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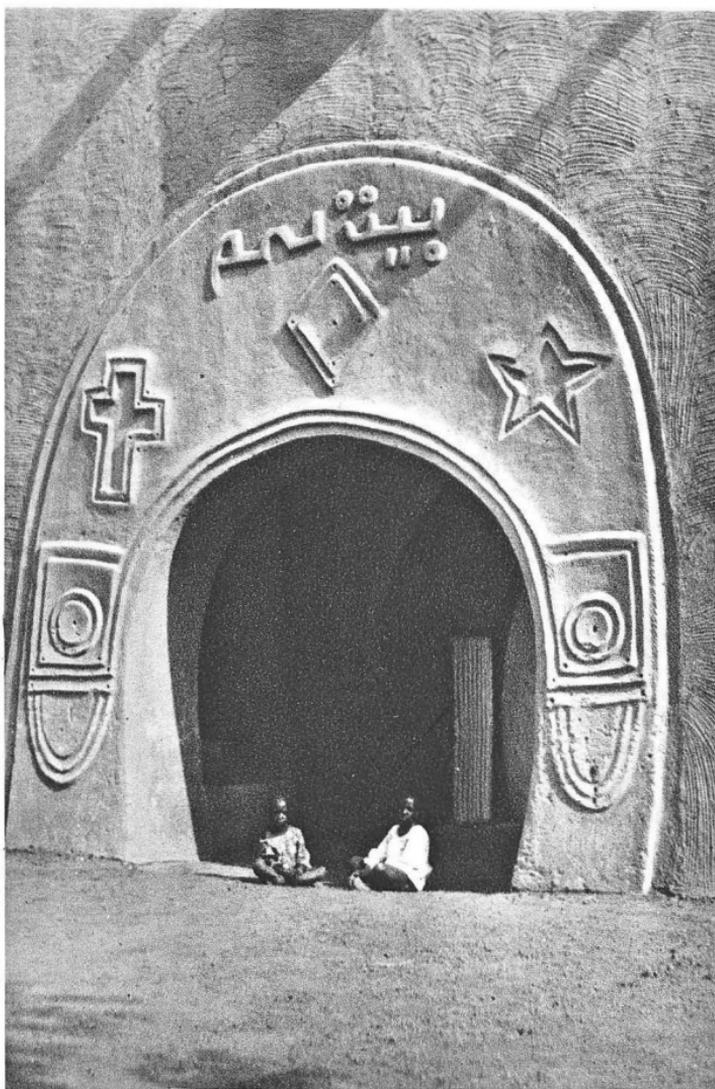


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The gateway into "Bethlehem" (Junior House)

THE STABLE DOOR

SKETCHES OF CHILD LIFE
IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

By

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WITH A FOREWORD BY

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FOREWORD

MOST people at home know that there are a large number of missionaries of various denominations working in Africa, and that a good deal of mission man-power is concentrated upon schools. It may be that some people think that too much time and energy are devoted to this side of the work, and that more ground could be covered if missionaries confined themselves to evangelization. Those who are of that way of thinking should be convinced by reading this little book that the school, and especially the boarding school which starts with quite small children, is the most effective instrument which the missionaries possess if they wish their work to be lasting.

It is not easy to write about a school in any country; the daily round appears so trivial, and nothing really thrilling ever happens in a well-organized school. Miss Locke's little sketches, however, of the kindergarten section of the C.M.S. school at Zaria give the reader real insight into the daily life of her little community, and into the thoughts and actions of her young charges.

FOREWORD

Incidentally he will see for himself that she is obviously the right sort of person to be in charge of it, so full is she of understanding, kindness, and humour.

Miss Locke's book is attractively illustrated and will, I am sure, appeal to a variety of readers.

E. R. J. HUSSEY

The photogravure illustrations have been made possible through the kindness of a friend of the school.

