EDITH WARNER OF THE NIGER

EDITH ASHLEY WARNER

The Founder, & for 30 years Principal of St. Monica's.

EDITH WARNER
OF THE NIGER

THE STORY OF THIRTY-THREE YEARS OF ZEALOUS & COURAGEOUS WORK AMONGST IBO GIRLS & WOMEN

BY

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Archdeacon of the Niger

AUTHOR OF "AMONG THE IBOS OF NIGERIA"

WITH A FOREWORD BY THE

RIGHT REV. BISHOP TUGWELL, D.D.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO

HER FELLOW WORKERS

FOR THE UPLIFT OF

THE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF

THE IBO COUNTRY

AN APPEAL

IT has been suggested that a Memorial of a permanent nature should mark the life and work of Edith Ashley Warner. It is proposed to erect a school chapel at St. Monica's, simple in form yet with natural dignity, something which will remind the worshippers of the fragrant life and example of the Founder and First Principal of the School. Should any profits accrue from this book they will be devoted to this purpose. Contributions will also be thankfully received by either of the following:

MISS LOUISA TOWNSEND,
31 Lancaster Road,
Wimbledon, S.W.

MISS P. M. ROW,
St. Monica's School,
C/o C. M. S.,
Onitsha, Nigeria.

The Ven. Archdeacon G. T. BASDEN, D.Litt.,
C. M. S.,
Onitsha, Nigeria.

PREFACE

IT is fitting that a brief sketch of the life and work of Edith Ashley Warner should be placed on record, yet the compiler of these notes wishes to make a humble apology, not for having produced the book, for that has been a labour of love, but for the utterly inadequate way in which it has been done. Edith Warner was a particularly reticent character and wrote little of her doings in the earlier days. She had no thought or wish for publicity. Consequently these short chapters have had to be culled from notes of other people, collected from Annual Reports, the Life of Bishop Sidney Hill, and the Letters of Archdeacon Dobinson, supplemented by reminiscences of the author's twenty-five years' association with her in the Niger Mission.

One feels that the essential spirit is sadly lacking, for how can words delineate such a character? How can one define "an odour of a sweet smell"? It is so difficult to describe a personality of her type. Those who were intimate with her were conscious of a fragrance, a sweetness, such as mere words fail to convey to others.

The one wish and prayer is that these brief notes may stir the hearts of others, and urge them to follow along the path of service which led to the consecration of her life to the uplifting of the women and girls of Africa.

G. T. B.

FOREWORD

I CAN heartily commend Dr. Basden's admirable account of the late Miss Warner's devoted work amongst the Ibo girls, in Nigeria.

I have read the MSS. with the deepest interest and thank God that one has been raised up who has been enabled to put upon record an inspiring account of a splendid work which otherwise might have passed comparatively unnoticed.

It was my privilege, as C.M.S. Secretary of the Yoruba Mission in 1892, to welcome, and entertain for a few days, the late Bishop Hill, Mrs. Hill and Miss Warner on their arrival in Lagos, en route for the River Niger.

During Miss Warner's short visit all with whom she came into contact were impressed with her spirit of devotion: her manifest capacity: der love of music, and her unfailing cheerfulness and good humour.

It was evident that, if her life were spared, she would be a tower of strength and an inspiration to the Niger Mission: at that time a somewhat stricken Mission. But none imagined, or could have imagined, at that time that so great a work would be or could be

accomplished by God's servant in so short a time under such difficult circumstances.

In 1895 Miss Warner laid the foundation of her school with nine undisciplined and somewhat rebellious girls at Onitsha.

In 1923 the Phelps Stokes Commission after visiting St. Monica's School, with its spacious buildings and beautiful surroundings, wrote " The C.M.S. Training School (for girls) is one of the most interesting and effective schools visited in Africa . . ."

But the real results are to be seen in the delightful homes and bright intelligent faces of those who have gone forth from the School and are exercising an ever widening Christian influence as the wives of School Masters, Catechists and Pastors.

And who can predict what God has in store for those who are yet to be sent forth from that school ?

May this book have a wide circulation, and may it be the means, under God's blessing, of calling forth many others to uphold and carry on the great work of the evangelisation of the Ibo country.

HERBERT TUGWELL (*Bishop.*)

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EDITH WARNER OF THE NIGER

CHAPTER I

A CONTRAST AND A CALL

MANY there are who have read the inspiring story of Mary Slessor, of Calabar. If we were asked for the briefest description of her personality the reply might be summed up in the one word "character." Now if you can contemplate a character, prompted by similar impulses, yet completely opposite in expression, you will be able to form a fair idea of the personality of Edith Warner, the subject of this memoir.

One of the marvels of the universe is that no two things are precisely alike. But totally unlike dispositions, equally with diversities of gifts, have their place in the service of God.

It would be difficult to find two women more diverse in upbringing and temperament than Mary Slessor and Edith Warner. Both were saturated with the one idea of uplifting the women and children of Nigeria. They laboured within 150 miles of one another for over thirty years on entirely different principles, and

both accomplished work which will stand as a foundation for the future welfare of those for whom they lived and toiled.

The study of their careers affords a striking illustration of the varied means and methods whereby God prepares His servants for particular service. In the one case the hardships of a lowly home, the struggles as a breadwinner from the early age of eleven, and the years spent in arduous toil in factory and weaving shed; the development of grit, courage and endurance gained in combat with adverse circumstances while living and teaching in the slums of Dundee; all these combined to temper the metal which produced such an extraordinary character as Mary Slessor, and made her the power she was in West Africa.

The difference in temperament between Mary Slessor and Edith Warner was remarkable. In the case of the latter it could be said:—

> "She seldom would argue, she never would fight,
> No tales could inflame her
> No rumours excite,
> So quiet, and even, so steady withal,
> She was ready, aye ready, to go at His call."

In each case, in God's own inimitable way, a character had been formed peculiarly fitted for service in West Africa: one was a born reformer, the other was a born educationist. Mary Slessor overflowed with energy, and was ready for action on every occasion. Edith Warner was the opposite. Mentally placid, careful, methodical and undemonstrative, yet, underlying all these traits, was the true spirit of adventure.

She was seldom overtaken by excitement, nor did she often let her normally serene nature be disturbed by worry. When difficult problems assailed her she had a way of meeting them, which not only helped to find solutions, but inspired confidence in others and made them willing to abide by her decisions. Sometimes questions arose which caused her acute mental anguish, but even though, at such times, she suffered much, she still maintained an attitude of quiet confidence and strength. In times of crisis she would calmly continue at her task, when others, passing through similar circumstances, would be confounded or put out of action. She was well equipped for life on the Niger, being evenly balanced mentally and spiritually, and these two are the greatest assets in maintaining physical health under the trying conditions of West Africa. She lived in close communion with God all her days, being neither depressed by doubts nor shaken in her faith. When a crisis arose she met it without fuss, thought out the best plan to meet the situation, and strove to avoid unworkable propositions.

As an example of her placid temperament, one of her fellow-missionaries relates the following incident :—

" I remember how, on one occasion, when we were itinerating, we had fixed up our camp beds in a native hut prior to paying calls upon the villagers. On our return in the evening I noticed that, during our absence, holes had been bored through my sheet and blanket. My suspicions were aroused, and I called to Edith, saying that a snake must be in my bed. Together we searched and found nothing. Edith was

for leaving the matter, and, no doubt, had it been her bed, she would have troubled no more. But the thought of a snake in my bed was too much for me, and I could not lie down in peace until further search had been made. Seizing the bedclothes again I shook them vigorously, and out tumbled Mr. Snake. A lively chase ensued. However, he wrigged into a hole in the mud wall of the hut and escaped, leaving his skin behind in his hurry.

" Edith never even examined her bed, and was soon calmly asleep, in a sane and healthy manner, whilst I, foolishly perhaps, lay awake for hours imagining every kind of undesirable visitor."

Edith Warner was born in London (Charing Cross) in 1867, and baptized at St. Martin's in the Fields. Her lot was cast in a goodly heritage. She was surrounded by an atmosphere of Christian influence and a happy home circle. Education and refinement were the elements that went to form her character, and to prepare her for a life work among the women and girls of the Ibo country. The essential features of a cultivated Christian home were the characteristics that loomed so largely throughout the years of her service on the Niger. Her schooldays were passed at Maidstone, and it was during her residence there that she first became conscious of a call to the Mission Field. It was the custom of the Rector of Teston (the Rev. Clement Cobb) to hold annually a Missionary Garden Meeting, and, on one of these festivals, when Edith was between thirteen and fourteen years of age, she settled the question of her life's work, and, henceforth,

her one aim was to respond to the call to service among the heathen.

In due time she completed her school career and returned to her home, now at Blackheath. There she attached herself to a Missionary Band, the members of which had pledged themselves that, if the way opened, they would go forth to the Mission Field. Later there followed a period of training at The Willows and acceptance by the Church Missionary Society. In 1892 she was appointed to the Niger Mission, at that time occupying a prominent place in the minds of the parent committee, owing to the death of Bishop Crowther and the changes in policy and *personnel* in the mission. A new leader had been found in the person of Joseph Sidney Hill, who had been chosen to succeed the " Black Bishop," and under his and Mrs. Hill's escort Edith Warner left home and kindred for pioneer work on the Niger.

CHAPTER II

FROM LIVERPOOL TO LAGOS

THE voyage seems to have been made under exceptionally happy conditions for those days. In company with the Rev. Joseph Sidney Hill (commissary to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop Designate of the newly constituted Diocese of Western Equatorial Africa) and Mrs. Hill, Edith Warner sailed from Liverpool on September 10, 1892, on the s.s. *Boma*. In the early nineties, and for many years afterwards, women were regarded as anomalies on the West Coast, and the amenities were not such as are now provided. The ships carried neither stewardesses nor doctors. Women were looked upon rather as "extras" and, not infrequently, as encumbrances to ship life. Of that particular voyage Mrs. Hill writes: "This ship is a steady-going old thing, with none of the modern improvements—none of your electric light, but those little oil lamps, so we were very glad of the night lights that we brought, which gave far more light and no smell. The food, too, is not of the best; yesterday we were several of us feeling queer, and the bill of fare was: salt boiled beef, roast pork and roast duck and ox-tail stewed: then the

sweets, rhubarb pie, cabinet pudding and Banbury cakes ! "

Life on a West Coast steamer at that time was not of the type to which Miss Warner had been accustomed. She had led a very sheltered existence hitherto, and was singularly transparent and unacquainted with the world. As a general rule women met with the proverbial kindness of the British sailor, albeit it was, perhaps, of a rough and ready nature. In this particular instance the winning ways of Mr. Hill did much to improve the situation, but the ship's officers could make little alteration in the prevailing conditions, nor could they change the characters of typical West Coasters. It was an entirely new experience to Edith Warner, and many incidents must have jarred acutely on her sensitive nature. Here she needed all the comforts of peaceful assurance to enable her to endure all things for the sake of Him Who had called her to His service overseas. The steamers did not run to a scheduled time-table, and, consequently, the duration of the voyage could not be definitely determined beforehand. Once the ship reached the coast the length of stay at a port depended upon the prospects of passengers and cargo, and the commission attached thereto.

The voyage furnished no unusual excitements. At Sierra Leone a visit was paid to the Annie Walsh School. From that point there was more novelty, but the conditions were less pleasant. We learn that owing probably to the damp heat, the meat, and all the food on board, was not nearly so good as before,

and from the large amount of cargo which was landed at Sierra Leone, Grand Bassam and other places, the *Boma* was much higher out of the water and "rolled more." Calls were made at many places after leaving Sierra Leone, for the *Boma* was like a big shop, and called at towns where they were in need of supplies of food or coal. On Sunday morning early the ship lay off Grand Bassam, where were landed 750 kegs of gunpowder; "the crane working at it awoke me (Mrs. Hill), and it gave me an awful sense of shame that *every* steamer there (and they came along oftener than once a week, year in, year out) is a practical denial of God, in the cargoes they land of firearms, powder, rum, etc., and in the lives of the traders, who come by dozens in every ship, and are willing to risk their lives for *money*, while such a paltry few come along to give these poor natives the message of God's love to them. Sunday is the busiest day on board these steamers. Last Sunday we called at another town and landed more powder. The Captain brought 2000 kegs of it! They are landing goods all day, and nearly every day, and travel at night."

