

A SOUTHERN METHODIST IN AFRICA: BISHOP JAMES CANNON, JR. AND THE CONGO MISSION

ROBERT A. HOHNER

The name James Cannon, Jr., usually conjures up vivid and often unflattering historical images. One thinks, for instance, of the militant crusader for prohibition during the Progressive era, the political preacher who campaigned against Al Smith in the presidential election of 1928, and the beleaguered cleric accused in the 1930s of stock-market gambling, financial wrongdoing, and adultery. Such dramatic events, however, have obscured other aspects of Cannon's career. Largely forgotten, for example, are his activities as a missionary bishop and champion of the ecumenical movement. A strong Wilsonian internationalist, he supervised southern Methodist missions in Mexico, the Congo, and Brazil, promoted world prohibition in Great Britain and on the continent, and participated in the international temperance and ecumenical conferences of that period. He also played an active role in humanitarian agencies, notably Near East Relief, the massive American philanthropy to aid the Christian victims of Turkish atrocities.¹

Although most prominent in the United States as a vigorous defender of prohibition in the 1920s, Cannon spent much of the decade abroad. Of his many trips overseas, one of the most memorable was his first visit to the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) in 1922. The bishop, chairman of his church's Commission on Temperance and Social Service, was a close observer of people and social customs. While in the Congo, he kept a travel diary, much of which the Nashville *Christian Advocate*, the southern church's general periodical, later published. For a century or more, missionaries had provided Americans with their primary source of information on other cultures, and Cannon's travel accounts followed in that tradition.² His candid observations in these writings, reveal much, not only about Cannon himself, but about African life, western imperialism, and the Protestant missionary enterprise toward the end of its heyday.³

¹For an assessment of Cannon's life and career, see Robert A. Hohner, "Dry Messiah Revisited: Bishop James Cannon, Jr.," in *The South Is Another Land: Essays on the Twentieth-Century South*, ed. Bruce Clayton and John A. Salmond (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 151-168.

²William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1.

³On the American Protestant missionary effort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Valentin H. Rabe, "Evangelical Logistics: Mission Support and Resources to 1920," in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. by John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 56-90.

The late Bishop Walter Russell Lambuth, the southern Methodist church's foremost missionary leader, had founded the fledgling Congo Mission in 1914.⁴ As a church journalist and educator, Cannon had been a vigorous advocate of missions, and after Lambuth's death, he reluctantly consented to make the difficult trip to central Africa. Cannon was burdened with other responsibilities, but no bishop had visited the Congo mission since its inception, and he considered such neglect to be unfair to the missionaries in the field, who needed episcopal attention and support.⁵ Sailing on December 10, 1921 on the *Olympic*, sister ship to the *Titanic*, he was determined to hold the first annual conference of the Congo mission and return in four months, a nearly impossible task, in time to report to the General Conference in May, 1922.⁶

After a brief stop in London, Cannon proceeded to Belgium, where he caught a small Belgian steamer, the *Anversville*, bound for the Congo by way of the Canary Islands and Senegal. At the brief stop in Dakar, he noted, with characteristic paternalism on racial matters, that the natives there were "genuine negroes — sit around warehouses and market houses doing nothing, just like many of our Southern negroes."⁷ On January 7, 1922 the *Anversville* entered the mouth of the Congo River, and after travelling another day and a half up river, the steamer reached Matadi, the port of entry.⁸ As a newcomer to Africa, Cannon was eager for information, constantly questioning the local missionaries and others about local customs. At dinner in Matadi with a British couple, for example, he learned how the mission churches dealt with the vexing problem of polygamy and church membership. The native males could keep their surplus wives if acquired before exposure to Christianity; otherwise, they must give them up and find them new husbands.⁹

The southern Methodist mission was located deep in the interior, in the heart of the Congo, in a territory covering some 70,000 square miles, or roughly the size of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia combined.¹⁰ To reach this remote area, located between the Sankuru and Lomami rivers, Cannon had first to travel from Matadi by rail around the long stretch of rapids on the lower Congo to Kinshasa, where the Congo again became navigable. The train trip, in rugged hill country, was refreshing, and

⁴Obituary, Walter Russell Lambuth, *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 10 March 1922, 299.

⁵Cannon, travel journal, 10 December 1921, James Cannon, Jr., Papers, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C., box 3.