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“ Human nature is like a stable, inhabited by the ox of passion and the ass of prejudice ; animals which take up a lot of room. . . . It is there, between them, pushing them out of the way, that the Divine Child is to be born.”—EVELYN UNDERHILL

INTRODUCTION

“ TELL me about your children,” is the request so often repeated when I am in England on furlough that last tour I found time to record these sketches of child life in the Wusasa Kindergarten.

The work of the educational missionary in Africa has its own particular contribution to make in extending the Kingdom of God, by fostering the inward and spiritual growth of even the smallest African child. It is particularly true of Moslem children that “ the ox of passion and the ass of prejudice take up a lot of room,” but by the coming of the Christ Child they are gently led (or prodded) out of the way.

This little book is merely concerned with “ Bethlehem,” the Wusasa Kindergarten, and so you will find no stories of wonderful conversions, no heroics, but the plain story of a new venture for Christ in the Hausa States. Who can tell whether

the future may not produce another Aggrey or Apolo for the Church of God?

The school lies in the low-bush country of Northern Nigeria, in the village of Wusasa just outside Zaria, one of the big cities of the Hausa Moslem States. The Hausa differs greatly from the simple childlike pagan of other areas who sees God in the beauty and wonder of nature. He builds a high wall round his compound so that no stranger, even if he is mounted on a horse, may look on his personal and private treasures. When perhaps, after many months of patient efforts at friendship, you win the right of entry and freedom of speech, it is only to learn that the life of the household is mostly a round of strong, unbridled passions—lust and greed, pride and jealousy. As the man orders his house, so it is with himself and subsequently with his children. There is the surrounding wall of prejudice with which to deal, a door to be found, a breach in the defences, and when a door has been found or a breach made, what of the passions?

The Wusasa Kindergarten endeavours to bring every possible positive influence to bear on even the "littlest ones," teaching them to love the good, the true, the beautiful. Between the prejudices and passions, pushing them out of the way, the Divine Child is born.

CHAPTER I

THE ROAD TO "BETHLEHEM"

Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sakes,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek thy good."

WUSASA takes its name from a huge, central rock, bare and black, shaped like a whale. It seems to push its smooth, tapering form out of the scorched-up land like some huge sea monster rising to the surface of the ocean. Its only vegetation is a few stunted trees at its base and various kinds of coarse grass in its crevices. The children gather the grass in the dry season to make brooms.

In a land where there are no village greens, smooth rocks are a common substitute, so Wusasa rock is an excellent playground for the children and a popular promenade for the older folk. On its modest brow sits the church bell. When the

wind is strong, one can look up and *see* the boy ringing the bell, and yet be unable to *bear* it.

From the top of the rock there is a splendid view of Wusasa village. To the west lies the school, and to the east the hospital; mid-way between stands the church, and the little clay cottages are scattered in between these landmarks. The railroad, burning in the sunshine, runs past the school on its 600 mile journey south to the coast. On the eastern side of the rock a white ribbon of road comes from Zaria city, winds its way through the village and round the foot of the rock to disappear southwards into the bush on its way to Kaduna.

The village lies bare and open to the sun; in the dry season the brown fields are baked nearly as hard as the cottage walls. The trees, few and far between, are chiefly of two kinds: the African locust bean, from which the Hausas¹ make a queer concoction for soup, and cottonwoods, tall, gaunt, and very much be-lopped according to the local custom. A few of the older compounds are sheltered by hedges or stunted trees, but we are growing for the future, and during the last five years several hundreds of trees have been obtained from the Forestry Department, planted along the roads and round the boundaries, so that before

¹ The chief tribe of Northern Nigeria.

thirty years are over we shall be living in a veritable forest.

If we come down from the rock and follow the road we shall pass close to the hospital, with its wards and dispensary and staff buildings, including the little thatched cottages of the married nurses, cooks, labourers, and the general hangers-on of the hospital.

