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MORE ABOUT THE MISSIONS . . .

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NEW YORK

With the assistance of the Catholic Medical Mission Board of 10 W. 17th Street, New York, and at the request of Father Roland Bordelon of the Catholic Relief Services, N.C.W.C., B.P. 2479, Leopoldville, Republic of the Congo, I recently spent six weeks in the Congo. Besides rendering orthopedic care to the sick, an evaluation of the health needs of the Congo was made.

The Republic of the Congo (Leopoldville) is situated in central Africa. The country is approximately one quarter the size of the United States (Alaska included). The equator crosses the northern portion of the Congo. The vast Congo river exceeds 2700 miles. The nation's capital is Leopoldville, which is several miles upstream on the Congo River. There are other cities of smaller size in the interior, but the remainder of the huge country is primitive and is composed of rolling plains, jungle and highlands. Wild life and mineral deposits are extensive.

The population of the Congo exceeds 13,500,000 persons. There are more than 5,000,000 Congolese Christians, most of whom are Catholic.

The common language is French. The political situation in the Congo has been gradually improving and at present most regions are entirely safe for missionary medical work.

Leopoldville combines an area of crowded Congolese living-

quarters and tall, concrete, air-conditioned apartment and office buildings. Beautiful homes are situated in the better residential areas. Electricity and running water, with all their associated home conveniences are commonplace. The food supply is only fairly satisfactory now and food is purchased at inflationary prices. Drinking water must be boiled before consumption (as it must be throughout the Congo). Congolese house boys are reasonably hired for household chores. The temperature averages 78 degrees and is more comfortable than the warmer summer days in New York City. Light protective clothes are used throughout the year in all areas of the Congo. There are extensive educational facilities in the region of Leopoldville, including Lovanium University. An excellent medical school is there, with a University hospital. Several other hospitals are present in Leopoldville; the largest is a general hospital of 1200-bed capacity.

In the more remote bush areas, the mission hospitals vary as to size, facilities and needs. Some hospitals are very new, with modern operating rooms. Some operating rooms have never been used. There are 43 Catholic mission hospitals that presently function without a physician. Other hospitals are overtaxed, have poor equipment, little food for patients and per-

sonnel, and they lack medicines. Any breakdown of existing facilities is disastrous, since replacements are delayed or impossible to obtain. Transportation and procedural difficulties exist everywhere.

Malnutrition, anemia, intestinal parasites and malaria are nearly universal in the Congo. Other parasites and venereal diseases occur frequently. Leprosy is present in 10% of the population of some regions, as is tuberculosis. Herniae and fractures are frequent, and epilepsy prevails. Hepatitis and cirrhosis are common and hepatomas are seen often enough. Tetanus neonatorum, snake bites and albinism are noted. Maternal mortality and neonatal deaths are high. Congenital defects are seen fairly frequently.

Prior to independence, 780 physicians were working in the Congo, and still more doctors were needed. The total number of physicians at present is about 300 (many are W.H.O. doctors). There are about one dozen American physicians, all Protestant missionaries, devoting their time and energy to the sick at several hospitals in the interior.

Physicians of all types are urgently needed in the Congo. The

Lovanium University School of Medicine needs a Public Health specialist and the many mission hospitals need general practitioners and specialists in all fields. Dentists are few in number. Nurses are needed for both teaching and administering nursing care. Ancillary medical workers can also help the needs of the Congo. Medical supplies are short. These include antihelminthics, drugs for leprosy, antibiotics for tuberculosis and acute infectious diseases, surgical instruments and medical texts. Financial help is also being sought in order to obtain the above supplies and perhaps even to help pay transportation costs and support some medical missionary who is able to give his or her services for a year or more to this cause.

The medical needs of the Congo are unique in a way, since they offer many missionary opportunities for work at hospitals that are already established. These needs will decrease after several years, because of the expected increase in the number of graduating Congolese students of medicine and other health fields. Our request therefore is for immediate help to extend only over the next several years.