, B.A., senior tutor at Harley House Institute, Bow, who has since written further on the concords. The circumstances under which these works were prepared prevented them from being other than provisional. They were, however, a praiseworthy contribution to the scant information then available to philologists.

It is interesting at this point to note the information and words obtained by Dr. Koelle, of the Church Missionary Society, from released slaves at Sierra Leone, and recorded in his "Polyglotta Africana." His Kabinda and Mboma are recognised at once. Musentandu, or Exintandu are the Bakongo traders east of Makuta and the Kwilu River. We know most of the places, and the little stream Mpioka, mentioned by the man from that district. Mbamba is the district between San Salvador and the coast. Nteke, Ba-buma, Ma-yombe, and Nsundi are also well known. Most of the words can be recognised.

To tell the story of the reduction of the Kongo language to a written form,

\* By this work we were enabled to find some Kongo words which had not been recorded in our note-books. They were in some cases omissions, in others seldom used synonyms of words which we possessed. In no case were words introduced of the usage and correctness of which we were not able to assure ourselves. Perhaps as many as fifty words may have been thus added to our lists, while some forms, provincialisms, and synonyms we have been compelled to omit, not being able to trace them.

it will be necessary to refer briefly to the origin of the Baptist Mission to the Kongo.

Until the missionary explorations of Dr. Livingstone had given us the knowledge of the interior of Africa, nothing could be done towards the evangelization of its teeming populations; all effort was confined to the coast. The Church Missionary Society was carrying on its work at Mombasa, commenced in 1844 by Dr. Krapf; and after the early decease of Bishop Mackenzie, of the Universities Mission, Zanzibar became the seat of the Bishop of Central Equatorial Africa.

The whole burden of the work interiorwards devolved on Dr. Livingstone. For him the end of the geographical feat was the commencement of missionary enterprise. Misunderstood by most people, he endeavoured single-handed to solve those geographical questions which needed to be mastered before Christian missions could be commenced on practical and comprehensive lines.

The salient points were ascertained, while his marvellous journeys drew attention to the peoples and their needs. He went to open the door to Central Africa; he flung it open wide; and when the news of the Doctor's death reached this country, it was felt to be a call to the Christian Church for a new and worthier effort for the evangelization of the Dark Continent. From that time commenced the development of missionary enterprise, which is now steadily and surely overcoming the difficulties which kept Africa so long secret, and already we are not far from the time when chains of mission stations will cross the continent.

The first to move was the Free Church of Scotland, followed at once by the Established Church. They selected the district of Lake Nyassa for their field, where they have been labouring since 1875. A letter from Mr. H. M. Stanley, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of November 15th of the same year, gave an account of his visit to Mtesa, the powerful King of Uganda, on the northern shore of Lake Victoria Nyanza. He spoke of Mtesa's earnest desire that Christian teachers should be sent to his country. A few days later two anonymous donations of £5,000 each were offered to the Church Missionary Society towards the establishment of a mission on the Victoria Lake. These gifts were accepted, and in a few months the pioneer party set out for the Victoria Nyanza, which has thus become the sphere of the Church Missionary Society.

In 1877 the London Missionary Society, aided by the generous gift of £5000 by Mr. Arthington, of Leeds, undertook mission work on Lake Tanganyika. The Universities' Mission has also extended its work in the districts south of Kilimanjaro, and on the Eastern shores of Nyassa.

When these missions had been established on the Great Lakes, Mr. Arthington wrote to the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society, offering them £1000 if they would undertake mission work in the Kongo country, and in districts east of Angola, where there had been Roman Catholic missions in times long past. The Society accepted the offer, and sent instructions to two of their missionaries at the Cameroons, Messrs. Comber and Grenfell, to prepare for a preliminary journey in the region to be occupied. Scarcely had these steps been taken, when the news reached this country of Mr. Stanley's arrival at the

mouth of the Kongo, having traced the course of the river from Nyangwe to the West Coast, a distance of nearly 2,000 miles, thus discovering a water highway into Central Africa. He reported the river to be navigable from a point a little above Nyangwe to the Equator, a distance of about 400 miles, then a cataract region of 40 miles, beyond which a clear waterway extended for 1,080 miles to Stanley Pool, where the river, plunging into a gorge, often 2,000 feet below the main level of the country, became unnavigable for nearly 300 miles, during which it falls 1,000 feet, until at Vivi the river becomes once more fit for navigation to its mouth, a distance of 100 miles.