The thatched cottages dotted about the village are a vital factor in the environment of the *yan* (children's) kindergarten. Some are their homes; some are holiday homes for the orphans or for those whose relatives live too far away, and the majority of them are visited by the bairns on their Saturday and Sunday rambles. As country children in England slip into the friendly house for the odd apple or pear, toffee or cake, so the equivalent happens here, and many a bairn trundles up the avenue at five o'clock on Saturday afternoon dragging sticks of sugar cane, or trips in by the bush path hugging mangoes or ground nuts rolled up in the front of his jumper; or better still, coming as only an African can, with belated steps and bulging tummy. One can tell a great deal about the character of a house by the way children react to it.

There is one cottage in particular which the children love to visit—the carpenter's shop, a round, thatched house with a veranda. From this

one small building have emerged all the doors and windows on the mission, and much furniture, including tables, chairs, cupboards, desks, and easels. This is a favourite rendezvous of the yan kindergarten, especially the boys, because as every one knows, the floor of a carpenter's shop is littered with fascinating little blocks of wood which make excellent toys.

At the very centre of the life of the village stands the church. It is built crosswise on a corner of the road; round about it are the houses of the *sarki* (chief), the African clergyman, and many other Christians. You must come in and see the church for it is where the children worship on Sundays and other special occasions; and one day, "in God's good time," when He puts the thought into some one's mind to send the wherewithal, we shall turn their own special transept into a Children's Corner.

The church has always held a very natural place in the minds of these small people; busy little hands have often helped in the decorations at festivals. I shall never forget the simple and spontaneous way in which they brought into it the joy of their first Christmas. They had had their bags of toys round an open fire in the largest dormitory early in the morning; I left them to go to early Communion, knowing I should see them all again at Matins. When the time came I was

met at the church door by a radiant procession of Junior House bairns bearing dolls and trumpets, picture books, puzzles, and mouth organs. With beaming smiles they trooped noiselessly into church, and quietly placed their gifts on the floor at their feet.

St. Bartholomew's Church was built in the dry season of 1929-30. The building itself is symbolic of that spiritual temple which is beginning to grow in our midst. It is made of soft red rock and red clay from Wusasa, the common building materials of the Hausa people; the architecture, too, is pure Hausa. It was planned by a member of the Wusasa staff, built under his careful supervision, and there it stands, unique, a symbol of the Hausa Church not made with hands. The interior is simplicity itself. The pulpit, lectern, and the seats are all made of clay and rock, rubbed over with a thick solution of silver mica. The walls and ceiling are also washed with mica, which reflects a soft, shimmering, silvery light.

After leaving the church you follow the road as it winds past the doctor's bungalow, and then, at the next turn, the vast panorama of school buildings unfolds before you—the boarding houses and class rooms, staff houses and cottages, playing fields and farms. By the roadside you will probably see two or three chubby little people lying in the grass, busily chewing sugar cane. They will bow

to you cheerfully and tell you that they live in the "kindergarten"—the tall house with a big archway, down near the railway line.

Such then is the road which leads to "Bethlehem"; a highway through the Christian village with its happy, helpful atmosphere in which these small people grow up. They are equally welcomed by Hausa and European who live side by side in Wusasa. The Hausa has a donkey for them to ride; the European possesses that wonderful box called a gramophone. Love and peace are shed abroad on them; love begets love, and where love is, God is.

