

MARY SLESSOR

OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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XXII. A GOVERNMENT AGENT

In these years far-reaching changes were taking place in regard to the political status and destiny of the country. Hitherto the British Government had exercised only a nominal influence over the coast districts. A consul was stationed at Duke Town, but he had no means of exercising authority, and the tribes higher up the Cross River would war upon one another, block the navigation, and murder at will. In 1889 the Imperial Government took steps to arrange for an efficient administration, and despite difficulties incidental to the absence of a central native authority succeeded in obtaining the sanction of the principal chiefs to the establishment of a protectorate—the Niger Coast Protectorate. In 1891 Sir Claude Macdonald, who had carried out the negotiations, was appointed Consul-General. No man was better fitted to lay the foundations of British authority in so backward a territory. The period of transition from native to civilised rule brought to the surface many delicate and perplexing problems requiring tact, skill, and unwearied patience, but the task was successfully accomplished, though not without an occasional display of force. It was a special cause of thankfulness to the missionaries that Sir Claude was in full sympathy with their work, and cooperated with them in every scheme for the benefit of the people. When he was promoted to Peking, the Foreign Mission Board in Scotland expressed their sense of the value of his efforts in promoting the welfare of the native population.

Sir Claude appointed vice-consuls for the various districts, and was proposing to send some one to Okoyong. Miss Slessor knew that her people were not ready for the sudden introduction of new laws, and that there would be trouble if an outside official came in to impose them. Sir Claude took her point of view, and recognising her unique position and influence, empowered her to do all that was necessary, and to organise and supervise a native court. He then left her very much to herself, with the result that the inevitable changes were felt least of all in Okoyong, where they were made through a woman whom the chiefs and people implicitly trusted. Her position was akin to that of a consular agent, and she conducted all the public affairs of the tribe. She presided at the native court. Cases would be referred to her from Duke Town, and she would travel over Okoyong to try these, taking with her the consular messenger, who carried back her decision to headquarters for official signature. Crowds of the natives also visited her to consult her regarding the readjustment and coordination of their customs with the new laws, and she was able to settle these matters so quietly that little was heard of her achievements. Although she rendered great service in this way, creating public opinion, establishing just laws, and protecting the

poor, it was a work she did not like, and she only accepted it because she thought it in line with her allegiance to Christ.

Her duties brought her in contact with the officials of the country. Government men came to see her, and were not only amazed at her political influence, but charmed with her original qualities. One of these, Mr. T. D. Maxwell, for whom she had a great regard—"a dear laddie" she called him—writes:

What sort of woman I expected to see I hardly know; certainly not what I did. A little frail old lady with a lace or lace-like shawl over her head and shoulders (that must, I think, have been a concession to a stranger, for I never saw the thing again), swaying herself in a rocking-chair and crooning to a black baby in her arms. I remember being struck —most unreasonably—by the very strong Scottish accent. Her welcome was everything kind and cordial. I had had a long march, it was an appallingly hot day, and she insisted on complete rest before we proceeded to the business of the Court. It was held just below her house. Her compound was full of litigants, witnesses, and onlookers, and it was impressive to see how deep was the respect with which she was treated by them all. She was again in her rocking-chair surrounded by several ladies, and babies-in-waiting, nursing another infant.

Suddenly she jumped up with an angry growl: her shawl fell off, the baby was hurriedly transferred to some one qualified to hold it, and with a few trenchant words she made for the door where a hulking, overdressed native stood. In a moment she seized him by the scruff of the neck, boxed his ears, and hustled him out into the yard, telling him quite explicitly what he might expect if he came back again without her consent. I watched him and his followers slink away very crestfallen. Then, as suddenly as it had arisen the tornado subsided, and (lace shawl, baby, and all) she was again gently swaying in her chair. The man was a local monarch of sorts, who had been impudent to her, and she had forbidden him to come near her house again until he had not only apologised but done some prescribed penance. Under the pretext of calling on me he had defied her orders—and that was the result.

I have had a good deal of experience of Nigerian Courts of various kinds, but have never met one which better deserves to be termed a Court of Justice than that over which she presided. The litigants emphatically got justice—sometimes, perhaps, like Shylock, "more than they desired"—and it was essential justice unhampered by legal technicalities. One decision I recall—I have often subsequently wished that I could follow it as a precedent. A sued B for a small debt. B admitted owing the money, and the Court (that is "Ma") ordered him to pay accordingly: but she added, "A is a rascal. He treats his mother shamefully, he neglects his children, only the other day he beat one of his wives with quite unnecessary vehemence, yes and she was

B's sister too, his farm is a disgrace, he seldom washes, and then there was the palaver about C's goat a month ago. Oh, of course A didn't steal it, he was found not guilty, wasn't he?—all the same the affair was never satisfactorily cleared up, and he did look unusually sleek just about then. On the other hand, B was thrifty and respectable, so before B paid the amount due he would give A a good sound caning in the presence of everybody.”

XXIII. “ECCENTRICITIES,” SPADE-WORK, AND DAY-DREAMS

Does it seem as if we were watching the career of a woman of hard, self-reliant, and masculine character, capable of living by herself and preferring it, and unconscious of the natural weakness of her sex? In reality Mary was a winsome soul, womanly in all her ways, tremulous with feeling and sympathy, loving love and companionship, and not unacquainted with nervousness and fear.

When people saw, or heard of her, toiling with her hands they were apt to imagine that she possessed a constitution of iron, never realising that her life was one long martyrdom. She was seldom free from illness and pain. Whether her methods of life were partly responsible for this cannot be stated. In any case, she seemed able to do things that would have proved fatal to other people. She never used mosquito-netting, which is considered to be indispensable for the security of health in the tropics. She never wore a hat, which seems a miracle to those who know the strength of the sun in these regions. Her hair she kept cut close, partly because it was a cleaner fashion, and partly because it was less trouble to look after. Shoes and stockings, also, she never wore, although jiggers and snakes and poisonous plants were common in the bush pathways. Mr. James Lindsay, who was the engineer of the Mission at this time, says, “I walked many miles with her through the bush, and only once did I know her to be troubled with her feet. She had been to Duke Town, attending Presbytery, and made some small concession to the conventions by wearing a pair of knitted woollen slippers. On returning to Okoyong through the bush, small twigs and sticks penetrated the wool and pricked her feet. With an expression of disgust she took the slippers off and threw them into the bush. That was the only time I saw her other than barefoot.” She never boiled or filtered the water she drank, two precautions which Europeans do not omit without suffering. She ate native food, and was not particular when meals were served. Breakfast might be at seven one morning and at ten the next; dinner might be an hour or two late; but this was, of course, mainly due to the constant calls upon her time, for she was often afoot most of the night, and her days were frequently taken up with long palavers.

