

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE BAPTIST WORLD

A Science for Seminaries project at the Centre for Baptist Studies

Science and Baptist History Case Study 4

George Grenfell

1873 enter Bristol Baptist College (aged 23)

1875 in Cameroon — an apprenticeship

1878 off to the Congo

Based at Sao Salvador.

Resigned from BMS in 1878 after getting his young housekeeper Rose pregnant. He returned to Cameroon and married her.

1884 Grenfell begins mapping Congo river aboard The Peace

1886 awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society

1891 appointed Commissioner by King Leopold to delimitate the boundary between Congo State and Portugal

1903 gives up his medals from Leopold II and resigns from

Commission for the Protection of the Natives

1906 death



‘These geographical labours were not allowed to interfere with Grenfell's primary work as a missionary, to which he devoted himself with unflagging zeal to the last.

. . . Mr. Grenfell had from his boyhood taken a keen interest in geography, and this natural bent no doubt had a good deal to do with the precise direction taken by his life-work. He joined the Society in 1882, and watched with appreciation its efforts to improve the status of the subject in the schools of this country. In 1887 he was the recipient of the Patron's Medal, given in recognition of his important services to geography during his long residence in West Africa.’

Obituary, *The Geographical Journal* 28.4 (1906):

‘While waiting for the arrival of engineers who were to reconstruct the steamer, Grenfell embarked on a preliminary voyage up the Congo "in a small steel boat. On this journey his talent for exploration revealed itself. He spent the time taking soundings and bearings, charting and mapping the river, visiting villages on its banks and noting sites for possible stations . . .

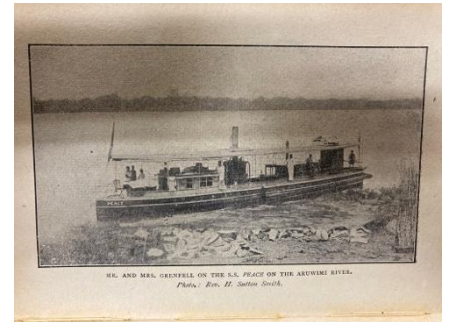
For the next two years-1884-1886, the Peace was used for exploratory work. In five extensive journeys it travelled 15,000 miles. On them Grenfell not only charted the main river for the thousand miles from Stanley Pool to Stanley Falls, but explored many tributaries which included the Mobangi, the Lefine, the Ruki, the Lomami, the Lulongo,

the Buruki, the Juapa, the Kasai, the Lilua and the Kwa to the limit of navigation. Every part of each journey was carefully recorded. The map Grenfell made was 125 feet long and is so accurate that, to this day, it is used by captains of state and trading steamers.'

(Hemmens, 'Grenfell', 129)

'the representatives of the Baptist Missionary Society have always been practical men, with whom science was, so far as they were able to serve it, a part of their religion.' (Johnston, 10)

. . . the enormous amount of good that has been accomplished by Christian missions in Africa from a purely ethical standpoint and the gigantic contributions they have made to the store of the world's knowledge in philology, in folklore, in first-hand studies of primitive people, in contributions to botany, zoology, geography, and map-making' (Johnston, 12)



References

George Grenfell, 'The Upper Congo as a Waterway', *Geographical Journal* (1902)

H. L. Hemmens, 'Grenfell of the Congo', *Baptist Quarterly* 13.3 (July 1949)

Harry Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo* (Hutchinson, 1980)

'Obituary', *Geographical Journal* 28.4 (1906)

M. A. Smith, 'Peace and Goodwill: George Grenfell on the Congo', *Baptist Quarterly* 35.3 and 35.4 (1993)