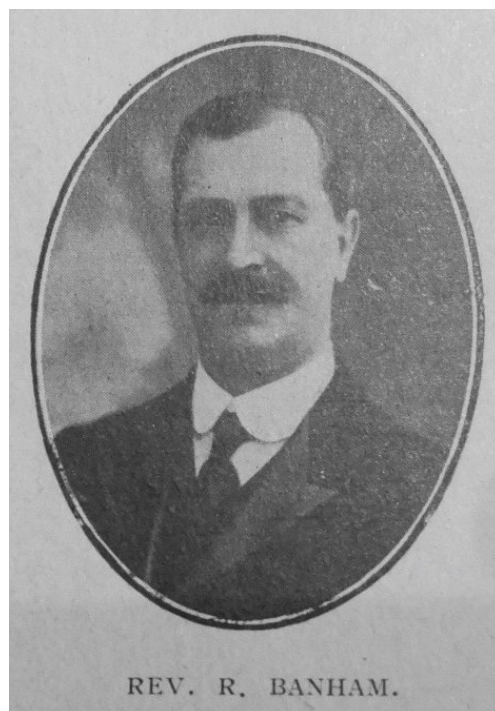


The Rev. and Mrs. Banham: African Missionaries
By the Rev. J.G. Bowran

AMONG the Missionaries of our Church none are worthier of honour: than the Rev. R. and Mrs. Banham. As an East Anglian, Robert Banham was reared in the Methodism of its villages. How virile and loyal that is all our history reveals. While but a youth he came to Sheffield, to the third circuit of that city, and in time became a local preacher. His gifts were such that obviously the wider ministry was his destiny. After serving as a hired local preacher, he was recommended by the circuit he thus served and entered the Hartley College. An apt and eager student, he greatly profited by the tuition and companionships of our splendid college. Once more tribute is borne to the abiding impression of Dr. Peake's instruction and influence. It is the same in every case. The scholarship and kindliness of Professor Peake have won the hearts of the successive batches of students.



Mr. Banham's probation was served on the Cardiff second circuit, and here he gave full proof of his aptitudes and singleness of aim. Passing to the Approved List, he was stationed at Coleford in the Bristol District. After six years in the English ministry, he was invited by the Secretary of the Missionary Society, the Rev. R.W. Burnett, to enter the foreign field. This was a high call - the highest call. To Mr. Banham it was a command, even the Lord's command. In 1901 he became a missionary at Archibongville. Much good work had been done here, but difficulties had arisen because of the alteration of boundary between the British and German territories. In the end it became necessary for our headquarters to be removed. The question of the location of our mission exercised the gravest concern of our missionaries. Accompanied by the Rev. W.J. Ward, Mr. Banham visited the Oron District, and together they recommended this as a suitable centre in Nigeria. Along with the Rev. N. Boocock, the present site was definitely chosen, and the Mission House and buildings were removed from Archibongville at the end of 1902. The wisdom of this transference has been abundantly proved, and it must be a source of satisfaction to our friend that he had such a share in so wise a settlement. This critical task accomplished, his first term ended.

After a brief furlough at home, he returned to the work which now engrossed him. It was during this period that the Boys' Training Institute was erected. Such was his skill that the buildings have been continuously admired for their suitability. We can understand how this industrial work would monopolise his time, and the drain it would be on his physical and mental strength, but on Sundays he was eagerly preaching the Gospel in the Native Compounds, on the very ground in which in succeeding years we have reaped such splendid harvests. We can imagine the pleasure he must feel in the knowledge of all that has been witnessed on this wide and inviting field. The story of our Nigerian Missions is pure romance. Mrs. Banham, too, was busily employed in many ways. They had boys boarding in the Mission House and paying for their education. These she ardently trained and at

the same time she carried on a fine work among the women. This term of their residence was prolonged in order to receive the Conferential Deputation.

The missionary gifts of our friend had been so strikingly revealed in these active periods on the field that the Missionary Committee naturally turned to him when they needed a statesman and leader to succeed the Rev. Jabez Bell at Fernando Poo. The conditions of ministry on the island were very different from those on the mainland, but Mr. Banham and his wife rendered excellent service. A second term they also spent at Fernando Poo, and much success was witnessed. A new interior was put into the church, a new organ was obtained, and the £100 required for these expenditures was raised by the natives themselves. In addition, he superintended the Bottler Point Mission, with Mrs. Showers as assistant. Here new members were added to the Church, and the Cocoa Farm was very much extended. It was during this period that services were begun at Batecopo, the mission which has so developed in recent times.



Our friends had then completed ten years of African ministry, and desired to resume the work in the Homeland. Mr. Banham was stationed at York. There are real gains in having returned missionaries in our English ministerial life. They quicken missionary interest, widen the knowledge of our congregations, and their experience is of value to the missionary authorities. The Wesleyan Methodist Church favours this policy. There must be scores of ministers in the British ministry who have served one or two terms on foreign stations. Mr. Banham gave himself to his circuit duties in York with characteristic devotion and thoroughness.

Once more the African call came to him, and this time back again to the Nigerian field. During his brief absence, great developments had taken place. We wonder whether our Church is fully alive to the immense possibilities of these marvellous areas. So well has the pioneer work been done that now the very success is embarrassing. Readers of *Mary Slessor* will be familiar with the type of native life. Similar triumphs to those she witnessed have been found on our Nigerian Missions. On Mr. Banham's return, a time of great prosperity was vouchsafed to him. Pioneering was the order of the day, and new stations were constantly being opened. The eagerness of the people for the Gospel and education was everywhere evident. The difficulty was to cope with the demand, to furnish the schools and churches with teachers and preachers. People were flocking to the Gospel. At one service he and the Rev. B.T. Showell baptised nearly a hundred converts. This is the missionary's joy, enrichment and reward

He has been on furlough for some months, and will soon be leaving for his sixth term on the field.

He has been in close consultation with the Missionary Committee in regard to the future. He goes back to Nigeria with high commands, and with the fullest confidence of the leaders at home. This

time he is going to the most northerly station in Nigeria. The Udi field is described as the very finest opening in the Protectorate, and Nara, the chief town, will be the centre of his operations. The Conference of Missionaries had recommended our going there, and the Rev. A.H. Richardson has led the way. Mr. Banham now goes to further extend the work, We owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Banham. Their daughter is left at home in the care of friends.

References

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