These habits, so seemingly eccentric to people lapped in the civilised order of things, had grown naturally out of the circumstances into which she had been forced in pursuit of the task she had set herself. She had deliberately given up everything for her Master, and she accepted all the consequences that the renunciation involved. What she did was for Him, and as she was not her own and had taken Him at His word and believed that He would care for her if she kept in line with His will, she went forward without fear, knowing that she might, through inadvertence, incur suffering, but willing to bear it for His sake and His cause. Her faith and devotion led her into strange situations, and these shaped the character of her outward life and habits. She shed many conventions, simply because it was necessary in order to carry out the will of Christ. She knew there were some people like the official who saw her pushing a canoe down to the river and preferred not to know her; but she was always sustained by the knowledge that she was acting in her Master's spirit. She found in her New Testament that He ignored the opinion of the world, and she was never afraid to follow where He led. "What," says Mr. Lindsay, "she lost in outward respectability she more than gained in mobility and usefulness. She kept herself untrammelled in the matter of dress that she might be ready for any emergency. In case of; sudden call in the night to some distant village where twin children had been thrown out or a bloody quarrel was imminent, she was literally ready to leave at a moment's notice." The one thing essential to her was her work, and anything that hampered her freedom of action was dropped.

Not that she was thoughtlessly reckless of her health. She frequently wrote about the need of conserving her strength, and stated that she was taking all due care. She apologised for reading her Bible in bed on Sunday mornings; it gave her a rest, she said, before she began her day's work. As her Sunday began at 5.30 A.M. and ended at 7 P.M., and during the greater part of that time she was walking, preaching, and teaching, she might well allow herself the indulgence. It may be noted that she sometimes misplaced Sunday. "I lost it a fortnight ago," she wrote, "and kept it on a Saturday. Never mind. God would hear all the prayers and answer them all the same." On another occasion she was discovered on a Sunday on the roof of the house executing repairs, thinking it was Monday.

Mr. Ovens relates that once when he went up on a Monday to do some work he found her holding a service. She was glad to see him; "but what," said she, "is Duke Town coming to when its carpenter travels on the Sabbath Day?"

"Sabbath Day!" he echoed. "It's Monday."

"Monday! why, I thought it was Sabbath. Well, we'll have to keep it as Sabbath now."

“Na, na,” he replied, “it’s no Sabbath wi’ me. I canna afford two Sabbaths in a week.”

“Ah, we must though,” she said; adding in a whisper, “I was whitewashing the rooms yesterday.”

Realising that he must “save her face,” he took part in the service and started his work next morning.

In one of Mr. Goldie’s letters to a friend at this time there is a delightful touch. “I am at Okoyong,” he wrote, “and am not sure of the date.”

Her womanly sympathy and tenderness were never better exhibited than in her relations with her dark sisters about her. She entered into their lives as few have been able to do. She treated them as human beings, saw the romance and tragedy in their patient lives, wept over their trials, and rejoiced in their joys. There was one little idyll of harem life which she liked to tell.

Some slave-dealers arrived at Ekenge, and among their “bargains” was a young and handsome girl, whom Edem bought for one of his chief men. Ma Eme, who heard of the transaction but paid no attention to it, had a respectable slave-woman at one of her farms whom she ordered to come and live in her own yard. The woman obeyed somewhat unwillingly, and in the village began to grumble to others about her enforced removal. The new slave-girl was cooking her master’s food when she heard the voice. As she listened memories were stirred within her and she ran out and gazed at the woman, then went nearer and stared closely into her face. The woman demanded what she was looking at. The girl screamed and caught her round the neck and uttered a word in a strange language. It was the name of the woman, who, in turn, stared at the girl. When the latter called out her own name the two embraced and held each other in a grip of iron. The daughter had found a mother who had been stolen many years before. Both went into the yard and sat on the ground discussing their experiences and receiving the warm congratulations of the other women in the village.

There was trouble at the time in the district, and Mary had occasion to see Ma Eme after midnight. She found the two sitting beside some burning logs, with Ma Eme on the other side, all three talking over the mystery of life and its pain and parting and sorrow. She squatted down beside them, and gradually the girl told her story. How she had prayed to the great God for some one to capture her so that she might have a chance of finding her mother when the traders went to Calabar. She believed that among the crowds at Duke Town she would see her face, and when they left there she almost lost hope.

But “Ma” craved the companionship of her kind, and she enjoyed going down to Duke Town to the various meetings, and seeing the ladies of the Mission. She would not leave the children behind, and as the whole family

would descend unexpectedly on a member of the Mission staff, some embarrassing situations occurred. One missionary, a bachelor, was preparing to turn in about 10 P.M. when he heard people crowding up the stairs of the verandah, and a babel of voices. It was "Ma" and all her boys and girls and babies come to lodge with him for a week. Fortunately he knew his guests, and, as he surmised, they were content with the floor. When the household grew, and she could not leave the children so often, she would sometimes walk with them to Adiabo on the Calabar River, taking provisions with her, and there, half-way, would meet and picnic with the Calabar lady agents.

It was about this time that the sense of her loneliness grew upon her to such an extent that she could not sleep at night. "I feel dreadfully lonely," she wrote, "and want a helper, and I have made up my mind to ask the Committee at next meeting for a companion." But when she went to Duke Town and realised the depleted state of the Mission caused by illness and death, and the manner in which the staff was overworked, she could not find the heart to prefer her request, and instead she thanked God for being able to hold on. She added her appeal to the other requests for workers that were so constantly sent home then, and her idea of the kind of woman most suited for the Calabar field is of interest:

. . . Consecrated, affectionate women who are not afraid of work or of filth of any kind, moral or material. Women who can nurse a baby or teach a child to wash and comb as well as to read and write, women who can tactfully smooth over a roughness and for Christ's sake bear a snub, and take any place which may open. Women who can take everything to Jesus and there get strength to smile and persevere and pull on under any circumstances. If they can play Beethoven and paint and draw and speak French and German so much the better, but we can want all these latter accomplishments if they have only a loving heart, willing hands, and common sense. Surely such women are not out of our reach. There are thousands of them in our churches, and our home churches have no monopoly of privilege in choosing to keep them. Spare us a few. Induce them to come forward. If there be the call from the Holy Spirit do not let mere accomplishments be a sine qua non. Help them to come forward. Take them to your own homes and let them have the benefit of all the conversation and refinement and beauty which fill these, and so gently lead them out of their timidity and accustom them to society that they may meet out in the world, and hand them on to us. Up in a station like mine they want to teach the first principles of everything, and they need to help in times of trouble in the home or in the town palaver. They will not need fine English, for there is none to admire it. No one knows other than native languages, and I would gladly hail any warm-hearted woman from any sphere if she would come to me. I cannot

pretend to work this station: the school work is simply a scramble at the thing, mostly by the girls of the house. I can't overtake it. It is because I am not doing it efficiently that I am grieved.

