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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

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Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers

Captured by slavers as a boy, freed by the Royal Navy, and raised at a mission, Samuel Crowther in 1864 became the first African to be ordained as an Anglican bishop. As a priest, he accompanied the Scottish merchant MacGregor Laird on his expedition to West Africa in 1854, and celebrated Sunday services in a variety of bizarre locations and perilous conditions. This 1855 book is Crowther's detailed record of his journey aboard the steamboat *Pleiad*. Written from the unusual perspective of an African-born, London-educated clergyman, it is a congenial and evocative account of the day-to-day difficulties confronting the explorers, their interactions with native peoples, and encounters with slavery and civil war. Crowther, a keen linguist, went on to publish several books on African languages including Nupe, Igbo and Yoruba. This book includes a substantial appendix comparing the grammar and vocabularies of the languages he encountered.

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JOURNAL
OF
AN EXPEDITION
UP
THE NIGER AND TSHADDA RIVERS,
UNDERTAKEN
By MACGREGOR LAIRD, Esq.
IN
CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT,
IN 1854.
BY THE
REV. SAMUEL CROWTHER.

WITH MAP AND APPENDIX.

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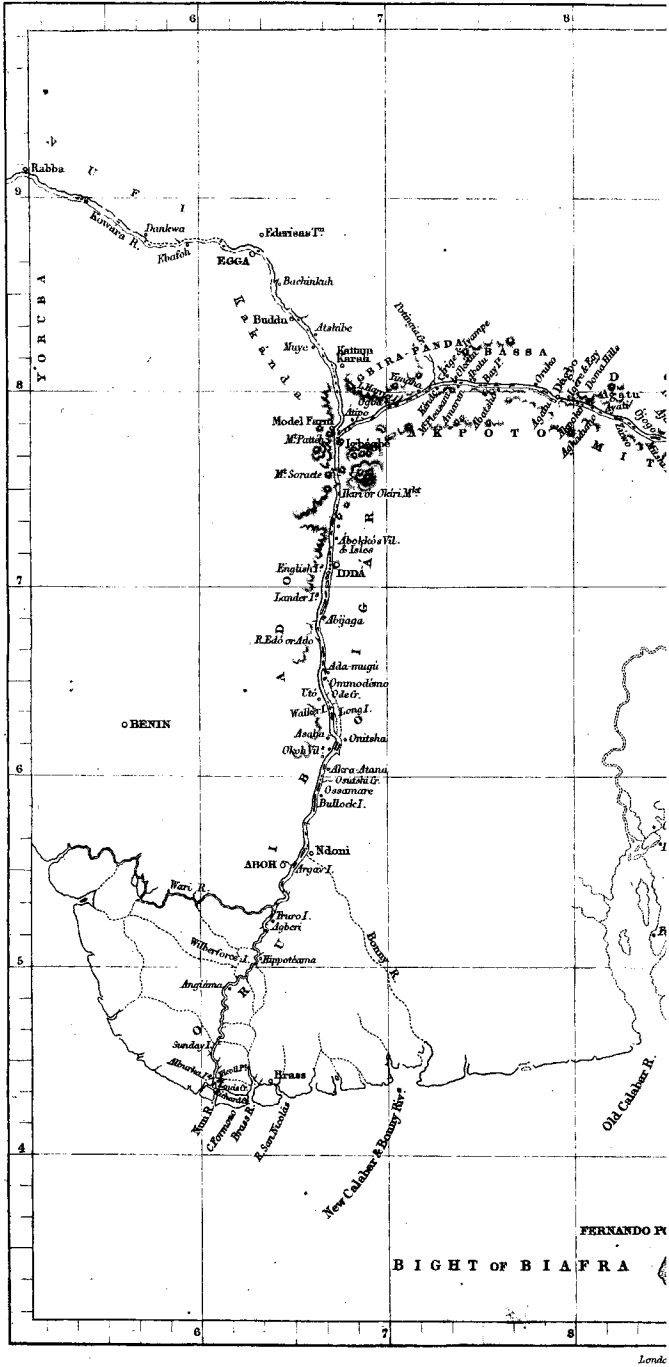
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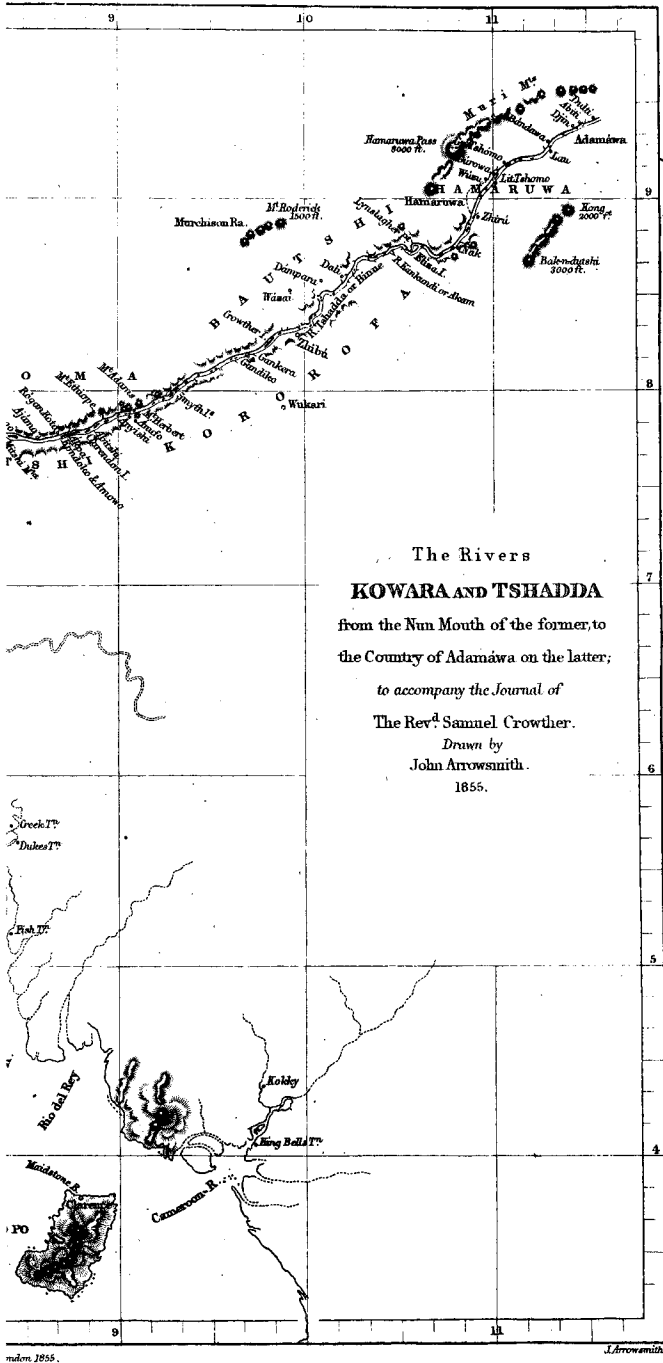
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IN the summer of 1853, Macgregor Laird, Esq., a merchant of London, long and extensively engaged in the West African trade, entered into a contract with Her Majesty's Government to fit out and send a small steamer to the river Niger, to ascend the stream to the confluence with the Tshadda, and then to explore that branch of the river. The object of the Expedition was to establish commercial relations with the native tribes: it was also hoped that Dr. Barth, the celebrated African traveller, would be met with in that part of the country.* Her Majesty's Government was to appoint certain officers to accompany the Expedition, and Mr. Laird was to provide for trade and barter with the natives. The risk and main expense of the

* About the time when the earlier sheets of *The Journal* were passing through the press, rumours had reached this country that Dr. Barth had lost his life in Africa; and hence the doubt respecting him expressed in a note, which will be found in p. 19. Dr. Barth, happily, has since returned to this country in safety. While the Expedition was up the Tshadda he was at a considerable distance in the interior.