At once the field of the new mission became enlarged, almost indefinitely. In January and April, 1878, journeys of exploration were made by Messrs. Grenfell and Comber, after which the latter returned to this country to confer with the Committee, and to seek for help in this enterprise. While these preliminary investigations were being made, a party arrived on the river to found the Livingstone (Kongo) Inland Mission (undenominational), which in 1885 was taken over by the American Baptist Missionary Union.

In June, 1879, Mr. Comber arrived on the Kongo with three helpers, of whom the writer was one. To pass the cataract region we found that we should have to make an overland journey of about 225 miles, which would bring us to Stanley Pool, where the river again becomes navigable. The natives of the Upper River bring their ivory and produce in canoes to Stanley Pool, where the inhabitants of the cataract regions buy from them, and convey it to the white men on the coast. One of the great trade routes passes close to San Salvador, which we therefore chose as the base of our operations, hoping that these native traders might carry our stores, and help us on to Stanley Pool.

The king received us very kindly, and at once we commenced to build. On our way out we had hired a gang of work-people from the Kroo Coast, but two days after our arrival at San Salvador they ran away to the River. We had then with us a lad from the Cameroons, and another from the Gaboon as personal servants, while to help us in our work we had two men from the Cameroons who had been in the service of our mission there. One understood rough stone masonry work, the other was a carpenter. We were, therefore, dependent upon the natives for labourers. Often they struck work, and threats and attempts at boycotting were troubling us in Kongo, before the word was coined in our English newspapers.

As a rule we were hard at work from 6 o'clock in the morning till sundown, and in the evening we were obliged to teach some of the lads of the town, who would not wait until the house-building was over. Amid all this work and travelling, we made our study of the language, having nothing to help us beside a short vocabulary of some 40 or 50 words, which Messrs. Comber and Grenfell had collected during their preliminary journey the previous year. As before noted, we had Bishop Steere's Handbook of the Swahili language, which helped us to gain some idea of a language of the Bantu family. The elder sons of Dom Pedro, the king, and one or two others, possessed some knowledge of Portuguese; they helped us in our early palavers, and occasionally gave us some words; but they had their own business affairs, and could not give us much time. The children, however, were always at hand, and words

could be caught more easily from them, as they articulated more distinctly. Every word gained was noted, entered in our memo. books, and in the evening we each reported to the other all that had been acquired, and further discussed the new words. Our vocabulary steadily increased as we talked or played with the children, or initiated our scholars into the mysteries of reading and writing. The alphabet was arranged, and the force of letters decided upon. Some words were gained as we worked with the men who helped us in building our houses, timber cutting, quarrying limestone, or in cutting the canoe to transport the stone to the holes in which the Portuguese had burnt their lime long ago. Also when travelling, or doctoring the sick, we collected words, and thus added daily to our lists. When we were able to speak the language a little, and ask questions about it in the language itself, we made further progress, and many mistakes were corrected.

Our work at San Salvador made good progress; but our aim was the evangelization of the Upper Kongo, and this had to be kept in view. Beyond the king's territory, however, we were blocked by the native traders. When we endeavoured to make our way from San Salvador towards Stanley Pool they steadily and persistently refused to allow us to pass, in spite of all we told them of our errand. "No," they said; "you white men stay on the coast; we will bring the produce to you there; but if you go to the Pool you will know our markets and buy where we buy, our trade will be lost; then how shall we obtain our guns and powder, beads and brass, crockery-ware and knives, cloth, and all the fine things we get now? No, we will never let you pass our towns; and if you persist, you will be killed." They could not conceive of people who were not traders.

Thirteen attempts were made, first on one road and then on another, until Mr. Comber was attacked and shot. He was able to escape, and the slug was extracted.