CHAPTER II

THE CHILDREN WHO COME

“ See that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

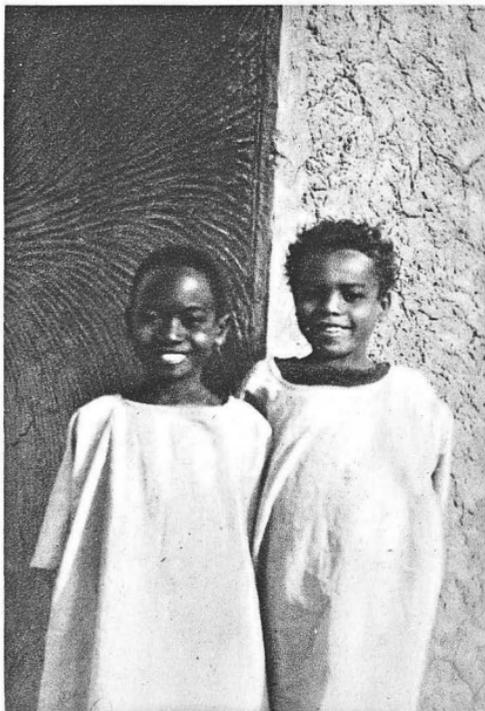
HAWA, Sani, Yakubu, and Uwaryaya all come from Moslem families. A glimpse of some of these children will illustrate a few characteristics of the raw material found at “ Bethlehem.”

Hawa is one of the fattest little four-year-olds ever born in Africa. For many weeks after her arrival at school she was famous for her anti-social habits in matters of hygiene, but now she is a perfect little lady, and takes her part with the rest in helping to form an enlightened public opinion on such matters. Yakubu is Hawa's brother. After months of obscurity he rose (or fell !) rapidly to fame by falling down a well (dry) on a quiet Sunday afternoon when he ought to have been asleep. He was manfully rescued by Joseph, aged nine, who climbed down a ladder and brought him

up on his back. Uwaryaya, which being interpreted means "mother of many children," has a highly-developed instinct of pugnacity. She rules those of her own size and smaller by fighting, and those bigger by swearing. "If I don't give in to her, she will swear at me terribly," is the fearful excuse used frequently by the head of her dormitory. Ishaya comes of a Christian family; he is the matron's eldest son. Perseverance and endurance burst out of his sturdy little frame on every occasion; with his marvellous stride he promises to be a champion long-distance runner.

Each child has to be studied individually, and yet all must be treated alike. Favouritism is one of the great weaknesses of these people. To stand well with the "big man" means that you can get what you like and do what you like. Privilege, in the English sense of the word, implying responsibility, is unknown to them. This characteristic comes out in fifty little different ways in the lives of these small people.

Many different types of children are found at "Bethlehem." There are the Hausa Moslem, the Hausa pagan, the Hausa Christian born into a Christian family; the Hausa child whose parents wish him to become a Christian but cannot make the effort themselves; there are also the Fulani of Aryan extraction, and the Angas, the pagan hillman. There is that very common "illegiti-



Two of the boys, "Bethlehem"



A very junior scholar, "Bethlehem"



The mission buildings at Wusasa

mate" type, the child with a Hausa or Fulani mother and a foreign native father. The father has come from one of the coast countries and has held a good position in the north. He is generally a well-educated man, as Africans go; he may be married or not, but while in the Hausa country he takes a Hausa woman and has children by her. After a while he is transferred to another place; he leaves the woman behind with the children in her own native town. He may send her money occasionally, or she may never hear of him again, but her eyes have been opened, she has been de-Moslemized, and her relationship with her husband has directed her outlook towards western civilization. She wants her son to be educated like his father; she knows only too well the difficulties confronting a girl in the clerks' quarters of a town, therefore her only refuge is the mission school if she can but gain a hearing. It is not uncommon for the father to pay a certain amount in school fees for his children, if one is fortunate enough to get in touch with him. These children are generally much quicker and brighter than the normal town or bush Hausa of a regular Moslem marriage.

In times of depression, which come to us all in turn, it is encouraging to look at the Christian children. It is in them, and through them, and by them that we can really see the slow but sure

growth of the Kingdom of God. There is as much difference between the children of raw, bush Moslems and uneducated bush Christians, as there is between those of the latter and the children of educated Christian parents. From the children of the uneducated Christian we look for fruit forty and sixty-fold, but from those of the educated Christian, we look for a hundred-fold, because Christianity can achieve so great a change in one generation. The parable of the mustard seed is working itself out. We realize that our work is one with those who went before us. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase," said St. Paul, and the experience is ours to-day. The pioneers toiled with the parents and grandparents, and we rejoice in the children. We are sowing for the future as they did for us, and if the kindergarten can be a means of bringing the lives of these raw Moslem children to Christ, we shall be taking our part in this generation in extending the Church of God in this country.

