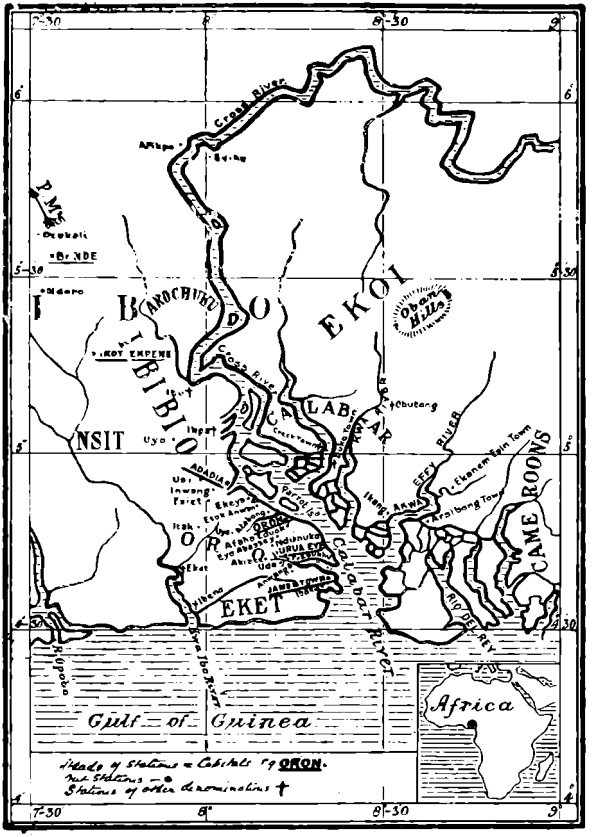

Primitive Methodist Missions in the Cross River Delta, Southern Nigeria.

PRIMITIVE METHODIST
AFRICAN MISSIONS

IN AND AROUND
THE
ORON COUNTRY

The Story of Primitive Methodism in S. Nigeria

By REV. W. J. WARD.

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FOREWORD.

IN accepting the invitation of the Missionary Committee to tell the story of our Southern Nigerian work, I desire, first and last, to serve the great cause so near and dear to the heart of our Master.

"Missonary facts are the fuel which feed the missionary fire," but such facts need their proper setting. I have sought, therefore, to give a fairly complete background to the glimpses given of missionary life and experience. Detailed treatment of many interesting matters is impossible owing to lack of space and I have found it well nigh impossible to accomplish—as per instructions—the double purpose of writing to interest juveniles and adults alike. I have done the best that in me lies.

The Rev. G. H. Hanney has helped me with photographs and information, Mr. John Walton has sketched the accompanying map, and my good wife has helped me in many ways. I have consulted with advantage books on "The Story of the Calabar Mission," written by Rev. Hugh Goldie and Miss Hogg, and Mr. R. L. McKeown's "In the Land of the Oil Rivers."

W. J. W.

IN AND AROUND THE ORON COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTRY.

IT is a far cry to the Oron country, the home of the people of our story. Calabar—the port for landing and the capital of the Eastern province of Southern Nigeria—is usually described as being 5,000 miles from the homeland ; but that 5,000 miles takes a long time to compass. To-day, the voyage lasts scarcely three weeks. A dozen years ago it took a week or ten days longer, according to the weather, Just imagine what that means ! Newspapers, a month old, are accounted fresh and up-to-date. At the time of the death of the late and much-beloved Queen Victoria, the nearest cable station was many miles from Calabar, and when the sad news reached us it was three days old. An experience in the very early days of the Arsibong Town Mission, made the distance seem 50,000 leagues, rather than one-tenth that number of miles. The first-born child of Rev. T. and Mrs. Stones died unexpectedly on the eve of their return to England. The nearest European doctor was sixty miles away up the creeks. The mother was very ill with fever, and the father just recovering. Yet a suitable spot for ' God's acre ' for the

mission had to be chosen, the undergrowth of the bush cleared, a coffin and a grave made, and the burial carried out within nine or ten hours. The peculiar wail of the natives, the undignified way the members had to scramble over fallen trees, recently cut down, as they wended their way to the graveside, the heartless jabber of the Bassa (working) boys who carried the dead, and the accompaniment of heavy crashes of thunder and vivid flashes of lightning made England and civilization seem as far away as the "man in the moon."

The ordinary run of things provides many reminders of the long distance separating Oron from Great Britain. You simply cannot forget you are in the tropics and near to the Line. Daylight reigns for twelve hours or thereabouts all the year round. The temperature in the cold season rarely drops below 65 degrees. The weather is not nearly so fickle as in England. There are two seasons, the dry or hot season, and the wet or cold. The former extends from November to March, and the latter from May to September. In the dry season, no rain falls for weeks together and in the wet it rains with depressing regularity. In April and October—the months when the seasons merge one into the other—the change is announced by heavy thunderstorms, called tornadoes. The sowing and planting on the farms are done in hot weather and the harvest is reaped in the rains. You put a blanket on the bed in July, and feel nearly roasted at Christmas.

The landscape is full of unusual features. The trees shed their leaves whilst putting forth new ones, hence they are never bare. The bush

scenery is always green, relieved by the colour-tints of new leaves and the flowers of certain shrubs and creepers. Two very strange trees are found in the bush which covers the banks of rivers and creeks. They are the mangrove and the palm-wine trees. Both flourish in the slimy mud which is submerged at high-tide. The mangrove-tree has strangely contorted roots. When bare at low water they look like a million twisted long fingers mixed up in hopeless confusion. The oyster attaches itself to these roots, giving rise to the saying that in West Africa "oysters grow on trees." This tree has another peculiarity, it sends down suckers from its branches, until they reach the water and finally become fast in the mud. It looks as if it grows downward from the top. The palm-wine tree is the one member of the palm family, which revels in a genuine and thorough-going swamp. It is not nearly so tall as some other species. By some natural process of suction it absorbs the dirty water about its roots, filters it, and aerates it too. The natives cut the tree near the top, fasten a gourd or tiny vessel underneath the wound, and in that way secure for themselves the results of its strange activities. The liquid proves, when fresh, a harmless and very acceptable drink.

The largest forests or bush are usually found skirting the banks of the magnificent waterways. Walking across country you pass clumps like plantations in size pretty frequently, but these are only allowed to remain through the superstition of the people who imagine them to be sacred or juju. Land is too precious for any other plea to

prevail. Except then, for the juju bush and that which surrounds and screens a town, the country is open and more or less cultivated. The need of land is urgent, because every farmer requires at least three holdings, so that he might follow ancient practice and till each plot in turn every third year.

Quite the outstanding feature of the landscape is the palm-tree growing to the height of 30 or 40 feet. It is very straight, minus branches, but throws out large and graceful leaves at the top. The fruit grows in clusters under these leaves. Its lack of boughs, its habit of growing in solitary grandeur, and its immense height make it peculiarly exposed to the fury of ravaging tornados. If it were not for the strength obtained from the fibrous-like tendrils thrown out just above the ground, which gather soil about them and make a tangled but effective support, every tropical storm would gather a heavy crop of victims and soon the palm tree would be no more.

The soil of the country is loose and inclined to be sandy. The termites or white ants are in their element amongst the sand. They form mounds of it, irregular in shape and varying from 6 to 10 feet high. Inside the hard smooth surface there is a well-planned and ingeniously constructed town. Here these tiny creatures spend their time and strength in laborious days if not wakeful nights. The soil affords a home for another curious and very troublesome insect called the chigger. It betrays a special liking for changing its residence whenever an opportunity offers to enter the toes, ball, or heel of a human foot. As the majority of

the natives wear their feet instead of boots and shoes, the chances afforded are neither few nor small. The feet of Europeans do not entirely escape in spite of their foot-gear. How the chiggers find their way in, is a mystery. Summary eviction is the only remedy for the torture they inflict. Even this must be skilfully done or a festering sore will probably follow. The natives are quite clever in the art of extraction, but many are so easy-going that, so far as their feet are concerned, they will not bother, and consequently lose portions of their heels or toes. Others, more careful, attend their feet periodically as we do our hair and finger-nails.

It is a fertile country. The response it gives to labour is generous. The produce of the farms includes yam, cassava, koko, maize, and sugar-cane. Plantains, bananas, pawpaws, oranges, limes and mangoes grow hard by the people's compounds or dwellings. With the fruits little or no pains are taken. The land will likewise give satisfactory support to both cocoa and rubber, and serious efforts are being made to grow them, especially rubber. The main source of revenue from the land, however, comes from the palm-nut tree, which, strange to say, requires no attention except to gather its clusters of reddish-brown nuts when ripe. The generous substance, covering the kernel, yields a rich fluid, known as palm-oil ; and both oil and kernel are exceedingly valuable to the European for manufacturing purposes.

The farms in June and July make the country appear at its very best, especially where yam farms are plentiful. For the yam-plant covers the six-foot stick placed close to its root, with tendrils and

leaves, until you are reminded of Kent or Worcestershire when the hops have covered the poles with their leaves and beauty.

Dotted all over Oron are towns, villages, and hamlets. Some of them are built on the banks of a river, or at the head of a creek, others are adjacent to one or more good springs, whilst the remainder are located within striking distance of river or farm. The towns are made up of compounds, which are oblong in shape and built of yellow mud. These are situated according to the will of the 'ete,' or head chief, and the wishes of the householder. There are no proper streets, and it is very easy for a 'makara' (stranger) to get lost in the twistings and twinings of the paths of a decent-sized town. Some of the larger towns are spread over a wide area, and are split up into sections, each one some distance from the rest. So separate are they, that every section adds its own special name to the one borne by the whole township. We can only speak of large towns in Oron in a very limited sense. A population of from eight to ten thousand people would mean a very large town. There is a good deal of curiosity amongst some people as to the actual population of the Oron Country. The fact is, nobody can really tell. A native king, who exercised a ruling influence over the district on the banks of the Mbo river, went to one of the towns for the purpose of taking the census. He gathered all the people together, told them why he had come, and asked them for the number of inhabitants in their township. The instant he finished speaking several sprang to their feet and began to supply the desired information in their own way.

One said there were so many, another alleged he was wide of the mark, a third gave an estimate widely at variance from the rest until confusion reigned. The king bade the chiefs retire, confer together and bring back a definite reply. When they returned, the head chief said to the king : "Can the wise man number the ants ?" "No !" answered the King, "that is a task beyond the powers of the wisest of men !" "Then," replied the chief, "we are as ants for multitude !" And with that the native king had to be content.

The distance between town and town, or town and village varies considerably. An hour's walk will bring you into touch with one or two at the very least, but probably three or four. Where there is a large township however, spread out over a rather wide area in sections, it takes quite half-an-hour to get through. As things go in West Africa, Oron may be fairly styled a populous country.

A walking tour is certain to provide new experiences. Every journey almost, be it long or short, furnishes one or more incidents out of the common. A new-comer has the strange and unfamiliar served up to him all the way. A walk along the winding bush paths, little more than a foot broad, is distinctly novel and very trying. In the endeavour to plant one foot right in front of the other, ankles are found to be very much in the way, with painful results if the journey should be an extended one. Conversation is only carried on with great difficulty, as the narrow path demands that the company shall walk in single file. Evidences of juju abound at almost every turn ; offerings

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of eggs, bones of animals slain in sacrifice, and empty gin bottles mark all cross-roads. These express the hope of some passing traveller for success in his present undertaking, or a prayer for the recovery of some sick one left at home.

The wise man soon learns to walk warily. "Eyes front!" is the recognised order for marching, for calamity dogs unwary feet. The ground is loose and sandy in places and frequently small portions fall in. A false or careless step might result in a sprained ankle. Then other creatures believe in travelling too. Some flee at the approach of man, but not all. The ant tirelessly pursues its way, regardless of everything. Woe betide man or beast that interferes with ants on the march. Swift punishment follows. In the twinkling of an eye, the feet and body of the intruder are assaulted, and sharp pincer-like bites full of tingling pain, make the offender bitterly regret his imprudence. Bush cats, porcupines and occasionally a snake or leopard may cross the path immediately in front, hence the necessity to keep a strict look-out.

Lizards are plentiful everywhere. Squirrels are numerous. When walking through the bush the jabber of monkeys may now and again be heard. Should a journey not end until after sunset, the flashing of the fire-fly, and the concert rendered by cricket, toad, and many another creature make an experience so weird and uncanny as to be absolutely indescribable.

But all travelling is not by land. The dug-out or canoe, and the boat, like a fishing-coble for size, are used for journeys along the rivers and up the

creeks. If both weather and tide are favourable and the paddlers or oarsmen in good trim, a canoe or boat-ride affords a pleasant change from life ashore. When things go wrong—and they do at times—nothing can be more wearisome, and on occasion, more dangerous. The carelessness of the steerer may lead to the grounding of the craft on a sandbank. This, more likely than not, will involve a long wait until the returning tide sets the boat afloat again. The interval of six or seven hours proves a great trial of patience, and if it is evening, leads to a night of fitful sleep upon the hard curved seat at the stern of the boat. From twenty to thirty hours in a boat without once landing is no joke. At certain periods of the year, tornadoes come up suddenly. Half-an-hour's warning may be all you get. With the shore four miles behind, and the destination eight miles in front, what can be done except to take bearings by means of the compass, very carefully furl the sail, make the awning secure, protect perishable cargo with a stout tarpaulin, and passengers with thick wraps against the rain which soon comes down in torrents? In spite of all precautions canoes are sometimes capsized, boats partially stoved in, and even launches sunk by the fury of the gale.

Diversions of other kinds relieve the monotony of long journeys. The boat boys will suddenly get quite excited and cry out, "Massa, massa, alligator he live, he live, I done smell him!" and sure enough, when you turn the bend of the river, there is the dirty looking monster fast asleep, stretched at full length on the bank close

to the water's edge. Another time it may be a manitee (sea-cow), though this happens less frequently. A rarer sight still, is to pass a turtle with only its head above water, swimming against the tide at the rate of seven or eight knots an hour.

