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978-1-108-01184-6 - Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of
the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859
Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor

Excerpt

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JOURNAL.

June 29, 1857 — After thirty-seven days' detention at Fernando Po, we got on board the "Dayspring" this afternoon: our stay, however, at this place was not without its advantages. On the Lord's-day two services were regularly held in the spacious hall belonging to the British Consul, Mr. Lynslager: they were well attended by nearly all the European residents on the island, many from the ships in the cove, as well as by a good number of native settlers. Mr. Taylor and myself took the services alternately, both morning and afternoon. It gave me no small joy to hear my younger brother in the ministry declare with zeal and earnestness the truth of the gospel as a faithful ambassador for Christ. Had not our candles been long kept under a bushel, and the smoking flax long suppressed, surely the number of faithful native preachers would have been twice as many. May the Lord increase the number of those who shall go forth under the direction of His Holy Spirit, to gather flocks into His fold! Our time during the week was employed in filling up and improving the Ibo vocabulary, and in receiving lessons in the powers of Arabic characters from my Arabic interpreter.

On the arrival of the "Dayspring," which brought us the Ibo Primer, an Ibo Primer class was immedi-

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ately formed for an hour or two every morning before breakfast, with which the Ibo settlers at Fernando Po were much pleased, this being the first elementary school-book that ever appeared in print in that language. On Thursday evening, previous to our embarkation, the members of the Baptist Church held a prayer meeting on behalf of the Expedition, to which we were invited. Such Christian sympathy and united prayers in a Missionary cause cannot fail to have the desired effect in drawing down blessings from above. May the spirit of union increase among Christians of different denominations in the Church of Christ! The kindness which we received from Governor Lynslager, and J. T. Hutchinson, Esq., H. B. Majesty's Consul, and from our own countrymen, during our stay on the island, could not be passed unnoticed. At our embarkation many of them accompanied us to the beach, and some on board, when they left us with expressions of many good wishes for our success. The schooner having sailed before us, on the previous Friday, to-day, at eight P.M., the "Dayspring" weighed for Brass. All the ships in the cove, among which was H. M. Steam Ship "Trident," Captain Close, cheered us one after another as the "Dayspring" steamed past. Governor Lynslager illuminated the cove with six brilliant blue lights, which example was followed by some of the ships; but unfortunately our own blue lights and skyrockets were so damp that we could not answer in acknowledgment of their good wishes and kind sympathy.

July 3—Owing to a strong current, heavy swells, and contrary wind, we could not get to the mouth

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ARRIVAL AT BRASS RIVER.

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of the Brass river till yesterday morning. To-day, following flood-tide, we crossed the bar, and entered the river in the afternoon, where we saw five palm-oil ships and a hulk lying. The arrival of the "Dayspring" created some excitement and novelty among the merchants, because steamers very seldom visit Brass River. We were soon visited by the captains and supercargoes of those ships, among whom many old friends were recognised by the gentlemen on board the "Dayspring," some having parted from each other at Balaklava, in the Crimea, and unexpectedly met again in this secluded part of Africa. So unlooked for a meeting in such an unfrequented part of this country made the circumstance the more interesting. We arrived here before the "George."

July 7—The "George" crossed the bar and entered the river this afternoon. During the time we were waiting for the schooner we visited the village of Tuon, at the terminus of a short creek on the left side of the river, at the mouth of which were several palm-oil canoes: the village is in swamps, and the inside of the houses very damp. We walked to the extreme end of it, where we met a man flattening two sides of some sticks for boards, of about three to five inches in width, of which materials his house was built: he was the only person in the village able to procure such materials. I asked him whether any boards were to be had in the village, to which he replied in the negative. Although there are many trees which might be sawn into fine boards just at the back of the village, yet there is no one who takes any interest in teaching the people, or inducing them to

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improve their condition. The right side of the village is separated by a swamp, which is not easily crossed, except by wading through or being carried over it.

There was a funeral ceremony of a woman of some consequence going on, which for some days was attended with a great deal of firing at intervals. Thus, this and many other towns and villages in the delta will remain for years to come, if not supplied with the light of the gospel. Though the palm-oil trade has been carried on with this people for years, yet it makes no impression or change in their social or moral condition.