CHAPTER III

HOW SOME OF THEM CAME

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”

ONE day a Hausa trader appeared at the gate. He was a short, stocky, little man with a cheery, gorilla-like grin. We exchanged salutations and he opened his bundle. These people resemble the pedlars and hawkers in England. They open their pack and display their wares—brass bowls and trays, grass mats, leather bags and cushions, ivory cigarette holders, beads, and a veritable Noah’s Ark fashioned in brass.

Every act must be sociable in the Hausa country. It would be an unheard-of thing to put down five shillings for the brass tray and take it in the same way that one picks up a string of pearls in Woolworth’s and hands sixpence over the counter! In all our shopping, the longest way is the most satisfactory. The trader will probably ask thirty shillings for the tray you want, and which you both know is not worth more than five shillings. If you

are prepared to spend ten minutes on cheerful banter you will obtain your purchase satisfactorily ; if you pay more than it is worth it is your own fault.

This particular little trader came again and again, and had many a private talk with my cook. At last, one day, with moral support from the cook in the background, he opened up.

“ I want to beg one thing of you. I have at home a small son, seven years old. He is growing quickly and learning the bad ways of the women in my house. Tudan Wadda (a place about four miles away) is no place for children ; they learn all the wickedness of the town. Your children do not swear and take God’s name in vain as ours do. There is no good school in Tudan Wadda, and I want my son to be taught well. Will you take him ? ”

We bargained over his school fees as we bargained over the wares. I explained to him that this was a Christian school, and that his boy could only become a good man if he learned about the Lord Jesus Christ and His way of life. He said he understood, although he probably had not taken in one word of it ; but at least he had grasped one simple fact of which he was sure. During his frequent visits to “ Bethlehem ” he had seen children different in character and behaviour from any others he had ever known, and he wanted his son to be like them.

A few days later he returned, beaming and triumphant. "I've brought him," he said excitedly. "His mother is furious but I took no notice of her. My neighbours cursed me for bringing him to the infidels' school. He is so frightened of coming here that I have had to drag him all the way. I have told him you will be kind to him. There! I leave him with you. Whatever happens you must not let him run back home! I will go and pacify his mother."

The father comes often to see his son, and from time to time brings the mother, who is now quite reconciled to her son's departure from home. The boy goes home for the holidays, comes back quite cheerfully, and is looking forward to the time when he will bring his baby sister to school.

Children come to us in strange ways. One day a missionary from a pagan area visited the school, and sought out a small boy named Abna who originally hailed from her part of the country. She told me his history which shows that old customs die hard.

Abna's parents were Christians. After they had been married about a year they began to quarrel as there was no sign of a child. The quarrelling went on for some time, the man blaming the woman and the woman the man. At length the man drove her out, saying: "If you cannot bear children you are useless!" The woman retorted: "It is your

fault! I will go and find a man who will give me a son and prove to you that I am right!" "Go then!" said the man, and she went.

Nothing more was heard of her until eighteen months later when she appeared at her former home with a bonny baby tied on her back. "See!" she cried joyfully, to her husband, "I knew I was right. God has given me a beautiful son!" And so seven years later Abna, or "Won-on-a-journey," as his native name declares, came to school.

One night when the children were returning from holiday, two boys from the Senior House brought their small sister aged five. She was dumb with bewilderment. Never had she been outside her bush village before; now she had been brought a long journey on foot the first day, and the second day had been spent in the railway train, followed by a long walk in the dark to school. Nothing would induce her to talk. She allowed herself to be washed, clothed, fed, and led to bed. After she had been in bed about half an hour I went on the good-night round; it was then that she spoke for the first time. As I was passing her, she peeped up out of her blanket and said: "My mother will be very angry when she knows I'm here. When she went to the market Daddy ran away with me to the station!"