⁶Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, General Conference, *Journal*, 1922, 525.

⁷Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book — VII," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 26 May 1922, 652.

⁸Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book — VIII," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 23 June 1922, 776-777.

⁹Cannon, "Leaves," 23 June 1922, 776-777.

¹⁰Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, 525.

Cannon amused himself by reading Sir Henry Morton Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*, which described the same route.¹¹ (It was also the route in 1890 of Joseph Conrad, on the trip which inspired Conrad's famous story, *Heart of Darkness*.)¹² "The negroes swarm to the trains," Cannon noted, "some bringing their stuff to sell and others just to look and chatter as many people do in America." The scene reminded him of Mexico, "but the natives do not look as dirty, ragged, hungry, or sickly as they do in Mexico."¹³

At Kinshasa, Cannon would travel by river steamer up the Congo, the Kasai, and Sankuru Rivers to Lusambo, some twelve hundred miles inland, and then overland by caravan for four days to reach the mission station itself. Upon arrival in Kinshasa, however, he learned that the steamer, the *Yser*, had been delayed somewhere up river. Cannon soon discovered that life in the tropics proceeded at its own leisurely pace, indifferent to the timetables, no matter how urgent, of bishops and other outsiders. As the days passed, he impatiently passed the time by visiting with local missionaries and further outfitting himself with tropical clothing and equipment. A merchant's son himself, he made it a point wherever he went to talk with local businessmen and merchants. From the clerks and shopkeepers in Kinshasa he absorbed as much lore about Africa as possible. Among other things, they assured him that "the Congo mosquito was the most cunning and treacherous animate thing in existence."¹⁴ The missionaries were especially helpful, sharing with him their photographs and knowledge of "the special difficulties of the Congo missionary life."¹⁵

Kinshasa (today the largest city in black Africa and the capital of Zaire, but then a colonial town of some 28,000) was located at Stanley Pool, a lake in the river which marked the beginning of the middle Congo. Cannon, born and raised in Maryland and in adulthood a prominent citizen of Virginia, noted with apparent approval that the large native village was "separated entirely from White Kinshasa" and "under strict government control." The law required the Africans to be in the native village by nine o'clock each evening. "I was in the village one night when the bugle blew," Cannon reported, "and they scampered to bed or at least to their huts in great haste. After the bugle blows, the streets are patrolled by the native soldiers, and very good order is maintained."¹⁶

Belgium's administration of its African colony impressed Cannon. Some 750,000 to 1,000,000 members of the Batetala tribe inhabited the

¹¹Cannon, "Leaves," 30 June 1922, 810.

¹²For Conrad's diary and selected correspondence during his adventure in the Congo in 1890, see Robert Kimbrough, ed., *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 105-122.

¹³Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book - XIII," Nashville *Christian Advocate*, 27 October 1922, 1352.

¹⁴Cannon, "Leaves," 14 July 1922, 874.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 20 October 1922, 1321.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 27 October 1922, 1352.

territory in which the southern Methodist mission was located. In this region as elsewhere, the Belgian government maintained control through a system of Belgian district officials, who in turn maintained authority through the native village chiefs.¹⁷ "The government is no longer cruel as under Leopold," Cannon claimed, referring to the notorious Belgian king who had developed the Congo basin in the late nineteenth century. "Indeed," he observed, "I rather think the effort is to impress the world with the contented state of the natives." The power of the native chiefs, he noted, had been "much restricted," and the government had punished several chiefs "for cruelty and tyrannical practices."¹⁸ The Belgian authorities had also been prompt in granting the church the concessions it required for mission villages and other facilities. "Under Leopold," Cannon asserted, "there was opposition to us, because the Roman Catholics fought us and had influence with the government. Since the Socialists have had control, things are different. We can get the sites we ask for."¹⁹

On January 19, 1922, after an eight-day wait in Kinshasa, the steamer finally materialized. To Cannon's dismay, however, lashed to each side of the small, stern-wheel vessel were barges "full of negroes and their varied equipment of tents, huts, goats, and chickens."²⁰ He immediately realized that this unexpected encumbrance would slow the *Yser's* progress and add several days to the long voyage up river to Lusambo.²¹ To his further disgust, he soon found that for a steamboat captain, life on the river had its own imperatives and protocol, regardless of the presence or needs of the passengers, black or white. The captain had many friends along the river, and he stopped often, not only to take on supplies and fuel, but to visit, exchange gifts, and take meals with Portuguese and Belgian traders, either ashore or on the *Yser* herself. Predictably, such social occasions were lubricated with the consumption of ample quantities of liquor, which further irritated the southern Methodist prohibitionist.²²

