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978-1-108-01183-9 - Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers:

Undertaken by Macgregor Laird, Esq. in Connection with the British Government, in 1854

Samuel Crowther

Excerpt

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CHAP. I.

DEPARTURE FROM ABBEOKUTA—EMBARKATION AT LAGOS—
ARRIVAL AT FERNANDO PO—THE LATE MR. BEECROFT—
ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF THE 'PLEIAD'—CROSSING
THE BAR AT THE NUN—INDUSTRY IN THE DELTA—UN-
HEALTHINESS OF THE DELTA—PROGRESS THROUGH THE
DELTA—ABOH AND KING OBI—SIMON JONAS REMAINS AT
ABOH—THE ATTA OF IDDA—AMA ABOKO—DASABA—ARRIVAL
AT THE CONFLUENCE.

June 13, 1854. To-day, being the day I had fixed upon to start for Lagos, preparatory to my joining the Expedition to explore the Tshadda, Messrs. Townsend, Maser, and King, and Dr. Irving, kindly came over to bid me farewell. After Mr. Townsend had offered up a prayer for God's protection and guidance, about eight A.M. I left Abbeokuta with Mr. Phillip and my son Samuel, who were also going down to Lagos; many of my church members followed me to Agbamaya. I took about seven hundred-weight of clean cotton down with me, to be shipped for Manchester.

June 15: Started early this morning from Agboyi, where we stopped last night, and arrived at Lagos about half-past eight A.M. Here I was sorry to hear of the unexpected illness of Mr. Beecroft, and that he was about to leave for Teneriffe by the next mail from Fernando Po.

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June 17: The 'Bacchante' arrived this morning from Fernando Po, and brought the painful intelligence of Mr. Beecroft's death, which took place the night before she sailed. I felt this very much as the Expedition was just expected, and I knew no other person connected with it besides him; this caused a little anxiety, but I resigned everything to God's good and unerring providence.

June 18: Sunday. Attended morning service in Mr. Gollmer's church, and in the afternoon at Mr. White's house, where I heard Mr. Phillip address the congregation.

June 19: To-day was spent in making necessary preparations, and writing letters for England, against the arrival of the mail.

June 20: The 'Forerunner' arrived about one o'clock P.M., by which I learnt that some of the gentlemen of the Expedition were on board of her, and that the 'Pleiad' would not touch at Lagos, but proceed direct to Fernando Po, so I prepared myself for embarking to-morrow morning.

June 21: About nine A.M., I embarked, and was very glad to meet Dr. Baikie, Dr. Bleek, and Mr. Dalton, a young zoological assistant, on board; they kindly brought me letters from England and Sierra Leone, and parcels of books and many useful articles from Lady Buxton and Captain Trotter, for which I was very thankful. I was sorry to find Dr. Bleek rather out of health, but it was thought he might be better by the time we arrived at Fernando Po. There was also on board, the Rev. J. Diboll, with Mrs. Diboll and daughter, Baptist

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ARRIVAL AT FERNANDO PO.

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missionary to Fernando Po: they were all very glad to see me. About half-past eleven A.M. the 'Fore-runner' weighed anchor, and in a short time we lost sight of Lagos.

June 22; Arrived off the Bonny river, where a ship was lying at anchor; the mail was left in charge of one of the passengers, who left the 'Fore-runner', and went on board of her: she was waiting for the pilot to take her across the bar next morning; we made for Old Calabar. After crossing the bar we anchored for the night.

June 23: Arrived at Old Calabar about eleven A.M.; as the mail was only to stop here a few hours I could not go on shore to advantage. Mr. W. C. Thompson, son of the late Mr. W. C. Thompson, linguist, in connection with the Church Missionary Society at Sierra Leone, took his passage in her for England, and the missionaries accompanied him on board; about four o'clock P.M. we started, and anchored outside the bar.

June 24: Arrived at Cameroon river about seven P.M. The mails were delivered, and received that night.