For the creeks, canoes are much handier than boats. They are narrower, require less depth of water, and consequently will take you much nearer the beach. Now and again on account of the varying depth of the creek, you may have to take off boots and stockings, roll up your trousers as high as possible, and wade from fifteen to thirty minutes if you are bent upon reaching the beach. Walking through the oily looking water of a creek at one time ankle deep and another up to the thigh, is not exactly exhilarating. Tender feet very naturally flinch from contact with sharp unyielding pebbles in the creek's bed, and dodging the dung and rubbish of a town, as it comes floating down this sewer provided by nature, kills or cures very speedily all namby-pamby, dainty people. Canoes are at best frail craft for ' big water.' A roller—a wobbling or unsteady one—is positively dangerous. The most expeditious and certainly the safest method of navigating both river and creek is by launch, with a small dinghy fastened on behind. The new motor-launch "The Centenary," has been long overdue. Now she has arrived out West, and already proved of great use. May she have a long and honourable career !

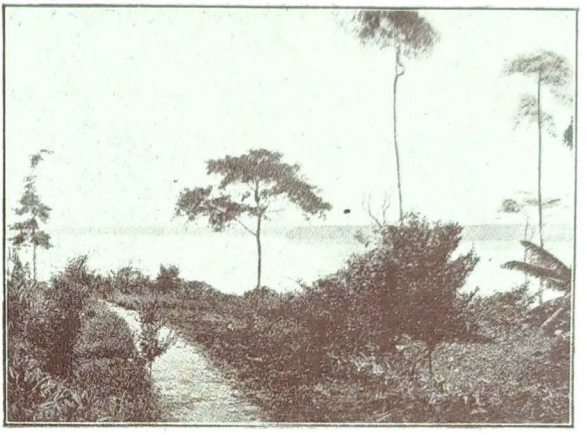
CHAPTER II.

THE PEOPLE.

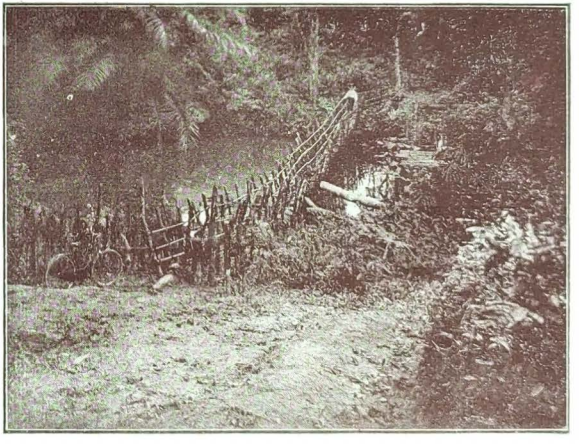
THE people of Oron belong to one of the many tribes of negroes peopling the Dark Continent. They have all the well known physical features of the negro, namely :—retreating foreheads and chins, large mouths with thick lips, broad flat noses and woolly hair. At first these make the impression that it is an impossible task to distinguish one person from another. They look very much alike, until a closer acquaintance brings with it more accurate observation. Then, differences of face and form are recognised, and one comes to see in every face the stamp of its own sharply defined character. Practically all are black, but some are blacker than others. The greater number are as black as ebony and they are the handsomest. Many are brown-black, others are lighter in colour, and a few are albinos who possess white skins, pink eyes, and red woolly hair. Poor albinos ! they are the despised of their tribe and through no fault of their own. The fact is, the negro is just as proud of his black skin as we are of our white. The Rev. John Enang Gill, a native missionary, spent some time when a boy, in England. Residing with his friends first in a small town, and then in a cathedral city, he very naturally attracted

much notice—amongst school children especially. It became embarrassing at times. I once asked him, "If he did not wish that his skin was white." He answered promptly and emphatically with a touch of indignation in his voice, "No etubom (master) I'm glad I'm a black boy." His patriotic reply made me prouder of him than ever.

Europeans do not usually regard the negro as a good-looking individual, but the Oron man does—without doubt and without hesitation. What he sees in the looking-glass pleases him immensely. After all is it not simply a matter of taste and has he not a right to claim that his taste and standard of judgment are just as true as ours? There are a few things of which he does well to be proud. For instance almost everybody, no matter the age or sex, rejoices in a splendid set of teeth. Great care is bestowed on keeping them white and clean. The process is an interesting one and usually takes place after meals, during short walks, or long talks. There is no attempt at privacy about it. A tooth stick serves both as brush and powder. It is made from the soft wood of a particular tree cut into short strips. Each piece is bent and ornamented at one end; the other end is chewed to a pulp and presto! there you are. This method is so successful that a dentist could not possibly gain a livelihood in Oron. Amongst the hundreds of persons who received medical attention at my hands only one was a victim of toothache. One of the Rev. W. Christie's working boys was formerly in the service of a German officer in the Kamerun colony. Whilst upon a mission of some importance the officer was shot and eaten by the natives. Jimmy fled to the



Calabar River from Oron Mission Grounds.
showing Parrot Island in mid-river.



Native Bridge, Urua Eye.

Ediko Church, in building.

Egbo Dancer.

bush ; he was caught and had to endure the pain and humiliation of having all his teeth filed until the spaces were broader than the mutilated teeth. The punishment was terribly cruel. The pain passed away, but the affront to his pride was a daily experience. He begged that when he had saved £5, Mr. Christie would get him some teeth from England to replace the ones which caused him such shame. Only once have I met a man who was dissatisfied with his ivories. He was the exception that proves the rule. Socially he was a very important person being the second chief of one of the largest towns in the Oron country. He came specially to see me on the subject. As is the custom, we sat and talked about many things before he named his errand. "My friend," said he at last, "I hear that you get fine teeth past mine, past all ; you fit (can) to take them out and put them back as you please. Is it so ? " I pleaded guilty, but yet he was not satisfied. "I beg you, Massa, show me this thing you say be true." We were on very friendly terms and so I humoured him, whereupon he flung up both his arms in sheer amazement exclaiming, "O etubom, white man he saby (knows) plenty thing too much. He done pass all ! " He wanted there and then to fetch money that I might provide him with an exactly similar set. I remonstrated and said : "You have teeth of which any man might be proud." But he insisted it was much better to have teeth he could take out or keep in at his pleasure.

The people are well built though not very tall. They carry themselves very erect. Few are round-

shouldered or walk in shambling fashion. A cripple or hunchback is practically unknown. Where deformity exists it has been contracted through disease after infancy. I never saw or heard of a bandy-legged child though little or no care is given to teaching infants how to walk.

Proud as the negro is of his appearance he endeavours to improve nature.

Members of the fair sex covet small wrists and small ankles. Where these are secured the prevailing style in dress allows for full display for both. To obtain them pieces of bush cord are tied round their wrists and ankles when quite young, and serve the double purpose of gratifying pride and meeting the strange demands of juju.

Another practice is to cut the skin of the arms from shoulder to elbow. The completed design shows a large number of small circular places quite close to each other, which, when healed, look like vaccination marks; only instead of being slightly hollow they are raised, or convex in shape. 'Pride pinches' is a proverb which needs alteration for use amongst the Oron ladies. 'Pride cuts,' would be nearer the truth.

The changes in personal attire during the last seventeen years bear silent but eloquent testimony to the changes wrought in the life. Girls used to be clad in a string of shells or beads round the loins; and boys wore a short piece of calico cloth tied in a knot just above the hip; this was left open on one side of the body and permitted free use of the limbs. The men were clad as the boys, but sometimes divested themselves of their scanty dress if engaged in certain forms of hard work.

The women wore a piece of cloth, which was fastened on the shoulder, covered most of the body and came below the knees.

To-day it is impossible to meet anyone—save a tiny toddler, or an idiot—nude. The orthodox garb for both boys and men consists of singlet, shirt and a pretty loin-cloth—certainly the most sensible dress for such a climate. The fair sex wear neat loose-fitting gowns, and a ' bocket ' or headcloth. The mission has never sought to compel conformity to any fashion in dress simply because it is English. The deciding factors have been decency, simplicity, and suitability.

In the earliest days when changes were first introduced, some of the queerest of queer sights were occasionally witnessed. One man came to church royally attired in a pair of white lace curtains, another wore bloomers, and a certain chief attended an important meeting of the native court dressed in a lady's white embroidered nightdress. A mission boat boy had two straw hats. On Sundays he felt he ought to wear them both. What was the good of possessing two unless everybody knew ? To have one in his cheap tin trunk whilst wearing the other, was sinful waste. To gratify his wish he pushed the crown of one through the top of the other, and stalked abroad—a swell !

Compromises between Oron and English modes of dress produce the most ludicrous results. A chief who attended one of our churches adopted the following style for his Sunday best ! A neat loin cloth, a white shirt with soft collar, a tight-fitting black frock-coat always buttoned up, over it a black silk handkerchief fastened round the

chest in a knot at the front, a skull cap, and a walking stick. A very devoted church official bought a khaki drill suit for special occasions. The first time he donned it he felt he really could not discard his Sunday loin cloth ; it was far too good to be put on one side, so he wore it over the top of his trousers ! At marriages, fancy in matters of dress, frequently runs riot. So notable an event in a person's life is signalled in striking style of dresses, as in everything else. A bride-groom who wore the oddest garb I ever saw, was married on a very hot day in the middle of the dry season. The thermometer registered 92 degrees in the shade and no rain was likely to fall for six weeks at least. Yet he was arrayed in trousers made of thick woollen cloth of a very loud plaid pattern, an old fashioned square-cut morning coat, and Wellington boots that reached to the knees. He was most uncomfortable and mopped his brow very often, but all the same he felt his "get up" did honour to the great occasion.

The Oron people are blessed with good conceit of themselves. Their tribe is *the* tribe. Their neighbours—the Ibibios—are regarded as "all same as monkeys." To distinguish themselves from all others they wear a tribal mark, which consists of two blue circles tatooed upon the face immediately below each temple. As a matter of fact, the Oron people are by no means as gifted and capable as, for example, the Zulus. On the other hand, other branches of the negro race can be easily named, that are poorer in gifts and possibilities. The Oronese possess capital mental powers, are remarkably imitative, and strongly ambitious. Their

possibilities suggest that there is a fine future before them, especially if a reasonable period of time is allowed for getting rid of the effects of a Barbarian ancestry, and for the development of initiative, grit, and character. Many critics of missions demand in ten or twenty years, what is the flower and fruit of centuries of Christian toil in the home-land. My strong conviction is that the negro is valued far below his worth. He will ultimately play a part—neither small nor unimportant—in shaping the world's destiny.

So far as can be ascertained there is no written history of this people. What they know of their past is, that the country in and about the Cross River delta has not always been their home. Once they lived much further inland ; but being defeated in tribal warfare they were driven forth and pushed down almost to the water's edge. If tradition is correct upon the point, these people are to be commended upon the way they have availed themselves, at first gradually, but now fully, of their unique position. Farmers they must always have been, and the majority have found large tracts of land suitable for growing native produce behind the creeks, rivers and mangrove swamps. Such land has been distributed amongst the towns and villages of the country, and the farming portion of the inhabitants have divided the ground into patches about the size of allotments. These are the farms. In the tilling, planting, &c., the women take more than their full share of labour. During the times of special farming operations the towns present an almost deserted appearance from six in the morning till the same hour at eventide.

The children, along with their parents, contribute their quota of service. If the plantation is some distance off and can be reached by water, the whole family will migrate thither for several weeks, staying in mud houses built for the purpose.

A considerable number have taken advantage of their nearness to European trading houses and the fine facilities afforded by the Cross, Qua, and Aqua Effy rivers for easily reaching up-country peoples, and have become traders or middle-men. Two or three pounds invested in such commodities as cloth, tobacco, cutlasses, lamps, or gin and rum, make a satisfactory start. The stock is taken up the rivers or creeks to some likely market and disposed of at a profit handsome enough to make an English shopkeeper's mouth water. With the proceeds palm-oil, palm kernels, and rubber or ivory are purchased, brought down to the white trader and sold at another satisfactory profit. Oftener than not the selling price agreed upon is paid in kind and not in money. Barter is the favourite plan as it allows of two profits, takes up less room in the canoe, and is much lighter cargo. The kind of money current in Oron is very clumsy as well as peculiar. It is heavy to carry ; a shillingsworth will weigh about a pound and is inconvenient because of its large and awkward shape. A British trader—one of the earliest who went to the Coast—is said to have introduced it. He had it made in England and exported thence. It is so popular that the British Government have found much difficulty in abolishing it, and replacing it with British money. To speed up the process the authorities have introduced

a new coin, which looks like a copper sixpence with a round hole through the centre. Ten of them are worth one penny. The native money consists of brass (?) rods, which look like stair-rods bent the shape of horse shoes, and copper (?) wires ; two of the latter are worth a little more than a farthing. But these two wires have an astonishing power of purchase. The new coin, with the hole in the middle, is specially intended to take their place. The rods are called 'okuk,' and the wires are named 'sittim,' after Chittim or Cheetham, the name of the trader who brought them first into the country. Four rods, or eighty sittim, correspond in value to an English shilling. It is very comical at first to watch the people wend their way to church on Sunday afternoons carrying their collection money in their hands, or on their heads along with their books or umbrellas. As they sit down they put their money under the seat, or on the floor beside them. It is impossible for anybody to give secretly to the collection. A plate, bag or box, such as is used in England would be altogether useless to take up the collection. Large trays are necessary and where not available, the offertory is placed over the arm of the steward as he goes from seat to seat.

There remains another class of people who inhabit towns near the water, and who avail themselves of the remarkable facilities for fishing. Towns like Jamestown, Atabong, and Idua Esik Edik are largely composed of fisher folk. All who ply this calling are exposed to much hardship and peril. At certain times of the year they are on the water for days together. In the tornado seasons

the risks of being swamped or blown out to sea are very great, and through the 'Harmattan' (white fog) period, it is dangerously easy for them to lose their bearings.

Different methods are employed for catching different kinds of fish. Some are so primitive, they must surely date back to the days before the Flood. Others are as ingenious as they are effective. Scarcely anything is waste which is landed in the bottom of the canoe. Young shark is prized as a delicacy, catfish is keenly relished, and shrimps dried and cured are in great demand everywhere. If taken up the Cross river to the Bende and Aro markets they fetch prices high enough to amply repay for the extra time and toil. Some fisher folk specialise on catching mud fish which frequent the slimy banks of river and creek alike, and look like magnified tadpoles. To secure them involves crawling partly across, and partly through the soft oozing mud on hands and knees. To stand up is dangerous, as the mud will not bear any heavy weight.