Then followed long palavering, and at last the road was declared open. Meanwhile, we learned that Mr. Stanley had returned to the Kongo, and was engaged in making a road from Vivi, on the north bank of the Kongo, the point where the river ceased to be navigable. He was said to be acting for the King of the Belgians, and to have instructions to open up communications between the coast and Stanley Pool. This was good news indeed. Next we learned that M. de Brazza, who had for a long time been exploring inland from the Ogowe River, near the Equator, had come down on to the Upper Kongo, thence to Stanley Pool, and by the north bank to the coast. As the south-bank road was declared open, it was determined that Messrs. Comber and Hartland should once more try it, while Mr. Crudgington and I should attempt the north bank. The south-bank party met with a repulse in a few days; on the north bank we were more fortunate. We found Mr. Stanley's steamer-road extending as far as Isangila, a distance of about fifty miles from Vivi. There we found his advance party; beyond was unknown land. M. de Brazza must have kept far from the river, for we were soon among people who had never seen a white man, while there was so little intercommunication between the people that no one knew of Mr. Stanley's approach a day's march beyond his camp. We were therefore able to take the people by

surprise, and when we reached the districts of the ivory traders, they were bewildered at our sudden, unexpected advent, not having any idea of white men trying to reach the Upper River; before they had recovered from their astonishment we had passed on. So, sleeping in quiet places, and travelling rapidly in this way, we were able to reach the pool and visit Ntamu, where Léopoldville and our Arthington Station were afterwards established. Having accomplished all that we desired, and ascertained the correct geographical position of Stanley Pool, we returned. It was a risky, adventurous, anxious journey; but we accomplished it in safety, and were thus the first who had made the journey interiorwards, from the Lower River to Stanley Pool. When at last we were able to open communications, and establish stations on the route which we had just explored, we had to leave our comfortable station at San Salvador, to the new missionary brethren who came out to help us; for our experience and knowledge were necessary when dealing with natives who had never before been in contact with Europeans.

Our study of the language, which had thus far been carried on amid all this work and travelling, was at this point rendered more difficult, and was constantly being hindered by the hard work incident to the establishment of our stations on the route thus opened.

We were so short-handed that until quite recently we were seldom more than one man at a station. It was very difficult to find time to record the words acquired and make the necessary corrections; or even to examine quietly our rough translations of Scripture. Now and then we had opportunities for taking down some fire-side stories, and this folk-lore gave us new words. We were too busy to study, classify, or enter the words; but our careful notes and rough memoranda were treasured up, and whenever a little leisure could be found, the attempt was made to lessen the ever-growing bundle of papers.

Later on our small rough vocabulary books became too crowded to contain notes, and a rearrangement became necessary. To do this an English Dictionary was searched for words which could be translated, and these words entered down in shorthand reporter's notebooks. Wherever modifications of English words required space, it was necessary to calculate the possibilities; thus under the verb "cut" it was necessary to plan thus:—

Cut, *v.*  
 (a terrace),  
 at one stroke,  
 be,  
 (castrate),  
 (chop) down,  
 (cloth or paper),  
 (corn, &c.),

in order to include the various phases, modifications, synonyms, and shades of ideas. When letter A had thus been planned, the Kongo words were filled in from existing memoranda, or asked for. The same process was gone through with all the letters, and the work checked and re-checked, and new words added until the larger vocabulary became once more chaotic. At this stage my col-

leagues requested me to take the work home to this country, and print the material thus collected.

To accomplish this, I took with me a lad named Nlemvo, to whom I could refer, and with whom I could test the accuracy of my work. The lad had been brought to me by his uncle, to be taught in our schools at San Salvador, a few months before the road to Stanley Pool was found, and our line of communication established. He had lived all his life in the neighbourhood of the old capital. Though only about 12 years old, he had been to the coast with his uncle. There is no special intelligence or ability in the lad; he was a very ordinary Kongo boy, but was willing to accompany me when I left San Salvador, and has been with me ever since. With the tribal pride of his people, he scorns the patois spoken in other districts, and has preserved the individuality and characteristics of his own dialect as spoken at San Salvador. He was never long enough in any one district to be much influenced by other patois, while the labourers hired from San Salvador, working on our stations, gave him constant opportunities for speaking and hearing his own dialect. He has not a single notion of the principles of grammar, nevertheless he always speaks correctly, and only twice has a slip been noticed. Until I brought him to this country in 1884, he knew scarcely a word of English, and after more than two years residence in England, we scarcely ever speak anything but Kongo together, though he has shown very fair ability in picking up English.