June 25: Sunday. Started as soon as it was light, and made for Fernando Po. It rained heavily; in consequence of which no service could be held. About four P.M. we anchored off Clarence, and found to our great disappointment that the 'Pleiad' had not yet arrived: various thoughts were expressed and conjectures made, as may be expected, as to the cause of her non-arrival. I landed, and took my lodging at Mr. J. Wilson's, the same house I occupied in

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1841 with Mr. Schön, in which we held divine service during our stay in the island. The people were very glad to see me, and expressed their regret for the loss of Mr. Beecroft; for he had made full preparation for the Expedition; and had engaged many intelligent natives who had been used to go up the Niger with him, and who were ready to go anywhere with him, they being mutually attached to each other, for he treated them as a father. It will be a long time before his place can be supplied by another, who will take the same interest in the country and her people as he did.

June 26: Took my boxes on shore to my lodging; every one was on the look out for the 'Pleiad'. After breakfast, visited Mr. Beecroft's grave, which is on the point of the cliff of Clarence, under a large cotton-tree, where he himself had directed that he should be buried. Thus ended the life of this useful person, after twenty-five years stay in Africa, during which period he had won the affection of many who knew his worth in the countries he had visited; and could not but greatly regret to hear of his removal by death. The chiefs of Abbeokuta had sent salutations and messages to him by me, which he did not live to receive. As long as this generation lasts, the name of Mr. Beecroft will not be forgotten in this part of West Africa.

June 27: The 'Pleiad' had not arrived, and the 'Forerunner' would not have waited any longer, had not Captain Miller, senior officer of Her Majesty's squadron in the Bights, ordered her to stay till Thursday.

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ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF THE 'PLEIAD.' 7

June 28 : The 'Pleiad' arrived this evening, to the great joy of all parties.

June 29 : The 'Forerunner' had been detained two days beyond her time, or she would have towed the 'Pleiad' off the Nun, in order to save fuel; she sailed away this evening with our letters for England. Dr. Bleek's state of health being considered by the medical gentlemen to be very precarious, he was pronounced unfit to accompany the Expedition, and was consequently sent back to England by the 'Forerunner.'

July 2: Sunday. Held the morning service in Mr. Beecroft's new house, which Mr. Lynslager had kindly ordered to be cleared out yesterday for the purpose: the service was well attended, both by resident Europeans and many from the ships in the cove, besides many of the Native settlers in connection with the Baptist Church; Captain Miller, of the 'Crane' was also present. I preached from 2 Cor. v. 1.

July 3—7 : Captain Miller rendered every possible assistance to hasten the departure of the 'Pleiad', and as his help was no more needed, he sailed away to-day.

July 8 : This afternoon, I embarked on board the 'Pleiad', as she was to sail this evening. About nine P.M. we weighed for the Nun, with two large iron canoes laden with coals in tow; the friends who accompanied us a short distance from the harbour left us with hearty cheers. As the wind rose, and the swell became heavy, the canoes did not tow well, and there was some fear of their being

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upset: the night was, therefore, past with some anxiety.

July 9: Sunday. Heavy rains: we were not much more than twenty miles from Fernando Po. The canoes continued to labour from the heavy swell and a strong current; the steamer could not go more than half her speed for fear of swamping the canoes. About noon, the spindle of the safety-valve gave way, and steam could not be kept up, so we could not proceed until it was repaired, which took three hours, and we were drifted eastward by the westerly current, with heavy swell and rains. Nearly all hands were sea-sick, no service could be held.

July 10: Off the mouth of the Bonny river; our progress very slow; the safety-valve out of order, in consequence of which we were many times short of steam.

July 11: Off the mouth of the St. John or Brass river; anchored for the night between it and the mouth of the Nun.

July 12: About two P.M. with the flood tide we crossed the bar;* the 'Pleiad' was piloted by Mr. Thomas Richards, a Yoruba man, who had made many voyages up the Niger with the late Mr. Bee-croft, and has a good knowledge of the localities about the coast and the Niger. When we were in the midst of the bar, the hawser of one of the canoes, in which there were seven Krumen, broke, and as

* In the former Expedition this same bar was crossed one month later in the year, viz. August 13th: and a week was spent before the vessels began to ascend the river. ED.