The voyage of the *Boma* terminated on October 28 (1892), on which date the party was transferred to a small "branch" steamer in Lagos Roads, and conveyed across the bar to the town of Lagos. Crossing the bar was a dangerous procedure. It was extremely risky for small boats, and there was not sufficient depth of water to allow the passage of ocean-going steamers. The transhipping in the open roadstead was a very uncomfortable experience. Passengers

were lowered over the side into a surf boat, then paddled to the branch steamer and hauled up by derrick upon her deck. It was bad enough in a calm sea : it was infinitely worse when the water was rough.

At Lagos the party met with a cordial reception from the missionaries. Alongside the mission house stands the Girls' Seminary, and very quickly Edith Warner was experiencing the first sensations of teaching African girls. Naturally gifted with a good ear, and, further, having been well trained in music, she was equipped for language study. She was endowed not only with musical talent, but also possessed a remarkably sweet voice. Hence her visit to Lagos brought great pleasure to the friends there at the time, and some retain to this day fragrant memories of the weeks spent in her company. She had brought with her a small portable organ, and a copy of *Hymns of Consecration and Faith*, then a new book. Some very happy hours were spent in exploring the collection of hymns, and Edith Warner had the chief share in introducing them to the knowledge of the missionaries and others living at Lagos.

The visit, so redolent of happy memories, lasted until towards the end of December, nearly a two months' stay, on the way to her final destination on the Niger

CHAPTER III

ARRIVAL AT ONITSHA

CHRISTMAS DAY, 1892, was spent on board the s.s. *Roquelle* lying at anchor in Lagos Roads. The party had been rushed away from the Mission House, with scarcely an hour allowed for packing, only to meet with four days of helpless inaction within sight of shore. While crossing the bar Edith Warner had suffered considerably, so much so that she vowed that nothing would induce her to cross it again. That meant that she would never again have visited Lagos had the old conditions remained. Happily, great changes have taken place since those days. Ere twenty years had passed the trials and discomforts of transhipment by means of small boats, and the subsequent crossing of the bar, were abolished by the skill and enterprise of the white man. The prodigious task of building two large moles, stretching far out to sea, and dredging the bar itself, resulted in opening up a deeper water channel for ocean-going steamers, and transhipment in the open roads became a subject merely to remember and talk about.

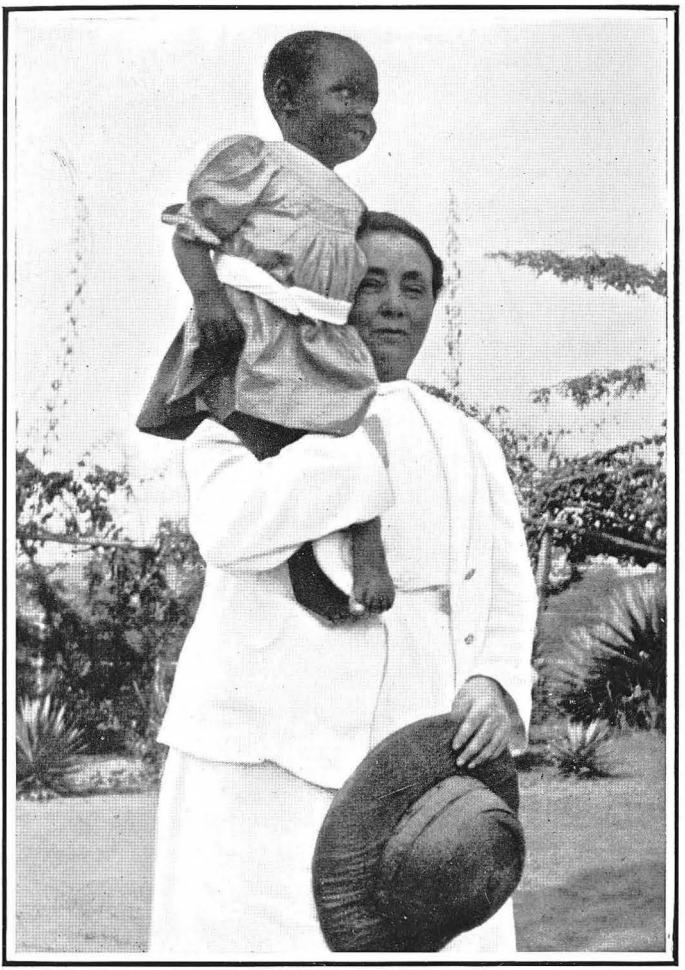
After a tedious passage the little company of missionaries arrived at the mouth of the Niger. Here

they were transferred to a river steamer. Patience was still needed inasmuch as the route followed was a tortuous one. Instead of taking the direct course up the main stream to Onitsha, the boat proceeded first to Warri. But there were compensations. The party was able to land and wander about the vicinity; the Consul made a four hours' journey in order to meet Mr. Hill. The appearance of white women caused quite a sensation, and great numbers of natives surged down to obtain a glimpse of them. The ladies were asked to stand together at the side of the vessel, in order that they might be in full view of the crowds. The Consul made an urgent and pathetic appeal for missionaries to be sent to that district, and his last words were: "Well, Bishop (he was Bishop Designate, he had not yet been consecrated), I hope you will do something for us before long; you really ought." Alas! it was the old story. Many years were to pass before that invitation received a response, and then it did not spring from English sources, but African. In more recent years the spread of Christianity has been so rapid in the Benin Province that two European clergymen are fully occupied in superintending the work.

The Niger Company's steamer *Boussa* arrived at Onitsha on January 7, 1893, and on this day began the life work of Edith Warner. The coming of white women to dwell among the natives of the Niger was a novel event. For the C.M.S. it inaugurated a new epoch in the Ibo country. They were among the pioneers of work among the women of the Niger.

A few natives had seen or heard of the wife of one of the traders on the river: some had seen the European ladies who had spent a few days at the mission while en route to Lokoja; two nurses, the Misses Clapton and Griffin, stayed at Onitsha for ten days before proceeding to Lokoja, January, 1891. Mrs. Wilmot Brooke and Miss Lewis followed in May of the same year, and there were some Sisters attached to the Roman Catholic Mission at Onitsha. An eye-witness states that the astonishment of the natives when these fresh white women appeared was profound; they immediately become the centre of curiosity to all around. At once the people assumed that Edith Warner must be the daughter of Mrs. Hill, and, with their ready wit and in accordance with their custom, quickly settled that she should be called *Omenwa* =a pet child, the name by which she was to be known throughout all the years which followed.

The missionaries then lived at what is known as the " Old Compound." The accommodation available was not of a palatial character. It consisted of a very small house built of clay, divided into three rooms with a tiny verandah. Moreover, it bore a reputation of being haunted (a distinction it retained until it was demolished). The two single ladies—for Miss Frisby had also companioned Miss Warner from England—dwelt here for a few months, and then removed to the cottage which had been vacated by the Rev. H. Dobinson. The thought often arises that, in those early days, much of the bad health of Europeans was due to the miserable housing conditions. They



"STEPHEN," ONE OF THE RESCUED CHILDREN

endured them willingly enough, but they had to bear the inevitable consequences. This remark applied to all Europeans for traders were no better situated.

Whatever welcome there was for the new arrivals had chiefly to come from the natives, for they found but one European (Mr. H. Proctor) in residence, and he had himself but recently come to Onitsha. He had been a fellow-passenger from England on the *Boma*, but did not break the journey at Lagos as the other missionaries did. The Rev. H. Dobinson (afterwards Archdeacon) was in England recuperating after his first tour in Africa. Mr. P. A. Bennett had also left the Niger for furlough after a long spell of work under trying conditions. But while on the homeward journey he met the outcoming party at Lagos, and chivalrously cancelled his passage in order to turn back and escort the strangers to Onitsha.

It was the time of the hot season, a somewhat trying experience for Europeans. The day after the party arrived one of the Roman Catholic Sisters died. Mr. Proctor had been left alone after Mr. Bennett's departure, and had already suffered acutely from fever. The natives had done their utmost for him, and he had been cheered by the neighbourly ministrations of one of the R.C. Fathers. But it was the women who rejoiced most to see the white ladies : their joy seemed boundless.

Fever very quickly made its unwelcome appearance, and an anxious time followed. There were many new problems to face—every situation was novel, and to learn by experience is not always easy or pleasant.

Almost the first thing was how to deal with twins born to a native woman dwelling at Onitsha. Among the Ibos the birth of twins was (and is still) regarded as a tragedy. They were treated as "abominable" (*nsaw*=taboo) things, and there was no alternative but to cast them away with the utmost despatch. The mother was reviled and abused, and (in many cases) driven forth from home. She, being accounted chiefly responsible for the calamity which had overtaken the family, must bear the penalty of separation and ill-treatment, and her offspring must be destroyed. Such a woman will manifest no trace of motherly instinct: she will refuse to nurse or even look upon the children. The birth of twins is a misfortune, and is treated as an ill-omen. Such practices are deeply rooted in the beliefs of the people, and are exceedingly difficult to eradicate. Indeed, they will not become obsolete until the people are taught and persuaded to follow a "more excellent way." We shall have more to say on this subject at a later stage, when we review the work done towards bringing about the abolition of this evil custom, through the efforts of the European ladies at the School and elsewhere.

One of the amusing things was that the European ladies knew little about the art of cooking. It is strange to find the Bishop-elect was chiefly responsible for the culinary arrangements with the lady missionaries acting as assistants. It is useful for a man to know something, but, certainly, no woman ought to come to Nigeria without some experience, but let that experience be gained under profitable conditions.

Fire, water, a pot and a frying pan may be the only outfit available on occasions, and it is wise to remember that the paraphernalia of a modern English kitchen will not be at the amateur cook's disposal. One has been offered buns which could scarcely be distinguished from flints whether tested by sight or teeth. Improvements have come with time (we are speaking now of apparatus, and also of buns!)—a stove, with oven complete, is now reckoned as part of the kitchen outfit at the main stations, and only when itinerating is it necessary to accommodate oneself to the old method of three stones (or cones of clay) for a fireplace, and a kerosine tin or water pot for an oven. Apparently the party fared poorly, even to going short of bread, when the Bishop was absent!

During those early days the missionaries lived a sort of community life. Meals were taken together, and the work of the day shared as circumstances allowed. Gradually a definite task was allotted to each, and he or she extended the scope of usefulness as experience was gained. Miss Warner, in addition to general teaching in the little school, gave singing lessons, and from that time Church music improved rapidly. Some of her pupils learned to play the harmonium, and the good work being started, it has continued ever since with ever widening benefits. Language study naturally absorbed a considerable part of each day. Miss Warner profited by her trained ear, in that she was able readily to detect the variations in tone. She laid a foundation upon which she became, perhaps, the most easy and natural speaker

of the Ibo language of any European member of the mission.

One cannot help thinking that during that early period life was somewhat cramped, and here, again, the tranquil disposition of Edith Warner was a tremendous help to her. Instead of chafing at the limitations she applied herself to language study, and her days were by no means wasted. During the initial stages of missionary work something more than zeal is required to guarantee success. Openings have to be made, methods and principles of procedure formulated, and there must be discernment, initiative and organising ability. A number of recruits arriving in a party is apt to throw the machinery out of gear where the work is still in the process of development. Soon after he returned from furlough Mr. Dobinson wrote:—

"I have always felt in such work as ours, that we ought to find work for people to do before sending them out. A common notion prevails that you have only to crowd people out and plenty of work will turn up. It is quite true that there is much to be done, but only a few persons have the power of making work for themselves. Plenty can sit down and work away at work cut out for them. Mind you, our work offers a grand chance for any bold and original spirit to strike out new lines and get in immediate touch with the heathen people. But the bold and original spirit is not always forthcoming."[1] "People must have a branch of work assigned to them out here in order to be

[1] *Letters of Archbishop Dobinson*, p. 148.

useful, and the mission field is not the place to come to in order to find out whether or no a person has qualifications for the work."[1] Edith Warner proved to be a born teacher and a gifted organiser, and happily fulfilled the qualifications demanded as we shall see in due course.