Every word was checked again and again at long intervals, so that the most powerful memory would have failed in *deceiving*, had there been any such inclination. Some words which had been picked up from San Salvador people were condemned by him, as having been introduced from the district of Mbamba by slaves from that neighbourhood. In a large number of cases I have been able to test the correctness of this myself.

For more than five years have I been watching carefully for new forms, words, and grammatical constructions, but have never had any reason to suspect changeableness. There are altogether only four or five words in the whole dictionary with which he is not familiar, and generally able to explain the actual idea conveyed by the word. Subtle distinctions thus made have been checked and re-checked at intervals, sometimes of months. Seldom has it been necessary to make any serious corrections.

On arriving in this country it was found that there was much more to be done with the chaotic manuscript which I had brought home with me, than we had at first expected. Prepositions, pronouns, adverbs, and conjunctions seemed to be used indiscriminately; *vo* for instance standing for "on, off, from, there, when, after, thither, if," &c. It was clear that more time and thought were necessary to solve these difficulties, and find out the rules by which things worked. This was done by making up English sentences, in which the English adverbs, conjunctions, &c., were used in every conceivable way, and then translating these into Kongo. Bishop Steere's and other vocabularies were again searched for special phases of actions and ideas, which should find their counterpart in Kongo, and so things began to take a more definite form. Finally, in writing out for the printers, Mr. Kölbe's "Herero Dictionary" was before me, lest any shade of idea of English verbs, simple or combined with prepositions, such

as "to come," or "to come in crowds," etc., should have escaped my attention. Even at this stage, new words were constantly cropping up and, wherever possible, inserted into the proofs that were under correction.

My work was growing larger than I had ever expected. Instead of being simply a clear transcription of the material brought home with me, the end of the work seemed ever receding. I had hoped and expected to keep my printers well supplied with copy as the transcriptions progressed; but the correction of the proof revealed errors, and sometimes also fresh niceties of thought, which required a great deal of time to formulate correctly.

As the proofs of the English-Kongo section came in from the printers, I sent them to a friend to be written for the reversed section of Kongo into English. He wrote each word as it appeared, with its English equivalent, on a separate slip of paper. As he sent in his slips from time to time, they were sorted into alphabetical order, according to the Kongo word on each slip. Later corrections or additions were also written on slips, and sorted in, so that finally every usage of a word, and any corrections made, were found together in its alphabetical order. Thus, when reversing the English-Kongo section at "ENTER, *v.*, **diuka, kota**," my friend would write on one slip: "**diuka, *v.*, to enter**"; and on another, "**kota, *v.*, to enter**," and then finally, when revising, we found these words in their places under **D** and **K**. Then again at "go in," he would find **kota (muna)**, and **diuka (muna)**. These he would write out in the same way, and so there would be several slips with the same Kongo word: **kota, to enter**; **kota, to get in**; **kota (muna), to go in**; **kota, to admit**. It was found, however, that "**kota, to admit**," was not correct; therefore a warning slip was sent through, which read thus: "**kota to admit (*del.*), (should be **kotesa**).**" In this way, not only the type was corrected, but the mistake eliminated from the second section. These reversal slips eventually numbered 25,000, being kept in trays, and measuring between 9 and 10 feet in thickness. As fast as the type was set up, the writing and sorting up of those slips progressed; and when the first section was finished, and the last slip written, the work of revising these for the press began.

All the slips containing one particular Kongo word were examined, and the different translations grouped and written under one heading.

About fifty words of the second section had been thus revised when a heavy trouble came upon me. I had been suffering for some time from an inflamed condition of the eyes. This was intensified by a cold wet drive home from a missionary meeting in October, and an attack of serous iritis set in which rendered it imperative for me to rest my eyes; indeed, it soon became impossible for me to use them. Happily the revision work had been started, and I was able to explain the principles to my wife, who bravely determined to help me through the difficulty, rather than leave me to the mercies of a paid assistant, who would probably have little interest in the correctness of the work, and to whom time would be the first consideration. My wife was always at hand, and we worked early and late; everywhere, whether at home or abroad, my work and my assistant were always with me, and I was able to push on at all times.