On her visits to Calabar she was an object of much interest. One who knew her then says: "She had the power of attracting young men, and she had great influence with them. Whether they were in Mission work, or traders, or government men, they were sure to be attracted by her vigorous character and by the large-hearted, understanding way she would talk to them or listen to their talk of their work or other interests. She loved to stir them to do great things."

It was sometimes remarked by visitors that her surroundings had not the spick-and-span appearance which usually characterises a Scottish Mission station. She had, nevertheless, a real appreciation of order and beauty, and liked to have everything clean and tidy about her. How to accomplish this was her daily problem, and perhaps only those who have lived in tropical lands can understand the position. The difficulty there is not how to make things grow, but how to prevent them growing. She waged as fierce and incessant a war with vegetation as she did with man, but it proved too much for her strength. "I think," she wrote, "if I left alone some of the outdoor work, even if the place did go to bush and dirt, I would not be so tired, and I could do more otherwise. But I can't help it. I must put my hands in wherever there is work to be done." The task had not become easier for her, for the new trade with Calabar had brought about a demand for Okoyong yams, and the people were so busy planting at their farms that she was unable to hire labour. The bush would creep up swiftly and stealthily to the edge of the dwellings and become a covering for beasts of prey, and then she and her girls would sally out and cut it down and burn it and dig out the roots. And in its place would be planted corn and cocos and yams and other products, the children each having a plot to tend. A private pathway to the spring which she had constructed in order that the girls might not mix with the village women and hear their talk had also to be kept clear. It was hard work in the hot sunshine, and she and her bairns literally watered the soil with their perspiration. But no tears were shed at the work save those caused by merry jokes and laughter. She often surveyed the scene with pride, revelling in the wild beauty of form and colour, the brilliancy of the flowering trees, the tender green of the yams on their supports, the starry jasmine with its keen perfume. She loved flowers, and taught her scholars to bring them to school. They had never been conscious of these before, and the fact that they began to appreciate them was, she considered, a step forward in their educational development.

Often she longed for the power to bring out thousands of the slum people from the cities at home to enjoy the open life, and to work the rich lands. Not that she used the word “slum”; it seemed to reflect on the poor, many of whom she regarded as the heroes and heroines of God; in her humility she believed that many of them would have been far ahead of her if they had had the same advantages. One of her day-dreams was to inherit a fortune and to spend it all on the poor. “If only”—but she would check herself and say, “Mary Slessor! as if God does not know what to give and how to give it, and as if He did not love and think for all these poor creatures who are so mercilessly pushed aside in the race of life.”

XXIV. MAIDEN-MOTHER AND ANGEL-CHILD

Of all the tasks to which she put her hands the sweetest as well as the saddest was the care of the babes of the bush. Her house was the refuge of little children: sickly ones that were left with her to nurse and return; discarded ones that were taken to her; outcast ones that she rescued from injury and death. So many came, received names, were described in her letters, and then passed out of sight, that her friends in Scotland were unable to keep abreast of her efforts in this direction.

They arrived in all stages of sickness, but usually the last. With many a broken body she had never a chance, but with marvellous patience and tenderness she washed them and nursed them and loved them and fought the dark shadow that was ever ready to hover over the tiny forms. Night after night she would sit up watching a face that was wasted and twisted with pain, or walk to and fro crooning snatches of song to soothe a restless mite in her arms. Sometimes a hammock was slung up beside her into which they were placed, so that if they awoke during the night she could touch it with her foot and swing them to sleep again. More than once, when the supply of condensed milk ran out, she strapped her latest baby to her body and tramped the long miles to Creek Town through the bush, and returned next day with the child and the tins.

The children that were brought back to health and strength and restored to their parents it was always a pang to part with. She wished she could have kept them and trained them up away from the degraded influences of their homes. Those who died she dressed and placed among flowers in a box, held a service over them, and buried them in a little cemetery, which by and by became full of tiny graves. She mourned over them as if they had been blood of her blood. Mr. Ovens used to say to her, “Never mind, lassie, you’ll get plenty mair”—and indeed there were always plenty.

Of all the African children that passed through her hands none endeared itself so much to her as Susie, her first Okoyong twin. The mother, Iye, was a slave from Bende, light in colour and handsome, and was the property of one of the big women, who treated her with kindness and consideration. When the twins arrived all was changed. Miss Kingsley, who arrived at Ekenge the same day on a visit to Mary, thus describes the scene:

She was subjected to torrents of virulent abuse, her things were torn from her, her English china basins, possessions she valued most highly, were smashed, her clothes were torn, and she was driven out as an unclean thing. Had it not been for the fear of incurring Miss Slessor's anger, she would, at this point have been killed with her children, and the bodies thrown into the bush. As it was, she was hounded out of the village. The rest of her possessions were jammed into an empty gin-case and cast to her. No one would touch her, as they might not touch to kill. Miss Slessor had heard of the twins' arrival and had started off, barefooted and bareheaded, at that pace she can go down a bush path. By the time she had gone four miles she met the procession, the woman coming to her, and all the rest of the village yelling and howling behind her. On the top of her head was the gin-case, into which the children had been stuffed, on the top of them the woman's big brass skillet, and on the top of that her two market calabashes. Needless to say, on arriving Miss Slessor took charge of affairs, relieving the unfortunate, weak, staggering woman from her load and carrying it herself, for no one else would touch it, or anything belonging to those awful twin things, and they started back together to Miss Slessor's house in the forest-clearing, saved by that tact which, coupled with her courage, has given Miss Slessor an influence and a power among the negroes unmatched in its way by that of any other white.

She did not take the twins and their mother down the village path to her own house, for though, had she done so, the people of Okoyong would not have prevented her, yet so polluted would the path have been and so dangerous to pass down, that they would have been compelled to cut another, no light task in that bit of forest, I assure you. So Miss Slessor stood waiting in the broiling sun, in the hot season's height, while a path was being cut to enable her just to get through to her own grounds. The natives worked away hard, knowing that it saved the polluting of a long stretch of market road, and when it was finished Miss Slessor went to her own house by it, and attended with all kindness, promptness, and skill to the woman and children. I arrived in the middle of this affair for my first meeting with Miss Slessor, and things at Okoyong were rather crowded, one way and another, that afternoon. All the attention one of the children wanted—the boy, for there were a boy and a girl—was burying, for the people who had crammed them

into the box had utterly smashed the child's head. The other child was alive, and is still a member of that household of rescued children, all of whom owe their lives to Miss Slessor.

The natives would not touch it, and only approached it after some days, and then only when it was held by Miss Slessor or me. If either of us wanted to do or get something, and we handed over the bundle to one of the house children to hold, there was a stampede of men and women off the verandah, out of the yard, and over the fence, if need be, that was exceedingly comic, but most convincing as to the reality of the terror and horror in which they held the thing. Even its own mother could not be trusted with the child; she would have killed it. She never betrayed the slightest desire to have it with her, and after a few days' nursing and feeding up she was anxious to go back to her mistress, who, being an enlightened woman, was willing to have her if she came without the child.

