

Chitokoloki: Celebrating a Century of the Lord's Work in Northwestern Zambia

Alma Turnbull

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On 11 January 1914 Frederick Stanley Arnot arrived on the Kabompo river in Northern Rhodesia, at its confluence with the Zambezi. His missionary companions were George Suckling and Lambert Rogers. They were looking for a suitable spot in which to establish a mission station for outreach among the Luvale people. A fortnight later, however, Arnot's spleen ruptured, forcing his return to Johannesburg. It would be his last expedition. He died in May in South Africa. In the final words of his last book he had written: 'Messers. Suckling and Rogers had no hesitation in deciding to stay on. May the Lord's richest blessing rest upon them'.¹ Within two years Rogers, too, was dead and the burden of the mission fell on Suckling. At the place known as Chitokoloki—meaning 'a place of bright shining'—he established a printing press and a school, with the aim of reaching through education the Lunda people, on whom his work came to focus. Later, came medical work, with the addition of a hospital and a leper colony.

Alma Turnbull's book, as the subtitle indicates, was published to coincide with the centenary of the mission of Suckling and Rogers. It is a fitting celebration, being lavishly illustrated on high-quality, glossy paper, with all but a few of the photographs in colour. She traces the beginning of the mission and the vast influence that George Suckling had on the area, and takes the story up to the present time. The book is based on fieldwork that the writer undertook in 2011, in which she talked with both full-time and short-term missionaries, and also with some Zambian nationals. It also contains insert panels in which some of the missionaries give first-person accounts of their experiences, and there is also one by a young Zambian who was treated at the hospital. Because of the author's contemporary research and the concentration on current testimonies, most of the book is

1. F.S. Arnot, *Missionary Travels in Central Africa* (Bath, 1914), 150.

about how the medical work, which is now the main work at Chitokoloki, has operated over the last few decades, rather than on history (Brethren historians will be interested to note that Chitokoloki was where the late Roy Coad's parents served). As such, it is a fascinating insight into how a contemporary Western mission station operates in a political and social climate that is favourable to such work.

Suckling's far-sighted strategy of concentrating on education was contentious in the Brethren at the time, as it seemed to be a distraction from 'preaching the gospel'. The school, which was taken over by the government at independence, provided a high standard of education in the area, and several future government ministers were educated it, aiding the Christianization of Zambia. Tension between the needs of body and soul are still there in the medical work. Emma Wichers, a recent short-term Canadian nurse, found 'that medical related tasks had the odd ability to swallow up a large proportion of my time', and so forgetting 'one of the main reasons I was there—to know Christ and make Him known' (134).

There evidently have been other strains. In the profile of Jill Ngangula, one of the Zambian nurses. She comments on the tensions in the church between the Lunda and Luvale people, until one of the missionaries, Gordon Hanna, explains the word of God is to be preached to everyone. Jill notes, 'as in a choir you have soprano, base [*sic*], alto... and there's harmony! Otherwise it's 'noise' and not comforting to the heart' (117). By its rarity in the narrative, this Zambian perspective, however, reveals another implicit strain. Text and photographs demonstrate Western dominance at Chitokoloki. Among the vignettes in the book, for example, one would have loved to have learned more of Mrs Chizungu, an illiterate widow who was an outcast from her village, who found refuge at the mission until her death in 2014 at (probably) age 104. She would memorize the Sunday sermon and then re-preach it in villages across the Zambezi.

One cavil: despite the obvious attention that has gone into the publication of the book, there are few captions for the numerous photographs, often leaving the reader to guess who is being shown. Nevertheless, the book is a tribute to Western missionaries and their

devoted, sacrificial service. Sudden death for them has not been consigned to the past. In 1968 four missionaries were killed in a car accident, and most recently, in 2011, the young mission pilot and his wife were killed in a plane crash. Arnot completed the sentence quoted above by blessing 'all the heroic band of missionaries throughout Central Africa who have put their hands to the plough and have not drawn back!' This book celebrates Arnot's vision over 100 years at Chitokoloki.

Neil Dickson