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undertaking rested with Mr. Laird, who immediately made to the Committee of the Church Missionary Society, the generous offer of a free passage for the Rev. Samuel Crowther, if he might be allowed to accompany the Expedition. After communicating with Africa, and ascertaining Mr. Crowther's willingness to go, the Committee thankfully accepted Mr. Laird's offer. This act of liberality on the part of Mr. Laird, is only an additional proof of the lively interest which he has long taken in promoting the best interests of the natives of Africa.

Mr. Crowther had accompanied the former Niger Expedition in 1841, under Captain H. D. Trotter, R.N., of which an account was published by the Society, containing the journals of the Rev. C. F. Schön and Mr. Crowther. Another member of the present Expedition, Mr. Simon Jonas, a native Christian, had also accompanied the former, as an Interpreter.

The general results of this Expedition, as contrasted with all former attempts, are ably stated in letters written after its return by Mr. Laird to the Earl of Clarendon, which are with his Lordship's permission, here inserted.

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MR. MACGREGOR LAIRD *to the* EARL OF
CLARENDON.

3, *Mincing-lane,*
8th Feb., 1855.

MY LORD,

I HAVE the honour and pleasure to inform you that the exploring steam-vessel 'Pleiad,' has safely returned from the Chadda, after ascending 250 miles beyond the point reached by former Expeditions.

The exploration occupied 118 days, and was unaccompanied by any loss of life; marking a new era in African discovery, and showing that by means of her navigable streams, the interior of that immense continent, may be safely and economically brought into relation with the civilized world.

I beg leave to congratulate your Lordship on the success which has attended an enterprise, promoted principally by yourself, and trust that that success will be followed up annually for some years to come, until the interior of that great continent is fully explored by the countrymen of Park and Clapperton, under their national flags.

These immense African rivers being now proved accessible to Europeans under proper management, and at the proper season with impunity, my object in offering to contract for the service is attained, and I must decline proceeding further, as the outlay of

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capital necessary is too great a strain upon my private means; and the loss already sustained is quite as much as I am justified in sacrificing, even for such an object.

I have the honour to remain,

My Lord,

Your obedient servant,

M. LAIRD.

The Right Hon. Lord Clarendon.

MR. MACGREGOR LAIRD *to the* EARL OF
CLARENDON.

3, *Mincing Lane,*
5th March, 1855.

MY LORD,

THE result of the late ascent of the Chadda has been so successful in proving the practicability of exploring Central Africa by her magnificent rivers, which in all tropical countries, and in Africa especially, are the natural lines of communication, that I trust Her Majesty's Government will persevere in following up the geographical discoveries so ably commenced by Dr. Baikie; and though the expense and risk has proved too great for me, individually, to again offer my services on the same terms as contractor, the interest I take in the subject may excuse my now addressing your Lordship.

Standing out in broad relief from all former ascents of the Niger or land expeditions of discovery into Central Africa, the Chadda exploration is re-

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markable for the safe return to this country of all Europeans engaged in it.

In 1805, Mungo Park perished descending the Niger with three companions, the survivors of 38 men who left the Gambia with him.

In 1816 Captain Tuckey's Expedition to the Congo failed, and only one survivor of it reached England.

In 1821 to 1824, Denham and Clapperton's Expedition from the Mediterranean to Soudan, lost its leader, Dr. Oudney, and other Europeans.

In 1825, Clapperton himself, and his companions, Captain Pearce and Dr. Morrison, lost their lives penetrating the Continent from the Bight of Benin, his servant, Richard Lander, being the sole survivor.

In the same year, Major Laing perished after reaching Timbuctoo.

In 1830, Richard and John Lander reached the Niger from Badagry, and floating down the stream, discovered its embouchure on the Bight of Biafra.

In 1832 and 1833, the Liverpool Expedition (the first ascent of the Niger from the sea) took place under my command. We lost 40 out of 49 Europeans.