After we had been thus labouring on for a couple of months, we obtained the

kind help of a young lady friend and her sister, who lived near, and were ever ready to help in any way possible; they assisted my wife much in transcription and the arranging of matter from which to extract principles and rules. Occasionally we had the help of other friends for an hour or two, and thus the burden which had fallen upon my wife was lessened, and the heavy task of correcting and revising the 25,000 slips of words, as well as the writing of the grammar and correcting the proofs, was accomplished in far less time than otherwise would have been possible.

As the revision progressed I found, however, that although the proofs of the earlier sheets of the first part had been repeatedly checked by Nlemvo and myself, some mistakes had escaped our notice. Some of these were due to our misunderstanding each other, others to the difficulty in distinguishing the middle voice of the verb, which, while conveying an active idea, is yet intransitive. This difficulty is increased when the verb appears in the applied form, which imparts to it a prepositional idea, and requires a secondary object. These forms are worked out in the Grammar, and are only referred to here to instance the special difficulties, which gave rise to several errata in those early sheets, which were thus proved to have been passed prematurely.

The system adopted in reversing the English-Kongo into Kongo-English, worked like the system of account-keeping by double entry. An erratum in the first entry proved its incorrectness when appearing among the sorted slips which recorded a word's appearance in any form or any part of the Dictionary. In this way the second section checked the first; and while regretting the many errata that were not discovered in time, it is satisfactory to feel that they have been found and recorded, and that the result is to so much greater extent correct. It would have been wiser to have waited until all had been finished before sending anything to press; but proofs could be read, and checked, at times and places in which it was not possible to write; and, hoping that the task would be finished in a few months, and that it would soon be possible to return to my work in Africa, I sent the material in as it took its shape, and after three or four careful readings, both by Nlemvo and myself, passed it for press.

These explanations may scarcely be needed, but they may serve to give assurance that the errata found are not a few out of many such still existing unobserved; but that to a very large extent they have been discovered, too late it is true for alteration, but better so than never. Some forms and idioms could not be fully understood until the grammar had been worked out, and until the absolute rule was found, some mistakes could not be noticed, since Nlemvo could only correct the words and their spelling.

In a general and wide study of the Bantu, or of any other family of tongues, we may expect to find certain individualities, forms, and tendencies much more developed in some languages than in others; some forms most rare and obscure in one member of the family, occurring frequently in another, in which also the construction appears most simple. Thus each language reduced should not only aid us towards a fuller knowledge of the general principles of its class, but should elucidate some of the difficulties belonging to other branches of its family. I was much helped by the study of other Bantu Grammars; notably

Bishop Steere's "Handbook of Swahili," whose remarks and rules as to the applied form, gave me the clue to the rules for the formation of the perfect.

While I record the help thus received, I cherish the hope that this last contribution, which I have had the privilege of rendering, may also be of some assistance, not only to my colleagues, but to any missionary brethren who in other parts of Africa, and under the auspices of other societies, are faithfully serving our one Lord and Master, and seeking the extension of His kingdom of righteousness and peace. Earnestly do I hope also that some new material and light may be found by those learned and patient students of philology, who, in temperate climates, and under circumstances more favourable to quiet and wider study, are carrying on their researches after linguistic truth, which have enabled them to render such great service to those of us who, in more confined surroundings, are struggling with the great difficulties which present themselves to missionary pioneers, one of the earliest of which is the great barrier of language.

There is always a danger that one who has for years given himself to the study of a language, previously unknown, should begin to consider that particular language the most interesting of all the members of its family; sometimes even to consider it the root of all, or at least the nearest to the obsolete radical. I seek to avoid this mistake, but at the same time cannot refrain from expressing the happiness, which is shared by all my colleagues, that, in the providence of God, we were led to study the Kongo language in the highly cultured, beautiful form in which it is spoken at the old capital, and which has therefore the widest range; whereas some of its dialects are harsh, uncouth, restricted to small districts, and, as far as we have learnt, weak and defective.

As we carried our investigations deeper and deeper, we were surprised to note how far-reaching and absolute are all the principles and rules. We are able to state and explain them definitely, and find them working without exception. Indeed, when an irregularity is found, at once the suspicion is raised that the real principle has not been discovered, and our Grammar stands without the usual lists of exceptions. In this respect it figures as an ideal, impossible to our European languages, which have been subject to such interaction and reaction, until Keltic, Saxon, and Latin rules have brought about results and changes, so arbitrary and strange as to be almost inexplicable, and we have to state facts as facts, and leave them so. In the Kongo language, as spoken at San Salvador, we find a language uninfluenced by any other great family. Negro, Semitic, or Hottentot peoples have been too remote, the nearest being the Negro Eñik, spoken north of the Cameroons, nearly 1,000 miles away.

