



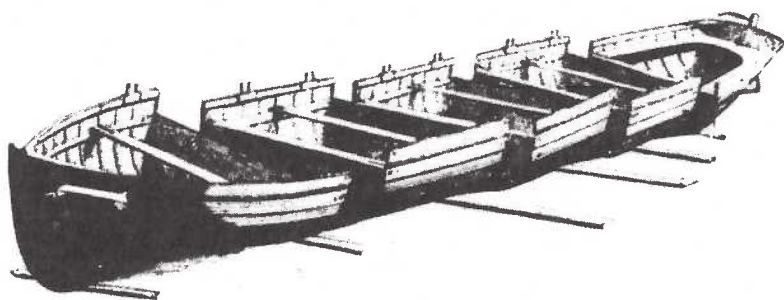
**BELGIAN
CONGO-
AMERICAN
SURVEY**

★

1956-57



The part of Central Africa comprising the Belgian Congo should be of great interest to Americans. Its discovery and development is a story of high adventure. Americans who are familiar with the "Leatherstocking Tales" of James Fenimore Cooper would find their parallel in the many stories of travelers and explorers in the wilds of Africa; but whereas one has to go back two to three hundred years to relive the period of exploration and discovery of the American continent, recorded history of Central Africa begins in fragment form barely a hundred years ago. There are many within whose lifetime the story of Stanley became known, and the whole series of exciting events that followed, one after the other, brings us down to modern times with the same feeling of high adventure.



The "LADY ALICE" in Sections.

"The barge was an invention of my own. It was to be 40 feet long, 6 feet beam, and 30 inches deep, of Spanish cedar $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick."—H. M. Stanley: *Through the Dark Continent*, 1878, N. Y.

In 1874, when Stanley put his little boat the "Lady Alice" in the upper reaches of the Lualaba, he had no idea that he was floating down the ever-widening Congo and would emerge on the Atlantic Ocean. The Stars and Stripes waved from the stern of his boat for Stanley was an American citizen at that time. Two years later, still on the same journey, he abandoned the boat near the site of Inga. This is the same Inga that is today being studied for its hydroelectric potential—the largest in the world.

Readers of the American press in those times were excited by Stanley's accounts, but the echo of his journeys resounded loudest in Brussels where King Leopold II had already established the African International Association with the idea of sending scientific expeditions to East Africa. The purpose of these expeditions in King Leopold's words was "to open to civilization the only part of the globe not yet explored, to penetrate the shadows that envelope its entire population; this is, I make bold to say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress, and I am happy to note that public opinion is favorable to its undertaking. The current is with us."

In the subsequent negotiations, which were long projected and oftentimes discouraging, the Belgian King held fast to his ideas. In 1884, Bismarck convened the Congress of Berlin, at which the United States assisted, and the result of which was the opening up of the vast Central African area and specifically the Congo basin to the trade of all nations. Six months prior to the meeting in Berlin, the United States, by joint resolution of Congress, stated that the "flag of the International Asso-