The woman's own lamentations were pathetic. She would sit for hours singing or rather mourning out a kind of dirge over herself: "Yesterday I was a woman, now I am a horror, a thing all people run from. Yesterday they would eat with me, now they spit on me. Yesterday they would talk to me with sweet mouth, and now they greet me only with curses and execrations. They have smashed my basin, they have torn my clothes," and so on, and so on. There was no complaint against the people for doing these things, only a bitter sense of injury against some superhuman power that had sent this withering curse of twins down on her.

The surviving infant, Susie, was not commonplace in feature like the other black children; she was not in reality a negress, but fair, shapely, and clean-skinned, with a nose like a white child's and a sweet mouth—a mouth which Miss Kingsley called the "button-hole." Every one loved her, and she was queen of the household.

When she was fourteen months old Miss Slessor one day went to the dispensary and left her in charge of Mana, who put down a jug of boiling water on the floor beside her. Susie thought it a plaything, and, seizing it, pulled it over upon herself. Instead of calling for "Ma" Mana ran with the child to the bathroom and poured cold water over the wounds. For thirteen days and nights she was never out of Mary's hands. Fortunately Miss Murray, a lady agent who, at her own request, had been stationed at Okoyong for a time, and whose companionship she valued, helped her greatly. "She was like a sister to me," she wrote. Thinking more might be done by a medical man she started off with the child in her arms, arrived at Creek Town at midnight, and woke up the doctor, who, however, said he could not do more than she had done. She returned at once to Ekenge, and again watched the suffering babe by day and night. In the darkness and silence, when all were

asleep, she would hear the faint words, "Mem, Mem, Mem!"—the child's name for her—and the wee hand would be held up for her to kiss. Early one Sunday morning she passed away in her arms. Robed in a pinafore, with her beads and a sash, and a flower in her hand, she looked "like an angel child."

The event caused a strange stir in Okoyong. None of the villagers went to their farms or market while the child was hovering on the brink of death, and when she passed away they came and mourned with "Ma."

She was buried in the cemetery where so many other hapless waifs were already at rest. In her anguish Mary could not conduct the service, but sat at the window and looked out while Miss Murray bravely took her place. The people, respectful and sad, gathered round the grave—the grave of a twin!—and one of the women, a leader in heathenism, praised the white Mother's God for the child, and prayed that they might all have her hope in the Beyond. "Surely," was Mary's comment, "they all felt the vast difference between their burials with all their drink and madness, and ours so full of quiet hope and expectant faith."

The slave-mother had often come to visit her, and had actually got to love the child, and when it died she was heartbroken. "Ma," she said, "don't cry. I have done this. God hates me. I shall go away and not bring any more evil on you." With that she went back to her but in the bush.

"If I were a wealthy woman," said "Ma," "I would buy her; but I cannot afford it, so we must do our best to cheer her up."

Although she objected to buying slave-women, even to restore them to freedom, on account of the wrong impression it left on the native mind, she made an exception in the case of Iye, and not long afterwards she was able to purchase her liberty for £10, and she became an inmate of the Mission House, Miss Slessor's intention being to train her so that she might be useful to any lady who lived at the station during her absences in Scotland. To the natives Iye was an outcast, and had "no character." "Etubom," Mary said to Mr. Ovens, "if a slave-dealer came round I would not get £6 for her." "Why?" said he. "She has no character." "But he would buy her and take her up country." "What for?" "To feed her for chop!" . . .

For some time she suffered physically from the shock she had received. No mother could have grieved more bitterly over the loss of a beloved child. "My heart aches for my darling," she wrote. "Oh the empty place, and the silence and the vain longing for the sweet voice and the soft caress and the funny ways. Oh, Susie, Susie!"

XXV. MARY KINGSLEY'S VISIT

Miss Kingsley paid her visit to the West Coast in 1893. Like all who travelled in West Africa, she heard of the woman missionary who lived alone among the wild Okoyong, and made a point of going up to see her. Miss Slessor welcomed so capable and earnest a worker. "She gave me," says Miss Kingsley, "some of the pleasantest days of my life." In some respects these two brilliant women were much akin, though they were poles asunder in regard to their outlook on spiritual verities. They had long discussions on religious subjects, and would sit up late beating over such questions as the immortality of the soul. Miss Kingsley was profoundly impressed. "I would give anything to possess your beliefs," she said wistfully, "but I can't, I can't; when God made me He must have left out the part that one believes with."

Nevertheless Miss Slessor said that for all her beliefs and unbeliefs she was one of the most truly Christian women she had ever met. On her return to England Miss Kingsley spoke often of her in terms of affection and admiration, and acknowledged to friends that she had done her much spiritual good. Mary, on her part, poured into her possession all her treasures of knowledge concerning the fetish ideas and practices of the natives, and probably none knew more about these matters than she. Most missionaries confess that they never get to the back of the negro mind, and one who worked in a neighbouring field once said that after nineteen years' careful study he had yet to master the intricacies of native superstition. The information that Mary supplied was therefore of great value, and much of it was utilised in Miss Kingsley's books. In *Travels in West Africa* she gives the following considered view of the missionary:

This very wonderful lady has been eighteen years in Calabar; for the last six or seven living entirely alone, as far as white folks go, in a clearing in the forest near to one of the principal villages of the Okoyong district, and ruling as a veritable white chief over the entire district. Her great abilities, both physical and intellectual, have given her among the savage tribe a unique position, and won her, from white and black who know her, a profound esteem. Her knowledge of the native, his language, his ways of thought, his diseases, his difficulties, and all that is his, is extraordinary, and the amount of good she has done, no man can fully estimate. Okoyong, when she went there alone—living in the native houses while she built, with the assistance of the natives, her present house—was a district regarded with fear by the Duke and Creek Town natives, and practically unknown to Europeans. It was given, as most of the surrounding districts still are, to killing at funerals, ordeal by poison, and perpetual internecine wars. Many of these evil customs she has stamped out, and Okoyong rarely gives trouble to its nominal rulers, the Consuls, in Old Calabar, and trade passes freely through

it down to the seaports. This instance of what one white can do would give many important lessons in West Coast administration and development. Only the sort of man Miss Slessor represents is rare. There are but few who have the same power of resisting the malarial climate, and of acquiring the language and an insight into the negro mind, so perhaps after all it is no great wonder that Miss Slessor stands alone, as she certainly does.

With all her robust ability Miss Kingsley's mental range was curiously narrow. She wrote strongly against Protestant missionary aims and methods in West Africa, her views being entirely opposed to those of the White Woman of Okoyong, who had a much greater right to speak on the subject. But the latter, nevertheless, loved her, and when the news of her death came, some years later, she was plunged into grief. "The world held not many so brave and so noble," she wrote. "Life feels very cold and seems grey and sunless." Hearing of a proposed memorial to the intrepid traveller she sent a guinea as her mite towards it.