In 1836, 1840, and 1845, the late Consul Beecroft made the ascents of the Niger with considerable loss of European life on each occasion.

In 1841, the Government Expedition under Captain Trotter, lost, in 62 days, 42 white men out of 150.

The Chadda expedition may be therefore consi-

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dered to mark a new era in African discovery; the deadly climate having been fairly met and conquered by improved medical treatment and mechanical organization. The plausible objection to exploring Africa—the risk of life—is answered; and the question now is, whether, after the lives of so many gallant men have been sacrificed, during the last half century, in clearing the way, and that way being now proved to be safe and practicable, Her Majesty's Government will, at an expense of a few thousands annually, complete the work of discovery in Central Africa, or allow that honour, which ought to belong to the British race, to be reaped by others.

Whatever ultimately may be the commercial value of the trade of Central Africa, the results of all trading expeditions hitherto have proved its present amount to be not equal to the expense of getting at it. Speaking as a mercantile man, there is no inducement to follow up the trade. For years it must be a losing one; and if after seven or ten years it became profitable, others would reap its benefits equally with the first adventurers.

As to any appreciable effect the continuance of the exploration would have upon the foreign traffic in slaves, *that* depends so much, if not altogether, upon the demand in the Western hemisphere, that annual expeditions for years to come could not possibly affect it.

The reasons I venture to urge upon your Lordship to continue the exploration of Central Africa are, the scientific and geographical results that it is

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proved may now be realized, at little risk of life, in the unknown countries which extend over 25 degrees of latitude, and 50 degrees of longitude, and which are virgin ground to the traveller. The great importance of keeping up the spirit of enterprise and research in our countrymen, and the advantage we possess in having in the educated African youth in the Colonies of the Gambia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast, most efficient Native agents; by their means new energy and a higher standard of living may be introduced naturally, unobtrusively, and rapidly, into the remotest regions of the interior.

To succeed, this return of the civilized African to his native country, carrying the English habits and language with him, must be spontaneous and self-supporting.

The next point is to make the communication annual and regular, so as to give the people confidence in the periodical visit of a steamer.

I attach great importance to the annual visit of the steamer, as it would prevent the tribes in the Delta stopping the passage of the people above them to the sea—enabling them to open direct communication with the trading vessels at the mouths of the rivers.

From the observations of Dr. Baikie, it would appear the month of June is the best time to enter the Niger. This would require the steamer to leave this country in April, so that if the expedition is to be renewed, an early decision must be come to. I am still of opinion that the best way to carry it on is by contract for a certain number of

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years. The expense is then fixed, and the contractor has every inducement to encourage the trade, and keep on good terms with the natives. But if the Government wish to carry it on entirely with their own officers, after the experience acquired, and consider the 'Pleiad' a suitable vessel for the purpose, I will hand her over, at a valuation, on her arrival in the Thames, and give every assistance in my power to forward the enterprize; or if any private individual undertakes it, I will be glad to afford him all the information I possess as to the trade, and if he wishes it, deliver the 'Pleiad' to him on the same terms.

I take for granted that Her Majesty's Government have no intention of forming any settlement, or interfering with the native powers in Central Africa. I should very much regret if any such attempt was made. The only hope of improving the interior is by African influence, introducing a superior race of negro blood. This can be found to considerable extent in the youth of our own Colonies. They volunteer for the work, and all that is required is to open the way for them. When in the interior they will soon assert their superiority, and may be safely left to take charge of themselves.

I know, my Lord, that it will be said the time is not favourable for a renewal of African expeditions; that other and more vital affairs occupy and engross the attention and mind of the public; but I trust and know that this is not, and never was the true feeling of the great mass of my countrymen. Fifty years back, while engaged in a far

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severer struggle than the present one, they sent out Mungo Park to explore Central Africa for the pure love of science; and the present generation will as readily support your Lordship in carrying out the work you have commenced.

I have the honour to remain,
&c., &c.,

M. LAIRD.

The Right Hon. Lord Clarendon.