The strangest livelihood of all is gained by the people—mainly women—who search for long white, fleshy worms which bore their way into the hard red trunk of the mangrove tree. How the boring process is carried on is altogether a mystery. Mangrove timber quickly dulls the edge of the hatchet and offers a stout resistance to the white ant, yet a worm succeeds. When a tap upon the tree trunk gives forth a hollow sound, the presence of the worm is detected. The tree is cut down and the pieces in which the worm secretes themselves, are brought away. When boiled in soup they make

a delicious tit-bit eagerly coveted by every man, woman and child.

'Chop palaver,' (cooking and eating) plays a very important part in the daily routine of an African's life. A white man's love of flowers fills an African with amusement and contempt. His argument runs like this : Flowers are not chop, therefore they are no good. One of the reasons why a man should marry is that he must have someone to cook his food. All plays and social functions are accompanied with feasting. To celebrate the opening of the new church at Afaha Eduok, a cow was killed, cooked, and eaten ere the great day had ended. A curious notion survives here and there that the human body is quite hollow ; this is their explanation of the feeling of emptiness which accompanies hunger. When chop time comes they faithfully discharge what they believe to be an urgent duty, if they would live and be strong, namely, to fill the hollow quite up. An Oron man chops twice a day and takes his time over it, especially at the meal after sundown. Why should he hurry over one of the main enjoyments of his life ?

A sure token of welcome and goodwill to a stranger is the gift of a dish of palm-oil chop. It is the favourite dish. If the visitor accepts it, he proves that he trusts them, and appreciates their kindly thought. Palm-oil chop is made of yam, fish, fowl or meat, herbs, pepper, and palm-oil. Europeans soon cultivate a liking for it, providing such meats as dog and monkey are left out. It is better to ask a kindly question on this

point before the meal is eaten than be full of prying curiosity afterwards. In two cases where the latter course was followed the results were well-nigh disastrous. One missionary discovered, to his horror, that he had eaten dog with relish, and the other that he had been enjoying monkey. The discovery disturbed both peace of mind and comfort of body for some hours. It almost resulted in an act of open rebellion — by the stomach !

Every town presents at least three grades of social rank, which are not altogether determined by money. There are chiefs, the people who are free, and slaves. The chiefs vary in status and power, the head chief being the 'ete,' or father of the town. Some 'etes' are more influential than others and exercise authority over other towns within a certain area. The 'ete' and his brother chiefs busy themselves with the government of the people ; they used to be supreme, but since the days of the British Protectorate, they constitute a kind of Town Council and a bench of magistrates. Within given limits they still make laws. One way of proclaiming a new law is to send two men with an empty tortoise shell to the door of every compound. Upon arrival, they rattle upon the hollow shell with their fingers, and afterwards proceed to announce the new law for the town.

If a palaver house is to be built or the roads of a town cleaned, or common cause made in any matter, the chiefs first deliberate among themselves and then lead the people according to their findings. A missionary upon his first visit to a town wisely makes his way to the head chief's compound,

pays his compliments and states his business. This prevents suspicion, gains very speedily the ear of all the chiefs, and attracts a big congregation in a very brief space of time.

Small open palaver sheds are a feature of most of the Oron towns. These are quite distinct from the homes of the people and of course are not nearly so numerous. Usually they are fitted with sitting accommodation round two, if not three sides, by means of trunks of trees. Here in the wet season, and when work is "iduhe" (away) the men gather to smoke, gossip, tell stories, and in general have a lazy time. It is certainly much healthier than being cribbed in their narrow dark rooms, which are built more for sleeping in than anything else, Many a time the palaver shed has been the first preaching place of the missionary and teaching evangelist. Therein they follow in the steps of the apostle Paul, who sought the market-place and the Areopagus to make the glad tidings of salvation known.

CHAPTER III.

"NEARER SEEN AND BETTER KNOWN."

A TRUE knowledge of the real character of the Oronese is not readily obtained. No one can understand and appreciate the native in a day, or a month, or a year. The newcomer learns this through the penalty of mistaken judgments. First impressions are proved misleading by comical or unpleasant experiences. It is only the traveller here to-day and gone to-morrow, who feels cocksure. If he stayed longer, his rash conclusions would be modified or disappear. The oldest residents in the country are the first to admit that they have yet much to learn of what lies "at the back of the black man's mind." Why is this the case? Let it never be forgotten that the slave raids conducted by European and frequently British sailors for three centuries up till 1842, are still a lively memory with the West African. Some mothers frighten their "wee ones" into good behaviour by the threat that, if they are not quiet and obedient, the horrid white man will come and carry them off as in the days of long ago. So often have they been taken advantage of and scornfully treated, it is no wonder they now seek refuge in a policy of reserve. When a 'makara' (stranger) first

settles in a district, the people welcome him, and then for several months—all unknown to himself—subject him to close, silent, and critical observation. It is only when a favourable judgment is arrived at, that the reserve, little by little, passes away, and the settler obtains that insight into heart and life which is the foundation of knowledge and esteem. Many a 'makara' is startled when he hears the current judgment of himself. So searching, and sure is it, that even when friendly it provides food for thought. One happy result of such critical observation is, that missionaries are permitted freer access than most to the inner life of the tribe and can travel in safety almost everywhere. It has become common knowledge that they—the 'God-palaver' people—are there, not for what they can get, but for the good they can do.

Having said so much about their reserve, it might easily be thought that the natives are inhospitable too. On the contrary they are naturally polite and kindly. I only know of one instance where any of our missionaries have met with a hostile reception. The rule is, that any white man will be welcomed to a new town, if he has the good sense to enter with due regard to native pride and prejudice. His visit is looked upon as proof of the superiority of that town over the others within the district, else why should the 'makara' single it out? If the visitor wishes to tarry over-night, shelter and food are offered with palm-wine or cocoa-nut milk. The only occasion when civility was lacking during my travels, was when paying a visit to a town named Anwang, and

the lack was fully explained by the drunken condition of all the chiefs.

Once a friendly footing is obtained one discovers how jealous town is of town, and generally speaking, how suspicious the people are of each other. It is not uncommon for the people of neighbouring towns to nourish a deep hatred towards one another. The original cause of such enmity may have been lost sight of long ago, but a very trivial occurrence will inflame the bad feeling into open strife. Jamestown and Ibaka are only a mile apart, yet there is an unsleeping feud between their respective inhabitants. Twice within my knowledge they have come to blows and bloodshed. The same holds true of the smaller towns, such as Usien Ufot and Idua Esit Edik. In Calabar where the Government of the Eastern province of Southern Nigeria has its seat, the rival portions of the native town have come to blows before to-day and now constantly fight each other through the law courts. One of the mildest ways in which such jealousy shows itself is in the reluctance of the people to worship in a church built in and belonging to an adjoining township.

Their distrust in one another shows itself in many ways. To prove that a 'dash' (present) of food is wholesome and free from poison the giver must taste first, and in case of palm-wine or water take a drink first. Let a native be found to possess a leopard's whisker or part of its gall-bladder, and immediately a hue and cry is raised, and whether the culprit is a 'big' chief or a slave, he is very speedily and severely dealt with. These parts of a leopard are looked upon

as rank poison and only kept for dark and deadly purposes.

Some of their curious beliefs encourage suspicion. For instance they hold it possible for one to cast an evil spell over another ; that injured parties may seek revenge by secretly placing poison on the ground at the door of the house where the offender lives, in order that he may tread upon it unawares, and the poison enter his body and cause his death. The belief is widespread that no death is natural except that caused by old age. As few live to be really old, a wide field of enquiry is opened up, and the witch doctor gets his awful opportunity. The witch doctor's grip on the life of Oron is baneful to the last degree ; and where the mission has succeeded in loosening his hold, or abolishing his prestige and breaking his power, greater success has been achieved than can be reckoned by the number of converts or the size of congregations. His influence is like a pestilence, and to be free from it means sweeter and purer life in every way. The witch doctor's claims expose him for the fraud he is. He pretends he can make rain, cure all kinds of sickness, find out the man who has stolen another man's soul and hidden it in a pot, provide charms which will make it impossible for the owner to be bewitched, supply medicine that will make a person able to see into the homes and hearts of people twenty or thirty miles away, and further declares his ability to detect the guilty one who has cast a spell or 'evil-eye,' or caused death by putting poison on the ground or in food. The findings of the witch doctor are tested by 'trial by ordeal,' it is

true, but this is so unreliable that an innocent person has little hope of escape. The favourite method is that of 'esere' or the Calabar bean, which is highly poisonous. The man accused by the witch doctor must swallow it. If he swells up and dies in an agony of pain, his guilt is held to be established, but should his stomach reject it with vomiting, then a mistake has been made and another attempt made to discover the offender. Woe to the man or woman who incurs the ill-will of the witch-doctor! Their life and property become subject to his displeasure and fell power.

Superstition has not wholly died out in Britain. Luck, fate, horseshoes, and the number thirteen have still an uncanny influence over the credulous, but it is well-nigh impossible for anyone in the motherland to realise how much life is affected by superstition in the Oron country. It infects all life's relationships. A clump of trees of unusual shape are marked off as a sacred grove. Parrot Island — opposite the Oron mission house—is held to be inhabited by evil spirits and none can cross it alive. To have a successful fishing season some living thing is sacrificed to juju, and the river. On fishing journeys, tufts of feathers or cloth are fastened to the prows of the canoes to ensure a big catch. If a bundle of sticks left by the road side has upon it the curled dry pod of a native fruit, it is as safe from harm as though it were under lock and key. Fear credits the harmless pod with dreadful powers to injure a would-be thief. I was very amused at one of my house-boys who was greatly alarmed one day, when he found that I had eaten only one kidney

of a goat at dinner. He was perfectly certain a dreadful sickness would follow. Safety lay in either eating both or none. What he thought when no harm came to me I never discovered. On another occasion a man brought me a curious little parcel ; it consisted of a tiny piece of coloured cloth in which were wrapped up two or three tiny sticks and several worthless odds and ends. The owner of the package slept with it under his pillow every night in order that it might dispose my heart to always feel ' good fashion ' towards him. Mothers take their offspring to the witch doctor and pay a goodly sum for a charm to be placed on the necks of the children. It is usually one of three things :—a small shell, a tiny bone, or an animal's tooth. These paltry articles are credited with power to keep the wearer in health and safety. Credulity and superstition do not always express themselves so harmlessly. In the birth of twin children, parents scent witchcraft and trouble speedily follows. The mother is either turned out of house and home, or thrown into the river, and the children left in the bush, or at the river beach. Since the British Government and the missionaries have set their faces against such outrages, their number has declined considerably ; but away from ' Consul ' house or mission, the cruel custom runs full riot to this day. Rude reminders of this ugly fact thrust themselves upon one's notice every now and then. The Rev. N. Boocock when at Oron three or four years ago, was hastily called to the mission beach very early one Monday morning. On the previous Saturday at noon, when the week's work terminated, all had been left in perfect order.

Sunday was spent in preaching work in the surrounding towns and villages. At six o'clock next morning when Ben, the head man, went to open the beach store, a hideous spectacle drove him back in haste to call his master. Mr. Boocock found the bodies of twins crushed into an iron cooking pot. The vultures had discovered them first, and the topmost child had quite a large hole in its back. They had been brought in a canoe from a distant town or village, and left there to make discovery of the culprits impossible. Two or three days later when Mr. Boocock was journeying to Calabar he saw a woman's body on the surface of the water carried hither and thither by the tides, and he naturally associated it with the dead twins. There can be little doubt that she was their mother. In the Oron district the prevailing practice now is for the husband to put his wife and babies away. The woman makes for a twin-mother village where she settles down and supports herself as best she can by farming and trading. At the head of the Ebukhu creek twin-mothers hold a market at regular intervals, and this is but one of many such. Superstition and juju may be said to be inseparable. The first makes the other possible and the latter strengthens the grip of the former upon the life of the people. Juju dominates almost everything, and is so varied in its forms and far-reaching in its application that it might reasonably demand the full treatment of a separate book. When a traveller deposits either an egg (good or bad), a few chicken bones, an empty bottle or a dog's skull at the juncture of bush paths, that is known as juju, and by its means a successful errand is confidently

anticipated. A live chicken placed in a cleft stick and left there to die, is also called juju, and is usually practised when a child is sick. Juju is thus invoked to drive the sickness from the child into the bush. At times juju is personified ; its vengeance is dreaded as much as death, and to appease its wrath no price is considered too great. The principal chief of Arsibong Town was Asuquo, one of the most level-headed, dignified, and intelligent heathen I ever met, yet juju held him in bondage. On the occasion I am about to refer to he had played Egbo all day and that meant he had been drinking heavily too, consequently he did not rest well through the night. He heard one of his slave boys coughing rather frequently. This upset him very much and next morning the boy was brought before him to explain matters. The chief alleged that the little fellow had offended juju which during the night had come and knocked him on the breastbone thereby causing the sickness. The boy stoutly denied the serious charge. Asuquo maintained his version was correct and said that offended juju would help him to prove it. Where upon he got two leaves, placed them across the palm of his hand, and threw them into the air, prophesying that juju would confirm his charge by making them both fall on the ground right side up. To make sure of juju's help he offered a sacrifice of fowl. To his surprise and chagrin, the leaves did not fall as anticipated. Despite repeated attempts it was not until thirteen fowls, six goats, four dogs and finally a fat chicken were sacrificed, the leaves alighted on the ground as desired. No fault was found with either juju

or the chief's explanation because the process had proved so tiresome and expensive. It was regarded rather, as an indication of the seriousness of the offence and the poor boy was dealt with accordingly.

At one of the earliest conferences ever held on the mission-field a native evangelist gave an address, wherein he urged the claims of the Son of God. He made a striking comparison between Christ and juju altogether to the disadvantage of the latter. A more serious and yet more sober indictment of its craft and cruelty was scarcely possible. With fulness of knowledge he showed that without exception, juju brought no benefit but wrought grievous harm, whereas Christ came not to be ministered unto but to minister and gave His life a ransom for many. When this conviction, now held by the few, possesses the multitude, hampering customs and superstitious fears will become simply a memory of a dark and dreary past.

CHAPTER IV.

QUAINT CUSTOMS AND SOCIAL HABITS.

