

Notes and News

Livingstone's Travels in Africa

SINCE Messrs. Dent's edition of *Livingstone's Travels* edited by the Rev. Dr. James I. Macnair puts all lovers of Africa under obligation, some reminiscences and observations may be permissible and useful.

When we founded the Dondi Central Mission in Angola, Portuguese West Africa in 1914, we were visited frequently by an African elder called Sakonjo, who, in spite of his advanced age, walked the eight miles from and to his village at Chamuanga. Sakonjo averred that he was 170 years old which, according to the method of reckoning years at that time with the dry season and the wet season counted as two complete units, would give him about 85 years. Sakonjo recounted how he, when a youth, met an *ocingelesi* (an Englishman) near the Luandu river in Angola when on a trading expedition to the interior. Conversation showed that this *ocingelesi* was none other than David Livingstone. 'He carried a book', said Sakonjo, 'from which he read and then talked to the people. He was one of you.' That would be in 1854, and Sakonjo would then have been about 25 years old; at 15 years the Ovimbundu of Angola started their youths along the paths which led to Barotse, Garanganze and Tanganyika.

Answering an inquiry as to Livingstone's physique, Sakonjo said he was *umbumbulu* (short of stature), thus correcting the idea I had that Livingstone was a man of big and powerful physique. Macnair's edition bears this out in several places, for example, on page 292, where Bishop Chauncey Maples quotes the testimony of an old man who, speaking of Livingstone, described him as being 'a short man with bushy moustache and keen, piercing eye'.

When Sakonjo was asked what they called Livingstone, he replied, 'Sekeseke'. This was new to me as I had heard or read that his African name was 'Monare' (which comes from the Boer 'Mein Herr'). Now, 'Sekeseke' in Umbundu is derived from *osekoseko*, the name of a small boring insect which penetrates even hard wood and is regarded as a symbol of perseverance. This sums up Livingstone as revealed in his journals: 'Small in size but persevering until the end.'

Macnair's description of the Mambari is erroneous. In the index they are referred to as being 'a slaving tribe' (p. 427); on page 410 Macnair refers to '. . . a tribe of half-caste Portuguese traders, the Mambari, who were engaged in the systematic barter of guns and cloth for human flesh'. On page 54 (footnote) Macnair writes, 'A tribe of Portuguese half-caste traders deep in the slave-trade.'

These so-called 'Mambari' were not a tribe at all, nor were they all mulattoes. The derivation of the word reveals their racial connexions. In Umbundu, Africans and mulattoes who are linked with European establishments are called Ovi-mbali, the root of the word being *mbali*, anything double (*ovi* is simply the pronominal prefix). Thus in Umbundu you have *olondwi-mbali*, two rivers. Applied to humans *mbali* means 'those of a double allegiance', linked to the African race but serving the Whites.

Across the continent among the tribes that Livingstone encountered, the prefix *ovi* (those of), as in Umbundu, becomes *Ma*, thus 'Mambari'. The substitution of the letter 'r' for 'l' in the root of the word is a common change made by Whites, especially Portuguese.

These *ovimbali* (still referred to in Angola as such) were individuals, either slaves or descendants of slaves, who acted as agents of white traders. Mulattoes would form part of caravans, but it is wrong to refer to these agents as forming 'a tribe'. The Ovimbundu were

in fact great slave-traders but the true home-born member of the tribe carefully and strongly differentiates himself from the 'ovimbali' or 'Mambari'.

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AN Institute of Social and Economic Research was founded at Rhodes University, Grahams-town, South Africa, in November 1954, to promote and co-ordinate social research in the Eastern Cape, Border and Transkei areas. The Institute has the co-operation of the (African) University College of Fort Hare, which is affiliated to Rhodes University. The general control of the Institute is in the hands of a Board of Management, composed of the Vice-Chancellor and the Heads of the Departments concerned at Rhodes University, and Professor Z. K. Matthews of the University College of Fort Hare. Professor D. Hobart Houghton (Rhodes) is the Chairman.

The Institute's field of operations covers the largest continuous area of Native settlement in the Union of South Africa and contains the area which for a long period constituted the frontier between the Cape Colony and African tribal territory, where White and Black first came into conflict. Government policy in this region underwent many changes: in the Transkei, generally speaking, the aim has been insulation and tribal self-development, whereas in the Ciskei policy has tended towards economic and cultural assimilation, and there has been much intermingled settlement of White and Black.

Prima facie this area constitutes a first-rate laboratory for the study of African life in a changing world. The African population is almost entirely Xhosa or Fingo, but includes everything from conservative pagan 'tribal' communities to 'assimilated' townspeople of many generations' standing. Most of this valuable anthropological material remains to be investigated, despite the fact that it is more than 130 years since European settlement began in the area. Only two corners have been the subject of modern anthropological studies: one by Monica Hunter in her monograph on the Pondo, *Reaction to Conquest* (1936), and another in the recent *Keiskammahoek Rural Survey* (1947-51).

The Institute now has several projects under way, thanks to generous financial help from the National Council for Social Research and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Between them these bodies have made grants covering the first five years' work, 1955-9. The grant from the National Council for Social Research is earmarked for a major co-ordinated project, the 'Border Regional Survey'. This includes a special section for Economics (directed by Professor D. Hobart Houghton), one for Sociology—European (directed by Professor J. Irving), and one for Sociology—African (directed by Professor P. Mayer). The last-mentioned section is intended to carry out a comprehensive anthropological study of the Xhosa, both rural and urban, with special reference to the adjustment between the traditional and the Western industrial social systems. Subjects provisionally selected for intensive study include economic adjustment; kinship and marriage; morality and social philosophy; youth; Churches and cults; cosmology; and leadership.

In 1955 research was started in the urban field. Dr. D. H. Reader has been at work in East London since 1 July. After a preliminary investigation into family mobility, quantitative surveys were undertaken for the purpose of securing basic demographic, household, economic and kinship information. This material, when analysed, will provide the necessary background for intensive study of particular topics.

The Institute is also conducting a study of African morality, based on field-work among the Xhosa, under the supervision of Professor P. Mayer. This has been made possible by a Research Fellowship for an African graduate, financed by the South African Committee of the Nuffield Foundation.

Other projects which have been set on foot include studies of aspects of African education;