TREMENDOUS WORK ACCOMPLISHED



BY

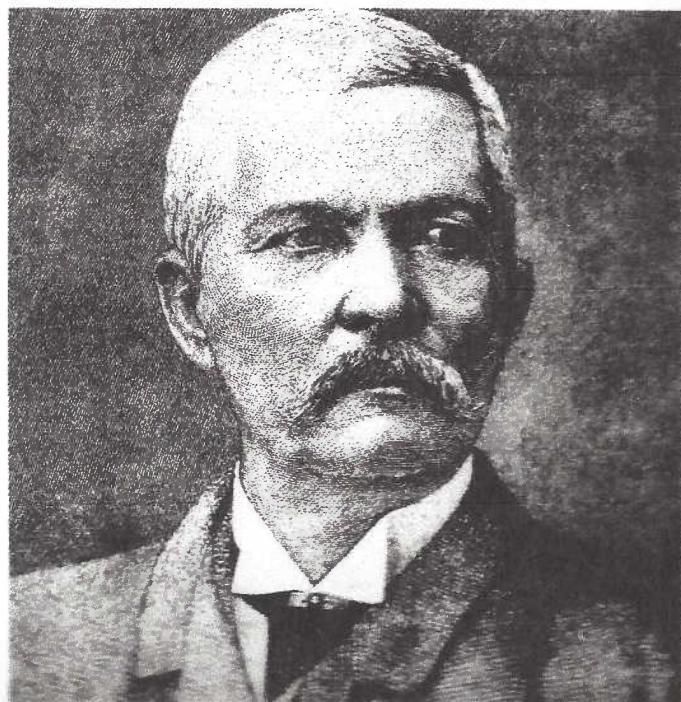
ROBERT G. MCGREGOR

CONSUL GENERAL

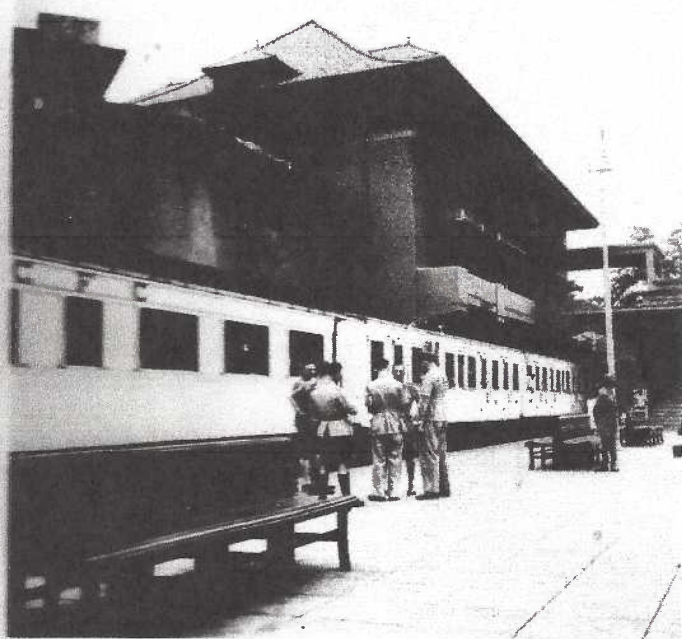
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN THE BELGIAN CONGO

ciation of the Congo is equal to that of a friendly government." The United States thus became the first foreign power to recognize the international status of the Congo Free State. This was very important for during that time King Leopold, who held personal title to the Congo Territory, received more condolences than sympathy for his undertaking.

H. M. STANLEY



Americans should also take pride in the great missionary work launched simultaneously with the recognition of the Congo Free State. British and American Protestant missions were the first to penetrate and were followed shortly by Roman Catholics. On the height overlooking Matadi is the site of Palabala where the first American mission was established for the purpose of bringing Christianity to native porters engaged in the long and arduous carrying trail that circumvented the unnavigable rapids of the Congo over its winding stretch of 250 miles from Matadi to Leopoldville. All trade in and out of the Congo was carried on human backs over this trail until the Matadi-Leopoldville railway was completed in 1898. It had taken eight years to build. Today there are several hundred American missionary families in the Congo.



The Railroad Station at Matadi

It was an American, too, who is credited with the idea of the great national parks that are today one of the Congo's richest and most prideful treasures. When King Albert visited the United States at the end of World War I, the Belgian Ambassador in Washington introduced Carl Akeley, then a man only slightly known outside his own country. He persuaded the Belgian King to accept the principle of wild animal reservations, and later his advice in the Congo brought about the National Parks. Carl Akeley is today buried on a mountainside in the northeastern Congo at a spot picked out by him near the bamboo forest where the gorilla lives unmolested.