AN outstanding peril to individual well-being and the public good is a secret society bearing the name of Egbo. There are other secret orders—as for example, the Idem—but they are less in number and power, and differ in their aims and methods. Of the Egbo not much can be affirmed to its credit. Its withering influence prevails throughout the Cross River delta. It is alleged that it was brought into the country from the Cameroons, further south. Tradition has it that two Cameroon men were captured by some Calabar people, and brought round to Duke Town. The chiefs decided that the prisoners must break their Egbo oath and reveal the secrets of this mysterious society. Physical violence was resorted to before success was achieved, and afterwards it was deemed prudent to put them both to death, since "dead men tell no tales." To become a member of Egbo is the dearest wish of nearly every youth, and a fond father feels that his money, hardly won, is well spent in securing the fulfilment of his son's desire. It is by no means easy to become an Egbo member. For women it is thereabouts impossible. In all my investigations I only heard of one wealthy

woman, of high family connections, belonging to it. One of the reasons given why no windows are built into houses which face the street is, that women must not see Egbo when holding high revels in the town. There are grades in Egbo membership. Initiation is costly, though an exception is made when a man catches the famous Egbo fish—the manitee. If he is not a member he is initiated free of cost, but if a member already, he is promoted to a higher grade on the same terms. Otherwise every step upwards is only possible by the payment of heavy fees. Just a few of the most powerful and wealthy chiefs reach the topmost grade in the society. Egbo's charms lie in its exclusiveness, its power to legislate, fine and punish, and the freemasonry spirit which governs the members in their relationship with each other. An English trader sought and obtained membership on this last ground alone and found his customers increase to a very profitable extent.

When a person has just been received into membership he parades the streets, exhibiting on his half-naked body the mystic signs of Egbo chalked thereon in several colours. He is proud of them as any Lord Mayor of his mayoral chain, and receives the very hearty congratulations of all his friends. Afterwards, the outward and visible sign of membership, is a peacock's feather.

When the Egbo people desire to play—which is fairly often—they first of all obtain permission from the local Egbo leader. Immediately afterwards a warning is issued, that within a given space of time Egbo play will begin. A man is sent round the town with a bell and he proclaims—

after the fashion of a town-crier—what is afoot. Returning residents and approaching visitors receive the intimation by means of two pieces of white cloth suspended from a cord, slung across the entrance to the town. During these hours of grace water is brought from the spring, all other necessities are obtained with the utmost dispatch, and members of the various households who are within striking distance, are hurriedly informed. Once Egbo goes forth to play the town is completely shut up. All trade and work are brought to a standstill. The doors of the compounds are securely fastened and none, save members of the Egbo, are allowed abroad. Breach of this rule involves a merciless flogging by a strangely-dressed Egbo man, who has a bell attached to his costume and carries a formidable whip for the special purpose. In the old days, offenders had the death penalty swiftly meted out to them. Now, the above procedure has taken its place. I have known a missionary's dog receive a flogging because it was not a member of Egbo and had wandered off to town when Egbo was playing, but gradually, through the leaven of the mission's influence, severity is being still further tempered with mercy. At Jamestown at first, the people wishing to attend church service when Egbo was playing, had to carry for their safety a boot, stick, or some other well-known article belonging to the native king. Through time a part of the street was roped off along which they could travel without fear of being molested. To-day the town is more or less open when Egbo prances hither and thither in all its pride and glory. In most of the out-

stations a worshipper is perfectly safe if he carries a Bible and hymnal either in his hand or on his head during the walk to and from church.

These recurring bouts of play are accompanied by much feasting and drinking. The fines which have been extracted, justly or unjustly, from frightened culprits, go to purchase the food for the feast and refreshment for the carousal.

The people of Ibaka call upon all their youths to prove that they possess the brave spirit of their fathers. The manner of proof is after the following fashion : a number of those yet untested, are sent off without the usual weapons of warfare in a gaily decorated canoe, to capture alive a varied collection of forest and river inhabitants. To return empty-handed is never dreamed of. The disgrace of it would make life intolerable. When however, the spoil is deemed sufficient, they return with beating of drums, laughter and song. An enthusiastic welcome is accorded them and their success celebrated in feasting and play.

When several towns seek to bind one another to engage in war against a common enemy, recourse is had to the blood bond. About eleven years ago, the inhabitants of Ebukhu, Ekem, Urua Eye, Ndunuko, Ukpata, Akiate and Okokudong (all mission towns now) entered into such a covenant against the British Government. The trouble arose out of the Government's demands for labour to make new roads. A clerk under the native government official, was sent by him one fatal Tuesday to call the chiefs of the towns named, along with those of Eyo Embassy to a conference on the matter to be held the following Thursday.

All went well with the messenger until he reached Ukpata, the nearest village to Ndunuko. There he was warned that the Ndunuko people were at play and it would be risky for him to proceed further. He insisted that he must go at all costs. When he reached the outskirts of the town he was told to go back but refused. A scrimmage ensued, the clerk was struck and he returned the blow, whereupon he was surrounded and beaten to death. The body was afterwards skinned and cut up into eight portions, and distributed amongst the towns named. Only one town refused their ghastly share. The people of Eyo Abassey declined to enter into the bond because they said it was courting disaster to give battle to the white man. The other seven places joined in the compact, and a force 70 strong led by three British officers spent a fortnight in subduing them. In one of the compounds, a small boy who had accompanied the ill-fated clerk was found crucified upon a wall. He was cut down, but had been so cruelly treated he could not speak for three days.

It is impossible for the Oronese to make agreements in the way that we do. They have not our writing materials, and could not use them if they had. An exchange of gifts—a domestic animal or yams—usually clinches the bargain. When the Rev. G. H. Hanney accompanied me on a fourteen miles' trudge to Itak to open a mission there, we were brought face to face with this custom. A long and friendly palaver ended in Itak's head chief addressing us in words sympathising with our object and accepting the usual missionary conditions. Before the conference closed a prime

fat goat was brought to him and he placed it at our feet as a gift to ratify the agreement arrived at. We in turn handed over the price of two pieces of cloth. But what a troublesome substitute for our Government stamp! That goat positively refused to walk the long journey back and had to be carried most of the way; on the other hand, much persuasion was needed to make the people believe the coins we gave them were money and not buttons!

In common with other West African tribes, their social life is cursed by polygamy. The only limit I know to the number of wives a husband may have, is that of his financial ability. It is a much more costly thing to get a wife than to maintain her, as afterwards she works to keep herself, and waits upon her lord and master into the bargain. The whole system degrades woman. She is made to minister to his pride as well as his indolence and greed. A man is not a 'big-wig' in the social world until, by the possession of a certain number of wives he has proved himself financially worthy. A young man said to me when he had taken to himself a fourth wife and I chided him, "I only be small boy yet, massa. By-and-bye when I fit to get three, four more, then I be big man too much." A girl is betrothed to her future husband when she is of tender years. She knows nothing about it. The betrothal is sealed by payment of a certain amount either in cash or in kind by the suitor to the parents. The sum varies according to the social standing of the family. Marriage is preceded by a term of more or less close confinement in the fattening

room, varying in extent, from four or five years, down to six months. When this is over, and the husband comes to claim his bride, sad sights are often witnessed. A girl burst into tears when she saw the wizened evil-looking man who had come to claim her. She begged her parents to pay back the money and release her. It was all in vain, and she was dragged off. Within a week or ten days she was back at Urua Eye and declared she would throw herself in the river rather than live with such a husband. Most mothers scrape and save in order to buy wives for their sons. The effect of the system upon the man from the industrial point of view may be gathered from the following incident. A patient came to the mission house for medicine. The necessary treatment was a lengthy one and therefore more expensive. He said he could only pay three rods (ninepence) instead of two shillings. As proof of his poverty he said he had no woman to work for him, neither wife nor mother.

Polygamy cheapens womanhood in every way. The birth of a girl into the family is scarcely welcomed ; whereas when a boy is born there is much congratulation and rejoicing. Miss Jessie Hogg tells a story of an old heathen chief who was asked how many children he had ; he counted the number upon his fingers. "Oh," was the retort, "then these (pointing to others) are not your children ?" "Oh, yes," said the chief, "but girls don't count."

Their funeral customs are very primitive and odd. Dark butcher's blue is the mourning colour. With a black skin for background, the effect is

sombre and depressing. The hair is not cut or trimmed during the mourning period. This varies in length from a few days to many months. If the dead person has occupied an important place in society the period of mourning may last for six months, and if a very big chief, twelve months and even longer. It was the ancient custom to kill a number of wives when a chief died, in order that they might discharge their wifely duties in his behalf in the great spirit-land. This has almost ceased now, thanks to the strong measures of the British Government and the influence of the Missions. When Prince Arsibong died one of his wives fretted and pined because tribal custom was not followed. It so preyed upon her mind that she committed suicide by hanging herself in order that she might join him and do her duty in the other world. Instead of such cruel slaughtering, all the wives are now shut up in the harem and not allowed outside on any account until the mourning ceremonies are concluded. Confinement to the harem is strictly enforced and very few visitors are allowed. After the first few weeks have elapsed, visiting is dangerous to health and very unpleasant. The women are only allowed to wash their hands and faces ; their bodies and garments on no account must be brought into contact with water. It is even forbidden to stand outside when rain is falling lest it should wash their clothes. Such restrictions very naturally produce wretched and unhealthy conditions and much sickness and suffering quickly prevail. When James Egbo Bassey—the head of Jamestown—died his wives were subjected to the

full rigour of this treatment. Protests followed, and the Government made enquiry which resulted in a declaration that the harem was no longer sealed, and that the women were free to go where they liked. None, however, availed themselves of the removal of the ban. After the Government had spoken they were aware that none dare punish them if they took advantage of the liberty just granted, but the force of public opinion held them in fear. They dreaded the unpleasant consequences of unpopularity. When mourning is over a 'big play' and much feasting follow. Preparations for these are made on an elaborate scale, and take some weeks to complete. The time of revelry is altogether regulated by the amount of food provided, and the longer the period of festivity the greater is the honour paid to the departed by his family. To secure this no expense is spared, and as the people of the neighbouring towns come in to play it not infrequently happens that big inroads are made upon the substance left behind by the deceased

With respect to the disposal of the dead, the general rule has been to bury under the house-floor. Slaves of course, are an exception to that rule ; the bush or river is good enough for them. Latterly, burial grounds have come more into use. One of them was situate behind the mission at Jamestown, and I saw a funeral conducted there in native fashion. My attention was first attracted by the shouting and general behaviour of four men, more or less under the influence of drink. They were carrying a rudely-shaped coffin covered with cheap blue cloth. No mourners followed. When

the grave was reached the box was lowered with scant ceremony to the accompaniment of much noise and forced laughter. A number of household utensils were afterwards broken and thrown in. The dead person is supposed to need them for use in the world to which he has gone, but lest anyone should steal them, they were broken before being placed in the grave. The process of filling in followed accompanied by much jabbering and loud laughter, and finally the bearers hurried back to town and home.

A peculiar rule obtains with respect to the interment of a head chief or native king. Two coffins are required. A mock burial takes place in his compound and under the floor of his dwelling, but few know where the body enclosed in the second coffin, is buried. The secret is held by only a handful of people and is never told. It is the practice to select a plantation (farm-place) many miles away, on account of its distance and loneliness. Such elaborate precautions for hiding the real resting-place spring from the desire to prevent a malicious person from digging up the coffin, cutting off the head and making juju of it ; or a stronger tribe from swooping down in force, taking up the remains and exposing the head to the ridicule and contempt of passers-by.

CHAPTER V.

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION.

BEFORE the advent of the mission with its day schools, the language of the people was simply a spoken one. Some think that the decorations burnt in upon calabashes and similar articles are after all more than they appear; that the curved lines and figures are really attempts at a written language, but only understood by the few, as the secrets of the Egbo society are expressed in them. Thanks to the able and devoted efforts of such Scotch missionaries as the Revs. W. Anderson, Hugh Goldie and Dr. Robb, there is not only a written language but a fairly extensive religious literature. All our missionaries gladly acknowledge their deep obligation to the United Free Church of Scotland for such splendid results.

The Efik tongue is the one which is understood by the people even as far as Bende, our newest opening. It is considered by the Government authorities to be one of the four leading languages in Southern Nigeria. Certain it is, that whilst nearly every town or group of towns has a language all its own, Efik is more or less freely spoken by all. It is the trading language of all the markets up to the Aro country, and is now being made the vehicle for the spread of the light and truth of the gospel.

As a language it is expressive and adaptable enough to satisfy most of the demands of a new faith and civilisation. A few of the makara's (strangers) words to meet the new conditions have had to be taken over altogether, but in the majority of instances the joining of two native words has proved a sufficient description. For instance: a school is named the house-book; a slate, the stone-book; a looking-glass, a look-face; and a steamer, a canoe which smokes. The compounding of words presents little or no difficulty to the native for he regularly indulges in the same practice. He calls the ankle the neck of the leg; and similarly, the wrist, the neck of the hnad; the palm, the mother of the hand; and the lips, the skin of the mouth; yesterday, he describes as the back of to-morrow; and morning as the hand of the day. Counting proceeds on the same principle; six, seven and eight are styled five and one, five and two, five and three. Eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen are spoken of similarly with ten as a basis instead of five. Their counting is conducted throughout on this plan. Ninety-one is called eighty and ten and one. A larger number like eight hundred and ninety-nine makes a formidable demand upon one's powers of expression. Just fancy! It means saying hundred with eight and eighty and nineteen. Is it humour or weariness which has determined the name for million to be akpatre ibat, that is, the last number, or the last of counting?