XXVI. AN ALL-NIGHT JOURNEY

An outburst of fighting had taken place amongst the factions around Ekenge. Women were the cause of it, and a number had been herded into a stockade near the Mission House, where a band of men were proceeding to murder them. Mary came on the scene and held them at bay. All day she stood there and all night, her girls handing her from time to time a cup of tea through the poles of the enclosure. Next night matters had become quieter, a tornado of rain and wind having eased the situation, but she was soaked, whilst the mats of the Mission House had blown up and the interior had been flooded, so that both the girls and herself needed dry garments. Then the condensed milk was nearly done, she was told, and the baby she was nursing would suffer without it. Both clothing and milk could only be procured from Calabar, and as she had no messenger to despatch there, she resolved to go herself.

After dark she stole out of the stockade, placed the child in a basket, secured a woman as guide, and with a lantern started out to walk through the bush to Creek Town. She reached Adiabo on the Calabar River about half-past ten, obtained a cup of tea from the native pastor, and pushed on. Her guide lost the way, a deluge of rain fell, and they wandered aimlessly for a time through the dripping forest, before again striking the track.

Creek Town was reached at four o'clock in the morning. She knocked up Miss Johnstone, who sent her to bed for an hour, and sought for some tins of milk. As soon as two had been procured Mary was eager to be off. Miss Johnstone gave her some changes of clothing, and King Eyo put his canoe

and a strong crew at her disposal, and she was soon speeding up-river. On her arrival she found to her satisfaction that her absence had not been discovered, and she was able eventually to restore peace without the shedding of blood.

Two days later a canoe which came down-river to Duke Town brought word that she was ill with dysentery. Dr. Laws of Livingstonia, who was then visiting the Mission as a deputy, happened to be at Creek Town and was asked to go and see her with Mr. Manson, one of the industrial staff, as guide. Their canoe was nearly swamped by rain, and they had to change their clothing when they arrived. She was soon up and through to the hall to provide hospitality for her guests, supporting herself by the table the while. A peremptory order came from Dr. Laws to return to bed at once. She gave him a long curious look, and then without a word went and lay down. He noticed that his companion appeared both astonished and amused, and it was not until he returned to Calabar, and heard Mr. Manson telling how "Ma" Slessor had been taken in charge for once, that he realised how bold he had been. Dr. Laws thought that few women, or even men, could have stood the isolation that she endured.

XXVII. AKOM: A FIRST-FRUIT

Although force of circumstances made her the instrument of law and order her chief aim was to win the people to Christ, and all her efforts were directed to that end. It was for souls she was always hungering, and the lack of conversions was her greatest sorrow. Nevertheless she was making progress. The people were becoming familiar with the name of God and Christ and the principles underlying the Gospel, and there were many who leant more to the new way than to the old, whilst some in their hearts believed. The boys that were being trained at school and service were perhaps the most cheering element in the situation, and upon them she set her hopes.

It was wonderful that she achieved what she did in view of the conditions that prevailed. How difficult it was for a native to break away from habits and customs ingrained in them through centuries of repetition may be gathered from, the story of Akom, a freewoman, one of the most self-righteous of the big ladies of the district. She had been betrothed, when a year old, to a young and powerful chief, and had been brought up in the harem and was a zealous upholder of all superstitious practices. On her lord's death she escaped the poison ordeal, and was active in placing wives and slaves into the grave. By and by Ekpenyong made her his wife and mistress of the harem, and for twenty years she held undisputed sway.

When Edem's son was killed by the falling of a log it will be remembered that Ekpenyong was blamed for the event and retired to the bush. Not long afterwards a young chief there fell sick, and the witch-doctor on consulting his oracle declared that he saw Akom and her son dancing the whole night long, and gaily piercing the sick man with knives and spears. Akom was charged with sorcery, and asked to take the poison ordeal. Her friends advised her to flee, and she and her son disappeared during the night and took refuge in Umon, where the people gave them the protection of their ibritam or juju.

"Ma" was in Scotland at the time. When she returned Ekpenyong begged her to interfere and have his wife brought back. This she managed to do after Akom had taken mbiam—the strongest and most dreaded of native oaths, which included the drinking of blood shed from the wrist. The woman came to see her, but stood outside. "What?" exclaimed "Ma," "you cannot come within my gate?" "No," was the reply; "you had a twin-mother once living in the yard, and I cannot come in lest I touch the place she touched." Those who took the mbiam oath believed that they would die if they came in contact in any way with a twin-mother. "Ma" pretended to be hurt, and said, "If my house is polluted you had better go home, as I do not receive visitors on the road." After a time Akom ventured in, and she was kind to her and gave her an order for mats, at the making of which she was an adept.

She then came regularly and listened intently to "Ma's" teaching, although she said nothing. By and by she began to remark on the purity of the Gospel religion and show increased reverence at the services. Twins came, and she mastered her fear and went into the house. But alas! a mysterious pain straightway developed in her foot, and this surely was mbiam punishing her; and when a skin disease followed, her faith nearly failed her, and she wailed and mourned in despair. "Ma" spoke strongly to her; and at last she rose and said, "I am a fool; my God, my Father, listen not to my foolishness. Kill me if Thou wilt, but do not leave me."

The disease was checked, and a native medicine effected a cure. But she stood out against any sacrifice, saying very sensibly, "My Father owns the bush and gives us the knowledge of the medicine, and as the Master knows what He has made He knows also how to bless it apart from any outsider."

Ekpenyong all this while had ignored his wife, expecting that the mbiam would do its work. He looked grimly on, and when she injured her foot against a root he believed the end had arrived. All the people watched the struggle between the white woman's prayers and the mbiam's power, and when the wound healed they were nonplussed, but quaintly explained the

miracle by saying that their Mother was different from other white people, and so had prevailed.

Akom grew in grace despite her surroundings, and found strength in her contact with Christ. An amazing thing to her was that the man who had accused her of witchcraft came and made friends with her.

“Ma,” she said, “see what God has wrought. The man who demanded my life comes to tell me his affairs! I sometimes wanted to take revenge, but I have got it from God, and His revenge is of a sweeter kind than that of the Consul.”

It was cases like this that coloured Miss Slessor’s life with joy. Sometimes, too, she was unexpectedly cheered by evidence of the fruit of her work in past days. In 1894 a lad, an old scholar of hers in Duke Town, turned up in the village. He had made good use of his education, and wherever he went, on farm and on beach, he held worship and got the people to listen. It was not surprising that she regarded the boys as her most hopeful agents, although she was always very careful in choosing them as teachers for bush schools; she thought it belittled the message to send those who were not thoroughly fit for the work.