The chief town of Brass is Nembe, which is situated about thirty or forty miles higher up from the mouth of the river, and ruled by two chiefs, namely, Kian, of one division of the town, and Arisima of the other. There is a village near Nembe, called Okpáma, or Fishtown, and ruled by Abàsi. In the interior behind the Brass country is a tribe called Ogbiyàn, speaking a dialect of their own, and dealing with Brass in palm-oil. A boat communicates with Bonny from Brass River in two days, at which place all Brass English letters are left by the African mail steamers, as they do not enter Brass river, which is about a mile and a quarter wide inland, and open to the sea breezes, which were much enjoyed all the time the "Dayspring" was lying there. We anchored about one-fourth in the midst of the stream. All the palm-oil ships anchored rather too close to shore, for the convenience of shipping; but their proximity to the bush facilitates their being infested by myriads of mosquitoes and sandflies, with which the shore abounds, and they

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ENTER THE NUN RIVER.

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are deprived of the benefits of the refreshing sea breeze, especially as their ships are closely housed in with bamboo mats.

July 8—Having written our last letters, which were kindly taken by Captain Mitchell, of Mr. Horsfall's firm, the schooner was lashed side by side with the "Dayspring," to cross the Akassa creek to the Nun, which was sounded by Lieutenant Glover the day before. In rounding the north point of the creek the "George" slightly touched, but was soon hauled afloat: she drew eight feet of water.

After clearing into the broad lake in the creek, Mr. Mitchell and party, who had kindly accompanied us thus far, took leave of us with loud cheers, which mark of good wishes generally characterizes enlightened nations when their friends are embarking on any enterprise. Towards the evening the schooner ran into shoal water, but the flood-tide, with some exertions, set her to rights by morning.

July 9—Ran into shoal water again at low tide. While waiting for flood-tide, the officers went to sound different creeks. Having got afloat again, we steamed into the Nun by sunset, and anchored in the midst of the stream below Albaruka islands. The Akassa creek is about ten miles from the Brass to the Nun, and varies in depth from one and a half to three fathoms or more. The Nun bar is less intricate than that of the Brass, though the Nun perhaps may have less water, it being two fathoms on the bar when crossed at three-quarter flood. The Brass River is more intricate, though it has more water, which appeared to be about two and a quarter fathoms when

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6 FIELDS FOR MISSIONARY LABOUR.

crossed at half-flood. If the Nun bar were more examined, it would be found to possess greater facilities than that of the Brass to communicate direct with the Niger.

Before leaving this bight, I am constrained to make a few remarks on a subject which has so long occupied my mind, respecting the great harvest before the Church of Christ, and, being on the spot, it comes the more seasonably. The Bights of Benin and Biafra divide themselves by means of their rivers into four great Missionary fields of labour, which, if they were so taken, and occupied by different Missionary Societies, would prove of great advantage to the rapid progress of the gospel.

1. From the River Volta to Badagry is one division, which takes in Whydah, Dahomey, Puto Novo, Badagry, and all speaking the Popo language on the coast; and, in the interior parts, the Shabe and Borgu countries to Busa, on the banks of the Niger.

2. The second division would be from Lagos to the Nun river, which takes in the Ijebu and Shekiri countries of the Yoruba dialects; and in the interior are the Yoruba and the kingdom of Benin to the banks of the Niger at Ibo, Igara, Kakanda, and Nupe countries.

3. The third grand division would be from the Nun to Old Calabar river, where, at Brass, Idzo, New Calabar, and Bonny, kindred languages are spoken: this division will include the large portion of the Ibo country inland towards the banks of the Tshadda.

4. The fourth division would be from Old Calabar

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SEPARATE WORK RECOMMENDED.

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to the Cameroons, having all the inland tribes north-eastward to the upper part of the Binuwe, to the country of Kororofa, the capital of which is Wukari.

Most happily the English Baptist Missionaries have turned their attention to the Cameroons, whilst the Missionaries of the Scotch Presbyterian Society have sole occupation of the Old Calabar river; and if this example were followed by the Church, the Wesleyan, and the American Baptist Missionary Societies, so as to occupy separate fields of labour, without intersecting each other's line of operations, or having their stations so close, in the same town and village, as to bring each other's peculiarities to the notice of the new converts, or heathen population at large, who cannot understand them,—if each Society worked in its own sphere of labour, we should be more successful in our Missionary efforts.