To these letters must be added one from the Rev. S. Crowther, in which he takes a brief review of the Expedition, and makes a forcible appeal on the importance of immediate measures to improve the existing facilities for introducing Civilization and Christianity amongst his countrymen, in the regions of the Niger.

The REV. S. CROWTHER *to the* REV. H. VENN.

'Bacchante,' at Sea,
Dec. 2, 1854.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

YOU will, no doubt, be glad to hear that we have returned from the Niger in good health and spirits,—a singular instance, without any death, either among the Europeans, twelve in number, or among the fifty-four Africans, either from sickness or accident. The Expedition was in the river exactly

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sixteen weeks, the very day it returned to the mouth of the Nun. We commenced our ascent of the Tshadda on the 7th of August, and the last point we were able to reach was Gurowa, above Bomanda, a port of Hamaruwa,* about 300 miles from the confluence of the Kowara and Tshadda, on the 22nd of September, when we were completely short of fuel, no wood being obtainable within three or four miles of the banks of the river. This was the only difficulty we met with, and which prevented our reaching the confluence of the Binue and Faro, where it was crossed by Dr. Barth, and, according to all the accounts we have received, could not have been more than 100 miles from Hamaruwa. It could be reached in five days' journey on foot, travelling by the course of the river, but dangerous on account of unsubdued natives, and ten days' journey by a circuitous route around the Fumbina mountains, which was said to be safer. The reception we met with all along from the kings and chiefs of the countries on the Binue was beyond expectation. We made two visits to Mohamma, the Sultan of Hamaruwa, fourteen miles from the river, in both which we were most respectfully received and entertained by the Sultan.

We returned to Aboh† on the 31st of October, and met Simon Jonas, whom we had left there, quite well and much respected by all, both chiefs and people. He moved about among them with perfect freedom, and made several visits up the river, to Os-

* Spelt Hamarrua in Mr. Koelle's map.

† Ibo or Aboh, the chief town of the Ibo Tribe, situated on the upper border of the Delta of the Niger.

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samare, Onitsha, and Asaba markets, and to an interior town called Oko-Ala, on the back of Aboh, of about a day's journey; the chief of which place asked Simon Jonas, why we always stopped at Aboh, and never paid them a visit; to whom Jonas replied, that there will not be left a place unvisited in due time. He was about three days absent from Aboh, when he returned, for fear the steamer might arrive in his absence.

Simon Jonas spoke to them of the folly of their superstitious customs, and he said, the one of chewing stick to clean their teeth early in the morning, and spouting the spittle before their country fashion, invoking his blessing upon those who wish them good, and imprecating his anger upon those who desire their hurt, was given up by some of them at his speaking to them of the folly of so doing. He was the companion of Tshukuma and Aje, although he paid them due respect.

Having found this favourable state of things in Aboh, I took the step to secure a parcel of ground for a contemplated Mission station, to prevent the spot being spoiled by the people, and gave Aje strict charge to keep the people away from it. My further proceedings in Aboh will be seen more fully in my journal to that place. I have furnished the Bishop of Sierra Leone with a copy of my journals to Aboh for his fuller information; and I have suggested to Dr. Baikie the advantage of taking Simon Jonas to Sierra Leone, to give his Lordship verbal information of Aboh country from actual knowledge of three months stay among them. I have taken these steps

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from the instruction I had received from the Bishop, to ascertain what reception Native Teachers would meet with in Aboh should any be sent there.

I regret much that none of those who accompanied Mr. Jones* to the same place for the same object had been sent with the Expedition.

I believe the time is fully come when Christianity must be introduced on the banks of the Niger: the people are willing to receive any who may be sent among them. The English are still looked upon as their friends, with whom they themselves desire to have connexion as with the first nation in the world. Could the work have been begun since 1841, how imperfect soever it might have been, yet it would have kept up the thread of connexion with England and the countries on the banks of the Niger. God has provided instruments to begin the work, in the liberated Africans in the Colony of Sierra Leone, who are the natives of the banks of this river.