Unfortunately that is so often the case; it is the ignorant women who keep the children back. Hc w

often is one told: "I would bring my son, but my wife will be mad if I do. Whenever I talk about it she begins to wail and scream and wring her hands. Then the neighbours come in and they are all angry with me for suggesting it!" Or, "If I bring my son, my wife will run away and leave me, and when people know why, no one else will marry me!" The "ass of prejudice," I think to myself.

One day a very round toddler was brought to me. "There!" said his father as he put him down. "His mother has just died. If I don't bring him now, my relatives will prevent him from coming when he is older."

Every child in the kindergarten has his own particular history.

CHAPTER IV

OF "BETHLEHEM" ITSELF

"Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

AT any time of the day during out-of-school hours the sound of vigorous and continued singing can be heard in the Junior House. It is generally in the nature of hymn tunes syncopated to accompany the banging of washing clothes in the bath room, or the grinding of corn in the kitchen. Occasionally one hears Hausa ditties, but in a Moslem country native songs are neither plentiful nor beautiful, and to the children they are not nearly so inspiring when corn has to be ground as "Onward, Christian soldiers"! Often the boys, squatting round on the bath room floor, each with a bucket of washing, are so keen on producing new "harmonies" to the various hymns that the washing is forgotten till the lunch bell goes.

Joy and gladness are such a marked feature of the life at "Bethlehem," there is no mistaking the

fitness of the place which the school has in the growth of these children. The need for the Junior House had been felt for many years before it ever materialized. Many children who might have come at the age of four or five had passed beyond our reach by the time they were eleven or twelve. The boys were found too useful during the farming season or for wood cutting, and the girls lessened the work of the house besides being near marriageable age with a dowry in prospect. The children themselves were content with their lives and their companions, and had no wish to enter into a strange community. They were more hardened in the Moslem tradition, and so school was more difficult for both teacher and taught. Moreover, the few small children who did come to school fared none too well as there were no special facilities for accommodating them, and they were often neglected by the older girls and boys either through ignorance or selfishness.

For some time plans were discussed and rediscussed, the chief problem being lack of funds for the necessary buildings and equipment. Then at last, God put the thought into the mind of an English lady who sent out £700 to build the Junior School.

The kindergarten was started in July, 1930, with ten boys and six girls, all under ten. In six months the numbers had mounted to thirty. In

1931, money was given to build another dormitory and the numbers rose to forty, and later on to fifty; but this was too much for one person and one house. Forty to forty-five is the best number for management and accommodation, and even then one often sympathizes with "the old woman who lived in a shoe." There may not seem to be much difference between forty-five and fifty, but those five represent just that amount of extra strain and pressure of work which considerably weakens and lessens the quality of care and attention given to the other forty-five.

Perhaps one of the greatest and most common temptations, and consequent failings, of missionary work of any kind is to take on more work than one can cope with adequately. The need is so great, and the demand so insistent that it is often very difficult to say "No." And yet, surely it is only right to say "No"? No one should sacrifice quality to quantity. There is no shame in recognizing one's limitations. It is a dishonest principle to water down the milk in order that it may go further. If there were money to build and to staff another house it would be an excellent thing, but we must accept our limitations and give our best to the number we can manage.

The house is approached by an avenue of flamboyant trees: these have grown rapidly during their five years of life. The first generation of the

yan kindergarten were given one young tree each to water and hoe all through their first dry season. Every evening before sunset a merry procession of bairns armed with buckets set off to get water from a muddy stream a mile away ; they made little clay walls round their trees to hold the water, and rivalled each other with some form of "hedge" or stone border. Although many of those children have gone up into the senior houses, the trees in the avenue are still known to them by the names of their original "tree men." The present generation of children naturally find great delight in climbing them, and the bi-yearly lopping of lower branches causes great excitement, especially when a small saw is produced for some of them to assist with the twigs !