The Portuguese element has made itself felt on the coast in the shape of "Kongoized" Portuguese names of some articles introduced. At San Salvador we find this influence only slightly felt; for instance, such words as *mpu* or *sapu* from *chapeo*, a hat; *lolonji* from *relojio*, a watch or clock; also the adjective *-ajimola*, used of money contributed for religious purposes, derived from *esmola*, alms. It is often hard to trace the derivation of such words, but nearly always we have succeeded in so doing. We have then an easier language to study than Dr. Krapf or Bishop Steere could find in Swahili, which is so

saturated with Arabic; or the many students of the Kaffir languages, which have been so much influenced by the Hottentot clicks and words, as well as by the peculiarities of the other Bantu peoples, conquered and enslaved by them in their marauding expeditions. It may be that some may gain new light from the rules for the derivation of nouns in Kongo, while it appears that in no grammar which I have been able to see has the principle of the locatives been deduced so clearly and fully; indeed in most it has received scarcely any attention. The "unnatural negative" also may suggest new possibilities to some, as also the rules for the loss, or retention, or change of prefix, the use of the particles **ya, ye, yo**, and of the article with adverbs, etc. These points are mentioned as being more fully developed in Kongo; and if new light has been thrown upon any questions or difficulties, it is largely due to the regularity and persistent conformity to type, which characterizes the language.

While the Kongo-English section was under revision, a number of words were found in a singular manner. I was working out the idea of a Kongo Primer, representing all the possible combinations of consonants with vowels—**ba, be, bi, bo, bu; mba, bwa, mbwa**, etc. Then syllabic combinations, as: **baba, beba, biba, boba, buba**. After a few examples, I took notice only of those combinations which were actually Kongo words, and sometimes a whole set of words could be found with all the vowels, as above; sometimes one vowel would have no example, and I would then ask Nlemvo whether they had such a word in his language, for instance, **yaba**. "Yes," he would say; "**yaba** is to root up by handfuls." After a few words had been found in this manner, it occurred to me that it might be worth while to try the whole alphabet for likely combinations which would convey some idea in Kongo. Accordingly, at odd times, I began to suggest **baba, beba, biba, boba, buba, bamba, bemba, bimba, bomba, bumba**; then **bada, beda, &c., bafa, befa, &c.**; and when all possible combinations on **B** with two syllables had been gone through, some twenty-two words were found. After **B, D** was taken as a base, **daba, deba, diba, &c., dada, deda**, and so on. It sounds almost too absurd a story to be true, but so amply did the guess-work repay, that it was continued at odd times, such as at meals or taking exercise, during several months. We went all through the alphabet in this way, and the result was the finding of some 300 new words. I offered the lad a small bonus to sharpen his wits, and the suggestion of two syllables put together would sometimes remind him of a word of three or four syllables which had not been noted before. Neither in the grammar nor in this word-guessing was there any possibility of fraud, had there been any inclination, for all the words were checked again and again, and the most powerful memory would have failed to preserve so many words, if they had been made up for the sake of the bonus. Now fresh words are very seldom found, certainly not one per week, and the language, though not exhausted, has been to a very large extent reduced. It has not been my endeavour to stuff the dictionary with derivative nouns of all kinds, and all possible verb forms; on the contrary, I endeavoured to keep words out, and regular derivatives are only inserted where their absence might be confusing—thus with "**nsoni, 2, shame**," it was necessary to insert "**nsoni, 1 & 4, one who writes**," and the adjectives "**-anson, dripping, dropping**," from "**sona, to drip**," and "**-anson, shameful**." Where-

ever a derivative could be safely omitted, and the rules given in the Grammar would be sufficient to help the student, the word was left out, otherwise the dictionary would have grown to a most immoderate size.