The Congo natives fascinated Cannon, as they did most white visitors to this exotic and mysterious region. The near nudity of the Africans, especially the females, was unsettling at first ("it is a rather startling sensation," Cannon declared, "when one looks out on . . . a congregation of comparatively naked men and women for the first time").²³ Although a moderate on the race question, he shared the assumption of most American

¹⁷Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, 525.

¹⁸Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XXIII," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 21 September 1923, 1193.

¹⁹Cannon address, General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 13 October 1922, 1285.

²⁰Cannon, "Leaves," 1 December 1922, 1512.

²¹*Ibid.*, 27 October 1922, 1352-1353.

²²Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XIX," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 13 April 1923, 457-458.

²³Cannon address, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, 1285.

whites that black people were essentially children and that the black race, despite some exceptional individuals, was suited only to a subordinate and dependent role in human affairs.²⁴ This perception was strengthened by his exposure to the Congo natives, with their strange, primitive ways.

The Congo river steamers burned wood for fuel, and they travelled only by day, stopping each night at wood posts or trading villages. The Africans were jammed into cramped quarters below, and except for the servants hired by white passengers, the captain did not allow them on the upper decks. When the steamer stopped for the night, the Blacks went ashore, where they cooked their daily meal and slept in the open, clustered around many campfires. "Night fell quickly," Cannon recorded, "and as I looked from the steamer deck the fires shining through the trees, with the dark forms of the negroes flitting to and fro, and the murmur, sometimes the clamor of their voices rising on the air, furnished one of the most unusually interesting sights I have ever witnessed."²⁵ Often mingling with the natives ashore, he extended them small favors and ministered to the injured and the sick. They soon recognized him as a friend. "Many of them know me and smile when I come to their camp fires," he noted with satisfaction.²⁶

Cannon enjoyed the company of the natives and expressed indignation when they were mistreated. One evening the captain anchored overnight in midstream, to the discomfort of the African passengers, who had been penned up all day and were now denied food. "Such treatment," Cannon complained, "would be cruel for animals, but the captain does not think it necessary to consider the comfort of the natives; of course they have no rights."²⁷ Some days afterward, the captain jettisoned one of the barges, and later the other, which meant cramming even more natives below decks on the *Yser* itself. "The new adjustment," Cannon noted, "was made . . . under the captain's eye, with whip in hand."²⁸

Despite the irritating slowness of its progress (the ship, Cannon complained, moved "not much faster than a native can walk and much slower than they can trot") Cannon liked the *Yser*, for it was a clean vessel, and the captain's wife ran a first-rate kitchen. "The cooking," Cannon observed, "is the best I have struck since I left London."²⁹ He found the two young waiters (one of whom was named Sambo) in the mess hall "good-natured,

²⁴Cannon address, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, 1285; Cannon, "Leaves," 13 October 1922, 1290.

²⁵Cannon, "Leaves," 1 December 1922, 1512.

²⁶Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XXI," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 18 May 1923, 616.

²⁷Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XX," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 4 May 1923, 552-553.

²⁸Cannon, "Leaves," 4 May 1923, 553.

²⁹*Ibid.*

fairly active negroes.”³⁰ Clean and attentive, they easily understood his sign language and, prompted by the captain’s wife, gave him special attention.³¹ “I already feel quite at home with them,” Cannon declared, “and, but for their Congo speech, I could not feel that they were different from our own negroes.”³²

When the captain paid his crew at the end of the month, Cannon, always the practical man, made a rough calculation of the costs and revenues in the riverboat business in the Congo. “It is evident,” he concluded, “that with such cheap cost for labor and fuel the profits are large.” Since “the boarding department is run by the captain and his wife as their own business,” he added, “they make a pretty penny out of it, for supplies are very cheap.”³³