At Sierra Leone this unavoidable evil has gone to a great extent, and it has been unhappily introduced into the newly-established Yoruba Mission, where it has already begun to cause strife and disparagement of one another's church connexion among the newly-converted natives belonging to different Missionary Societies: this does no good in a new Mission field, either to the new converts or to the unconverted native population, and has caused us many sorrowful days and weeks.

It is of the utmost importance that timely measures should be adopted by the great Societies, whose sole and benevolent object is the conversion of the heathen from idolatry to Christianity; and to do this effectually, and with greater success than hitherto, they should,

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and ought, to work separately for the extension of the Church of Christ. Why should not this generous-hearted proposal be as applicable to Christian Missions as to the settlements of Abraham and Lot? "Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou wilt depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." At least the same town should not be occupied by Missionary Societies of different denominations. The highly-talented prelate of the Church at the antipodes, and his band of Missionaries, have felt the same evil, and have laid down a rule, with firm determination to avoid its increase and bad effects in their Missionary fields in the South Sea. He expressed himself in these words—"I speak, of course, with diffidence of any thing that relates to the state of religion in England, but I am bold to speak of that which I have seen and heard in the Mission field. There I assert, without fear of contradiction, schism is looked upon as an acknowledged evil. There may be the utmost charity and brotherlykindness among the Missionaries themselves, but that is not enough: no inward and spiritual unity can act as an outward evidence. The keen-sighted native convert soon detects a difference of system; and thus religion brings disunion instead of harmony and peace. I seem, then, to be justified in drawing you to this conclusion, that religious strife is wrong in principle, and also proves, experimentally, to be injurious to the progress of the gospel. We make a rule never to introduce controversy among a native people, or to impair the simplicity of their faith. If

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REACH SUNDAY ISLE.

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the fairest openings for Missionary effort lie before us, yet if the ground has been pre-occupied by any other religious body, we forbear to enter. And I can speak with confidence upon this point, from observations ranging over nearly one half of the Southern Pacific Ocean, that wherever this law of religious unity is adopted, there the gospel has its full and unchecked and undivided power: wherever the servants of Christ endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there the native converts are brought to the knowledge of ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all.’ (Eph. v. 6.) Nature itself has so divided our Mission field, that each labourer may work without interference with his neighbour.” (Bishop of New Zealand’s Sermon before the University of Cambridge, pp. 59, 60).

July 10—Weighed early this morning, and commenced our ascent with the tide, which greatly helped our progress, the schooner being lashed side by side to the “Dayspring;” and in the evening we anchored a considerable distance above Sunday island.

July 11—Weighed early, and anchored a mile above Angiama in the evening. To-day we began to meet with villages, and, as our progress had been hitherto so good, Dr. Baikie made it a point to halt opposite each of them, because we never stopped at any of them before (especially below Angiama) to hold friendly intercourse with them: accordingly we halted at the villages of Kperemabiri, whose chief was Fula; at Ekeao, chief Mugbe; Angolo, chief Doezen; Oyoma, or Kalakporoma, chief Ekpokpo; Okpokporoma, chief Bukpara, son of Nonjo; Angiama, chief Ndawa, our old friend of 1854.

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July 12: Sunday—We remained at anchor. After service we landed in the town of Angiama, on a visit to the chief, to whom, with a large crowd of spectators, we spoke a few words on religious subjects. In walking about to see the extent of this village, we came unexpectedly on a fetish-house, into which the priest, who had been following us, entered, and took his seat, evidently expecting that we should make some presents to the gods. Here, also, we spoke a few words on the folly of idolatrous worship, contrary to the priest's expectation.

July 13 — Weighed early this morning, but our progress was very slow. We anchored off Ogobiri, and on the 14th, off Hipporoteama, where we purchased stock, and held friendly intercourse with the people. As the current began to be stronger, which greatly retarded our progress, and the schooner now and then touched in shoal water, because we had to steer close to shore to avoid the force of the strong current in the midst of the stream, where there was plenty of water, our halts at these villages were less frequent, but we endeavoured to get the names of all from those who boarded us. On the 17th we anchored a little below Agbiri; and, on the morning of the 18th, off the above village, where we bought stock and wood, and invited the chief on board, Dr. Baikie having previously landed on a visit to our old friend Agbekun, who was, after all, found not to be the chief, but a man of some standing among the people. The old chief and the head trader came on board: they were very open and friendly, and would be glad to have a trading establishment in their town, and to see their children and people taught the white