XXVIII. THE BOX FROM HOME

The most joyous break in the domestic life at Ekenge, both for the house-mother and the children, was caused by the arrival of boxes of gifts from Scotland. So many congregations and Sunday Schools had become interested in her and her work that there was a continuous stream of packages to Okoyong. “I am ashamed at receiving so much,” she would say. Her own friends also remembered her; and on one occasion she wrote to a lady who had sent a personal contribution, “It seems like a box from a whole congregation, not from an individual.”

She was specially delighted with the articles that came from the children of the Church, and many a letter she wrote in return to the scholars in Sunday Schools. None knew better how to thank them. She would give them a picture of the landing of the boxes at Duke Town, and the journey up the Calabar River in the canoe or in the steamer David Williamson—which they had themselves subscribed for and supplied—to the beach, and of the excitement when the engineer came over, perhaps with visitors, to announce the arrival.

“White people come, Ma!” The cry by day or night always roused the household. One girl ran to make up the fire and put on the kettle, another placed the spare room in order, a third took the hand parcels and wraps, and “Ma” herself welcomed the guests with a Scottish word or two, and a warm

hand-clasp. They would give her home letters, but these she would lay aside until she was more at leisure. Then a whisper would go round that there were goods at the beach, and every man, woman, and child about the place would be eager to be off to bring them up. But the boxes would be too large and heavy to be borne on heads through the forest, and they would be opened and the contents made up into packages, with which the carriers marched off in single file. Depositing them at the house they would return for more until all were safely conveyed. Then the articles would be exposed amidst cries of wonder and delight, and the house become like a bazaar. Sometimes there would be a mix-up of articles, but the loving messages pinned on to each would clear up the confusion. Mary dearly loved to linger over each gift and spin a little history into it, and she would pray with a full heart, "Lord Jesus thou knowest the giver and the love and the prayers and the self-denial. Bless and accept and use all for Thy glory and for the good of these poor straying ignorant children, and repay all a thousand fold."

She was careful in her allocation of the gifts amongst the people in order that they might not be regarded as a bribe to ensure good behaviour or attendance at the services. She would not even give them as payment for work done, as this, she thought, put the service on a commercial basis and made them look again for an equivalent gain. Pictures and texts, like dolls, were somewhat of a problem, as there was a danger of the people worshipping them. But they liked to beautify their squalid huts with them, and she regarded them as an educative and civilising agency not to be despised. Also to a certain extent they gave an indication of those who had sympathy with the new ideas, and were sometimes a silent confession of a break with heathenism.

To one old woman, the first Christian, was given a copy of "The Light of the World." Holding it reverently she exclaimed, "Oh! I shall never be lonely any more. I can't read the Book, but I can sit or lie and look at my Lord, and we can speak together. Oh, my Saviour, keep me till I see you up yonder!" It was explained that the picture was an allegory, and the woman understood; but she simply saw Christ in all the fervour of her new-born love and faith, and Mary trusted to keep her right by daily teaching.

Some of the 'articles found odd uses. A dress would be given to a girl who was entering into seclusion for fattening; a dressing-gown would go to the chief who was a member of the native Court, and he would wear it when trying cases, to the admiration of the people; a white shirt would be presented to another chief, and he would don it like a State robe when paying "Ma" a formal visit. Blouses she retained, since no native women wore them. The pretty baby-clothes were a source of wonder to the people—they were speechless at the idea of infants wearing such priceless things. It must be

confessed that there was something for which “Ma” always searched when a box from her own friends arrived. Like the children she was fond of sweets, and there would be a shriek of delight from more than juvenile lips when the well-known tins and bottles were discovered in some corner where they had been designedly hidden.

XXIX. AN APPEAL TO THE CONSUL

“Religious missions have worked persistently and well, and pointed out to the people the evil of their cruelties and wrongdoing, but there comes a time when their efforts need backing up by the strong arm of the law of civilisation and right.”

Sir Claude Macdonald wrote this in the autumn of 1894. Perhaps he had in mind the case of Okoyong. For in that year Miss Slessor came to the conclusion that it was time to invoke the great power which lay behind her in order to put a stop to the practice of killing on charges of witchcraft.

She was busy with a twin-murder case when word suddenly arrived that a man was being blamed for causing his master’s death, and that a palaver was going on. She sent some of the children at once to say that when her household had retired she would walk over in the moonlight. But a tornado came on, and the rain poured all night. As soon as it cleared she despatched a message: “Don’t do anything till I come—I will come when the bush is drier.” On receiving this the accuser rose: “Am I not to give him any ordeal till ‘Ma’ comes? I will not be able to do it then! She won’t be willing. Unlock his chains and take him to Okat Ikan, where he will be beyond her reach.”

Seizing the man his henchmen hurried him off, and the chief followed with a grunt of satisfaction at having outwitted the White Mother.

When she heard of the manoeuvre she determined not to go wandering aimlessly in the bush in search of the party. She resolved to do what she had never done before, send down to the Consulate at Duke Town and seek the assistance of the Government not only to rescue this particular victim, but to end the evil throughout the length and breadth of Okoyong.

The house-girls became aware of her intention, and the news that “Ma’s” patience, so often and so sorely tried, was at last exhausted, and that she was going to adopt stronger measures, spread swiftly through the villages. In order not to involve any native in the transaction she was the bearer of her own communication to the beach, and she was not long gone on her walk through the forest when the people concerned arrived breathlessly at the Mission House to beg her to forgive them for going beyond her voice.

“Ma’ is away,” announced the children, “and you cannot reach her now.”

Sadder and wiser they returned to their village, for they feared the Consul, who was associated in their minds with big guns and burnt towns. She returned late at night, wearied with the journey, yet was up early in the morning again and walked six miles in intense heat to a palaver, carrying a couple of babies. When she arrived she was at the point of fainting.

The next night the slave who had been carried off succeeded in breaking the lock of his chains and escaped to the Mission House. In his baffled rage his master chained all who belonged to him, but fear of the impending visit of the Consul made him reflect, and he sent word later to “Ma” to ask her forgiveness, and to say that all the people had been freed. He asked her to go down to Duke Town and make the Consul come “in peace and not in war.” She did so, taking the refugee with her. The Consul adopted her view of the situation, and arranged to visit the district and hold a conference. To this she invited all the chiefs, telling them to free their minds of fear, and preparing them for the subjects that would be dealt with.

It was Mr. Moor, the Vice-Consul, who came, and he brought a small guard of honour which paraded in the village, and gave Okoyong a greater thrill than it had yet experienced. Mr. Moor found “Ma” on the roof of her house repairing the mats which had been leaking, but she was not in the least perturbed, and received him with perfect composure. He was very patient and kind with the chiefs, but sought to impress upon them the necessity for some improvement in their habits. Already Mary had been much impressed with the new stamp of Government official under Sir Claude Macdonald, and this representative of the class she thought one of the best.