As the *Yser* headed ever deeper into the interior, leaving the Kasai for the Sankuru, Cannon noted a marked change in scenery: “the river banks are much higher, the forest denser, the bird and animal life more frequent; and as the river is much narrower, we are always closer to the shore.”³⁴ When the vessel finally neared its destination, Cannon repacked his belongings in preparation for the trek overland to the mission. “I now have a corrugated iron trunk,” he counted, “two canvas rolls, my heavy leather suit case (which I have carried with me for fifteen years), portfolio, kodak, box of malted milk, six cases of canned meats, preserves, sardines, etc., three boxes of soda water and ginger ale, my cot, mattress, and folding chair.”³⁵

On February 9, 1922, after twenty-one days on the river steamer, Cannon at last reached Lusambo, the governmental center for the Sankuru district, where W. W. Higgins, one of the southern Methodist missionaries, greeted him. That evening Higgins and his wife treated the bishop to “a real Southern dinner.” Afterwards, they joined several southern Presbyterian missionaries, “all fine, clever folks.” The occasion, Cannon recalled, “was all too short. They wanted to hear about home, and I wanted to hear everything about their work in the Congo.”³⁶

The next afternoon, after a six-hour trip up the Sankuru on the mission steamer, the *Texas*, Cannon set forth overland on his first African caravan, together with two Methodist missionaries and some forty-five natives (later increased to sixty), including hammock men, porters, and a cook and house boy. The natives carried him in a hammock whenever

³⁰Cannon, “Leaves,” 1 December 1922, 1513.

³¹*Ibid.*, 22 December 1922, 1608.

³²*Ibid.*, 1 December 1922, 1513.

³³*Ibid.*, 4 May 1923, 552.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 554.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 18 May 1923, 617.

³⁶Cannon, “Leaves From My Note Book—XXI,” *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 18 May 1923, 617–618.

possible, but the terrain was steep, and it was necessary for him to walk and climb much of the way. As the caravan neared its destination, the village of Onakasongo, the "hammock men began to shout and sing and put on their best appearance, running lightly by" and shifting their burden from shoulder to shoulder without stopping.³⁷

The Belgians required village chiefs to provide European travelers with shelter, food, and water. Chief Onakasongo (villages in the Congo were named after the chief), a young African in European dress, soon appeared with his kapito, or head aide, and greeted his visitors "with much friendliness." Onakasongo, Cannon learned, had attended the Belgian school for chiefs in Lusambo for six months. "With the facility of so many negroes for languages," the bishop observed, "he had learned to express common everyday thoughts in French fairly well."³⁸

While the native women prepared supper, the chief sent for his medicine man to entertain his guests. With that insensitivity to other cultures characteristic of the western world, Cannon dismissed the medicine man, who "wore a headdress most remarkable for its hideousness," as "the great fraud." Nevertheless, the grotesque African cast a certain spell over his American visitors. "The gyration of his body," Cannon observed, "the beating of his drum, and the noises of his mouth were so fearfully silly that they were interesting, and the way in which his contortions were watched by the gaping natives was equally interesting." Just when Cannon thought the medicine man "had expended all his breath and worn himself out," the bishop made the mistake of rewarding him with some coins, "only to realize that his joy and gratitude were sufficient to restore all the energy he had lost."³⁹

That night, protected by a mosquito net, Cannon slept soundly on the porch of the simple but comfortable rest house provided for visitors. He had not heard the last of the medicine man, however. Just before dawn, the bishop was awakened by an "outrageous assault" upon his slumber. As a storm approached, the native sorcerer began to pound his drum and yell loudly to drive it away. Unfortunately, as Cannon recorded, "his efforts were futile. The tornado swept down upon us with roaring thunder and lightning." To Cannon's further annoyance, the medicine man "still poured forth his cries and exorcised his incantations to protect the village from the lightning."⁴⁰ Perhaps he was especially determined to display his spiritual and supernatural powers for the benefit of his Christian visitors.

At the next village, the night was cool and rainy, and Cannon had a fire built in the center of the guest house, tended through the night by

³⁷Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book — XXII," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 14 September 1923, 1161.