The time now approached for the first furlough to England. Just when all preparations were made to depart, and, at the same time, when all were expecting recruits to arrive, came the distressing news of the death of Bishop[2] and Mrs. Hill at Lagos and four other European missionaries, and the invaliding back to England from Lagos of Miss Maxwell, who was coming to Onitsha to develop and organise medical mission work. For the time being all hopes were shattered ; it seemed that the work was doomed to failure, and very sadly the good-byes were said. What could be said, in these circumstances, of a cheerful nature ? Who could have prophesied that, in spite of these disasters, the Holy Spirit would move in such a fashion that within a generation thousands of these Ibo People would be gathered into the Church of Christ ? Faith was sorely tried in those dark days, but God was working out His purposes, and in the years to come Edith Warner, among others, was to witness a great ingathering of souls. Her work among girls was to be established, settled and extended, until the School which she founded became a recognised institution and power for good in the land.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[2] Mr. Hill had returned to England after a few months, and was consecrated Bishop on St. Peter's Day, 1893.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST SEVEN YEARS

BY the end of the year (1894) Miss Warner was back at Onitsha, and the work of establishing a Girls' Boarding School was begun in earnest. The European quarters had, in the meantime, been transferred from the Old Compound to a new site on the crest of a hill about a quarter of a mile to the north. Alongside one of the English houses that had been built a three-roomed bungalow was erected, and, behind this, a dormitory, class room and other buildings were arranged. It was a modest effort, as could only be expected at this stage of work among girls who had never known discipline or control. Nine girls came into residence, and the School was formally inaugurated by Bishop Tugwell in 1895. Other girls were soon admitted, and, before long, there were twenty-four attached to the School. One can imagine the difficulties of initiating order and method with such a collection of raw material. Cooking after their own fashion the girls understood, and this occupation absorbed a large amount of the time of those told off each day for the purpose. The staple food is *yam* (a large potato-like vegetable). It has a tough rind which is hacked off in chips: then the *yam* is cut into

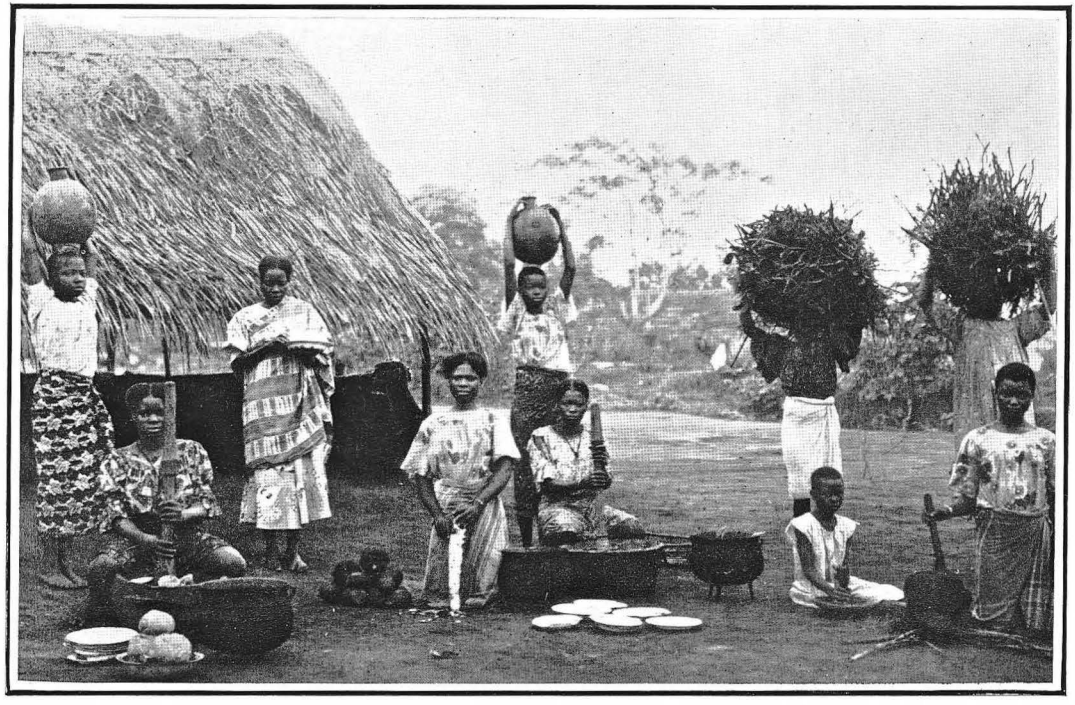
chunks and boiled. But the real work comes after the cooking. The pieces of boiled *yam* are dropped into a heavy wooden mortar, and they are pounded with a massive pestle and turned and mashed until the whole becomes a dough-like mass. This is then moulded up into balls of the size of a large coconut, and one is placed on the plate for each girl. Rice may be served also, but the savory must not be overlooked. This is made in a pot, and consists of a little water, a good supply of palm oil, raw pepper, salt, certain leaves and as much smoked fish as can be secured. The latter is apt to be rather pungent at times. Those acquainted with the business know only too well what a length of time is needed to prepare the evening meal.

Two hours per day were devoted to the teaching of domestic duties such as scrubbing and cleaning. Laundry work was commenced, an altogether new idea, for no native had cloth to wash in those days, and girls had not been accustomed to any sort of apparel. The day was to arrive when those who had not been worried by clothing at all would become as keen to follow the fashions as girls of other countries, albeit for a few years they followed their own ideas on dress. Nowadays they consider themselves more up-to-date, though this trait manifests itself much more conspicuously after school days are over, when they are at liberty to choose for themselves.

Four hours a day were spent in actual school lessons, and soon many of the girls showed an aptitude for learning. The idea has prevailed that girls are not

equal to boys at lessons, but this has been exploded. There is little to choose between boys and girls up to about the age of twelve. Then the thoughts of the future are apt to cause a parting of the ways. The boys apply themselves more closely to their lessons, prompted by the hope of rising in the world; the girls think more of the market and the home. They are soon to be married and why trouble, then, to study? They will be attending markets, cooking food, or caring for babies, and, in their opinion, book-learning is not needed for such occupations. What is there for women of the better things of life? Hence interest dwindles down, and teaching is not a sinecure under such conditions. Enthusiasm certainly increased at the approach of an examination. Then excitement did lay hold of the girls and no little anxiety. At the close of one term three of the girls busied themselves by cutting off each other's hair. This self-denying ordinance was enacted on the assumption that their heads would be cooler and thus help them to think better. They were careful, however, to leave a small tuft on the top " for the thoughts to collect there."

A placid temperament is a great asset in any circumstances, but more so in this kind of work. With these raw specimens there are constant calls for patience and firmness. As it is, the girls are sometimes too much for the European ladies, and one or other of the male staff used to be called in to hear palavers and to restore discipline. But patience was rewarded, and the foundations laid of a sound school. Many English ideas had to be scrapped. Method has its advantages,



PUPILS PREPARING THE FOOD

but when the pupils are not amenable to method it does not work, and this is where Edith Warner became such a success. She was a teacher born, and consequently had not become stereotyped. She was able to adapt herself to the local conditions, and first won the girls and then taught them in a fashion that was suitable for their stage of development. Others came to help her, but she was the only one to begin, continue and end her work at the School. Gradually the School was built up, and its influence began to be marked. The numbers increased, and the future became assured. Girls who had run wild all their lives learned to submit to order. Those who came as raw heathen heard the Gospel of the Grace of God. On Sundays it was a cheering sight to see the long procession of neatly dressed girls filing into Christ Church. For many years Miss Warner served as organist, and the School girls formed the choir. Church singing improved wonderfully as a result, and the influence spread to many other places of worship. The great majority of the early evangelists and catechists were men from Onitsha, and they were able to teach others what they had learned at their home church. The School became the recognised training institution for wives of the mission agents, and in this one direction alone fulfilled a very useful purpose. In addition to the school work time was found to visit the people in the neighbourhood. Open-air services were held, and Miss Warner's violin proved a great attraction. By its use many were drawn to listen to the Gospel message. It was no easy matter then, any more than

it is now, to convince people of the fact of sin. Sin in general was acknowledged, but to make it a personal matter was repugnant. Its blight upon the world might be admitted, but no person was prepared to take up the position of a sinner. Very largely the idea was, and is still, that evil is not a sin unless it is discovered —the being found out is the real trespass. During these early years of school life Miss Warner had the assistance first of Miss Frisby, followed by Miss Wilson, and, later, Miss E. Dennis and Miss Holbrook. It was still the day of small things, but foundations were being laid. School life was apt to be more monotonous than exciting. Progress seemed slow. Life went on quietly from day to day, and daily the Gospel was unfolded by word and life. After so many generations of repression the attempt to set forth a new vista of life was arduous. Response was not quickly roused. It was like awakening people out of a deep sleep before a real impression could be made upon these girls. And in this very fact lay an insidious danger to the teachers themselves. They had to fight continuously against the tendency to become apathetic also. This was a temptation which has lost most of its force in modern days in the Niger Mission, and, perhaps, an effort is required to appreciate its deadening effect on one's life.

As time progressed the influence of the School widened. There were signs of blessing, and more that was interesting. The tone of the School greatly improved: there was a manifest change in the lives of some of the girls, and Miss Warner and her colleagues

were greatly encouraged. Use was made of *Pilgrim's Progress*. One day a girl came to her teacher, and, turning her back, said very earnestly, " Is the burden of sin there ? "

Early in 1899 the Committee gave its sanction to the opening of a Créche, in which *nsaw* (taboo), children, i.e. those (whether twins or otherwise) who would in the normal course of things have been cast away as unclean, might be received. From this time the rescue of abandoned children had always a prominent place in Miss Warner's life. It was a practical challenge to a deeply ingrained superstition. Such children were under a curse, and it was one of her most cherished ambitions to banish this evil custom. Only by an expulsive force could the abject fear and suspicion be removed, and this force lay in the Gospel of Love, which she had come to promulgate. With the establishment of the créche specific cases of rescue became feasible, and, henceforth, a number of such children have always been inmates of the School.

In these early days in spite of every care the task of rearing these " castaway " children proved exceedingly difficult and many died. On one occasion one of the rescued babies died, and, as there was no man at hand to help, Miss Warner herself made a tiny coffin, dug the little grave and conducted the funeral.

So far the provision of a School had not been received with any enthusiasm by the native element, particularly the men-folk ; in fact, the very idea had been scouted as ridiculous. What was there for a girl in life but to cut wood, attend markets, help on the

farm, look after the house, cook food and to bear children? It was not exactly opposition, but rather complete apathy towards the movement. In spite of this the work gradually forged ahead. The labour expended was not in vain, and the effort to uplift the girls materially, mentally and morally bore fruit. A gentleman calling at the School on one occasion remarked how very different the girls were from those in the town, and added, "You can see it in their faces."

Thus passed the first seven years of Edith Warner's service in the Niger Mission, a time of small beginnings, years when faith was often sorely tried and tested, when quiet patience and steadfast endurance were absolutely indispensable wherewith to tide over the difficulties and problems of those early years in the history of the Girls' School.

CHAPTER V

REMOVAL TO IYI-ENU

THE Girls' School had now become a settled institution; an integral part of the mission, and, henceforth, it became, if possible, even more closely bound up with the life of Edith Warner. It might truly be said that, for the next twenty-five years, it centred round her personality: the School could not be visualised without her.