As a result of the conference the chiefs promised to abstain from killing at funerals, and to allow “Ma” to have an opportunity of saving twins and caring for them in a special hut. She gave thanks to God; but she knew the African nature, and did not relax her vigilance. A month after the Consul’s visit a kinsman of the above chief, older and much more wealthy, died suddenly. “We trembled for their promise to the Consul,” she wrote, “but we left them to themselves, believing that it was better to trust them to a great extent, and instead of going and staying with them to watch, we sent our compliments and gifts, and told them we expected they would remember their treaty and the consequences of any breach of faith. After all was over not a slave or vassal was missing, and though there were not wanting idle tongues let loose by the unlimited supply of strong drink, and brawlings, and determinations to take the poison of their own accord in order to prove their innocence, not one person has died as the direct result of the dread event.”

Mrs. Weir once spent a week-end at Okoyong, and accompanied her to a village two or three miles away where she was in the habit of going to conduct a service. When they arrived they found that the head of a house had died, and was being buried, according to custom, inside the house. They were taken to the place and saw the dead man's possessions—his pipe, snuff-box, powder-flask, and other articles—placed in the grave in order that they might be useful to him in the other world. Mrs. Weir could not help wondering at their superstition after all the teaching that they had been given. She said nothing; but Mary, with her keen intuition, read her thoughts and said, "You will be thinking they are not very different yet, but when I came to Okoyong, do you think I would have seen men and women moving freely about like this? They would have all been refugees in the bush, and those who had been caught would have been in chains, waiting to be put to death, so that their spirits might accompany the chief."

Towards the end of the year she had what she called one of her descents into the valley of the shadow, and was removed to Duke Town. "Daddy" Anderson, who had retired, but had come out again to Calabar on a visit, walked over to see her; he said very little, but just sat and held her hand. He, himself, was passing into the shadow, but not to return. She was with him at the last, and did her best to comfort him. "Dear Daddy Anderson!" she wrote; "Calabar seems a strange land to me now. All the friends are strangers to the old order. The Calabar of my girlhood is among the things of the past."

Her scepticism regarding the promise of the people was justified, for the killing of twins went on as usual; and in the following year she brought up Sir Claude Macdonald himself to renew the covenant. Sir Claude was all kindness and courtesy, assuring the chiefs that he did not come to take their country, but to guide them into a proper way of governing it, that all, bond and free, might dwell in safety and peace. What he insisted on was their recognition of the claims of justice and humanity. The spokesman, an old grey-headed man, said they wished to retire, in order to consult together. On returning he naively excused their conduct by stating that when they only heard words once they thought the matter unworthy of their consideration, but when they were repeated, they thought there must be something in them, and so they would obey the requirements of the Government this time. As regards twins, they were doubtful. "We are not sure that no evil will happen to us if we obey you; we have our fear, but we will try." They would not, however, consent to keep them in their own homes, and again Mary said that if they would notify her of the births she would be responsible for their welfare.

She had been acting as interpreter, and as the palaver lasted from early morning until after dark she was much fatigued. Her last words were to encourage the chiefs to keep their pledge, and they would enjoy the benefits when she might be no more with them. The very suggestion of farewell alarmed them. "God cannot take you away from your children," they exclaimed, "until they are able to walk by themselves."

XXX. AFTER SEVEN YEARS

Africa is slow to change: the centuries roll over it, leaving scarcely a trace of their passing: the years come and go, and the people remain the same: all effort seems in vain. Could one weak woman affect the conditions even in a small district of the mighty continent?

It had been uphill work for her. At first there had been only a dogged response to the message she had brought. When some impression had been made she found that it soon disappeared. In ordinary life the people were volatile, quick as fire to resent, and as quick to forgive and forget, and they were the same in regard to higher things. They went into rapture over the Gospel, prayed aloud, clasped their hands, shed tears, and then went back to their drinking, sacrificing, and quarrelling. They kept to all the old ways, in case they might miss the right one. "Yes, 'Ma'," they would say, "that is right for you; but you and we are different."

But she never lost hope. "There is not much progress to report," she was accustomed to say, "and yet very much to thank God for, and to lead us to take courage." She was quite content to go on bringing rays of sunshine into the dark lives of the people, and securing for the children better conditions than their fathers had. "After all," she would say, "it comes back to this, Christ sent me to preach the Gospel, and He will look after results." She was always much comforted by the thought of something she had heard the Rev. Dr. Beatt, of her old church in Aberdeen, say in a sermon: she could recall nothing but the heads, and one of these was, "Between the sower and the reaper stands the Husbandman." But results there were of a most important kind, and it is time to take stock of them. Fortunately she was induced at this time to jot down some impressions of her work, and these, which were never published, give the best idea of the remarkable change which had been wrought in the life and habits of Okoyong. It will be noticed that she does not use the pronoun "I." Whenever she gave a statement of her work she always wrote "we," as if she were a co-worker with a Higher Power.

"In these days of high pressure," she says, "men demand large profits and quick returns in every department of our commercial and national life, and these must be served up with the definiteness and precision of statistics.

This abnormal and feverish haste has entered to some extent into our religious work, and is felt more or less in all the pulses of our Church. Whatever may be the reasons for such a course in regard to worldly callings, its methods and standards are utterly foreign to the laws of Christ's kingdom, and can only result in distortions and miscalculations when applied to His work. While thanking God for every evidence of life and growth, we shrink from reducing the throes of spiritual life, the development and workings of the conscience, or the impulse and trend toward God and righteousness, to any given number of figures on a table. Hence it is with the greatest reluctance that we endeavour to sum up some tangible proof of the power of God's Word among our heathen neighbours. While to our shame and confusion of face it has not been what it might, and would have been had we been more faithful and kept more in line with the will and spirit of God, it has to the praise of the glory of His grace proved stronger than sin and Satan.

"We do not attempt to give in numbers those who are nominally Christian. Women, lads, girls, and a few men profess to have placed themselves in God's hands. All the children within reach are sent to the school without stipulation. One lady of free birth and good position has borne persecution for Christ's sake. We speak with diffidence; for as no ordained minister has ever been resident or available for more than a short visit, no observance of the ordinances of Baptism or the Lord's Supper have been held and we have not had the usual definite offers of persons as candidates for Church membership. We have just kept on sowing the seed of the Word, believing that when God's time comes to gather them into the visible Church there will be some among us ready to participate in the privilege and honour.

"Of results as affecting the condition and conduct of our people generally, it is more easy to speak. Raiding, plundering, the stealing of slaves, have almost entirely ceased. Any person from any place can come now for trade or pleasure, and stay wherever they choose, their persons and property being as safe as in Calabar. For fully a year we have heard of nothing like violence from even the most backward of our people. They have thanked me for restraining them in the past, and begged me to be their consul, as they neither wished black man nor white man to be their king. It would be impossible, apart from a belief in God's particular and personal providence in answer to prayer, to account for the ready obedience and submission to our judgment which was accorded to us. It seemed sometimes to be almost miraculous that hordes of armed, drunken, passion-swayed men should give heed and chivalrous homage to a woman, and one who had neither wealth nor outward display of any kind to produce the slightest sentiment in her favour. But such was the case, and we do not recollect one instance of insubordination.