There are also many stories of high adventure associated with the war against slavery, the scientific expeditions that first probed the Congo to discover its untold wealth, and in the mere establishment of an administration designed to bring a semblance of order to the chaotic conditions under which the hundreds of tribes inhabiting the Congo Basin had lived for centur-

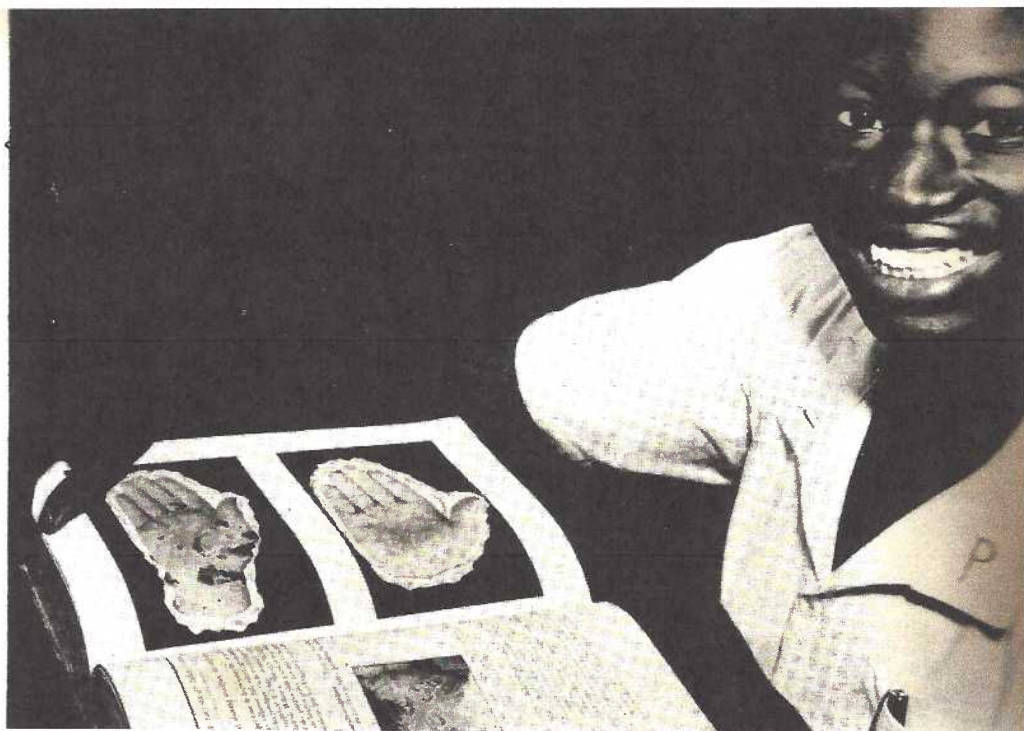
ies prior to the arrival of the white man. It should be remembered that when it undertook its civilizing mission in the Congo, Belgium had had no previous colonial experience, counting barely fifty years as an independent country itself. Its African undertaking could never have been established or succeeded had it not been for the determination, intelligence and great courage of its citizens.

As new administrative posts were set up, health problems assessed and education established, it became apparent that instead of the 97 million inhabitants that Stanley forecast, the million square miles of the Congo Territory contained barely 9 million Africans. In casting about for a system of government and a policy, the Belgians observed that in a rudimentary and primitive manner tribal tradition afforded "cradle to grave" care for its members. The Belgian policy has often been described as "paternalistic", and, in truth, the loyalty of an African to his chief, his subservience to the tribe and utter dependence upon it was a paternalistic system. Gradually the State took over functions belonging to tribal chiefs and in modern urban areas the transition of an African from the bush to the city is made easier by the substitution of government for the chief. The transference of loyalty from the tribe to the new State is likewise facilitated.

I am certain it is very difficult for anyone who has never visited Africa to imagine what it is like to live here. Africa has become a very popular subject of late, and book stalls in the United States are crowded with books about it. Several have become best sellers. Yet most of them fail to convey the essence of African life—perhaps it is the challenge of trying to put this intangible into words that tempts so many to try. I have tried to indicate some ways in which Americans have influenced the trend of events in a part of this continent. This is by no means the whole story. The method we use to resolve our Negro problem at home, for example, is something that will have profound meaning for the African in Africa. Our ability to share the fruits of Western inventiveness, our capacity for mass production and marketing, our experience in technical education—all these things when brought to bear on the formation of the African will influence his thinking about the United States. We have the great advantage that traditionally the Belgians are our friends. We have much in common. There is therefore much to build upon in Belgian Africa.