³⁸Cannon, "Leaves," 14 September 1923, 1162.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1161.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

the caravan's cook and house boy. "They were clean-looking boys," he observed, "who have been trained in the missionaries' houses and, like the house servants on Southern plantations, thought themselves better than the other natives."⁴¹ While waiting for supper, he strolled about the village, watching the women preparing the meal, "with bodies practically untrammelled by any clothes." In the tropics, he noted, clothes were not only unnecessary but largely a hindrance. Nevertheless, the native women in public wore long, colorful garments "with much vanity." They delighted to wear attractive clothes, for such apparel was an indication of their prosperity and social station. The "black chief and his kapito and other headmen," Cannon declared, "are learning that the white man has brought him a new burden—the buying of 'clothes' for his favorite wives."⁴²

The next day at one of the villages en route he and Higgins chanced upon the Belgian administrator of the district and his wife, who welcomed them with refreshments. Cannon was delighted to meet this official, whose good will was important to the success of the mission. In conducting a prolonged conversation, Cannon observed, "we gratified the natural desire of white people meeting in the heart of savagery to look each other in the face and talk about that outside world to which we belong."⁴³ That night Cannon and Higgins arrived at Lubefu, located on the river of that name, and one of the two mission stations maintained by the southern Methodist church in the Congo. After a warm greeting from their missionary hosts, they "sat down to supper in a Baltimore Conference Congo home." Once more among southern Methodists, Cannon relaxed, confident that he could carry out his plans on schedule. "We lingered long," he reported, "eating and talking . . . while the black faces visible in doors and windows made me think more of home than of the Congo."⁴⁴

The missionary program of the southern Methodist church, like that of other denominations, encompassed not only evangelism, but education, medical care, and industrial training. The foundation of its effort in the Congo was the mission village, to which it invited the natives to live. The church, as Cannon explained, told the Africans, "You can come and live in our village if you abide by our laws. If you build your houses as we say and keep them clean and keep the surroundings sanitary, if you are willing to work under missionary direction, if you behave yourselves morally and have only one wife, if you will attend the services of the Church from time to time, you can come to our village." Anyone guilty of immoral conduct would be expelled. In this way, Cannon noted, "we have control of the native life outwardly." The mission required every man

⁴¹Cannon, "Leaves," 14 September 1923, 1161.

⁴²Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XXIII," *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 21 September 1923, 1193.

⁴³Cannon, "Leaves," 21 September 1923, 1193.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

in the village to work, for which it paid him seven francs, or about fifty-six cents, a month. "It is not much," Cannon conceded, "but it is enough for their needs."⁴⁵

After inspecting the little mission settlement at Lubefu, Cannon and the missionaries set forth on the last leg of his journey to Wembo Nyama, the church's main mission station in the Congo. The terrain was the most difficult that he would encounter in Africa, with steep hills and dense undergrowth. Since he had scheduled the annual conference to begin the next day, he pressed on, keeping the caravan going until well after dark. "As it was a new path," he reported, "I thought it likely that there might be snakes and wild animals in the vicinity, and I proceeded with mental reservations, greatly preferring to travel through those spots by daylight." When fatigue nearly overcame him, he noticed that the missionary wife alongside him seemed to be negotiating the hills without difficulty. Not to be outdone, certainly not by a woman, the bishop received a second wind and managed to keep up with her and the others. Finally, at nearly ten o'clock the group stopped for the night.⁴⁶

Starting again at 4:15 the next day, the travelers reached Wembo Nyama at mid-morning. As the caravan neared its destination, the native evangelists came out and trotted beside it. Upon reaching the main village, the hammock men "raised a great noise, and the villagers responded." After quickly paying respects to the chief, the travelers continued a mile farther, to the mission village. There, the entire population of some six hundred lined up on either side, shouting greetings, and as the caravan passed through in triumph, the natives fell in behind, until the large throng, Cannon at the head, arrived at the house where the missionaries were waiting. In true African style, their bishop had at last arrived.⁴⁷

With typical dispatch, Cannon wasted little time in getting down to business. He called the first annual conference of the Congo mission to order that afternoon, February 14, 1922, on schedule. Together with nineteen missionaries and wives, he devoted nearly a week, holding three sessions a day, to "close, intense study of conditions and of the needs of the field."⁴⁸ Between sessions of the conference, Cannon toured the mission village (the "best natives" liked to live there, he contended), received the chiefs from the surrounding territory who came to pay their respects, and met with the native evangelists who worked under the supervision of the missionaries. He also made a point of taking a photograph of the conference for publication in the church press. "This group of earnest, intelligent workers in the heart of Central Africa," he believed, "is the best

⁴⁵Cannon address, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, 1285.