Meanwhile circumstances were changing for the better. The enlargement of the premises enabled the staff to reside in the same compound with the girls, and thus bring a more direct influence to bear upon them. Confidence had been gained to such an extent that it was decided to introduce fees, a rather startling innovation. The experiment was attended with some trepidation. Fees were to be asked only from those parents who were more or less interested in this side of their children's welfare, and who, at the same time, were well able to make some contribution towards the education of their daughters. Like most innovations it met with resentment in some quarters, and a few of the girls were withdrawn. On the other hand, it tended to increase respect for the School, and, furthermore, created fresh interest.

Men were much more ready to take the School seriously when they contributed something towards its upkeep, however small the fees charged, and within a short period the new system justified itself, much to the satisfaction and no little surprise of the promoters of the idea.

Another indication of the growing interest was that the girls themselves began to take much greater pride in their work, and paid earnest attention to the Scripture lessons. They became more amenable to the routine and discipline of the School, and responded more freely to the love and care bestowed upon them. An awakened intelligence helped them to enlarge their sphere of knowledge. The practical side was developed so efficiently that laundry work earned a return sufficient to support three girls, while the home-made bread (an addition to the curriculum introduced by Miss E. A. Hornby) gained such a reputation at Onitsha that the Government officials were ready to pay any price for it, declaring it to be incomparable.

Here it may be noted that on January 1, 1900, the British Government assumed control of the country thus displacing the Royal Niger Company, which had previously administered the Niger Territories. One of the earliest acts of the Government was to issue a proclamation prohibiting the destruction of twins and other children who came under the native custom of taboo.

Towards the close of 1901 a test case was brought for trial, arising out of twin children cast away, and afterwards discovered and brought to the mission.

The father was arrested, and, inasmuch as one of the children had died as the result of the cruel treatment it had received, he was tried, found guilty and condemned to death. But the Government wished, at this early stage, to temper judgment with mercy, and an intimation was given to the Chiefs of Onitsha and Asaba that commutation of the sentence would be recommended to the High Commissioner if they themselves would take action to abolish the custom of child murder. In these circumstances the Chiefs of Onitsha called a meeting and agreed to prohibit the custom. Though the proclamation was made officially it is doubtful whether there was any sincerity behind it: certainly it did not issue in a cessation of the practice. Within a year it was reported that some thirty to forty children had been destroyed. However, it did mark the commencement of a new order, and, in due time, the custom will become as obsolete as witch-burning has become in England.

The Headquarters of the Royal Niger Company were at Asaba, and the Government, in its turn, administered the district from that centre. But, almost immediately, it was decided to transfer the offices to Onitsha, and the hill on which the mission premises stood was selected as the new site. On the crest behind the Girls' School barracks were erected for the native troops. On account of this, and other distracting elements springing up at Onitsha Water-side, it was considered advisable to transfer the School to a quieter neighbourhood. Coincident with this decision was the removal of the Evangelists' Training

Centre from a place called Iyi-Enu, a hill-top some five miles to the east of Onitsha. The men's class was transferred to Awka, and the opportunity was seized by Miss Warner and her colleagues to move temporarily into the vacant premises. This took place in December, 1903. Meanwhile, Miss H. Duncum (previously attached to the Yoruba Mission) had come to assist in the school, and to her, at this stage, a great deal of the future development of the School as an efficient educational centre was due. She brought a trained mind to the task just when it was most needed. That the change of residence did not interfere with the work is illustrated by the following incident. In the market-place one of the girls met some of her former heathen companions, who acquainted her with the fact that one of her relatives had recently died. By all the rules of native etiquette the girl was bound to visit the home, to express sympathy with the bereaved. But this involved sharing in certain ceremonies of an idolatrous nature connected with the death and burial of a person, and partaking of the feast. The girl refused to comply with the request, excusing herself by saying, " I intend to be a Christian and have done with such things."

Although the transfer to Iyi-Enu was not allowed to interfere with the work of the School, yet the actual removal was a great strain. Recompense followed inasmuch as, rather contrary to expectation, at such an early stage more girls applied for admission.

One of the rescued girls had the joy of finding her relatives. She belonged to some people at Onitsha,

PREPARATION FOR BAPTISM

to whom she was sold by her dead father's relatives when she was too small to remember anything. With the owner's consent she had been taken into the School two years previously. Her mother and grandparents had been seeking her since the day she was sold, and had but recently obtained a clue to her whereabouts. Miss Warner and Miss Duncum went with her in the Easter Holidays (1904) to her town (about eighteen miles distant), and they had the joy of seeing her meet her relatives. At the girl's own request she stood up before a large crowd gathered outside her grandfather's house, and at which the relatives who had sold her were present, and told them she was glad of their action, because, through it, she had learnt to love God, and she had come back to tell them about Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

The efforts to save banned children began to bear fruit, and in the year 1906 there were seven of them at Iyi-Enu. One of these was baptized by Bishop Tugwell, and he writes of the event as follows :—

" Her father was present, and appeared to be deeply interested. This man lost his wife when the child was born ; but instead of throwing the child into the bush as the heathen often do in such circumstances, he has walked twice daily a considerable distance to the ladies' house for the last eighteen months in order to get the Swiss milk which they undertook to provide when he appealed for their help. During that period also he has come to the services in the Girls' Schoolroom every Sunday, bringing the child with him, and, as a result, has discontinued the worship of idols.

His pots have been broken, and he has been turned out of his house on two or three occasions by his fellow-villagers because he would not join them in their idolatries; but he steadily continues to attend the services, and it is hoped that, ere long, he will definitely accept Christ as his Saviour. If this is the case his little child will have led him. He has put his mark to a paper setting forth that it is his wish and intention that the child be brought up as a Christian."

So far the number of girls had increased slowly but steadily, about fifty being in residence at this time. But a more interesting feature lay in the fact that the girls were now being attracted from a much wider area. This might not strike a stranger as worthy of note, but really it was of prime significance. Prior to the commencement of missionary work in the interior of the Ibo country, and, later, the expansion of Government control, practically every township was in a state of feud with its neighbours. Tribal warfare was rife, and fear and suspicion were rampant in the land. Now the girls at the School represented many different towns—in other words, former enemies were not only meeting each other, but were living together, and daily learning first to tolerate and then to love one another. This was a factor which, as it developed, was bound to have weight in bringing about more peaceable conditions in the country. The girls, with their guardians, passed from place to place on their way to and from the School. During the holidays the girls narrated their experiences to their relatives and friends, and, as they themselves had learned the

habit of dwelling peaceably together, so it added its quota of good influence in the pacification of the country.

For three years the School remained at Iyi-Enu. Meanwhile the ladies had been prospecting in the surrounding district for a new site, where buildings of a suitable and permanent character should be erected, and the School raised to a more modern and approved standard. Miss Duncum took a leading part in these new schemes, and never spared herself in any task which was likely to foster the efficiency of the School. She had been instrumental in introducing a real element of the modern system of educational method. Unfortunately she did not live to witness the result of her genius. She was, to Miss Warner's intense grief, invalided to England, and died shortly after her arrival (July 4, 1907).

CHAPTER VI

PERMANENT QUARTERS

THE new site was situated in the midst of delightful scenery on a picturesque but rather lonely hill-top. At the foot of the hill flowed the Nkissi stream, thus securing a constant supply of good water. On one side, half a mile distant, lay a village of the town of Obunike. On the remaining sides open country stretched away for miles with round-topped hills in profusion. Near by was a town called Umu-di-awka, where some missionary work had been begun a year or so earlier, and, by mistake, this name was attached to the School for a time, instead of Obunike. It was the people of the latter place who owned and leased the plot of land to the C.M.S. for the School premises. The mistake arose owing to the original route of approach being via Umu-di-awka, which necessitated making a detour around Obunike and entering upon the land from the back.

The hill-top chosen for the purpose was bare, strewn with loose boulders and studded with rocks. The first inspection left an impression that it must remain bare and barren for ever—it did not appear feasible that any plant or shrub could be induced to grow under such

untoward conditions. This would have been a blow had it proved to be the case, because there is nothing more aggressively displeasing to the eye than a collection of corrugated iron roofs standing blatant in the midst of charming scenery. Nor would it suit the task of such a person as Edith Warner. One of her first cares was to conserve the beauty of the countryside. With admirable foresight she commenced to collect and plant flowers and shrubs wherewith to clothe the hill. It meant many hours of patient toil, digging holes and filling them with good soil, making up beds with rock borders to prevent the good soil being washed away by the torrential rains, and tender watchfulness over the young things set to grow against unfavourable odds. The result has been astonishing—there are few places in Nigeria with such a display of flowering plants, especially roses, so much so that the School buildings are now hidden in a bower of trees and flowers. The effect is striking. In 1915 the writer spent a few days at the School for the purpose of pegging out a graded road suitable for motor traffic to connect the School with the main highway about two miles distant. As the visitor turns the last curve through one of the villages of Obunike, suddenly the School hill bursts into view. Consequently we have " Surprise Corner " to enliven an otherwise uninteresting road.

But a change of site could not be accomplished without money in addition to loving labour. To meet the initial expense of building a dwelling house for the European staff and dormitories and class-rooms for

the girls, the Hon. Miss Portman generously undertook to meet all needs. She had long been a keen supporter of the School, and now came forward to strengthen the hands of the staff. An exceptionally well-built and commodious house was erected, the walls consisting of rich terra-cotta clay, and absolutely in keeping with the countryside. Around this nucleus have grown up other buildings to meet the increasing demands, and still the cry is for more accommodation.

The expansion of the School in all its aspects became the absorbing aim of Miss Warner. For a time she had Miss Brandreth for a fellow-worker, but practically ever since the transfer from Iyi-Enu to Obunike she had the Misses Martin and Row as colleagues. The School will ever be famed for the associated work of these three women, for they have worked together devotedly as a team. For some fifteen years they laboured and loved side by side, and the future of the School must be linked up with this partnership inspired and led by Miss Warner.

The ideal of gradually raising the standard of education for girls was never allowed to slip into the background, not only in respect of book knowledge, but in respect of those other departments which would fit them for spheres of wider usefulness. In addition to domestic training some of the older girls were induced to join the Medical Mission and learn something about nursing and the care of children. Others became pupil teachers, an utterly new feature for girls in the Ibo country.

The School continued to fulfil the rôle of saving homeless children. In one week (1910) six such children were sent by one Government official. These had all been kidnapped, and sold for dedication to certain idols as " Living Sacrifices."

We have already noticed that, under heathen customs, numbers of children came under the law of " taboo " and are " abomination " upon the land. But these six small girls formed part of a company of ten children who were destined to become slaves to various town deities. Such are known as *osu* children (or people). A child is purchased by some man or woman, and is " devoted " to an idol sometimes as expiation for offences committed, sometimes as an act of merit. Such children are sacrosanct, and must take up their quarters within the precincts of the deity to whom they are dedicated. Beyond the fact that they are the slaves of the deities, and have no rights of freedom or citizenship, they are left very much to themselves. As they grow up they may marry, but with fellow-*osus* only. The fate of a child " devoted " in this manner means that it becomes a slave, because the *osu* man or woman who first sets eyes on a fresh victim claims the child as his or her rightful property. Sometimes the life is very hard, daily sustenance being very precarious. In other cases we find whole villages composed almost, if not quite, entirely of *Ndi osu*.

Of the six children received on this occasion the ladies were able to restore three to their parents; one proved to be a leper, and two remained at the School. It may be interesting to note in passing that many of

these *osu* people have become Christians, and been able to obtain release from their environment, thus proving, once more, the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in bringing "liberty to the captive."

About this time (1911) another new feature was introduced to the girls, namely, to take a part in the evangelisation of the heathen around. It was arranged that they should adopt a school "own missionary." It seemed rather a formidable proposition in those days, inasmuch as few of the girls possessed any money whatever. However, they resolved to find ways and means. In addition to the few cowries they were able to contribute to the Sunday collections they planted patches of ground, and gave the produce at the Harvest Thanksgiving Service. The first issue was that they accomplished what had, at first sight, seemed an unattainable task. A town was selected as the Girls' School "own missionary" station, and not only did they provide the salary of the evangelist, but they, in company with one or more of the European ladies, paid periodical visits to encourage and, withal, to criticise when they considered it needful! Never since has the School ceased to maintain its "own missionary," a pleasing example of the fruits of the Spirit, they having first given themselves to God and now desiring that others, less favoured by circumstances, should also partake of the blessings of Christianity.