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SUNDAY ISLAND.

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we could not stop to render her any assistance, she was left to make the best of her way through the surf, though not without great anxiety for the men; for the surf was tremendous, so much so that it broke once over our poop, though the tide was in our favour: every eye was fixed upon the drifted canoe, and it was no small joy to see her now and then buoyed up from the deep furrow upon the top of the surf, following our track, till she got across in safety:—the iron canoes seem to ride very lightly upon the surf. About three o'clock we anchored inside the bar very near to Alburka Island: when the engineer came to examine the engine, he found that the safety-valve was just gone, and it was providential that we had got across the bar before this happened.

July 13, 14: These days were spent in repairing the engine; and on the 15th, about six A.M., we got under weigh for the Niger. Louis' Creek was found blocked up, so Mr. Richards took a boat to sound the next creek, the 'Pleiad' waiting at the entrance. He returned about half-past nine A.M., and reported that he had found the channel. We started, with the tide still in our favour; but about twelve o'clock we missed the right channel, and ran aground on the point of Sunday Island, the left passage having been taken instead of the right, which was the proper channel; we could not get the vessel off this evening.

July 16: Sunday. With the flood tide exertions were made, and the vessel was hove off about half-past eleven A.M.; but before the ship could be put to

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rights, it was too late to make any progress. I had service in the afternoon about two o'clock, and preached from St. John i. 22, 23. All hands well and cheerful. When we were lying aground this morning, a canoe was seen paddled down the river with produce; another came alongside with four men in, unarmed, to see the ship, they asked whether she was a slave or oil ship:—they were answered 'palm-oil ship.'

July 17: We got under weigh about seven A.M. and made good progress in three to seven fathoms water. Soon after we had cleared Sunday Island, traces of cultivation began to appear, together with land about three feet above the water's edge. As the water has not yet risen to its full height, it gave an entirely new appearance to the river, from that it bore in August 1841. At that time, only a few spots near the water's edge were under cultivation, and the whole was covered with water, as the river overflowed its banks. Not only old plantations showed a continued industry of the people of the Delta, but many newly-cleared spots, in the midst of which numerous lofty palm trees stood, which were carefully preserved for their rich and valuable produce, showed further, the improved state of the banks. About three hours from Sunday Island, we came to inhabited villages; we induced two canoes to come off, from whom we learnt that the people between Brass and Aboh are called Oru. One of the people who came off, and who spoke the Ibo language, was so confident, that he offered to go with us to Aboh; and the people on shore, never

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UNHEALTHINESS OF THE DELTA.

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showed the least sign of opposition, but folded their arms and gazed at the steamer as she glided on. Fewer traces of cultivation were observed during the day till we came to the village of Angiama. Brass people come up here to buy palm-oil with large casks in their canoes, some of which they land as they proceed upwards. There is another striking change in the habits of the people themselves; in 1841, very few of them were to be found with any decent articles of clothing; I spied to-day, among a group of about forty people on shore, fifteen who I could distinctly see had English shirts on. This is an evident mark of the advantage of legal trade over that in men. The chief of Angiama, or Anya, came off, and expressed his regret, that we did not wait at his village, as Captain Trotter had done; and it was with some difficulty that we could satisfy him by our excuses; but we hoped to be able to stay on our return. Dr. Baikie gave him a red cap and a looking-glass; but I could read in his countenance, as well as by the temper one of his men manifested, that, if they had had it in their power, they would have detained us in Oru, to reap all the benefits of the trade to themselves, instead of allowing it to pass through their waters to the people of the interior beyond them. To-day's voyage occupied eleven and a half hours.

Since we entered the Nun, I have been thinking what could have made this river more unhealthy than any other, independent of the general unhealthiness of the climate. It occurred to me, that the evil might have partly originated in the Ex-