To become an expert in Efik is not so easy as at first appears. The dropping of a letter in the pronouncing of a word can lead to awkward

At Native Compound with Oron people. These people have been in touch with civilization for a short time.

mistakes. The writer at a public service tried to say "hymn, number eight." He dropped the sound of the middle letter 'a' in the Efik word eight, to everybody's amusement but his own. That one omission made an important difference for he was understood to announce "Hymn number, three cracks on the head." Correct pronunciation is by no means the most serious difficulty. A beginner finds the differences between book-Efik and spoken Efik very puzzling and frequently comes to grief. It is possible to speak book-Efik and find the congregation has only understood about half the address. In the vernacular, graphic word-pictures or idioms abound, and to secure these requires long patience, observation, and training to see matters from the Efik standpoint. The natives are past masters in the use of figures of speech, maxims and Nke (fables or parables). Many an Æsop has passed from their midst 'unhonoured and unsung.' Several samples of their use of striking speech readily recur to one's mind. A man of average social position rallied his friend—a very powerful chief—upon the slackness of his friendship since he had not visited him for a long time. The chief's reply came naturally enough, "Does the spring visit the jug, or the jug the spring?" The District Commissioner had to take the head chief of Esuk Oron to task for disobedience. The old man did not reply. When asked why he was silent his resentment blazed forth, and he answered, "Am I a dog that you want me to bark for you?" A member and an official of our church was charged with indiscreet talk; his excuse was that his tongue was like a fishing stick which bent according to the

flow of the tide. Shakespeare makes Mark Antony say, "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones." The Oronese seek to convey a similar idea by saying: "You lock up my goodness in the room, but sell my badness in the market." To state the certain disaster which overtakes a two-faced man they declare "his canoe will turn bottom up."

Religion plays an important part in their lives. The first thing erected when a new house is being built is an altar, and this is characteristic. Their beliefs are a strange mixture of faith, fear, and superstition. Certainly fear is the strongest motive dictating their worship. Abasi is the Good God and to Him they occasionally pray and offer sacrifice at certain phases of the moon. In the centre of the compound stands His shrine, 'Isu Abasi' (face of God). It is generally a growing tree with a clay dish at the base filled with water. Where it is more elaborate there may be several dishes, some bones, and a human skull upon a raised mound in front of the tree. Abasi would certainly be remembered oftener if the people felt they had any occasion to fear that he would do them harm. Isu Ekpo (face of devil, or evil) receives much greater attention. It is situated in a corner of the yard, and consists of a small clay mound covered with bones of animals which have been sacrificed, and an enema filled with water. The spirits of the fathers are supposed to haunt it. They believe the spirits of the departed come back to their former habitation, but only to work mischief—hence the excessive attention paid to Isu Ekpo.

Mention should be made of 'Efa Ibak,' the name given to a very small shed built in the back room or yard, in which is placed a pot half full of water. 'Efa Ibak' is regarded as a sort of protective deity. In a fishing village near Arsibong town, named Aqua, there is a large cotton tree which is looked upon as sacred. Certain religious rites are practised in its behalf at stated times. Men and women join hands and dance round it; when they have compassed it seven times they kneel and ask the spirit of the tree to take care of them. The blood of fowls or a goat slain in sacrifice is poured out upon its bark. When kneeling they dip their fingers first in the blood, then upon the ground, and lastly, place them upon their foreheads as they pray, "Take care of me, take care of me." At Ibaka, hard by Jamestown, there is a similar tree to which women come from long distances to seek special help and protection.

Though human sacrifice is no more, offerings involving the shedding of blood are still in vogue. At Urua Eye and Esuk Oron the fisher folk substitute a goat for a human being. The head is cut off and thrown into the water to bribe the god of the river.

Ruled as it is by fear, their religion fails to satisfy the deep cravings and noble longings of the human heart. Despite all that travellers and missionary critics assert to the contrary the natives freely declare that this is so. Prior to the opening of Ikot Ntika as an out-station of the Jamestown mission, the Rev. N. Boocock and the writer paid a visit there. When the head chief and a number of his men met us in one of the palaver sheds,

genuine pleasure was expressed at our coming. They said they had heard reports of what the missionaries taught, and though they had no one to instruct them, they 'sat down' (rested) on the first day in seven to honour God, but none knew how to worship Him as they ought. The first visit to Ebukhu brought forth the same testimony. How that assembled crowd of half-naked men eagerly listened to the simple story that Abasi is the God of Love, and actively concerned in their behalf! It was the most attentive and astonished congregation I have ever seen. When their turn for speech came they said, "We are as children who sit in darkness, will you bring us the light?" Deputations from towns outside the mission area have frequently visited us to prefer their request for school and church. A favourite and significant plea is: "We want the light."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE MISSION.

THE Southern Nigerian Mission is really an offshoot from our Fernando Po work, and at first was regarded as a branch of the Santa Isabel station. Its origin may be traced to the following circumstances : for several years the conviction, that something further should be attempted for Christ and His kingdom in West Africa, had possessed both missionaries and members of the Island alike ; the subject was discussed at meetings and in special conference and gradually certain conclusions were reached. All recognised that extension work in Fernando Po was only possible on a small scale. The nature of the Government, and its readiness to yield to Roman Catholic pressure, forbade hopes of any fresh work upon considerable lines. It was felt too, if a new country could be entered, that not only would these difficulties disappear, but the serious drawback of an unhealthy climate might be relieved. The hope was at first cherished of securing such healthy conditions as would furnish both place and opportunity for fever-stricken missionaries from Fernando Po to recruit, without returning to England. Just about twenty years ago with the approval of the Missionary Committee, the Revs. R. Fairley and F. Pickering went

prospecting in several directions upon the West Coast mainland. Mr. Fairley visited both the Opobo and Calabar river deltas. At Opobo he found a native mission, under Archdeacon Crowther, already settled and provided with an ambitious programme for the future. At Calabar having ascertained the intentions of the United Presbyterians, he discovered there was ample room for us in the lower reaches of the river. Eventually Issangelli—near to Rio-del-Rey—was chosen as the starting point of the new venture. A carpenter from Santa Isabel was engaged to erect suitable mission premises constructed largely of native materials. Mr. Knox had not proceeded far, however, before the German Governor of the Cameroons interfered. Issangelli was situated in German territory and mission work could only be carried on with his consent, and in harmony with certain stringent conditions, so it became necessary to seek a new location. Mr. Pickering came over, explored the creeks round about Rio-del-Rey until he entered the Aqua Effy river and reached Arsibong Town in the (British) Niger Coast Protectorate. The head of the town, Prince Arsibong, gave him a warm welcome when he knew his errand. He and his people had long desired to have a missionary to teach them. Hailing originally from Calabar (Duke Town) they knew the value of missionary work. They had already engaged Mr. Effa Ekpe Esuk to conduct a day-school at a small salary. It is true that the school was intended simply for the sons of Arsibong and his chiefs, and Mr. Effa was not far advanced in matters educational, but that appointment made very public native dis-

satisfaction with the old conditions of life. Mr. Pickering—delighted with the prospect—came to an honourable understanding, and returned to Fernando Po to report upon the success of his tour.

The Rev. J. M. Brown left England on October 25th, 1893, with instructions to proceed to Fernando Po to receive directions from the Rev. R. Fairley as to his final destination. By the time of his arrival Arsibong Town had been substituted for Issangelli as the place best suited to commence work upon the mainland. On the 15th of December Messrs. Fairley and Brown landed there at midday ready to commence a task which has proved singularly fruitful and inspiring. Mr. Brown's own words respecting his arrival are worth quoting : "We found a partly finished mud house in the midst of a bush clearing, the completion of which we hurried forward, and within a week we were able to sleep in it. The first service was conducted in the palaver-house on Sunday, Dec. 17th, 1893. Mr. Fairley preached in the morning and I took service in the afternoon. On Dec. 23rd, Mr. Fairley returned to Fernando Po, arriving there after a long wearisome journey of 30 hours in an open boat. I was then left alone—60 or 70 miles from the nearest English neighbours—to put in the foundations of that mission which is so full of promise to-day."

It is difficult to say which is the more striking the modesty, or the audacity of such a beginning. The town was of the usual West African type with a population not exceeding 2,000 souls ; awkwardly situated as a base for missionary work on an extended scale, and very limited for a man of active

temperament, being bound by thick bush on all sides save where the waters of the Aqua Effy cleansed its beach. We need to call imagination to our aid to realise fully the humble nature of such a beginning, and the courage demanded for the enterprise. An unfriendly climate made unusual demands upon the body ; an unknown tongue placed human fellowship almost out of the question for at least several months ; the first church—a rude palaver-house—offered free access to goats, fowls, dogs, as well as worshippers, and added considerably to such difficulties of worship as arose from total ignorance of native speech and religious notions ; whilst to live first with natives, then in a single room of a partially completed house before the mud walls had had time to dry, and afterwards in the completed house, made hardship as inevitable as sunrise and sunset. Surely the situation faced by a young probationer finds its parallel only in the early episodes of the brave founders of our great church. Mr. Brown, however, quickly found two or three redeeming features in his lot. Mr. Effa, the native schoolmaster, and his brother Efiom, with their wives, were already decided Christians, and members of the Presbyterian Church at Calabar; from the first they were friendly and helpful. Mr. Knox and his wife, who served as schoolmistress, did what they could ; and Prince Arsibong, though a heathen and wedded to drink and polygamy, used his powerful influence to advance the new venture of faith and love.

The work of breaking up new ground was tedious and trying to faith and patience. Visible impressions upon native fashions steeped either in

superstition or immorality, were not easily made. The first communion service held, little more than a year after landing, was attended by Mr. Brown and six natives. The latter were composed of Mr. and Mrs. Knox with Messrs. Effa Ekpe Esuk and Efiom Ekpe Esuk and their wives, who had been received as members by transfer from the church at Calabar. That service was memorable in that it marked the constitution of the first Primitive Methodist Church in Southern Nigeria. The first two converts from raw heathenism were baptized and received into Christian fellowship on June 2nd, 1895, after a probation extending over twelve months. The privilege of sharing the holy joy of such an occasion proved an adequate reward to Mr. Brown for all the disappointments, drawbacks and sufferings of the previous eighteen months. He was too ardent a missionary, however, to allow Arsibong Town to remain his sole concern. Visits were paid to Bassey Willey Town, from 8 to 10 miles distant, and Ekanem Esin Town in the Oron country and both places became established outstations. Prior to his return to England he made an extended journey into the interior in the direction of the Oban mountains ; he found the district had never been previously visited by a white man, that the towns were small and few in number, and in view of the sparse population held it unwise to think of reaching out further towards the east. That wise decision has had far-reaching consequences. A year or fifteen months after Mr. Brown's return to England, his successor, the Rev. T. Stones, received a quaintly-worded invitation to begin a mission at Jamestown, situated

at the mouth of the Mbo river, and lying considerably west of Arsibong Town. The note sent by the native king bore traces of the wide influence wielded by our work on Fernando Po, one of the Fernandian members being mentioned by name. What is more significant still, it provided a providential opening for missionary work in a large and populous heathen district with prospects of expansion almost without limit. Acceptance was not long delayed ; Mr. Effa was sent over as native teaching-evangelist until the writer and his wife arrived early in March, 1897. Jamestown was found to be very low lying, exceedingly insanitary and of a mixed population. Nevertheless the advantages in its favour were many, and it was the port of call for all trading and fishing canoes within a fair radius ; people coming from Eket peninsula knew Jamestown to be a very convenient terminus, and there was the additional advantage that its native king possessed considerable influence over many towns in the southern portion of Oron. The work of the mission thus became early and widely known. Very naturally therefore, when extension was next embarked upon, it branched out from Jamestown. Within five years operations had not only been put upon a satisfactory basis there, but, beginning with Ikot Ntika, the mission had come into working contact with most of the Mbo river towns, and Urua Eye, Ibaka, and Ikot Ntika recognised out-stations supplied by local preachers from Jamestown.

The geographical position of Urua Eye marked it off as peculiarly fitted to become the centre of activities from whence the farming towns

of Western Oron could be linked up and effectively missioned. Accordingly the Rev. G. H. Hanney was specially sent forth to commence this important piece of work. He rightly gave his first attention to strengthening the position at Urua Eye and gaining a foothold in the nearest towns. Rev. W. Christie followed and built on the foundation so well and truly laid ; out-station was added to out-station until ultimately the movement began, which has now culminated at Bende. In the meanwhile affairs were not standing still at Arsibong Town. Under the Revs. T. Stones, W. J. Ward, C. F. Gill, N. Boocock and R. Banham, a strong and vigorous church and day school had been built up, several acres of land cleared and some of it planted. Within a couple of years after the opening of Jamestown mission, rumours were afloat that Arsibong Town would shortly be declared to be in German Territory, and the inhabitants and missionaries alike became more or less uneasy. Tariffs imposed by the British and German authorities in their adjoining protectorates made it desirable to both that, wherever possible, the boundary between Southern Nigeria and the Cameroons should be a natural and well-defined one. In this particular region the Aqua Effy river was held to be the best dividing line. A Commission spent several years inquiring into the whole matter. Finally along with other recommendations, they suggested the river as a boundary instead of an imaginary line drawn through the bush as hitherto, and this meant that Arsibong Town would be on the German bank

of the Aqua Effy river. Without waiting for the adoption of the Commission's report, the members of the church had a conference amongst themselves, and then met the Rev. R. Banham along with myself at a church meeting. The necessity of removal was not even questioned; the people made it very clear that they understood the sacrifice involved in leaving home and farm and going forth to buy land and settle elsewhere. They realised they were starting life afresh—no light task for the heads of the families to undertake. Yet it was unanimously agreed that not simply in self-interest but for the sake of the mission, no other course was open to them. The uppermost thought in every mind was, whither would the mission remove? Most of them could have crossed to the other (British) bank of the Aqua Effy and by dint of hard labour, founded new plantations or farms there. Such a course would have involved much less wrench and sacrifice; but no, they said they could not live without the mission. "Yam was good, Bread of Life was best of all." Finally a number were appointed to accompany the missionaries to a particular spot on the west bank of the Calabar river, a dozen miles or so from Jamestown. Longing eyes had long been cast in this direction by the missionaries, and Mr. Boocock and I had previously paid a visit and had a talk with the chiefs of Esuk Oron. From information gathered then, it was plain that such a coign of vantage was extremely desirable for greater efficiency and future progress. After a long night passage full of discomfort on account of the weather, the beach at Afaha Eduok was reached—about half a mile

lower down than Esuk Oron. During the interview which followed with the Afaha Eduok chiefs the following interesting information was elicited : twice before they had been approached by missionaries and twice they had refused ; our overture was the third invitation and they said that Abasi (God) was surely prompting us and they dared not reject it.