At every point and turn new surprises were met with, as the richness, flexibility, exactness, subtlety of idea, and nicety of expression of the language revealed themselves. All this richness of speech is at the disposal of the lad who has been my chief helper, and he, not selected, but coming to me by chance, as far as such a word can be safely used. We find then the Kongos speaking a language so exact and truthful that the tricks, the double intention, the falsities and illogical perversions which are so freely perpetrated in European languages, would not be possible in Kongo argument. Half the quibbles and mountains of reasoning, thrown up upon strained usages of words and indefinite expressions, which have vexed and separated sections of the Christian Church, could trouble no Kongos, with so exact and definite a speech at their command.

They have also an almost exhaustless store of proverbs and trite sayings ("Kingana, 5; or ngana, 2"), to point any story or remark. Often two words are sufficient to suggest the proverb, just as we might say "sour grapes," and by these suggest the fable of the fox and the grapes.

This wealth in idea and form does not specially characterize Kongo, but is possessed by the whole family of Bantu languages to a greater or less extent. Identical rules, words, forms, and turns of expression are spread over the whole area inhabited by the Bantu race, and are found among peoples who can have had no intercommunication since their first separation, such as the languages spoken at the Cameroons and in Zululand, which are 3,000 miles apart. The wide-spread possession of these qualities points to their existence in the parent stem, which must have been itself of a high class, as in the case of that language in which were written those early Vedic hymns, sung in Hindu worship, at the time when Moses was growing up to manhood at the court of the Pharaohs.

Once more we are brought face to face with the fact, that, the further we trace the forms of speech found amongst barbarous, or, as some are pleased to call them "savage" people, we can but feel that there has been to them a greater past. We find them peoples, whose language is superior to themselves, illiterate folk, with an elaborate and regular grammatical system of speech of such subtlety and exactness of idea that its daily use is in itself an education.

Before I close I must not fail to express my appreciation of the kindness shown by the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society, who have patiently allowed me to carry on this work, on which they could themselves form no opinion, trusting only to my word, that my time and energy was being rightly spent.

I take this opportunity also to express my indebtedness to R. N. Cust, Esq., LL.D., &c., &c., who has himself made so great a contribution to African philology, in his bibliographical work on "The Languages of Africa." His kind and constant interest in my work, his experience, suggestions and advice have been throughout most helpful and encouraging.

To my printers, Messrs. Butler & Tanner, of Frome, I must record my

thanks for the patience which they have shown during the long delays, and inconvenience, which resulted partly from the unexpected growth of work, and partly from my temporary blindness. Their care also and accuracy have saved me much labour.

In conclusion, I feel I must state that the great thought which was ever before me, and which prompted me to carefulness and thoroughness, was, that I was preparing a grammar and dictionary, which would be used by my colleagues in the translation of the Scriptures, and that, therefore, any carelessness or error might be very serious in its consequences. Generally such work has been done on other lines, and often have translations of parts, and even of the whole Bible been made with a most imperfect vocabulary, which has not even been preserved in any written form; and good and faithful men have passed away, leaving to their successors no clue as to the rules of the language into which they have made their translations, and which would help others to learn the language also. Such acquirement of the colloquial has its dangers; words may be often terribly misapplied. Let one instance suffice; the word used in one district to express the name of the Saviour was **Nlaludi**, from **Lalama**, "to float on the surface of the water." **Lalula**, the reversive means, "to pick off or rescue something or somebody floating on the surface of water," **Nlaludi** "one who rescues from drowning, or takes something floating on the water." This very confined idea is all that **Nlaludi** can possibly express. How very poor a word to use in speaking of the Son of God, who came to be our Saviour from the curse and thralldom of sin. What can hill folk understand when they hear the word? A superficial knowledge of a language may suffice the trader, or explorer; but a very deep and thorough acquaintance should be sought by those who seek to inculcate religious truth, and to translate the Word of God. The deep responsibility above referred to has ever been before me, than which a better, purer, and higher incentive to thorough truthful work it is impossible to conceive. If anything has been accomplished, and any good and true thing produced, I can only thankfully and humbly ascribe all to the Great Master, who has deigned to use so poor and weak a tool, and who with the duty has also accorded strength and grace to perform it. May the evil influence and hindrances of its imperfections be forgiven and counteracted, and so, as far as possible, may this work be to His glory, and tend towards the enlightenment and restoration of His lost and fallen children.

AUGUST, 1886.

W. H. B.