If this time is allowed to pass away, the generation of the liberated teachers who are immediately connected with the present generation of the natives of the interior will pass away with it also; many intelligent men who took deep interest in the introduction of trade and Christianity by the Niger, who had been known to the people, have died since; so have many of the chiefs and people in the country, who were no less interested to be brought in connexion with England by seeing their liberated coun-

* The Rev. E. Jones, with three natives of the Ibo Tribe in Sierra Leone, attempted to reach the Ibo country in April, 1853, but found it unsafe to ascend the Niger without a steamer. *Vide* "Church Missionary Intelligencer," November 1853.

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trymen return. Had not Simon Jonas been with us, who was well known to Obi and his sons, we should have had some difficulty in gaining the confidence of the people at Aboh at our ascent.

It would be of very great advantage if the colony-born young men were introduced by their parents or countrymen to their fatherland; it has many advantages which have not been sufficiently noticed. It cannot be expected that children born in the Colony should become acquainted with the countries and characters of the people so soon as their parents and countrymen. Though the parents are illiterate, yet if they are sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, their service will be of much worth in introducing Christianity to their own people. They are brought back to their country as a renewed people, looked upon by their countrymen as superior to themselves, as long as they continue consistent in their Christian walk and conversation, and do not disgrace themselves by following heathenish practices. The language of the people of Abbeokuta will be that of the natives on the banks of the Niger: "Let those who come from the white man's country teach us and condemn our heathenish practices, we shall listen to them." It takes great effect when returning liberated Christians sit down with their heathen countrymen, and speak with contempt of their own former superstitious practices, of whom, perhaps, many now alive would bear testimony as to their former devotedness in their superstitious worship; all which he now can tell them he has found to be foolishness, and the result of ignorance; when he with all earnestness,

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invites them, as Moses did Hobab, Come with us, for the Lord has promised good to Israel : and all this in his own language, with refined Christian feelings and sympathy, not to be expressed in words, but evidenced by an exemplary-Christian life. The services of such persons will prove most useful in the introduction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the heathens. Let such persons be employed as readers or Christian visitors, and thus they will gradually introduce their children into the country, who in course of time will be able to carry on the work more effectually ; as pioneers, we must not look for instruments of the keenest edge, anything that will open the path for future improvement will answer as well at the onset.

* * *

I shall entrust my journals to the care of Dr. Baikie, made up into a parcel with some specimens of translation of Doma or Arago language, and that of the Mitshis, not found among Koelle's collection. I have also sent under his care a long red box, containing curiosities from the river, which I hope will safely reach you.

I remain,

Rev. and dear Sir, &c.

SAMUEL CROWTHER.

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DR. BAIKIE *to the* REV. S. CROWTHER.

Clarence, Fernando Po,

November 28, 1854.

MY DEAR MR. CROWTHER,

After having been together for upwards of four months, closely engaged in exploring Central Africa, I cannot allow you to depart without expressing to you, in the warmest manner, the pleasure I derived from your company, and acknowledging the information I have reaped from you.

Your long and intimate acquaintance with native tribes, with your general knowledge of their customs, peculiarly fit you for a journey such as we have now returned from, and I cannot but feel that your advice was always readily granted to me, nor had I ever the smallest reason to repent having followed it. It is nothing more than a simple fact, that no slight portion of the success we met with in our intercourse with the tribes is due to you.

* * *

Our voyage has providentially terminated so far favourably, and without loss of life.

You are now about to return to the scene of your past labours, and to resume your share of the work for civilizing and regenerating a vast territory. That your labours may continue to meet with success, and that you may be spared to see your exertions bearing good fruit, is the earnest and sincere wish of

Yours very faithfully,

W. B. BAIKIE.

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The prospects opened by this Expedition acquire an additional interest when viewed in connexion with the extension of the Yoruba Mission, which has already reached several large towns, connected by intercourse with the tribes on the banks of the Niger, at various points, extending many hundred miles from its Delta. In a journal, just received from Mr. Crowther, after his return to this Mission, he thus notices his visit to Ibadan, which is the most Easterly of the towns at present occupied by the Missionaries of this Society.