The settlement of the whereabouts of the new colony and mission was a long and difficult affair. Some land was staked out during the afternoon, but this proceeding led to a long palaver with two selfish claimants, and lasted far into the night. Subsequent efforts by Revs. Banham and Boocock were more successful, and the majority of the Arsibong Town Primitive Methodists migrated to form a new Christian colony at Afaha Eduok. The Mission obtained land on lease from the Henshaw family close to the river bank, between the towns of Esuk Oron and Afaha Eduok and named the new centre Oron. Events ever since have not only proved the wisdom of choosing Oron for the new location, but that the difficulties making the removal from Arsibong Town imperative, were a blessing in disguise.

To Revs. R. Banham and N. Boocock fell the heavy task of moving the mission property across thirty-five miles of water always difficult to negotiate and to Mr. Boocock more especially was committed the work of rebuilding on the new site. The full story requires detailed and separate treatment elsewhere. It was pioneering in very truth. Once firmly established at Oron progress was inevitable and rapid ; out-stations began to multiply chiefly

in the direction of Urua Eye and the western branch of the Cross river. To supply the needs of these and complete the course of the house-boy system, the Training Institute—erected by Rev. R. Banham—was soon opened under my supertendence, Mrs. Ward rendering splendid assistance as teacher during the whole of her stay. Almost from the first the Institute became a powerful factor making for rapid expansion, for before the youths were ready to occupy posts as teaching evangelists, they went hither and thither proclaiming the Word, either separately or in bands. The frontiers of the circuit—for such Oron had become —gradually pushed out towards the North until it joined hands with the extensions of the Urua Eye circuit. Had finality been reached so far as the extent of our work in the Eastern province of Southern Nigeria was concerned? That immediately became the question of the hour.

Again Providence showed the way. The deputation from the Home Board, Rev. James Pickett and Ald. Linfield—had discussed with the missionaries during their visit, the future of our West African work on the mainland. The Opobo country, Benin, and the districts north of Oron stretching away in the direction of the Aro country were all brought under notice; and in the case of Opobo, visited—at the deputation's suggestion—by Mr. Banham. Previous to these consultations an expedition had been organised by the British Government and sent into the Aro country to smash the power of the Long Juju and thereby destroy the seat of the slave traffic. News gradually filtered through respecting the people, their

great numbers and their appalling needs. It was plain that the resources of more than one missionary society would be taxed to the utmost, if Christ was to occupy the new field rather than the Mohamet. Concerning Opobo and Benin nothing seemed likely to be done, so finally an understanding was sought and a working arrangement reached between our Protestant neighbours; the United Free Church of Scotland, the Qua Iboe Mission (undenominational, with headquarters at Belfast), and ourselves.

The Rev. W. Christie whose eager spirit chafed against the limitations and routine work of an ordinary station, and whose glowing words gave the Missionary Committee a clear vision of our opportunity and duty to the unreached masses of heathendom, was specially commissioned to be missionary scout and pioneer. He fixed first upon Ikot Ekpene beyond the Nsit district, as a place from which the work could be carried right through the Nsit and Aka districts until the out-stations of the Adadia Mission were reached.

From Ikot Ekpene too, a large and important country bearing the same name was easy of access and could be effectively worked. After a stay of some months, during which time much unseen, but valuable work was done at Ikot Ekpene and two or three out-stations, it again became possible to advance.

The Rev. W. and Mrs. Groves were sent out to take charge at Ikot Ekpene and the Rev. F. W. Dodds at Adadia, thus leaving Mr. Christie at liberty for another attack upon the scarcely broken line of heathendom. It was more or less

a plunge into the unknown. At Ikot Ekpene law and order are respected, and the white man counts for a good deal. The Government have officials in residence there. To attempt to mission the towns dotting the country up to Bende was another and much more perilous matter. Mr. Christie entered Irriam first of all. The people knew neither him nor the mission. He was accorded a chilling reception. Hospitality was not even proffered. There was nothing for it but to annex the palaver or rest-house and make it as comfortable a dwelling as its low walls and gaping spaces and wide, doorless entrance would allow. He was left so severely and utterly alone that he found it impossible to get near enough to engage in conversation with anybody. Had Mr. Christie depended on native goodwill he must have starved or retreated. Such a contingency he had foreseen and provided against. The days lengthened into weeks and still they would not talk or enter into negotiations, hence a move was decided upon. If one town received not the Gospel, Mr. Christie believed in following the Master's instructions to enter another. Ndoro was a larger town of which he had heard much and thither he removed. As the natives were less sullen, and more ready to enter into friendly converse, Mr. Christie hoped to gain a hearing for the "Good News," but all in vain. His stay there ran into months. By all legitimate means he sought to show them that the missionary of the Cross is a true friend of the people. Many injustices perpetrated by natives in government employ were put a stop to. The sick were healed. The native mind slowly rid itself of the usual notion

that every white man is 'on the make' at the black man's expense, for he neither traded nor oppressed, and lived in a more or less open palaver shed, without comfort and completely dependent upon their mercy and goodwill. Still they remained obdurate. They would not allow their children to come to school and refused to gather to hear the preaching of the Word. Time was precious, Mr. Christie's health showed signs of giving way. A third attempt was made to secure a locality offering better prospects of successful work and from which Irriam and Ndoro, along with the other towns of the adjoining districts could afterwards be successfully occupied.

Ozakali and Bende were both visited and the final selection for a base fell upon Bende. It is a fine centre in every way. Its population is exceedingly large. People settle here from almost everywhere. Many are well versed in handicrafts. Chiefs from far and near come to Bende on business and—favourably impressed by the mission—will be our messengers in advance. A day school found favour in the eyes of those in power and has done well from the beginning. Though the preaching services have been scantily attended as yet, the field is a magnificent one and we are certain to hear very much of Bende and the Bende people in the days to come.

A halt has been called and wisely so. Ere the Okigivi country, with its teeming population spread over an area of 1,000 square miles, is entered, certain tasks must be discharged : the Ibo language —quite new to our missionaries—will have to be mastered ; the districts already entered more

fully possessed ; and a way found for a large and permanent increase in the staff of missionaries.

In such a rapid survey of the years of our missionary activity and progress in Southern Nigeria, many noteworthy facts have of necessity been left out. One of these must at least be referred to—the establishment of a Girl's Training Institute at Jamestown. The Institute buildings were erected by the Rev. G. H. Hanney whilst superintending the Urua Eye and Jamestown Mission stations.

Boys in the Institute at Oron have received particular attention and training from the beginning ; not because they stand in higher favour in native thought, but because they are easier to secure and offer greater promise as future recruits to the mission staff. It was always felt, however, that unless a similar work be undertaken amongst the girls, the difficulties in the way of saving Oron would be only halved, and the efficiency of the native staff considerably interfered with. The future motherhood must be won for purity and holy living ; and our teachers and native ministers supplied with wives suitably trained and sympathetic with their work and outlook. Mrs. Hanney was the first missionary's wife to take girls into the house for training, and during her first term of two years she gathered four promising pupils and advanced their education and training very considerably. After a well-earned rest in England Mrs. Hanney found the numbers increase until they warranted the commencement of the Jamestown Institute, which was opened by Miss Richardson and Mrs. Langley ; and since carried

on by the former with the assistance of Miss Fisher and the late Miss Dodds.

A retrospect covering all the work of eighteen brief years provokes the exclamation, "What hath God wrought." His guiding hand has led us step by step as surely as the pillar of cloud and fire determined the route and pace of the journeying Israelites. Suffer a word of warning lest the enthusiasm and joy over the rapid extensions of the last eight or nine years, should lead to any neglect or disparagement of the first decade. The earnest, unseen work of those foundation years has had its natural fruit in these later extensions. Consolidation paved the way for expansion. Some of the best native workers now occupying positions of responsibility, were being quietly educated and prepared by missionaries and their wives, without the praise of printed paragraph, or the stimulus of beholding their pupils serving the cause of Christ and the missions as they are at this hour! Mesdames Stones, Ward, Boocock, Banham, and Hanney have laid a large proportion of those who are the life and vigour of our churches to-day, under a debt of deep obligation for their services rendered gladly for the Master's sake.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK.

"MISSIONARY WORK" is a phrase as comprehensive as it is common. It embraces everything from the rough and ready life of the pioneer to the systematic and highly efficient methods of work at a training Institute. A day's duty is sure to include either travelling, building, farming, doing the duty of an unpaid magistrate, tending the sick, or teaching and preaching. Occasionally requests come to hand to trim hats, interpret dreams, or mend sewing machines. An ideal missionary is ready for every emergency and fits himself to every circumstance. He realises that the ways of advancing the kingdom are manifold. The familiar picture of a man standing under a palm tree preaching to a number of negroes at his feet, is little better than a caricature of a missionary's life and work.

Pioneering is full of hardship and suffering. The foundations of every missionary enterprise have been laid in tears and blood. The mission in Southern Nigeria is no exception to the rule. The first-comers were the greatest sufferers. It could not be otherwise. Mr. Brown who led the way suffered from fifteen attacks of fever before his indomitable spirit obeyed the doctor's orders to return. Ere Mr. and Mrs. Stones finished their

first term of service, they endured much hardship and sickness which wore Mrs. Stones to a mere shadow, and suffered the bereavement of their only child, Dorothy.

When the Rev. C. F. Gill landed he found that he had to shoulder the task alone. The writer and his wife had sailed three days previously to save life, as it were, by the skin of the teeth. No tribute is too high to pay to Mr. Gill's unfaltering devotion in exceptional circumstances. He had to acquaint himself with the very rudiments of life and labour. Fancy living on biscuits until you have learned how to bake bread. There were two stations to manage, one just in the initial stages and requiring much oversight. This involved many boat journeys in all weathers, and sometimes he despaired of ever reaching land again. When the inevitable breakdown occurred, the nearest doctor was a day's journey away ; to fetch him was out of the question. John Enang Gill then quite a boy installed himself as nurse and dispenser ; as the crisis approached, Ikani Ukpabio—our Society's steward's wife—took matters into her own hands, and adopted native treatment. Mr. Gill was too prostrate to object ; her vigorous massage meant kill or cure ; providentially he was spared. The heavy drain upon his system told in the end and after eighteen months' toil and suffering he had to be carried on board a homeward-bound steamer.

Many striking stories can be told of peril by water and hardship on land. During the first six years there were seldom two men on the ground together. Supplies for vacancies seemed hard to get. The

brunt of it all fell upon the solitary representative who would try to be here, there, and everywhere, counting the work more dear than life, often with disastrous physical results. Boating is pleasant as a pastime, but undertaken at short notice or in the tornado, or foggy seasons of West Africa, is likely to prove both trying and full of peril. I remember the first boat-ride we took from Arsibong Town to Jamestown, as though it only occurred yesterday: my wife and I were going to our new home and work; the journey lay through creeks, over the Aqua Effy and Little Qua rivers, and across the 'big water'—the broad mouth of the Calabar river. It was towards the end of March when tornadoes are plentiful. Heavily laden with much cargo and in the best of spirits we waved our adieus to Rev. T. and Mrs. Stones and began our passage by 9 o'clock in the morning. We were timed to reach Jamestown by sundown and consequently had only prepared for dinner and tea on the way. Everything went well until we got out on to the 'big water'; a strong tornado sprang up with little warning, and raged as though the 'furies of hell' were being loosed upon us; the boys did what they could, but we were eventually driven back to find anchorage under the lee of the bush we had left some hours before. A second attempt made later ended similarly. Drenched to the skin and rocked in the cradle of the deep we did our best to snatch a few hours of sleep. At daybreak the following morning we essayed a third time to cross the 'big water,'' and at last met with success. As we drew near Jamestown beach, it appeared quite as desirable in our eyes

as the island's shore to shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe.

This experience could be matched by many another. Lost in the fog, driven out of the course, succeeding with the greatest difficulty in keeping the nose of the boat to the angry waves, suggestively sum up many a graphic jotting in a missionary's log-book.

Life in the mission's early days soon rid a man or woman of all dainty or fastidious habits. Mr. Hanney lived for several months at Urua Eye in a one-roomed house of his own erection, about the size of a back kitchen, whilst with plod and skill he built the present model mission house, which was occupied in turn both by himself and Mr. Christie his successor, before it was really finished. Owing to its incompleteness the rats from the bush found ready access, and played many pranks during night, generally winding up with devouring the candle by the missionary's bed. Mr. Boocock and Mr. Banham lived in a single room of a native mud house whilst better premises were being erected at Oron, and proved to the full the drawbacks of insanitary surroundings and the serious inconveniences of compound life.

It fell to my lot to discover, upon first landing at Jamestown, that the native mission house which was to be our first home as married folks, did not exist. The site was marked out but that was all. To make matters worse, the water supply was alike inadequate and bad. A visit of inspection to the three springs in the bush behind the town made one's heart heavy as lead. It was at the end of the dry season, and two were practically dried up.

The third had to bear the burden of supplying all the townsfolk, save such as contented themselves with the dirty river water. To see women and children walk in the water with their dirty feet, fill their vessels and replace them on their heads and walk calmly off, was enough to disturb the imagination of the most easy-going of individuals. One could only hope that filter and fire would prove effective purifiers of our supply. I suppose we ought to have felt honoured when invited to be the guests of royalty until our house could be built. We accepted and did our best to be grateful. The palace was a wooden structure built on piles; it was old and shaky and during a tornado, whatever the hour, safety demanded a hurried leave-taking to find shelter in lowlier but safer quarters. The one room reserved for our special use was small and filthy. The window was a door-like arrangement; when shut the air was stifling, and when opened unpleasant odours were borne in upon the night-breeze, and vigorous, vicious insects rejoiced in the clear course afforded them for reaching fresh fields and pastures new—our bodies. We were hemmed in by the king's harem. Sanitary accommodation was absolutely lacking, and cooking could only be carried on by means of a three-legged pot over a fire of wood. Verily, living with royalty had its drawbacks.

Mr. Christie's life in tent and hut during his prospecting in the Nsit and Bende countries, must have furnished him with many experiences which equal and probably surpass the foregoing. For instance, when living at Ndoro in an open palaver-shed a woman was murdered by two men during

the night, hard by where he was sleeping. To a pioneer, the 'picturesque in missions' is difficult to discover. In his love for Christ and the people however, he counts episodes involving hardship and suffering as the 'pepper and salt' which give spice and zest to his life and toil.