“As their intercourse with the white men increased through trade or otherwise, they found that to submit to his authority did not mean loss of liberty but the opposite, and gradually their objections cleared away, till in 1894 they formally met and bound themselves to some extent by treaty with the Consul. Again, later, our considerate, patient, tactful Governor, Sir Claude Macdonald, met them, and at that interview the last objection was removed, and they promised unconditional surrender of the old laws which were based on unrighteousness and cruelty, and cordial acceptance of the just and, as they called it, ‘clean’ code which he proffered them in return. Since then he has proclaimed them a free people in every respect among neighbouring tribes, and so, placing them on their honour, so to speak, has made out of the roughest material a lot of self-respecting men who conduct their business in a fashion from which Europeans might take lessons. Of course they need superintendence and watching, for their ideas are not so nicely balanced as ours in regard to the shades and degrees of right and wrong, but as compared with their former ideas and practice they are far away ahead of what we expected.

“No tribe was formerly so feared because of their utter disregard of human life, but human life is now safe. No chief ever died without the sacrifice of many lives, but this custom has now ceased. Only last month the man who, for age, wealth, and general influence, exceeded all the other chiefs in Okoyong, died from the effects of cold caught three months before. We trembled, as they are at some distance from us, and every drop of European drink which could be bought from all the towns around was bought at once, and canoes were sent from every hamlet with all the produce at command to Duke Town for some more, and all was consumed before the people dispersed from the funeral. But the only death resulting has been that of a man, who, on being blamed by the witch-doctors, went and hanged himself because the chiefs in attendance—drunk as they were—refused to give him the poison ordeal. Some chiefs, gathered for palaver at our house on the day of his death, in commenting on the wonderful change, said, ‘Ma, you white people are God Almighty. No other power could have done this.’

“With regard to infanticide and twin-murder we can speak hopefully. It will doubtless take some time to develop in them the spirit of self-sacrifice to the extent of nursing the vital spark for the mere love of God and humanity among the body of the people. The ideals of those emerging from heathenism are almost necessarily low. What the foreigner does is all very well for the foreigner, but the force of habit or something more subtle evidently excuses the practice of the virtue among themselves. Of course there are exceptions. All the evidence goes to show that something more tangible than sentiment or principle determines the conduct of the multitude, even among

those avowedly Christian. But with all this there has dawned on them the fact that life is worth saving, even at the risk of one's own: and though chiefs and subjects alike, less than two years ago, refused to hear of the saving of twins, we have already their promise and the first instalment of their fidelity to their promise in the persons of two baby girls aged six and five months respectively, who have already won the hearts of some of our neighbours and the love of all the school children. Seven women have literally touched them, and all the people, including the most practical of the chiefs, come to the house and hold their palavers in full view of where the children are being nursed. One chief who, with fierce gesticulations, some years ago protested that we must draw the line at twins, and that they should never be brought to light in his lifetime, brought one of his children who was very ill, two months ago, and laid it on our knee alongside the twin already there, saying with a sob in his voice, 'There! they are all yours, living or dying, they are all yours. Do what you like with mine.'

"Drinking, especially among the women, is on the decrease. The old bands of roving women who came to us at first are now only a memory and a name. The women still drink, but it is at home where the husband can keep them in check. In our immediate neighbourhood it is an extremely rare thing to see a woman intoxicated, even on feast days and at funerals. None of the women who frequent our house ever taste it at all, but they still keep it for sale and give it to visitors. Indeed it is the only thing which commands a ready sale and brings ready money, and their excuse is just that of many of the Church members at home, that those who want it will get it elsewhere, and perhaps in greater measure. But we have noted a decided stand being taken by several of the young mothers who have been our friends and scholars against its being given by husbands or visitors to their children. We have also thankfully noted for long that on our making an appearance anywhere there is a run made to hide the bottles, and the chief indignantly threatens any slave who brings it into our presence.

"All this points to an improvement in the condition of the people generally. They are eager for education. Instead of the apathy and incredulous laugh which the mention of the Word formerly brought, the cry from all parts is for teachers; and there is a disposition to be friendly to any one who will help them towards a higher plane of living. But it brings vividly before us the failures and weaknesses in our work; for instance, the desultoriness of our teaching, which of necessity stultifies the results that under better conditions would be sure to follow. School teaching has been carried on under great difficulties owing to the scattered population, the family quarrels which made it formerly a risk to walk alone, the fear of sorcery and of the evil spirits which are supposed to dwell in the forest, the denseness of the

forest itself, which makes it dangerous for children to go from one place to another without an armed escort, the withdrawing of girls when they have just been able to read in order to go to their seclusion and fattening, and the consequent drafting of them to great distances to their husbands' farms, the irregular attendance of boys who accompany their masters wherever they go, and who take the place of postmen and news-agents-general to the country.

“There have been difficulties on our own side—the distances consume time and strength, the multifarious claims made on the Mission House, the household itself which is usually a large one having in addition to servants those who are training for future usefulness in special spheres—as the Mission House has been until quite lately the only means of getting such training—and having usually one or more of the rescued victims of heathen customs. The Dispensary work calls also for much time and strength, nursing often having to accompany the medicine; the very ignorance and superstition of the patients and their friends making the task doubly trying. Then one must be ever at hand to hear the plaint of and to shelter and reconcile the runaway slave or wife or the threatened victim of oppression and superstition. Visitors are to be received, and all the bothersome and, to European notions, stupid details of native etiquette are to be observed if we are to win the favour and confidence of the people.

“Moreover we must be both able and willing to help ourselves in regard to the wear and tear in our dwelling and station buildings. We must make and keep in repair buildings, fences, drainage, etc., and all amid surroundings in which the climate and its forces are leagued against us.

“Add to all this the cares of housekeeping when there is no baker supply, no butcher supply, no water supply, no gas supply, no coal supply, no laundry supply, no trained-servant supply, nor untrained either for that matter, except when some native can and will lend you a slave to help you or when you can buy one—which, under ordinary circumstances is a very doubtful practice, as, though in buying the person you are literally freeing him, the natives are apt to misinterpret the motive, and unless you are very fortunate in your purchase, the slave may bring you into conflict with the powers that be, owing to their law which recognises no freedom except that conferred by birth. After all this is seen to day by day, where is the time and strength for comprehensive and consecutive work of a more directly evangelistic and teaching type?—specially when the latter is manned year by year by the magnificent total of one individual. Is it fair to expect results under such circumstances?”