⁴⁶Cannon, "Leaves," 21 September 1923, 1194.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, 527; Cannon, "Leaves," 21 September 1923, 1193.

possible appeal to our people to give reënforcement of men and of money."⁴⁹

The progress of the Congo mission during its brief existence impressed Cannon. The reports at the annual conference claimed 637 members, 42 native evangelists, and 48 preaching stations. "The natives are very receptive," Cannon observed, "and many fine characters have already been developed."⁵⁰ Each morning, some 250 Africans came to prayer meeting, before the day's work.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the needs and problems were great. The mission sorely needed more substantial structures, such as those built by the Roman Catholic Church throughout the Congo and elsewhere. "The Romanists insist upon good buildings," Cannon noted, "and in this I think they are clearly right."⁵² The medical facilities of the Methodist mission were especially primitive and badly in need of equipment and trained personnel.⁵³ "We have not a single doctor," Cannon confessed, "within 150 miles of our missionaries."⁵⁴ During its deliberations, the annual conference decided to open two additional stations. To staff an enlarged mission properly, taking into account that for health reasons missionaries required a furlough every three years, it would be necessary to increase the complement to some thirty-two workers. "We have barely one-half the force necessary," Cannon concluded.⁵⁵

During the annual conference Cannon paid a "State visit" to chief Wembo Nyama in the main village one morning, including a visit to the enclosed area where the chief had located the houses of his "harem." His wives were then working in the field (not very hard, according to Cannon), and the chief insisted that the bishop return that afternoon to take photographs of them.⁵⁶ Cannon noted with regret that the chief was "entirely willing for his wives and children to be members of the Church, but he cannot himself consent to give up his wives."⁵⁷ With insight into cultural differences, Cannon observed that one of the most difficult problems facing the church in the Congo was the "condition of women by native custom, even law." The issue of polygamy, he recognized, involved "the entire economic, social, and moral fabric of native life."⁵⁸

On February 20, 1922 Cannon pronounced the benediction closing the annual conference of the Congo Mission, after eighteen sessions in

⁴⁹Cannon, "Leaves From My Note Book—XXIV," Nashville *Christian Advocate*, 12 October 1923, 1289.

⁵⁰Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918–1922, 527.

⁵¹Cannon address, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, 1285.

⁵²Cannon, travel journal, 1 March 1922, Cannon Papers, box 3.

⁵³Cannon, "Leaves," 12 October 1923, 1289.

⁵⁴Cannon address, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 16 May 1922, 1285.

⁵⁵Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918–1922, 527.

⁵⁶Cannon, "Leaves," 12 October 1923, 1289.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1289–1290.

⁵⁸Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918–1922, 528.

six days.⁵⁹ That afternoon, accompanied by one of the missionaries, he departed by caravan, this time traveling east to Kibombo on the Lualaba River, and stopping that evening in Tunda, the proposed site of the new mission station, to “a noisy welcome” from the chief and his fifty-six wives.⁶⁰ Chief Tunda and his favorite wife entertained his white visitors in grand style, serving them “fried chicken, hot cakes, ginger beer, sweet potatoes, jam, papaws, and canned cherries.” While they dined on the porch of Tunda’s house, the openings to the enclosure were “filled with heads and portions of bodies of the chief’s many wives, of all ages from twelve to forty.” The women, Cannon reported, “after peering and dodging and ducking for thirty minutes . . . forgot any fear that they might have had of us and lounged about, utterly oblivious to their nakedness.” The chief’s wives, he added, “were mostly kind-faced women, observant and keen to notice unusual things.”⁶¹

After inspecting the mission site the next morning, Cannon departed for Kibombo, where he would travel by train south to Kongolo, and by river steamer up the Lualaba River to Bukama, and then by train again to Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi), near the border of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). Before leaving, he took photographs of the village and of the chief and forty of his wives, “the favorite wives standing next to him dressed in gay clothes, the less favored on each end decreasing in clothes to stark nakedness.”⁶² After four more days on the path, Cannon arrived at Kibombo, and on February 27, 1922 he departed by train, en route to Elisabethville and Cape Town, South Africa.⁶³ He had spent eighteen days in the southern Methodist mission field itself, visited the existing mission stations at Lubefu and Wembo Nyama, held the first annual conference of the Congo mission, traveled the breadth of the mission territory, and inspected the new mission site at Tunda.⁶⁴ Now he was on the first leg of the long journey home.