A new town is missioned either by invitation or on account of its possibilities and importance. The first step taken is a visit to the place. Upon arrival, a bee-line is made to the ete's (head chief's) compound. After greetings, questions and answers follow in swift succession. When the ete finds his visitors are 'God-palaver' men, all signs of fear vanish and he becomes friendly. News of our arrival soon spreads, and the ete's henchmen—the smaller chiefs—quickly gather round him. Now comes the opportunity to present the case for 'Abasi' and tell of His love for His children—the sons of men—as revealed in Jesus Christ. Discussion amongst the chiefs follows. If the Word is well received, proposals for the establishment of a mission are made, and time and terms are settled. From the very beginning, the practice of insisting that the town should do its share towards meeting the cost of commencing work in their midst, has been wisely followed. Mr. Brown estimates that the value of the materials and labour supplied freely by the natives in the erection of the first mission house and church at Arsibong Town was £70. The usual stipulation is that the natives should provide the site, native parts of church and teacher's house, and afterwards contribute by means of collections, towards the teacher's salary. It is customary also, to ask

that the Lord's Day shall be observed as a day of rest, and that neither Egbo nor any other heathen practice shall be allowed to flagrantly oppose the mission or its staff. Concerning some of these stipulations, some people at home may be inclined to cavil and regard them as arbitrary, if not indeed, harsh. The one reply is, that to do all for nothing, has a pauperising effect upon man wherever found. Some older missionary societies have proved by bitter experience, how true this is of the negro. We have sought to profit thereby. An Oron man who is ill and seeks advice and medicine, will neglect the one and despise the other if he obtains them too easily. The payment of a moderate fee works wonders. Besides, in the matter of church and house building, the materials cost nothing but journeys and labour. All the materials are found in either the bush not far away, or the ground hard by the site. As for the time taken up, that is by no means so serious a matter as in England. A West African is an adept at going 'softly softly catch monkey' style. In most things he lives up to the proverb which advises "Never do to-day what can be put off until to-morrow." After all, our methods carry out the teaching of a Nigerian maxim, which points out the foolishness of seeking "to save a drowning man with a smooth stick," that is, saving him too easily.

Every established mission centre has at least three clearly defined departments of service: the educational, the medical, and the definitely religious. One of the first objects to receive attention in opening a new place is the day school.

Nothing commends our missionary work to the native mind more than its educational achievements, and no effort more effectively paves the way for receiving the Gospel than the displacement of ignorance with knowledge. Heathen fathers past their prime, seared by sin and held fast in the bonds of superstition, often desire that it should be otherwise with their children. A not infrequent appeal for admission to mission house or training Institute is : that the applicant's child might become like so-and-so, naming some particular worker on the mission staff. A chief brought his boy as a candidate for admission to the Institute. His plea was : "Massa, make you fit to do all strong fashion (strict discipline) by my boy, make him all same as John Enang." A most influential and very intelligent chief is using his means freely to educate his boy in order that he may become a medical missionary. Yet the father is not a member of the Christian church.

A day school at first, is very elementary. In the early years, boxes were used as blackboards and a table had to take the place of desks. Even now, with better equipment progress is only slowly attained. Very few schools go beyond the equivalent of the work in Standard IV. of an English school ; but that is excellent surely, when heredity, circumstances, and irregularity of attendance are taken into account. Planting, fishing and trading made big breaks during the year. It was deemed advisable on this account that the most promising boys should be brought into the mission house to live, and there receive continuous and individual instruction. This be-

came known as the house-boy system and eventually developed into the Training Institute. Rev. John Enang Gill is the first and most brilliant product of the earlier educational methods. He received all his training—first as a house-boy, and then as teaching-evangelist—at the hands of the missionaries except, for a space of eighteen months or so, when he visited this country in charge, and at the expense of Mr. Gill. During that brief period he was a scholar of an elementary school in Shrewsbury.

A great fillip was given to the educational branch when Mr. Boocock brought over Fernandian boys to receive the instruction they were denied at home. During our second term, we had for some time no less than a dozen boys living on the mission premises. Their training was only part of 'the daily round and common task.' Such embarassing success could only have one issue, namely—the Training Institute. This, in turn, has yielded large and abiding results. Ten, at least, of the first pupils are now occupying outposts with credit.

The medical aspect of missions is coming into prominence, after long delay. The healing art is known and practised extensively amongst these people. They are great herbalists. Whilst the medicinal properties of certain roots and leaves are the common knowledge of all, quackery abounds and there is ample scope to supplement the little they know, with the abundance of British medical resources. To alleviate the pain of a sufferer, or to cure a sickness thought to be incurable, is to make considerable advance in their thought and esteem. The gratitude of a Jamestown leper, who found temporary relief in the mission-

ary's ointment and dressing was something touching to witness. A man at Urua Eye was troubled with an African complaint of a peculiarly distressing nature and could procure no relief from any native. Mr. Christie persuaded him to go to Calabar where he went under an operation which freed him from the terrible growth. When he returned home, he ran round the town shouting for very joy : "I'm a new man, I'm born again." Afterwards his joy made him a valuable recruiting sergeant for the mission. Usien Ufot—a village about midway between Esuk Oron and Akani Obio, commonly called Aka—is the headquarters of a native doctor and chief called Edem. It is generallv believed that Edem went far up the Cross river and paid a large sum of money for a certain medicine named 'Aka'; hence the current name for his village. When he returned the news spread abroad and soon Usien Ufot became the resort of the lame, halt, sick or possessed people for miles around. He built in the bush not far away from his home a kind of 'sacred grove.' Here, accompanied by a faithful slave, he practises his healing art. The fees charged yield a rich return upon Edem's original outlay and are payable in advance. One patient, suffering from wasting sickness, had to hand over a cow before being treated at all. His total bill of costs amounted to £30. Edem looked upon the mission, working all around him, with unfriendly eyes. True, the unfriendliness was not openly expressed, but by subtle intrigue and influence, he made common cause with the hostile forces. However Edem became the victim of a serious sickness. Every

known native remedy was tried, including, of course, the great 'Aka,' but all in vain. At death's door, he overcame all scruple and prejudice and made a piteous appeal for help to the Missionary at Oron. His plea ran something like this: "Missionary say he love black man because God be his father all the same as white man, so he came to black man's country to tell him about God and do him all good fashion; if that be true, you be fit to help me, Aka doctor all same as other black man." The response was immediate, and by the blessing of God he gradually recovered. Within a month he walked to Oron paid all dues and demands, and proffered — if we sent suitable preachers—to open his village to the preaching of the Gospel every Sunday morning. Now, right in the centre of superstition and the home of witchcraft, the truth which enlightens and sets at liberty, has found a place. The men of recent years have gone well prepared for this fruitful side of missionary work, and have correspondingly encouraging results to show. The Rev. W. Glover treated hundreds of cases per year when resident at Jamestown, and Messrs. Hanney and Christie at Urua Eye hold similar records. Thanks to the policy of the Missionary Executive and the tuition of Livingstone College, no missionary is now handicapped like those of the pioneering years. Imagine the awkward position of a man, knowing little or nothing of medicine but the household remedies of a working man's home, called upon to deal with patients of all kinds within a week of his arrival in a strange land. The awkwardness was only surpassed by the chagrin at being unable to use

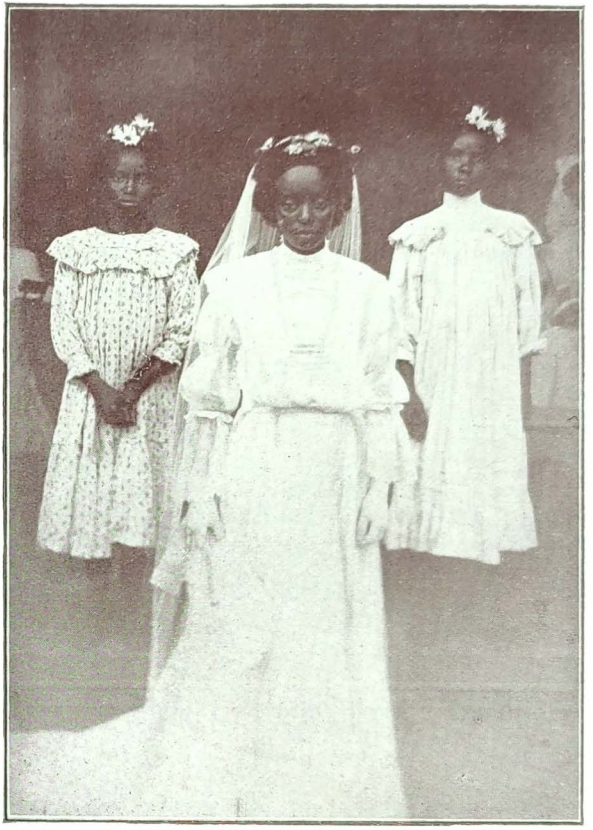
such opportunities to their fullest advantage.*

The distinctly religious work upon a mission station largely consists of preaching and instruction. The services are organised similar to those in the homeland, but are conducted in a different way. The class meeting is almost like a Bible Class and testimony has only a minor place. The catechumen class is composed of men and women as well as those of tender years; it is really a class for all who have desires to forsake heathenism and live a Christian life. Definite religious instruction is imparted so that they may be able to give a good account of the faith they espouse. When a probation lasting upwards of six months has been served, an interview is sought with the stewards and teacher of the church when the candidate for membership explains his desire. A stiff examination is gone through, enquiries made as to the applicant's reputation in the compound where he lives, and if all is satisfactory the missionary is asked to speak and pray with him, and arrange for his public recognition as a member of the household of faith on Sacrament Sunday. Sacrament day usually falls on the first Sunday of every second month. It is regarded with the same kind of feeling that a High Church clergyman cherishes towards his church festivals. One of the first acts of the new member is to sit at the Lord's table, and show forth Christ's death until He comes. Wherever business may have taken the members,

* Sir W. P. Hartley has offered to defray the cost of equipping a hospital base. This should surely bring a medical missionary into the field before long.

they travel back for this particular day, even though it means starting off again on Sunday at midnight on a journey of seventy or a hundred miles to pick up the threads of their work-a-day life again. If members absent themselves from the Sacrament it is at once known that something is amiss, either they are ill, or have been overtaken in a fault. This is an unfailing test. Two of our most devoted members of Afaha Eduok once refused to attend. The reason they gave was they did not feel towards their son-in-law as Christians ought to feel. He had not treated his wife as they thought he should have done, and consequently they cherished resentment in their hearts.

Admission into the church is by baptism which takes place on the morning of Sacrament Sunday. The girls and women are clad in white and the men don new clothes befitting the occasion. The address by the preacher bears on one or more of the characteristics of the Christian life ; after the sermon the candidates are called by name and asked publicly to answer searching questions, which relate to heathen plays, marriage, drink, and support of the work by gifts and service. When thought desirable, they are called upon to furnish the congregation with the motives which have influenced them to take their stand for the 'new faith.' At the conclusion of the service, the members gather round their newly received comrades and sing them home ; when they reach the threshold they commend the new converts to the guiding and keeping power of the 'Aqua Ete' (great Father). The favourite hymn for a baptism service is "O happy day, that fixed my choice."



Mrs. J. E. GILL.

School Children at Ediko.

This hymn is sung on almost every occasion and might be styled the Oron National Anthem. It has been heartily rendered at a marriage service before to-day, and why not ?

Other meetings include early morning services held respectively by the men and the women, once a week, on separate days. The services begin as early as 5.30 a.m., so as not to interfere too much with the day's duties. Collections are made, and healthy rivalry exists as to which meeting can render the most help to some particular object in connection with the church. An attempt was made to introduce the tea meeting in Oron, in connection with the opening of the fine, new church at Jamestown, built by Mr. Glover. From every point of view it was a pronounced success. The mission boys and young men under the leadership of Rev. J. Enang Gill, had subscribed for the provisions, and baked the bread and cakes needed. The tickets were printed by hand with the price in bold lettering. The deputation from England graced, by their presence, the festive board. Some of the folks seemed a bit ' at sea ' with cup and saucer and spoon, but nothing more untoward occurred than trying to carve a plum cake with knife and fork !

One of the missionary's most painful duties is to hear the voluntary confession of wrong-doing made by an erring brother or sister. As a rule the culprit does not wait until found out, but comes to the mission house and makes a clean breast of it ; suspension follows ; the period varies according to the nature of the offence, and sound admonition is given as to how, and by what means, a repetition of the deed can be avoided.

Every possible care is taken to build the living church upon right foundations. Quality is never for a moment sacrificed to quantity. Indeed were the same tests always imposed in the home churches a shrinkage in numerical strength would speedily follow. In such strongholds of vice as West Africa laxity is full of peril and would lead to swift disaster.

CHAPTER VIII.

DRAWBACKS AND TRIUMPHS.

A JOURNEY by canoe up some creek that twists and twines like a huge boa-constrictor amid the jungle of the dense bush, is occasionally interrupted by the fall of a forest giant. Lying across the stream, the tree proves an effectual obstacle to further progress, until the state of the tide allows the frail craft to pass over it, or under it, as the case might be. In the same way certain native institutions and practices interrupt and hold back the full success of missionary toil.

Egbo, juju and polygamy—already described in previous chapters—are hindrances lying athwart the path of advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Light can have no fellowship with darkness and those who love the darkness fear the light. Besides, evil habits have so rooted themselves into native life that they are strongly supported by the influences of prestige and fashion. A petty chief became a regular attendant at our services and the enquirers' class; everything pointed to a public confession of allegiance to Jesus Christ. One day he explained to me his great difficulty: "My heart fit to love God good fashion, s'pose you 'gree to let me keep all my wife (he had four) I fit to become Christian one time." He recoiled from

the idea of having one wife only, because it would lower his social status, and make him to appear in the eyes of his neighbours as 'a small boy too much.'