Many marvel today that the Congo is a large area of tranquility and successful economic development. Many reasons are ascribed to this condition of affairs, among them the economic wealth, the river transport system, the paternalistic system of government, and the efficiency of Belgian administration. There is, however, an additional factor that is not immediately apparent and escapes many who know the Congo only superficially. In a climate so different from that prevailing in Belgium, Belgian colonial officials spend an average of twenty-

Science does not depress this student.



three years' service. Starting in small posts in the bush, they learn the native language, traditions and customs, and work their way through a career increasing in their responsibilities. Most of them become fascinated with their work and acquire a deep affection for the African peoples. This instills in them a devotion to duty that leads the majority to work daily far beyond the eight hours required, and develops a sense of pride in accomplishment that makes them even more eager to create something lasting in Central Africa.

In this commendable objective, Americans can join in admiration, understanding and collaboration. For what is being done here, as indeed elsewhere in Central Africa, is to establish firmly the principles and traditions of Western culture in order that the African may emerge to play his part on the world stage with a foundation that enables him not only to understand but also to practice the ways of our Western Christian civilization. This is a great and worthy endeavor, conceived in embryo by Leopold II, and being brought to accomplishment by the subjects of the Belgian kingdom. There is need for understanding of Belgian methods and objectives, and nowhere more than in the United States, for it is possible that as the Congo presses on and enters a phase of industrialization, Belgians will seek more and more the friendly association of non-Belgian interests in the development of their enterprise. The Government welcomes those who come to the Congo to see for themselves prevailing conditions, and interposes no restrictions of any kind to those who come here for this purpose. While wild animals and primitive native tribes still exist, and where there is much out of the ordinary for the tourist to see, nevertheless the great thrill that one experiences in visiting the Congo today is to see the rapid transformation of this area and the building of a modern State.

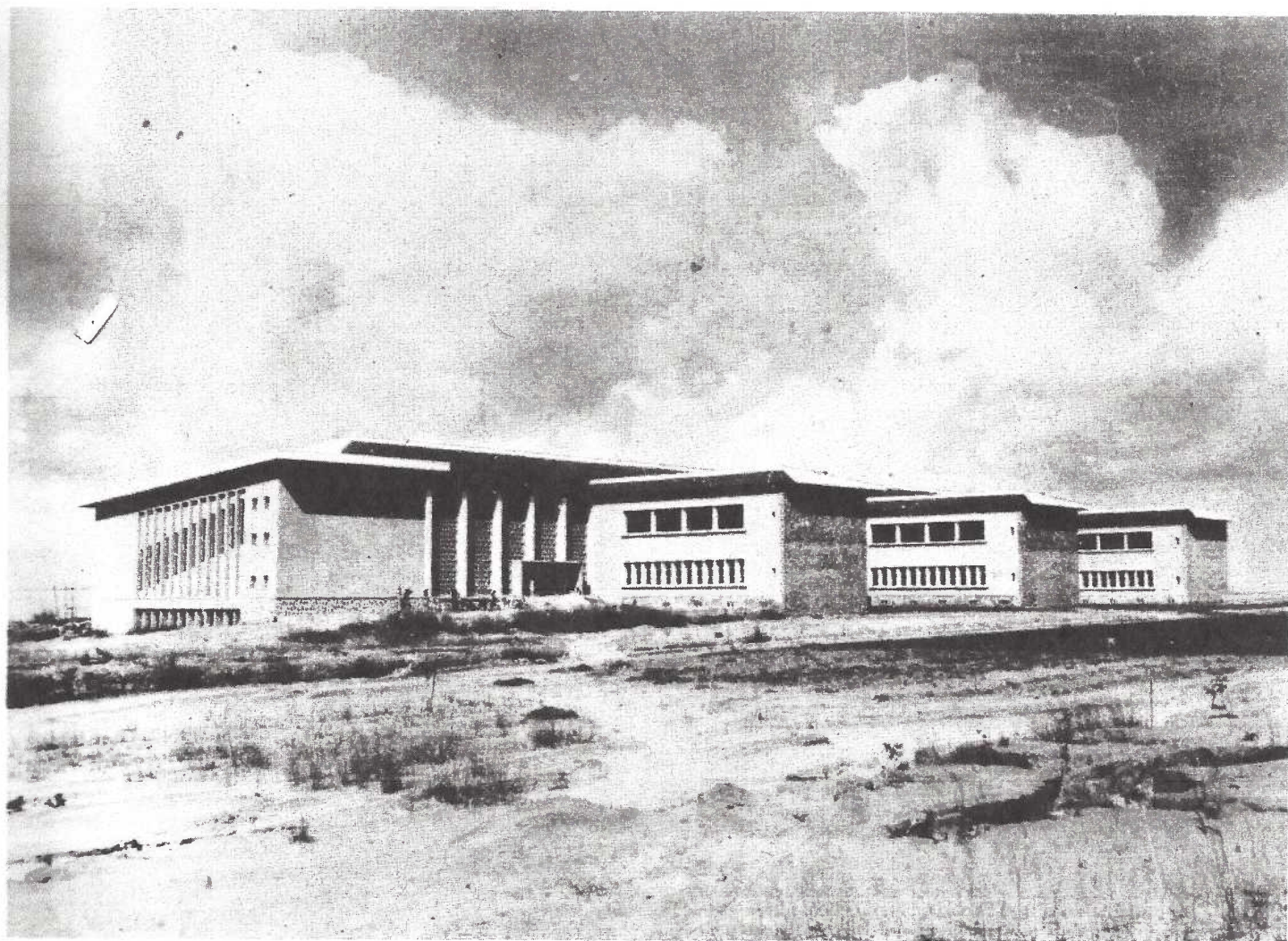
In the field of economic development, while much has been done in the Congo in seventy-five years, a great deal remains. By 1960, the current Ten Year Plan will have run its course. Its primary purpose — the strengthening of the infrastructure — will have been achieved to the extent foreseen. One billion dollars will have been spent for the purpose. It will interest Americans to follow closely development plans that are made as the Ten Year Plan begins to phase out.