EXTRACT FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE
REV. SAMUEL CROWTHER.

Jan. 1855.

“I told Bôlle, the chief of Ibadan, that I had lately returned from the Niger, and that I had heard of his soldiers being with Dasaba, in that neighbourhood. He replied—Yes, that there were about 1,000 Ibadan soldiers with him. I said, had we made arrangements to that effect previous to our ascent up the Tshadda, I would have returned by way of Rabba or Lade, with his warriors, through Yoruba to Ibadan. He said, certainly, that I could have done so, and that it might be done now from here to Rabba and Lade, on the banks of the Niger. With prudent management and means to effect it, how easily the road could be opened across the Yoruba country to the Niger! The opportunity should be

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embraced when we can get the aid of the chiefs in accomplishing such an object: it is much better to act in co-operation with them, than without them—they know their own interest in having Europeans for their friends, and with a little encouragement they can be made use of in effecting much in this country.

The disposition of the people at Ibadan though warlike, yet is not unfavourable to peace and trade; they are not worse than the Egbas of Abbeokuta, and I have seen even at Ibadan the effect of the establishment of lawful trade at Lagos. Palm oil, with which Ibadan abounds, is a chief article of trade at this time, large calabashes full are conveyed through the Ijebu country to the coast, and others find their way to Abbeokuta, where it is sold to the Egbas, who convey it to Lagos, in their numerous canoes, by the Ogun river.

Cotton is another staple article of trade, which will largely occupy the attention of the people in general in this country: the extent of farms now under cultivation in cotton and other produce, though merely for home consumption, was not known in Ibadan for many years back. How much will it be extended if they are a little encouraged, and a market is opened for their cotton.

In order to take full advantage of the present opportunity, it is evident, as Mr. Laird has pointed out, that Her Majesty's Government should assist in keeping open this great river-road into the interior of Africa, at least for a few years:

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until the natives themselves shall become sufficiently sensible of the advantages of lawful commerce and the benefits of Christian Teachers, so as to co-operate, as among the Yoruba tribes, in maintaining a friendly intercourse with their European benefactors. A meeting of a few of the influential friends of Africa has been already held in London, in July last, to confer with Dr. Baikie upon this subject—Sir T. D. Ackland, Bart., M.P., in the chair, at which the following Resolutions were adopted :—

That it appears to this Meeting that the opportunities of introducing civilization and Christianity into Africa, by the navigation of the rivers Niger and Tshadda, contemplated in the Expedition of 1841, are shown to be still most promising by the late Expedition of 1854, and that they should be promptly improved by this country before they are closed by any change of circumstances, or taken out of our hands by other nations.

That it is essential to the success of any plans for the attainment of this object by means of Native agency, that Her Majesty's Government should establish or promote the establishment of a regular steam communication between Fernando Po and the confluence of the Niger and Tshadda rivers, in order that Native Traders may be assured that the way will be kept open; and also that Her Majesty's Government should, at periodical intervals, extend such communication further up the two rivers, with a view to the

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extension of geographical discovery, of commercial enterprize, and of religious civilization in the interior of Africa.

That should Her Majesty's Government accede to this proposal, there is every prospect of the completion of the great and benevolent object in view, by the spontaneous commercial enterprise of liberated and other Africans in the various settlements upon the West Coast, and by the zeal of Missionary Societies.

The Board of Admiralty have kindly sanctioned the insertion of a Map of the course of the rivers, reduced by Mr. Arrowsmith from a larger Admiralty Chart, furnished by the Naval Officers attached to the Expedition.

May the good hand of the Lord, which is evidently beckoning us forward in our efforts to reach these long isolated members of the human family, and to bring them within the circle of Christian civilization, direct and prosper all the measures which may be adopted for this end, and may He shortly establish His kingdom in this long-benighted region.

*Church Missionary House,
October, 1855.*