The foundations having thus been soundly laid steady progress followed, and has continued ever since. The numbers show an upward tendency, and new buildings have, from time to time, become imperative.

But much prejudice against the education of girls remains as a reproach and stumbling block among the Ibo People. Such an upheaval of age-long custom cannot be rectified in a day, or even a generation, but that a new spirit is making itself felt is everywhere apparent. The scores of girls who have passed through the School and who are, in their turn, the mothers of children, are helping to bring about the change. The sure signs of this are the occasional outbursts from the men who raise the question, "what is to be done with the educated women?" They seem to think that the education of girls will result in a transformation of affairs, and that it will lead to a reconstruction of Ibo society. But the real objection is to be found in the jealousy of the men: they resent the prospect of girls attaining to equal knowledge with themselves. For a wife to be as well educated as her husband is an almost intolerable thought, and for her to surpass him in knowledge is unthinkable. Such a man would be covered with confusion and chagrin.

However, no fear need be entertained for the future; these things will right themselves in due course: they are but part of the travail of the new birth. A day will come when it will be duly recognised that the influence of the School established through the persistent labours of Edith Warner will have proved one of the greatest factors in the uplifting of the Ibo People. There remains much yet to be done, and we can now pass on to note the latest developments of the School and to sum up its present prospects and salient needs.

CHAPTER VII

ST. MONICA'S

WE now see the School soundly established and making steady progress in all its ramifications. Schemes for further development were always prominent in the mind of Miss Warner. It was decided to designate the School, and the name of " St. Monica " was chosen. Regular normal classes were formed for the training of teachers, and the first Ibo girl has obtained a Second Class Teacher's Certificate from the Government.[1] The domestic side still receives a full measure of attention as is abundantly evident to every visitor to the School. Agricultural pursuits, which in England we should term kitchen gardening, the care of goats and fowls, and the teaching of various handicrafts, all tend to bring out the inherent abilities of the girls. This was so manifest that when the Phelps-Stokes Commission visited St. Monica's in 1923 Dr. Jesse Jones was able to report as follows :—

" The Church Missionary Society Girls' Training School, located in the open country ten miles from

[1] A Third Class Certificate must first be obtained : after an interval another Examination for Second Class, and so on to the First Class.

Onitsha, is one of the most interesting and effective schools visited in Africa. The teaching staff includes two European[1] and six African women. One hundred girls are enrolled as boarders. Seventy of the pupils are distributed through six standards of regular instruction. The pupil teachers remain for about three years of teaching experience. The other thirty are young women in what may be called a 'Short Course' of two years. They are betrothed to young men, who contribute to their expenses at the School. They are living in a separate compound within the school grounds. They receive some instruction in the usual school subjects and considerable training in the care of the home, gardening, and activities relating to their home communities. The school programme for both groups of girls is notable for its use of every school need for educational purposes. The school plant is simple, but comfortable. The dormitories are rows of one-room structures, made of rich brown clay polished within and without until they glisten in the sun."

Since the above was penned a new system has been introduced approximating to the public school methods in operation in England. Instead of the "rows of one-roomed" dormitories the pupils have been divided into "houses." A limited number of girls, presided over by a senior, constitute a "house." Each "house" has a distinctive title, such as "Perseverance" or "Unity." Each has its own dormitory, dining-room and kitchen standing within its own little compound.

[1] Three—one on furlough.

Marks are given for the manner in which buildings and grounds are kept. The value of this system was quickly apparent. Friendly rivalry was initiated with beneficent results. The girls have become keen and ambitious for the honour of their " houses," and now show a readiness for work above anything displayed hitherto.

This improvement in tone and character has been further fostered by the formation of a troop of Girl Guides—the 1st Onitsha Company. Perhaps this innovation has done more to develop the characters of the girls than any other single change in itself. It has had a wonderful effect on the disposition of the girls. Whereas they seldom showed signs of enthusiasm or exhilaration in any ordinary peaceful pursuit, the " Guide " spirit is evoking elements of emotion which have hitherto lain dormant. The Ibo Girl has humour, abundance of it, but she is not an exponent of energy. She has not become accustomed to being praised; her mind has been from her earliest days occupied with the more humdrum things of life, housekeeping, farming, marketing and the care of children, all good in themselves, but apt to produce stodgy dullness. She stood as one by herself, usually wanted only for what she could do in a useful or practical line, without particular thought for the benefit of others. The Guide training is changing this attitude. It has brought an entirely new force to bear upon the girls, and they have responded in a most unanticipated manner. The drill has given scope for their physical activities, while games have fully demonstrated a

love for fun and sport, which had little chance of expression under the weight of tribal etiquette. The displays of the Guides are now a regular feature at the many public functions in the countryside.

The progress of the School has led also to another change, namely, the placing of St. Monica's upon the list of Government Assisted Schools. Such action is only feasible on being approved by official inspection. The School has passed this test, and its position has, consequently, been more surely established. Regular inspections are made by Government Superintendents of Education, and grants-in-aid follow in due course. But with the progress come also the deeper sense of responsibility and much closer attention to what may be termed systematic education. The code is a fairly rigid one, and the syllabuses laid down by authority must needs be followed: there can be no drifting into easy-going elastic methods.

What will be the effect on school life? Happily Miss Warner was permitted to watch over and guide through the days which saw the introduction of all these new ideas. Her serene temperament, wide sympathy, and practical common sense brought the School safely through this transient period. She set herself to solve the problems involved: she recognised the value of bringing the School under Government inspection. She was right in her belief that it would tend to raise the standard of education of the girls, and that, if taken rightly, it would provoke ambition and stimulate them to greater effort, a characteristic sadly deficient in the disposition of the normal Ibo

girl. The prospect of a visit from an official inspector might produce a certain amount of nervous tension; but, equally, it would rouse every ounce of energy and a strong desire to excel. This is proving to be the case, and no one was more gratified than Edith Warner. After many years of patient toil and endurance she had the joy of seeing the fruit of her labour.

From the first, too, she realised that there were dangers to be faced in accepting the challenge of the new conditions. There could easily arise a tendency to neglect the spiritual side of the work in favour of the secular part of the curriculum. The girls would be quick to note that arithmetic might be more highly commended than the study of the Scriptures. This danger must needs be met and throttled from the outset. And here it was that experience and love were able to maintain the proper balance. The missionary aspect must be kept in the forefront since in that alone was to be found the reforming influence which would change a heathen girl into a Christian. Without that spiritual element mere education would prove no real benefit to the girls. Edith Warner held the most profound conviction that in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its wondrous fullness, could be found the regenerating power which would effectually change the lives of the girls brought under her care. To this end she lived and laboured unfalteringly, and she had the rare joy of witnessing scores of erstwhile pagan girls blossoming forth into bright and happy Christians. It would be difficult to estimate the number for whom she stood as God-mother. Her great ambition was to

have not only a long list of scholars, but to send them forth as disciples. Who can calculate the value of the work done by this one personality in the Ibo country, nay, in Nigeria ? Her old pupils are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land as the wives of teachers, evangelists, pastors, traders, clerks and mechanics, and wherever they go they take with them those qualities which they have gathered while inmates of St. Monica's School. No teacher could desire more.

There have been many disappointments. Not every girl has turned out an unqualified success, and often one or another has caused tears of sorrow, but the " overweights of joy " have far exceeded the bitterness of shattered hopes. It is not too much to say that hundreds throughout the Ibo country are full of thanksgiving for the lessons learned at the School, and for a generation or two there will be many in this land both of men and women who will rise up and call her blessed. " She being dead yet speaketh," and the burden of her words would be, " Carry on ; go from strength to strength, and finish the task which I was privileged to begin."

CHAPTER VIII

EAST AND WEST OF THE NIGER

A CASUAL introduction would not produce an impression that Edith Warner was a keen and enthusiastic traveller. There was no obvious indication that she possessed a spirit of sport and adventure, but once begin to discuss the possibility of a journey her interest was immediately apparent. She was always alert to seize an opportunity to travel. Here, again, her methodical habits and serene temperament were very useful assets, and on many occasions helped her out of difficulties. Combined with this interest to see the country was an intense desire to evangelise the people. The fact that she had a Gospel to preach was ever paramount in her thoughts, and in and out of season she sought to declare the Love of God to those whom she met on her journeys. She revelled in what are termed " itinerations," despising the hardships, and tackling the obstacles with zest fortified by good humour.

She had a share in several pioneering efforts, and was the first white woman to be seen in parts of the Ibo country. In the earliest days of the Mission the area for travelling was very circumscribed: it being almost impossible for either men or women, white or

DRILL WITH THE BABY ORGAN

black, to move far from the Mission base. On her second tour in Africa, however, she began what was to be a series of expeditions into the " regions beyond." Meanwhile other ladies had joined the Mission, and, therefore, companions in travel were forthcoming. The first recorded itineration took place at the beginning of 1896, when, in company with Miss Maxwell, she visited the hinterland on the west side of the Niger. On this occasion they visited what was then the outmost fringe of mission influence. Travelling from Asaba they went to Akwukwu and Onitsha *Olona*. Their arrival created great excitement. A small nucleus of church adherents had already been won in these two towns, and the foreigners had nothing to fear. On the contrary, they were received with great joy and enthusiasm, men and women vieing with each other in their demonstrations of welcome. This seems to have been the first appearance of white women in these parts, hence the visits had all the elements of novelty for the natives, so much so that the ladies were followed by crowds when they ventured out of the compound, and had to submit to the gazing curiosity of the multitude whether at home or abroad.

The next journey to be noted lay in a different direction. In company with Miss Holbrook an excursion was made to the Anam country. This necessitated travelling in a " dug-out," a canoe formed of a hollowed tree trunk hewn roughly to shape with native axes, from Onitsha northwards up the Anambala Creek. The people were rather primitive, dwelling

for most of the year in swampy surroundings adjacent to the river side. One of the most noticeable characteristics was their deep reverence for a species of beautiful heron.

The town of Awka has become much more widely known than it was thirty years ago. Even then it had a fairly wide reputation, owing to the skill of the blacksmiths who made annual pilgrimages throughout the length and breadth of the Ibo country, and frequently beyond its limits, plying their trade on the one hand, and, on the other, advertising the merits and powers of their *abwala*. This was a sort of " Delphic Oracle " which had attained to fame over a wide area, and was a source of wealth and influence to its owners.

Archdeacon Dobinson attempted to gain a footing in this town, but without success. Later, Bishop Tugwell assayed to reach Awka, but met with such hostility by the way that he was forced to abandon his quest.

In February, 1899, another attempt was launched, this time by a party of four Europeans and five Christian natives, three of the former being women, and the fourth, the Rev. S. R. Smith, who acted as manager of the expedition. This venture met with more success inasmuch as it became possible to make a short stay in the town.

To face the difficulties of the journey both courage and endurance were essential. The direct route across country was blocked to travellers: any attempt by that path would certainly have met with a fate

similar to that which checked Bishop Tugwell. Instead, the long way round had to be chosen. Use was made of canoes to convey the expedition up the Anambala Creek as far as Aguleri. Thence it proceeded overland along unknown tracts through bush and forest intersected by rivers and swamps. The hardships were many, apart from the dangers from the hordes of natives who resented the intrusion of foreigners, and who had had no experience of the white man's ways. Very probably it was the presence of the women which made it feasible for the party to proceed at all, as even savages could realise that women would not be members of a war party.

Eventually, after surmounting many obstacles by the way, the party reached Awka. Here they were met by a number of chiefs, and were taken under close escort. These men were not so inexperienced since, during their journeys to the coast towns, Calabar, Bonny and others, they had come into contact with European influence. Though better qualified to deal with strangers yet they were not manifestly glad to have them in their midst. They sought to impress upon the travellers the perils to which they were exposing themselves, particularly emphasizing the disasters that would follow should they stray across a raiding party of the notorious *Abams* (Mercenaries). The chiefs, moreover, were quite well aware that the coming of Europeans would, sooner or later, lead to the exposure and consequent destruction of their wealth-producing *abwala*.