More and more the economics of African territories are acting on one another. Secondary industries are being established based upon local market prospects. The African in the Congo is advancing to the stage where provisions are having to be made to extend him credit facilities to finance his growing needs—land and house, appliances, automobile. Savings accounts of Congolese have grown rapidly in recent years. An African Middle Class Association has been created to protect and foster the interests of the 7,000 Africans in Leopoldville alone who are their own employers or work for other Africans. Two universities (one in Leopoldville and the other in Elisabethville) will begin in three or four years to turn out graduates who are academically as highly qualified as Belgian university products. And what is more important, education at the base is being farther extended every year. Currently there are 1,400,000 children attending school out of a total population of a little more than 12 million. This means that African tastes will change, earning capacity and therefore purchasing power will increase, exposing marketing problems and opportunities heretofore dormant. Americans should be cautioned, however, that it is fatal to jump to hasty conclusions in Africa. The reactions of the evolving African are often surprising and unpredictable. As he emerges from the tribal conditions under which he has been living, he appears to acquire readily the attributes of

Western culture. However, a reaction oftentimes sets in and the pattern that proves universally acceptable has a distinctly African twist that can appear incongruous to us but is very important to the African. In his relationship with the African, the Westerner must show a sympathy and understanding for the ideals and objectives which the African cherishes and an ability to comprehend the mentality and psychology of the African mind. If he hopes to meet and commune with that mind it will behoove him to disabuse himself of some of his popular notions of superiority. Among other things he will learn that the African has a delicate appreciation of the amenities of social intercourse and is by nature extremely courteous and polite, that he has an abiding good sense of humor which helps him to see himself and people and

things around him in proper perspective, and, above all, that he has a personal dignity which cannot but evoke from us the most sincere sentiments of respect, tolerance, and appreciation.

I will leave to others to set down in figures the remarkable economic development in this area and limit myself to bearing testimony to the tremendous work accomplished through the leadership of the Belgians in the Congo. I have been glad to serve in this area not only to witness at first hand what is being done but also to try to encourage Belgians to tell more of their story themselves. I hope that their innate modesty will not be offended by the sincere testimony in this article of one who places a high evaluation on their work.



Science Faculty Building at Lovanium University