There are other practices which heavily handicap missionary progress. One of these is slavery. Twelve or fourteen years ago the cost price of man, woman or child could be easily ascertained, and away from Government centres it was quite a common experience to discover fresh inhabitants, who could neither speak nor understand the Efik tongue. They were slaves newly-acquired, and brought from afar. Even in those days there were not wanting Europeans, who alleged that such slavery was only a 'domestic' or mild form of the more cruel and atrocious system, which formerly obtained in the States and West Indies. To some extent their contention was true ; but my experience has taught me that domestic slavery is not the comparatively harmless thing some have imagined. Here are two or three instances culled from my diary. A lad about eight years of age was sent by his master upon an errand ; he was too long away ; the master flew into a rage, took up the first thing he could lay his hands on and felled them to the ground with one blow. At first it was feared the boy was dead. When some neighbours sought to interfere they were told to mind their own business the tyrant adding, " 'Spose I kill him, the loss is mine, not yours."

One day on the beach at Jamestown I saw a canoe approach in which there were three men, two paddling, and the third—a slave bound and sitting on the floor of the shallow craft. Upon

landing the owners stated they hailed from the Qua district and had come to obtain justice at the hands of Jamestown's native king. It appeared they had bought their prisoner for 12,000 wires (£7 10s.) from individuals living in our district; he turned out to be a poor bargain, for they said he would neither work, nor settle good fashion; hence their present errand to obtain redress. They were amazed when I insisted that the slave should be partially released from his fetters, and allowed to step forth out of the fierce heat of the tropical sun, and find shelter under the shadow of a big cotton tree. Poor fellow! I shall not easily forget the look of gratitude he cast at one who remembered he was made of flesh and blood, and demanded human treatment for him. Time was, when slaves accused of crime could not plead in a native court, consequently when charged with theft or something akin, they were often bound and flogged without conclusive evidence of guilt or the trouble of a trial. Upon women, domestic slavery has pressed even more hardly; suspicion provoked by caprice or passion has been sufficient to subject them to horrible indignities not fit to be named, without any power to obtain redress.

Conditions have been much improved during the last few years. The Aro campaign of nine years ago, broke the back of the slave traffic and has enabled the British Government to move slowly but surely in the direction of improving the slave's lot. Buying and selling slaves is almost a thing of the past. Participation in such a trade is held to be a serious criminal offence. If done at all now it is carried through with the utmost secrecy. When

a master dies the slave is at liberty to choose which of the deceased's brothers he will serve. The old name of domestic slavery has disappeared in favour of the milder description—'household rule.' All these are signs of the beginning of the end. A system closely akin to slavery obtains pretty widely in Oron. Children are pawned in order to obtain ready cash just as people pawn goods in England. It is seldom that parents—after parting with their offspring—desire, or are able, to redeem them.

Manifold are the ways in which slavery retards the kingdom of God. Simon—a Cameroon man, and slave of a small chief—became a Christian. His master did not relish the change and when Simon wanted to travel as a local preacher on Sundays, he was sharply forbidden under grave penalties. A man and his wife, both members of our church, were the property of Arsibong Town Chief. He insisted that the woman should become one of his wives too, and though both objected very strongly there was no escape. The master's wish was supreme. On another occasion they longed to attend the annual missionary meeting, which fell due in the farming season; they begged to leave off work a little earlier in the afternoon in order to journey back to town, offering to return before daybreak next morning to make the lost hours good, but their simple, earnest request was curtly refused. Nevertheless they determined to obey God—so they put it—rather than man. The day after the missionary meeting, the master laid a charge against them at the native court of Bassey Willey's Town, and imprisonment followed.

In England most ladies are free to accept or refuse

the attentions of suitors for their hand. In Oron it is far otherwise, especially with slave girls who are beset behind and before with the supremacy of of their master's will. Jane was a very promising member of my enquirers' class. She made capital progress at the day school also. Everything pointed to a bright and useful future but suddenly all was changed. She was the slave of the King's head wife. The King demanded that Jane should join his harem. She objected with pleadings and tears ; then a few women interested in her ventured to interview the King. They urged she should be allowed to marry the youth she loved. The old man's heart was hard as adamant ; the story of sleepless nights and a broken heart only fed his vanity. Into the wives' compound she had to go. She was only a slave and neither the law nor public opinion could avail her anything.

Samson was brought to the mission when quite a boy. His master wanted him to learn the 'white man's fashion.' As servant to the missionary's wife he earned a respectable sum per year, but five-eighths of this went to his owner. Samson not only learned white man's fashions, he learned also of the Gospel the missionary had come to preach. He began to pray and to live a good, consistent life. His master grew jealous of his progress and by a cunning plan he drew the lad away to their native town. There, every means was used to make the youth promise he would never return to the mission, but in vain. Finally his money and good clothes were taken from him and he was severely flogged. When twenty lashes had been administered he was warned of further

dreadful punishment to follow if he attempted to run away. Several days afterwards, whilst writing a note of explanation to send to the missionary he was caught in the act and again flogged. In spite of the strict watch kept upon his movements he eventually managed to escape under the cover of night and by means of a canoe reached a mission station once again. Several years after this episode, he was sentenced to imprisonment because he refused to leave off working for the mission and engage in trading for his master. At last in despair, he sought and found relief by running away to Fernando Po.

Another obstacle lying across the missionary's path is one for which the white man is wholly responsible. I refer to the importation of gin and rum. The natives prior to the introduction of the deadly fire water relied upon palm wine. When kept a few days, the latter was intoxicating enough but the after-effects were not nearly so physically disastrous as those which follow in the wake of the European intoxicants. Besides the supply was limited according to the number of trees. The natives had also to wait upon Nature's slow process of manufacture, but now, cases of fiery liquor are poured into the protectorate by thousands every month. In some parts it has become a kind of currency, and everywhere it has supplanted palm wine as the favourite drink with sad results. It has entered into the warp and woof of their lives : if ground is marked off for building, a quarrel settled, a betrothal made, or a person buried, liquor is sent for and largely consumed ; and it is the accompaniment of all plays and feasts. Missionaries, when

prospecting for new centres, find the drink already there working terrible havoc. When the Rev. N. Boocock paid his first visit to Uda, he was struck with the large number of empty black bottles scattered along the path from the creek to the town. During the palaver with chiefs and people about the introduction of the mission, he asked, "Where are your old people?" They replied, "We have none older than ourselves;" whereupon Mr. Boocock showed them that it was largely on account of the gin and rum they consumed.

The first funeral of a native I conducted in West Africa was the outcome of the deadly fire-water. The man, one of the most intelligent of negroes, died raving mad as the result of drink. Where a town gives itself up to frequent drinking bouts, you find little disposition to trade, but a strong inclination to quarrel, and idleness and squalor abound. I am not surprised that some of the European traders are sick of their share in the traffic and wish that, instead of higher duties imposed by the government, total exclusion would become the order of the day. To say the least, the policy is short-sighted which prevents such a desirable end. Trade would benefit, and what the Government lost in duties, it would gain in the lessened cost of administration. The districts which oftenest give trouble are those blighted by this devastating curse. In the meantime, it ought immediately to be made a criminal offence for any white man to give glasses of liquor to the bush native in order to entice him to trade at his particular store. When I lived at Oron a German trader always kept a barrel of rum on tap expressly for this purpose. All licensed

premises in towns, should be abolished. They are sinks of iniquity. Once an Oron man comes under the spell of gin and rum, there is little chance of the Gospel reaching him. It means at least, that a stiff fight is made much more difficult. He all too soon regards himself as a hopeless victim, and thinks struggle and effort unavailing. When living at Jamestown I used to hold a weekly service in a compound at Ibaka. One evening, just as we entered the town we came upon a palaver shed half full of men in various stages of drunkenness. In one corner of the shed lay a heap of empty bottles. They bore silent witness to the extent of the drinking bout. Heart-sick, I turned to one of them who was not too intoxicated to talk, and said, "Why do you take this gin, he no fit to do you good fashion?" His leering reply was speedily forthcoming, "We no saby him until your white brother done bring him for this country. Which white brother we fit to follow?" I answered him straightway: "Not all white man get white heart. S'pose missionary stop for his country until all get white heart, I no fit to saby them time when his black brother hear plenty good thing about God." A goat ran past the shed at that moment and I addded, "What would happen if you give that goat some gin?" He motioned to signify that it would become drunk. "Exactly," was my respose, "and what would the goat do if you tried to make it drunk a second time?" "O etubom, he no fit to agree, but it be too late to talk this fashion now. Fire live for our body, and humbug us all the time until we drink them thing. Make you tell our boys and girls not to be

fool all same as their father and then you be our good friend.

The great work of saving the Oronese, rendered difficult by native fashions and European complications, is not however impossible of fulfilment. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has proved to be the power of God unto the salvation of many. There are some who deserve special mention. The Rev. JOHN ENANG GILL is a product of missionary work of whom any Missionary Society might be proud. He has been connected with the mission from the commencement. The missionaries who have worked on the field, without exception bear tribute to his reliability and devotion. On the way to England with the Rev. C. F. Gill, he was the recipient of a testimonial made jointly by passengers and crew. At Shrewsbury elementary school, similar tokens were presented to him at the end of twelve months — by teachers and scholars alike—when he left for his own country again. The chiefs of Jamestown refused to let the Rev. W. Glover station him elsewhere, even for a brief while, for they said, "He humbugs us too much when we do bad fashion." He was their conscience. By forsaking the service of the mission John could have doubled his salary as a Government servant years ago. Some advised him to do so. When he refused, declaring that the mission had done more for him than he could ever repay, they called him a fool for his pains. Rev. J. E. Gill is now a fourth year probationer in our ministry and is one of our most valuable assets.

Mr. EFIOM EKPE ESUK really died a martyr for "the faith once delivered to the saints." He

was the first Primitive Methodist Society steward in Southern Nigeria. Christianity changed his compound into a home, and led him to find his highest joy in seeking the advancement of the Kingdom of God. One particular step he took in this direction earned for him the displeasure of certain powerful Egbo leaders. To compass his downfall a false charge was made against him supported by the testimony of secretly suborned witnesses. He was adjudged guilty and sentenced to imprisonment. In prison, not a murmur fell from his lips, his countenance showed no trace of discontent, and his faith in God remained unshaken ; but the stigma of prison life broke his heart. Before his sentence was completed, he was sent home a dying man. On his way to Afaha Eduok, carried thither in his brother's canoe, the end came. He died triumphantly. His last words were : " It is light, I see Jesus," and immediately he was at home with God.

ANIE KOFON'S name must always be associated with the church at Arsibong Town. When the missionary resided there, he was a tireless worker and a trusted counsellor. After removing the headquarters to Oron, Anie became Arsibong Town's unpaid evangelist. His master's interests forbade his migration along with the contingent who settled at Afaha Eduok, but instead of repining he devoted time, prayer, and effort to meet the religious needs of those left behind. What a pleasure it was to visit this out-station and interview candidates for church fellowship who had been carefully selected and trained by this zealous servant of Jesus Christ. The wayward ones were likewise

presented for admonition and discipline ; in short, he honourably bore the burden and discharged the duties of pastor, in addition to the ordinary labour of daily life. Recently a teaching-evangelist has been in charge, and Anie is his loyal lieutenant. He never worked simply for the position it gave him, and none rejoices more than he that a fully qualified man has now the oversight of Arsibong Town along with Ikang.

Mr. EFA EKPE ESUK is our oldest teaching evangelist. He has a long and honourable record. As narrated elsewhere, he was originally employed to 'keep school' by the Arsibong people. The Rev. J. M. Brown engaged him straightway as a mission worker, and for over eighteen years he has manifested Christian earnestness and conviction, often under trying circumstances. It has mostly fallen to Mr. Efa to break up ground freshly occupied by the mission. Well versed in native fashions and prejudices, an expert Efik scholar and devout Christian, the missionaries have always had the completest confidence that the witness of his life would harmonise with the principles of the Gospel he preached. He is far outstripped by the younger members of the staff in English and educational methods, but Primitive Methodism will always remain debtor to one who was zealous and effective in the day of small things.

The ranks of womanhood have furnished notable recruits for Christ and His Church. IKANI UKPABIO, widow of Mr. Efiom Ekpe Esuk, is our first female evangelist. She is located at Idua Esit Edik. When invited to join the mission staff, she was considering a very eligible offer of marriage,

but decided to refuse matrimony in order to help to evangelise the people of her country.

DEBORAH IME is one of our best local preachers. Regularly for several years she visited Ndunuko Sunday by Sunday and preached the Word of grace unto the townsfolk. It meant a journey of four miles each way, and in the rainy season she was as faithful as in the dry. Her power in prayer is very remarkable, and she is so jealous for uprightness and consistency, that I have known her to refuse to stay to the Lord's Supper because she felt hard and forgiving towards her son-in-law.

One of the older Christian women nearly lost her sight. She had to be led about by her grandson. After making this a matter of prayer for some time, it was partially restored to her and her thankfulness knew no bounds. One day she brought Thomas, her grandson, to the Institute, and said "I want to give Thomas to God and the mission so that he become all same as Massa Efa and John Enang." But I said: "Does he not work for you and help you to obtain food and clothes? If he comes to the Institute who will get you these things then?" Her reply came swift and unhesitating: "God done plenty thing for me. I must give Thomas for His work. I fit to trust God for chop and all." Verily, of such are the kingdom of heaven!

There are times when the missionary's eyes are holden; when his faith burns low. Cases of backsliding, lack of response, bitter opposition to the work, or cruel persecution of those who are faithful, induce these doleful hours. I confess I have found

nothing fuller of rebuke and refreshment than a comparison of what was, with—what is. Compare the unpretentious beginning at Arsibong Town under Mr. Brown with our present standing, and one can only say in humility and gladness "What hath God wrought!" At the close of eighteen years' toil we report three circuits: Oron, Jamestown, and Adadia. These comprise 40 preaching places. Ikot Ekpene is only in the initial stages, but already boasts of four out-stations. In Bende the flag of the cross has been unfurled, and the whole land northwards to Northern Nigeria is before us. There are the two Training Institutes for youths and maidens, the first full, and the other gradually increasing its numbers. Both are destined to give a far more powerful impetus to the movement for advance than has yet been realised. Our staff comprises: 11 Europeans, two native ministers, and 20 teachers and evangelists; there are 278 on the roll of membership and £200 is raised annually towards the cost of the work in their midst. These are but the first fruits, indicating what the harvest will be when

"Christ shall draw all things unto an order fair,
All fierce extremes that beat along their shores
Shall like chidden waves, grow mild and creep
to kiss His feet;
For He alone it is that brings
The fading flower of their humanity to perfect
blossoming."