Accommodation was provided for the visitors more

or less reluctantly at first. Gradually suspicion was to some extent removed and gave way to speculation. Who were these strange creatures, and for what purpose had they come to Awka ? No more need be said here than that the abundant hair of the women, together with their long dresses, confirmed the fairy stories heard from infancy concerning the ancestry of white people. These stories were not flattering to Europeans ; they corresponded remarkably closely to the Evolutional theory of the Descent of Man !

During the stay of about a week the visitors were allowed to preach, and though more friendly relationships were established, yet, behind all was a spirit of distrust, and it soon became obvious that it was time to leave.

In the end their departure was somewhat unconventional, and the party had to retrace its steps rather hastily. Benighted on the road the hardships were not lightened. Negotiating rivers and swamps by the aid of a small flickering lamp is not an enjoyable experience, and they were thankful, indeed, when once more they arrived at the bank of the Anambala Creek.

Five years later Awka became a definite objective of the Mission. At first it was a precarious undertaking : the attitude adopted by the people being, " we do not want you, yet we are not prepared to drive you away by violent methods." Thus it continued for a few years, and then the tide turned. The story of the spread of the Gospel in that part of the Ibo country is as striking as any to be found in the annals

of modern missionary enterprise. Visitors to Awka to-day cannot possibly realise the conditions which prevailed thirty years ago. The transformation in the town itself: the changed attitude of the people, and the fact that the journey by motor-car can be comfortably done in an hour, make it impossible to understand the hardships the pioneer party had to endure in 1899.

Awka was the furthest limit of white penetration on the eastern side. The contrast now comes with a visit to the extreme western boundary. The first party of white women were about to visit Idumuje Uboko and was to consist of three, namely, E. A. Warner and the Misses E. and F. Dennis. They left Asaba early on January 6, 1902, and travelled that day to Ubolo-Okiti. At each village passed through crowds quickly collected, and to them short addresses were given, explaining the reason why the visitors had come to the country.

The most trying experience in this part of the country is lack of water. On this occasion the only supply was surface water collected in pits during the rainy season, which had ended the previous November. It was, of course, stagnant, dark brown in colour and frequently thick, and smelt horribly, but the carriers gladly paid for a drink. No doubt they were thirsty, for the party spent eight and a half hours on the road on this first day.

They moved on to Isele-Ukwu, the King of which was regarded as a very superior being by the people of the surrounding country. His palace, surrounded

by a high wall, really consisted of a village. He was reputed to have two hundred wives! These, with the children, slaves and clientele required a large compound. In the courtyard was a deep hole containing filthy water, the sole supply for the use of the Royal Family and its dependents.

On the afternoon of the second day out from Asaba the party arrived at Idumuje Uboko, the usual curiosity being aroused at the first appearance of white women. All went well, and the ladies spent their time marking out the lines for foundations of mission houses, visiting the chiefs and the leading "medicine" man, who, although of unprepossessing appearance, seemed inclined to be friendly.

Not content with the journey already accomplished the party decided to attempt an excursion into country occupied by another tribe. Hence they made a day's journey into the Isa country, the King of Idumuje providing leaders who could also act as interpreters. They pushed on through Ogamadi until about noon they reached Isa itself. The people were greatly excited, and crowds accompanied the party from the entrance of the town to the King's residence (an hour's journey), all gesticulating wildly and shouting at the top of their voices.

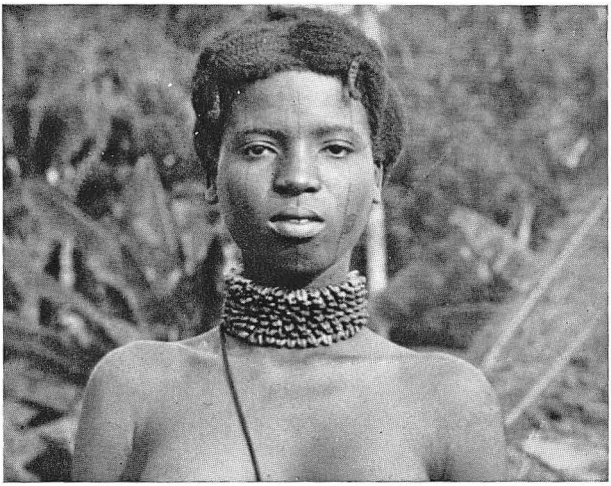
The King's compound was very large with buildings either tottering or in a generally ruinous condition. Maintaining native procedure and etiquette there was no hurry on the King's side to welcome the strangers, rather they, though tired and weary, had to await the pleasure of his majesty. In due time he arrived, and

his appearance did not inspire confidence. His smile of greeting was of the kind that aggravates and evokes suspicion rather than assurance. A little later he withdrew to an inner chamber, and signified his wish for the ladies to follow. Expecting to enter an apartment more worthy of a king they were disappointed to find the place in a dirty and dilapidated condition. Men only were present, no women being permitted to take part in the proceedings. The King was presented with a sash, worth 2s. 6d., but such a gift did not please his majesty who coveted cloth. In these early days it was customary for visitor and host to exchange presents, and the party had made the mistake of trying to enter a new district without carrying with them acceptable gifts. Consequently the King was by no means favourably impressed in spite of the attempts to pursuade him that the present was sufficient for the occasion. However, he promised accommodation, and the party started off for a much-needed rest. But disappointment and chagrin met them, for the man appointed to receive them declined the honour, and they had to retrace their steps to the King. Another host was allocated, this time with more success. It amounted to one small room, and it had to serve for all—three Europeans and several natives! Meanwhile Edith Warner was busy with camera and musical box and generally doing all she could to enliven the situation. Even yet the ladies had not realised the kind of people among whom they had ventured. They had acted on the impulse of the moment, and had to pay the price of indiscretion.

Some six years earlier a Roman Catholic priest visited Isa. He was forced to make a precipitate retreat and lost all his belongings.

The King and Prime Minister were both antagonistic. The native catechist who accompanied the party saw and heard things which aroused his suspicions. As a matter of fact they were virtually prisoners. For the time being they were helpless: the only thing to be done was to take what rest was possible in the circumstances. The catechist remained on the alert, and about four o'clock next morning quietly warned them, and, as dawn broke, a dash was made for Idumuje Uboko, European dignity and native etiquette both alike being dispensed with in the hurry to escape. It was an escapade more, perhaps, of high spirits than of faith. Still there was a hope that it might not prove an altogether worthless adventure: some day the way would open for the messengers of the Gospel, but from that day to this that part of the Isa country remains untouched by missionary influence. However, the harvest is beginning to show signs of whitening, and, at this moment, twenty-five years later, it would be possible to commence operations with every prospect of success in the Isa country. If ways and means could be found there would be no obstacle worth serious consideration to prevent mission centres being established. To-day the way is open for others to follow that venturesome little party of pioneers.[1]

[1] In May, 1903, a church was opened at Idumuje Uboko by Bishop Tugwell, when three young men were baptized, the first fruits of the work in that town. Later in the same year six more persons



A GIRL WIFE

BELLES OF THE VILLAGE

But "finis" had not been written to the troubles of the party. They thought themselves secure at Idumuje Uboko, and were much surprised to find it otherwise. The second night after their return from Isa they were awakened soon after midnight, and it soon became obvious that their presence in the town was resented. The young men had taken matters into their own hands and threatened violence unless the foreigners immediately departed. Protests and appeals proved unavailing, and the party could do nothing but wait and pray until morning light appeared. The King called a Council, and, though he and his chiefs expressed their regret, there was no alternative but to accept the terms of the people, and for the mission party to depart as quickly and as unostentatiously as possible.

No carriers were procurable, of course, and each member had to carry something. The hammock was abandoned, the bearers taking ordinary loads instead. The exit was the more trying, because they were unable to start travelling until midday, when the heat and glare of the sun were wellnigh unbearable. The nearest C.M.S. station was fifteen miles away over rough forest tracks, and it was not until next morning that Akwukwu and safety were reached.

Meanwhile the young men were busy at Idumuje Uboko: they cut down the church bell, shovelled earth

were baptized, one being the chief woman of the town. Another was the first Isa convert. This man had left his own country and gone to live at Idumuje, in order to be out of reach of the tyrannical King of Isa, of whose cruelty terrible tales were told.

into the saw pit, rooted out the posts set up for the new house, and generally played havoc to their hearts' content.

It was a discouraging experience in many ways. However, the day was not long in coming when fortune changed, and Idumuje Uboko became a centre of evangelistic effort.[1]

[1] A native teacher had been stationed at Idumuje Uboko in December, 1900, following a pioneer journey by the Revs. J. Spencer and G. T. Basden and others to Agbor.

CHAPTER IX

VACATION VENTURES

AS time passed, and the duties of the School became more prescribed and exacting, the instinct for travel and adventure had to be repressed: to do as inclination prompted was no longer practicable and visits to interior parts had to be compressed within the limits of school holidays. Advantage was taken of these vacations for two reasons: one, to secure recreation and refreshment of mind and body by a complete change of surroundings, and equally as vital, to promote a periodical revival of evangelistic fervour. For, wherever Edith Warner went her primary resolve was to broadcast the "good news" contained in the Gospel. Her keenness never flagged, and she was ever ready to explain in the most simple and lucid manner the Way, the Truth and the Life. Her quiet and natural way of expression, and her rock-like assurance in the message itself, gave to her words an attractive force that held the attention of all who listened. Many there are who first heard of the Way of Forgiveness and Access to God through her lips.

Throughout the school term she would ruminate between whiles over plans for the next itineration.

She was always interested in the " Regions Beyond," and in full sympathy with any new venture which had in prospect the widening of the frontiers of the Kingdom of God. At the first opportunity she would go to investigate for herself: to her it was a real source of joy to start forth to some little-known part of the interior. It will suffice to relate here the narrative of one such holiday excursion.

Meantime mighty changes had been going forward in Nigeria. The country was being rapidly opened up, especially in certain areas. Some idea of the changes will be gathered from the fact that the next journey to be described tells of good roads, motor-cars and railways. But these developments were in their initial stages. The intersecting country, and by far the greater part, still remained as primitive as it had been from the beginning of time.

The party consisted of Miss Warner, her colleague, Miss Row, a Bible woman and about a dozen of the bigger girls. The idea was to travel from St. Monica's towards the south-east until they reached the Nigerian Eastern Railway, then under construction. They proposed striking the railway at or near Afikpo Road Station, there to take train northwards to Udi Junction (now Enugu), and back via the Udi, Awka and Onitsha road. As far as Ujalli was easy of accomplishment, inasmuch as, by this time, a road had been constructed and the ladies were able to travel by motor-car (a little over forty miles). From this point to the railway had to be traversed on foot, for nothing in the nature of a road existed, and the tracks to be followed were very

narrow, tortuous and, in many parts, strewn with rocks and stones.

At Ujalli they had a commodious and airy " Rest House " placed at their disposal. A stay was made here of several days, as it was a convenient centre for visiting a number of towns in the district. Many meetings were held, and crowds flocked to hear the white women who had come into their midst. Eagerly they listened to the Gospel story, and, ere long, several of the choruses[1] so familiar to C.S.S.M. workers were being sung by the native women.

From Ujalli a move was made to Owerri (Awka District), where another halt was made. No hotel accommodation was available here, not even a " Rest House," and the tiny house of the evangelist was swamped with the girls of the party. However, the problem was quickly solved by the erection of a couple of booths made with palm stems. The quarters were somewhat primitive but they were cool, clean and wholesome, and to be able to peer through the roof and watch the shining stars is quite a pleasant experience. It is when the stars are invisible, and the rain begins to pour down, that such booths are, well—simply dreadful ! Doors and windows of course there were none, and to enjoy life one needed to dispense with all thoughts of possible nocturnal visitors. Likewise one should turn deaf ears to the eerie hooting of the owls and other noises apt to be disturbing to nervous sleepers.