As soon as Cannon’s train crossed from the Congo into Northern Rhodesia, he sensed the change. “I could hardly realize,” he exclaimed, “that I was actually on a train in English speaking territory again heading for Cape Town, and the steamer for home.”⁶⁵ The return trip along the Lualaba River in the Congo, and by rail through Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa, was even more picturesque than

⁵⁹Cannon, “Leaves,” 12 October 1923, 1290.

⁶⁰Cannon, “Leaves From My Note Book—XXV,” *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 7 December 1923, 1546.

⁶¹Cannon, “Leaves,” 7 December 1923, 1546.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³Cannon, “Leaves From My Note Book—XXVII,” *Nashville Christian Advocate*, 21 December 1923, 1611.

⁶⁴Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918–1922, 528.

⁶⁵Cannon, travel journal, 12 March 1922, Cannon Papers, box 3.

Cannon's original journey up the Congo River and its tributaries. He marveled at the beauty of the Lualaba, found Southern Rhodesia much like Mexico and Texas, expressed disappointment with the Southern Cross ("it has been exaggerated by writers"), and in the veldt and Karroo regions of South Africa ruminated about the history of that area ("Mafeking, Orange River, all of these smell of the powder of the Boer War").⁶⁶

After a brief appearance in Cape Town, Cannon sailed for England on March 17 on the ocean steamer, *Briton*. Despite the various delays, he noted with satisfaction that it appeared that he would complete the trip in record time.⁶⁷ Arriving in England on April 3, he sailed for home on the *Homeric*, arriving in New York on April 13, 1922, in time to report on the Congo personally at the meeting of the board of missions in Nashville and at the General Conference itself in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The trip had been a great adventure. He had been gone for four months and three days, having traveled some 30,000 miles. In the process, he had gained valuable experience and knowledge of Africa and provided the missionaries in the field, isolated from home and always eager for support and recognition, with episcopal guidance and encouragement. Upon his return, he paid tribute to "that company of choice spirits, that little band of consecrated men and women loyal to their Lord, holding forth the torch, the word of life, in the heart of darkest Africa, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of black men and women to whom they minister in the spirit of the Master."⁶⁸

An intense combatant and controversialist in the political and ecclesiastical arenas in America, Cannon was perhaps happiest when travelling overseas. The missionaries, dedicated to a life of Christian sacrifice and service abroad, admired his toughness, activism, and sense of duty.⁶⁹ They also valued his internationalist perspective and vigorous advocacy of their cause. During the bitter struggle in the southern church over Methodist unification in 1925, Cannon strongly defended his church's missionaries against charges of modernism and heresy. "Few men who labor in the homeland," he declared, ". . . can ever realize what it means and what faith, courage, and consecration it requires to labor persistently year in and year out among a pagan people."⁷⁰

At home, no one worked harder than Cannon for the Centenary, the southern church's campaign in the 1920s to raise funds for missions. As a result, no one was more disappointed at the church's failure to support

⁶⁶Cannon, travel journal, 5-17 March 1922, Cannon Papers, box 3.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 27 March 1922.

⁶⁸Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, 528.

⁶⁹J. Earl Moreland, interview with author, Ashland, Va., 5 June 1971.

⁷⁰Cannon, "Undermining 'Our Joy and Crown,'" Nashville *Christian Advocate*, 17 July 1925, 999-1001.

that cause adequately.⁷¹ Despite setbacks, Cannon continued to believe that missions was the most important work of the church.⁷² "I have them all in loving memory," he wrote of the Congo missionaries, "and shall be glad, if it be God's will, to visit them again."⁷³ Like many of the missionaries, Cannon never spared himself. Africa fascinated him, and although it would nearly cost him his life, he would indeed return.

⁷¹On the Centenary campaign, see Robert Watson Sledge, *Hands on the Ark: The Struggle for Change in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1914-1939* (Lake Junaluska, N.C.: Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, 1975), 73-79.

⁷²Cannon to Collins Denny, 22 June 1925, Cannon Papers, box 5.

⁷³Cannon, report for the quadrennium 1918-1922, 528.