There was much of interest to foreigners at Owerri.

[1] Of course translated into Ibo by Miss Warner.

The women are adepts at pottery, and the party was able to watch the manufacture of various articles through all the processes from the raw clay to the hard-baked finished pots. It appeared a simple business, but attempts to emulate the women all too surely demonstrated the need of skill and practised hands.

Not far away were two interesting spots. One, the source of the Imo River, and the other a very beautiful waterfall set in the midst of exquisite scenery. The two ladies were the first white people to visit the glen. The water drops over a cliff clothed in dense masses of verdant green. The rays of the sun transform the spray into a shimmering gauze of rainbow-tinted colours too delightful to describe in words. Another unique experience is to walk behind the fall and look at the sun through the sheet of sparkling dazzling white water. At the foot of the cliff is an opalescent pool, while, on one side, is a series of interesting grottoes. These are formed of iron and sandstone. The effects of erosion are extremely curious. The sand has been grouted out, leaving the ironstone in columns and arches of most grotesque shapes, spirals and curves and flat pieces being mingled together in fantastic fashion.

At Owerri the native women were equally attracted to the visitors. They were as primitive as any to be found in Africa, being clothed in little more than camwood and indigo dyes, and their bodies scarified by cicatrisation marks. But they were keen to learn, and meetings were held for them during the stay, and

not a few showed themselves eager to follow the " more excellent way."

The ensuing stage was a trying one even for the Ibo country. A start was made at 4.30 a.m. The track leads through the town, and away over fine open country with masses of towering hills stretching as far as the eye can see. The path is very uneven, and to descend to the valley below involves a drop of nearly a thousand feet, clambering over boulders and slithering down step-like rocks. There is not much scope left for dignity on this route. One has not time to think of it, because a false step means a sprained ankle or a broken leg, if not worse. Moreover, it is very tiring, and after eight and a half hours of this hard trekking the travellers were wellnigh exhausted. Then, down came a torrent of rain, drenching everyone to the skin: they passed from extreme heat to extreme cold. O shivers! But Edith Warner was not so easily ruffled as some folk are apt to be by things of this sort, and continued to march forward spiritedly in spite of being wet, cold and fatigued. Also it was about time camp should have been made, but where?

The carriers, with the evangelist who was acting as guide, had pushed on ahead in search of the " Rest House." Presently the women came along to find the loads dumped in the puddles under a clump of trees, the dejected carriers sitting huddled together the picture of misery. The guide announced: " This is where the ' Rest House ' should be, but it has fallen

down!" The feelings of the rain-soaked party need not be described.

Nne-ayi Warner wrung the water out of her dress, then bade the guide go and seek for a shelter for the night. Presently he returned with the information that the people of the village were terrified as they had never previously seen white people, and "would they please depart as quickly as they could!" He added that there was another village a few miles further on where the people might prove more friendly and offer them a lodging. There was no alternative but to resume the wet and weary march through the darkness.

At long last they came to the village, and, happily, met with a more favourable reception. The chief seemed more enlightened, and agreed not only to allow them to stay in his village, but promised to lead them to the railway next day. He at once had two houses swept out for their use, and provided wood and water wherewith to prepare and cook a meal of which they stood, by that hour, in dire need. The huts were round and of a circumference little larger than a good sized umbrella, and altogether too small to admit the setting up of a camp bed. The only solution was to place the beds under the eaves. It was rather a weird experience, and ere long, in spite of their weariness, the girls came and begged to resume the journey, because they said "the people are going to eat us all in the night." *Nne-ayi* calmly replied: "I *think* it is all right, and anyhow we can only trust." Far into that night she sat and talked to that young chief

HEATHEN WOMEN MAKING COOKING AND WATER POTS

explaining in simple language the Gospel of God's love for man.

Very early next morning, with everything wet and clammy, the party sallied forth again, the chief with long strides stalking along ahead cheering the party from time to time with the words, " we are nearly there now." About ten o'clock he stopped, and with great pride announced " here is the railway." True ! but where was the station ? He did not know whether the nearest one lay to the north or south : he had fulfilled his promise to bring them safely to the railway. However, as soon as he perceived that they were in need of rest and food he conducted them to the house of a friend in a village near by and quickly had wood and water provided for their use.

After a rest, and a glance at the map, they moved away in a southerly direction. It was now intensely hot with, of course, not a particle of shade along the open railway track, and all were footsore and weary. After an hour of this some of the girls sat and wept miserably, and it was some time before they were comforted. Eventually, at about 3.30 p.m., Afikpo Road Station was reached and a " Rest House." The joy of pure water to drink and refreshing baths was something to remember in after days.

The same evening a train arrived from Port Harcourt, a matter of tremendous excitement as not one of the girls or the carriers had ever seen such a moving monster. They supposed it also got tired, for they noted that " it went to sleep for the night."

The novel experience was trebled next morning

when the girls went for their first ride in a train. They proceeded to Enugwu, in those days a place with a sinister reputation. But this only kindled the more interest for Edith Warner. She was keen to explore the neighbourhood, and was full of questions in her search for information. The pastor in charge had to tell her everything he knew about the place and people. He was anxious to do all he could for them, but he made particular request that none of the party should venture out of the compound without him as " it was not safe." We shall have more to say about Enugwu-Ngwo in the next chapter.

Strangely enough a little pamphlet, called *Light in Darkness*, telling the story of the coming of the Gospel to this benighted town, was one of the last things she read, and was by her bedside when she passed away.

CHAPTER X

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

MUCH more might be written concerning the travels of Edith Warner in Nigeria. On one occasion she traversed nearly two thousand miles on a visit to the Yoruba country. She ascended the Niger to Baro, thence passed to Minna, and turned south-west to Oshogbo, Ọyọ, Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos and back again to St. Monica's. Journeys were also made to Benin, Calabar and other centres of work and interest, but these were more or less under modern conditions. In this sketch it has been the aim rather to note only such journeys that had a distinctly pioneer element in them. A record of all her travels would entail a much larger volume. Suffice it now to add descriptions of a couple of journeys described by herself.

The first was made in October, 1921, and is included to illustrate the interest she took in the women generally in addition to her duties at St. Monica's. The object was to preside at a Conference of Native Women.

"Nearly six hundred women, and we had three meetings each day. We had addresses from Miss Row and myself and some of the native women, and heard

reports of the work from some sixty towns. Then we discussed various questions, some introduced by us and some by the women. The burning question was that of a man marrying his brother's widow according to native custom. How I wish you could have seen the women: they are so primitive most of them! The babies were rather tiresome. If one cried and I, from the chair, requested the mother to take it outside, the whole meeting shouted, 'take it out,' and confusion reigned. Then, when a question was under discussion, many of them would begin to speak at once, and often I had to give out a hymn to obtain order again. Some would come an hour late for a meeting, make for the seats they had at a previous meeting, and attempt to turn out those who were occupying them.

"I taught them a new chorus the first morning and we sang it at each meeting, so I hope even the most ignorant will at least remember that.

"Two chiefs came to the last meeting and occupied chairs just in front of the platform. They came to show their interest. At the close of this last meeting we were all invited to the catechist's compound and found a surprise waiting for us all. The Christians had cooked food for all the women, and a procession of boys came carrying baskets of cooked yam and pots of soup. The women sat on mats in groups, the whole scene reminding us of the 'Feeding of the four thousand.' The five chiefs of the town sat in a row and we were given seats beside them. The Christians presented us with a goat and a large basket of yams. Then each chief gave us something, three goats, two

fowls and more yams. We were very pleased and surprised.

"One or two of our catechists' wives spoke so well at the meetings. They know what appeals to their own people. One spoke of the humility of Our Lord's mother. She said, 'If one of you had been brought such a message by Gabriel, you would have gone about everywhere proclaiming *I* am going to be the mother of the great promised One!'

"Two women from distant towns 'borned' babies while here, one on the first day of the meetings and the other on the second, and they both walked home last night![1]

"If you could see the costumes! A very few had nice print dresses, many only a cloth wrapped round, but all had decked themselves out in their best. Among the 600, thirty-five only were communicants, 161 were baptized and but 133 could read their Bibles, so the great majority were beginners. The work in many stations in this District (Awka) is new, and the women are always behind the men."

The following are culled from notes of a visit to Enugwu-Ngwo taken in the Easter Vacation, 1924, but a few months before she was invalided to England, and are supplementary to the concluding part of Chapter IX.

[1] Being interpreted it means that two babies were born to women who had come to attend the Conference. It is not at all uncommon for a woman to be overtaken on the road and her baby to be born sometimes at a considerable distance from home. After a short interval the mother will rise up and carry home her newly born infant.

" We left (Miss Row and I) on Friday afternoon and spent the night at the Training College at Awka. Next morning we started early and arrived at Enugwu about midday. It was the beginning of the rainy season, and everything was looking fresh and green. We stayed with the pastor. Two of his children are at St. Monica's, and his wife was trained there before them. The pastor himself put up our beds and nailed curtains to the windows. No Englishman could have done more for our comfort all the time we were there.

" Eight years ago Enugwu was a wild, lawless place, the people were cannibals and murderers. Then the C.M.S. came in the persons of this pastor and his wife. Six years ago we saw the beginnings of the work. Dr. Basden was Superintendent of the District, and he and Mr. Ejindu (the pastor) have opened up station after station until now there are sixty-six. When we were here six years ago there were a few Christians; now there is a large church near the pastor's house, and two more in other parts of Ngwo. Thieving was so rife that the Christians brought their little crops of edible roots and hid them in the ground round the pastor's house. No yam, maize, cassava, coconut, bamboos, fowls, goats or sheep were to be had; the people lived on a few beans and palm oil. Mr. Ejindu taught the Christians to farm, planting yams and other crops, but the farms had to be watched at night because of the thieves. Now farms are to be seen, and even the heathen are beginning to cultivate the land.

" Mrs. Ejindu taught the women to plant cassava, make some clothing (for hitherto the women had gone entirely naked) and do simple laundry work. We went to see some of our former pupils who are now married, and the contrast between their houses and those of the heathen was remarkable. As we walked about the town various men were indicated to us as, ' that man is a great thief, he is just out of prison again,' or, ' this man has killed many people,' or, ' that one is a great persecutor of the Christians.' The town is now more prosperous, and much of the evil has disappeared. The Christians own fowls and goats, and look so much more human and intelligent. An Industrial School has been established with thirty-two young fellows as apprentices, thus putting them into a way to earn a living. They supply the mission stations with tables and chairs and the schools with desks and forms. A band of sawyers has also been put to work. The change that Christianity has made shows that the Gospel has not lost its power over the hearts and lives of men and women.

" Our chief object in visiting Enugwu (Ngwo) these holidays was to be present at Mercy's wedding. Mercy was thrown away into the bush when a baby because her upper teeth came first. How long she lay there cannot be definitely stated, but long enough for vultures to leave their marks on her leg and cheek. She was found by a Christian man who brought her along to us. We brought her up and the last few years she has been teaching at St. Monica's. The wedding was quite simple, as the Church Council in this District

has forbidden marriage feasts which often, in other parts, lead the bridegrooms into hopeless debt. One of our St. Monica girls played the little harmonium at the service and I gave the bride away.

"The marriage question in these parts is a difficult one. By native custom a man must kill someone and bring the head of the victim to his future father-in-law, then, after paying to the value of about twelve shillings, he is at liberty to take the girl. She may be quite a child, in which case the husband supplies her with food; not the father. Several girls have become Christians, and are refusing to remain engaged to heathen men. Consequently there is no one to provide food: the fathers simply tell them to go to their (heathen) husbands, which, of course, they will not do. The Christians are doing all they can to help these girls. It is proposed to build a hostel for them and, by farming and marketing, make them self-supporting.

"From Enugwu we turned back and visited other towns, passing over some almost impassable tracks. At the first place we found 120 women attending the services although the work has not long been started. It was very encouraging to see all these women. We gathered that the women are the first to become Christians and their husbands follow their example. This is not the case elsewhere, for, as a rule, the women are the most difficult to influence, and the most bigoted. We passed on to Nachi, a town abounding in palm trees, but six miles from the nearest water! We had to wait a long time for a supply, but, at last,

THATCHING WITH PALM LEAF (BAMBOO) MATS

a boy appeared bearing a pot of water on his head. O! joy—a chance for a bath and to be clean and refreshed once more.

"Meanwhile sand-flies had begun operations, and were a perfect plague. Arms, necks and faces were soon showing visible marks of their attentions, so much so that our faces were much swollen and hardly recognisable. But darkness brought relief: the sand-flies ceased to bite, a meal and a bath put a rosier complexion on life, and soon we had retired to our little rooms (about seven feet square), and all our weariness was forgotten in blissful sleep.

"We did not see much of the people at this place, owing to their being occupied with work. It was the beginning of the rainy season, and every able-bodied person was busy in the farms. We climbed a peculiar flat-topped hill, which appeared to be composed of iron-stone, and were rewarded with a magnificent view of the country for miles around.

"Next morning we were awake and departed on our homeward journey, arriving at the School soon after 3 p.m. During our absence naughty Belle (our dog) had killed two rabbits. Our eight days away had done us good. Fresh scenes, fresh people and the encouragement in seeing the mission work forging ahead had put new life into us"

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST TOUR—AND AFTER

WE come to the closing scenes. Edith Warner's life in Nigeria might be indexed under the following characteristics :—

1. Her great love for the Ibo People, specially the women and girls.
2. Her unselfishness and thoughtfulness for others.
3. Her daily example of the Christian life.

Her prime aim always was to raise the status of womanhood in Nigeria. Her method was to train the African girl to regulate her naturally undisciplined life to the rules of Christian conduct. She encountered many difficulties in her task, many from the girls themselves, equally as many from sources outside the School. To meet these she was happily endowed with a firm yet winning personality, and she possessed a marvellous gift of bringing out the best from those around her. The secret of her inspiring influence lay, undoubtedly, in putting her feelings into actual practice, " in spite of their wickedness I love them so." The Ibo is very quick to observe, and soon notes where love and care for others are the mainsprings of action Yet there was no spoiling of the girls. With all her

love and natural serenity there was vigorous control, and no slackening of discipline was tolerated. A breach was followed by swift retribution in some form suitable to the misdemeanour, though, as a matter of fact, she often sympathised with the offender, and really suffered mental agony at times: the infliction of pain was so utterly contrary to her disposition.

On the other hand, she took the keenest interest and pleasure in the recreations of the girls. She joined them in their games and assisted with the Guides. More important still, she always had time to talk and listen to the girls. Very often it needed a vast amount of patience, especially when a dozen other duties were pressing for attention. The Ibo generally introduces business with a long-winded preface which usually has but the remotest relation to the subject in hand, and not all can listen patiently through all the preliminaries, and, finally, discover the real point at issue.

Her sound knowledge of colloquial Ibo was of incalculable value, conversation being easy and natural. Scores of women to-day, scattered far and wide, remember with pleasure and gratitude the talks they had with *Nne-ayi* (our mother).

The daily round of school life was not allowed to swamp all external interests. She took great delight and pride in her surroundings, and was in every sense a home-maker. She planned the lay-out of the compound as well as many of the buildings, and, herself, superintended operations. Often part of a school holiday was spent in this way. The native is apt to

work slowly, and he abhors continuity of effort. On one occasion she had spent some hours sitting on a stool acting as overseer of workmen engaged in building a house. One of the labourers endured it as long as he could and then enquired pathetically: "Isn't *Nne-ayi* going away these holidays?" A negative answer being forthcoming the man heaved a sigh and remarked: "When does School begin again? I am very tired."

The gardens were a great pleasure also. Whenever she could spare the time she would join the girls and work alongside them. It afforded opportunities to come into closer touch with them, and, at the same time, she was in her element among the flowers and shrubs, many of which she had herself brought from distant places.

She returned to St. Monica's after her last furlough in England on February 16, 1924. Within a month or two after arrival her health began to give cause for some anxiety. At first the symptoms were not considered to be serious, and it was hoped that the trouble was but a temporary ailment. But it did not respond to treatment, and, a few months later, it was deemed advisable to seek the opinion of a specialist. Even so it was thought that all that was necessary could be obtained at Lagos, and thus avoid a long absence from the School. Plague, however, had broken out, and there was a prospect of delay owing to quarantine regulations. Finally, as no improvement was to be observed, it was decided that she should proceed direct to England. It was a great grief to leave at that time,

and she dreaded the thought of saying "good-bye" to the girls. Her last week-end in the Ibo country was spent at Awka very quietly discussing the many problems involved, and bravely facing the possible issue. She gave no intimation to the girls, or her native friends, that her ailment might prove of a serious nature; she just slipped away without any show of demonstrativeness on either side. It was like her, and just what her closest friends would expect of her. The one concern that oppressed her at the end, in addition to that of leaving the work in which her whole heart and soul were bound up, was for those upon whom the burden of the School would fall in her absence. All that was humanly possible she did before she left so that those upon whom the responsibility devolved found everything arranged and in order. Every detail had received her personal attention, and she was consoled with the thought that she had "done what she could."

She left Port Harcourt on November 11, 1924, and travelled to England in the s.s. *Elmina*. Within a few days of her arrival she was admitted to Middlesex Hospital, and on Boxing Day underwent a very serious operation. The result raised the highest hopes, and for a few months we were cheered by the prospect of ultimate restoration to health and strength. In the summer she was able to visit friends and to attend the C.S.S.M. gatherings at Swanage. Alas! the end was nearer than we realised. Early in September she was overtaken by an attack of pleurisy, and this was soon accompanied by a return of her original complaint.

The end came peacefully on December 18, 1925. To the end her interest was centred in the Ibo country, and during her last conscious hours her thoughts and questions were concerned with the land and work to which she had devoted her life.

She had been privileged to see a work begun and to garner where she had sown. She lived long enough to see the School she had commenced under such untoward conditions become an established power in the land. The standard of education among the Ibo girls had been raised to a degree uncontemplated and unimaginable in the early days. From nothing the School had developed, until she saw it recognised as a Government Assisted Institution, turning out, from year to year, scores of girls fitted to take their places as Christian wives and mothers in the Ibo country and beyond. More and more is the School being appreciated, and the girls themselves are comprehending, as never before, the benefits of school life. We are thankful, indeed, that *Nne-ayi* was allowed to see so much fruit for her labours in West Africa. Who will follow in her wake and continue the good work? Who can estimate the possibilities? As it was of old so it abideth still, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few."

These notes cannot be concluded without adding the testimony of some of her friends. First we quote an extract from the Parish Magazine of St. Michael and All Angels, Blackheath Park, S.E.

"A word of tribute to the life and work of Edith Ashley Warner, for thirty-three years one of St.

Michael's 'Own Missionaries,' who just before Christmas passed from this earthly scene to the presence of her Lord. I said in church, and I say again here, that her passing is a loss not only to those who loved her at home and in the great West African Mission-field. The whole Christian Church has been the richer for such a lifework and example as hers, and it is the poorer by her death.

"Year in, year out, in a climate that has earned for that region the name of 'the white man's grave' she made light of discomforts and sacrifices, while she toiled at her task of building up a pure Christian girlhood and womanhood in the growing African Churches. No one can calculate the value of that school work of hers, in laying a sure foundation for the future of Christ's Church in Nigeria. Yet to her sincere and simple nature it would probably come as a shock if she had realised that anyone thought of her as a 'Heroine' of the mission-field. This note of simplicity clung to her to the end. As we followed the rustic waggon on which her mortal remains were reverently borne across the Sussex Common in the sunlit haze of the winter afternoon, and then stood in the little village churchyard to speak the words of triumphant Christian hope, how fitting it all was. No pomp and no throng, for the world has no rewards, and but scanty praise, for a life so lived and a sacrifice so offered: but the assurance that she had won her reward—the only one she wished for—from Him whom she had loved and served."

The following from a Native pastor :—

" DEAR MISS WARNER,

" The sad news of your leaving our country suddenly on grounds of health came to my wife and me rather late. Practically we were mourning for you (as we did not know what was going to happen) till the cheering news of your improvement in health reached us a little while ago.

" I sent my daughter to the school because I knew YOU were there, and you are like a mother to me.

" The love which you had for me since I was a schoolboy has never grown cold. We bear you in mind incessantly, and do pray that it may be God's will that we see you again in our midst either as a visitor or as a worker who has come to finish up her time in this Ibo Vineyard of Our Lord's.

" The following is a resolution passed by our District Church Council in your behalf at its last meeting :—

" That a vote of thanks and sympathy be sent to Miss E. A. Warner,

" (*a*) thanking her for the good work that God has enabled her to do in our country in connection with the training of girls ; and

" (*b*) telling her how deeply we all sorrow for and sympathise with her in her present condition. We hope and pray that she may soon regain her strength."

Finally, a letter from one of her earliest pupils and now a pastor's wife. Unhappily the letter reached

England a few days after Miss Warner had passed away :—

" MY DEAR *Nne-ayi*,

" We have all heard when asking about you at two of our Conferences that on account of your illness you will not be returning to us just now. We are all very sorry and are missing you so very much from our midst. We had wanted to have a combined conference, but have not yet had it as we were hoping you would come back to be with us in that meeting.

" At our last conference the Chairwoman asked all the women present to stand who had been in your School and a large number stood up, and then we thought of the many more all over the country who had also been with you. We know these words will be true for you that her children will rise up and call her blessed.

" At our meeting we all remembered you in Prayer and put you in Our Father's care to keep and guide you.

" In St. Monica's School now we are seeing so many of your children's children, and we know there will be still more and more in the coming years. *Nne-ayi*, we shall be so glad to have a little letter from you with a message from you for us all, and to give us advice as you used to do when you lived for so long among us, and helped us all so much. We cannot help feeling you were one of us and will always be so.

" There will be no other *Nne-ayi* for us but you,

Omenwa,[1] we are still remembering all our singing, and at our last conference we sang a chorus that you taught us.

" *N'obim k'am Zọbelu okwu ọnu Chuku.*[2]

" I am writing this on behalf of the conferences of the Onitsha District, who send to you their love and many kind thoughts.

" *Nebi ọfuma Nne-ayi.*"[3]

ST. MARY'S, CHAILEY

December 23rd, 1925

On the sunny side of a little country Church, between the ivied walls and a sweeping stretch of heather, where, as far as eye can see, there is no disfiguring sign of man's handicraft to mar the fair landscape; where the fragrant scent of wild flowers is wafted by the soft south breezes of the Channel, there, in one of the fairest spots of Sussex, is laid to rest all that is mortal of Edith Ashley Warner. Days before and after were wild and wet, but on December 23rd the sun shone from a cloudless sky, and God walked in that fair garden. Outside the little sanctuary, earth and sky seemed to radiate joy and gladness. Within its walls a note of victory pealed forth, the triumphant song of Mortality putting on Immortality, of Death

[1] Pet child.

[2] In my heart let me hide the word (of the mouth) of God.

[3] Live well, our mother—idiomatic for dwell in peace, our mother.

being swallowed up in Victory, and Sin being vanquished eternally.

Nothing could have been simpler yet more surpassingly beautiful and appropriate than the Burial Service that afternoon. A quietness which was rest itself, a complete detachment from this world's noise and turmoil, a sense of Heaven's Peace, all these blended together in one harmonious whole as if to offer a fitting welcome to and for her whose life was so peculiarly marked by order and calm serenity.

It was an hour to be long remembered. God came very near to us in that small assembly. It was neither the place nor time for grief. Though we were saying "Farewell" to a beloved sister and friend, yet the impression was rather of wonder as of witnessing the passing of an honoured guest into the presence of the Lord of Glory.

. . . . .

The Gospel of a life like hers
Is more than books and scrolls.

. . . . .

From schemes and creeds the light goes out.
The saintly fact survives;
The blessed Master none can doubt
Revealed in holy lives.

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