The buildings are of Hausa architecture, made of soft red stone mortared together with terra-cotta coloured clay, faced inside and out with a softer mixture of the same kind of clay. The whole structure hardens like rock in the dry season, dried by the wind and baked by the sun. Any room over ten feet square has an arched roof which greatly enhances its architectural appearance.

As one enters the central archway, a flight of steep steps in the left hand wall leads up to the European flat, consisting of a bed room, sitting room, and office over the gateway. On the ground floor, the boys occupy the east wing and the girls

the west. Each has its own separate dormitories and bath rooms ; there is a large common dining room, also kitchens and store and matron's rooms.

Everything is very simple. The dormitories contain large cupboards for storing clothes and blankets. Each child has a mat for a bed, and a plain wooden box in which to keep his possessions. The mat is rolled up during the day time and balanced on the top of the box. The bath rooms have bare cement floors with ropes strung across for towels, and each child has his own small bucket. The dining room has four low tables, one for each dormitory, and low benches. There is also a medicine cupboard.

In the centre of the courtyard stands a shady tree, with small trees beneath it. Beyond the courtyard lies a big, open playground with wells on the borders, lavatories beyond, and the cotton farm stretching down to the boundary. To the west of the house there is a broad, grass playing field. The old pond in the furthest corner of the compound is rapidly being filled up, because in the wet season it is full of water and breeds mosquitoes. The future generation of children will miss this exciting spot because many a jolly hour is spent in catching tadpoles and tiddlers during the rains. On its further bank stands a little grass playhouse with a sand pit—a never-

failing source of amusement and education for wee bairns. The whole compound is enclosed with a hedge made up of a variety of trees.

The class rooms where the Junior House bairns have their lessons are joined to the main school block of class rooms in the next compound. There are two kindergarten classes in one large room. The babies have mats on the floor, but the next class has little low benches which serve as seats or tables. The room possesses two cupboards, and two blackboards and easels. Such is our furniture. The children have a quantity of pictures of all kinds (thanks to many friends), reading and number cards, boxes of letters, shells, beads, puzzles, bead frames, sticklaying boxes, building bricks, sewing cards, plasticine, coloured pastels for drawing, and so on. There are many more things we should like, and apparatus wears out quickly, but it is a very happy and busy group of little people that you see whenever you look through the door.

CHAPTER V

THE DAY'S WORK

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

AT dawn the matron rises and begins to cook the morning meal; this is the call to get up. Drowsy bodies creep out of warm blankets; sleepy eyes search for buckets, and the children trot off to the wells for water. The buckets are similar to seaside buckets in England. Having procured some lukewarm water from the well, found their soap box—a cigarette tin—and their towels—a production of Messrs. Woolworths—they proceed to the bath rooms. Bathing is not viewed favourably by newcomers, so at times the day's work starts with tears.

After dressing, which is a simple process as there are only two articles of clothing to put on, the children tidy their boxes and go about their several duties. The fours, fives, and sixes wash the dishes and take away the sweepings. The older ones sweep the compound, dormitories, and dining room, and wash down tables, bath rooms, and lavatories.

The whole house then assembles for morning exercises either in the courtyard or on the playing field. These take the form of various free movements, such as running, jumping, skipping, and hopping. Every one is now thoroughly awake; so each, armed with a handkerchief (of sorts) and a spoon, retires to prayers in the dining room.

In the wet season, when it is too wet to go out to work, the children sit and sing, or else drum and dance, until breakfast time, but this applies to little more than a fortnight in August each year. Usually, new work for the day is given out, clothes to wash, paths to hoe, cotton or potato farming, grass to cut—one quarter of a child's life in the kindergarten is spent in hay making! The children of the four dormitories work together in four groups, with a ten-year-old at the head of each. The matron's eldest daughter helps her mother with the cooking and serving out of forty odd basins of porridge, while her second child baths the two babies and sweeps her mother's house.

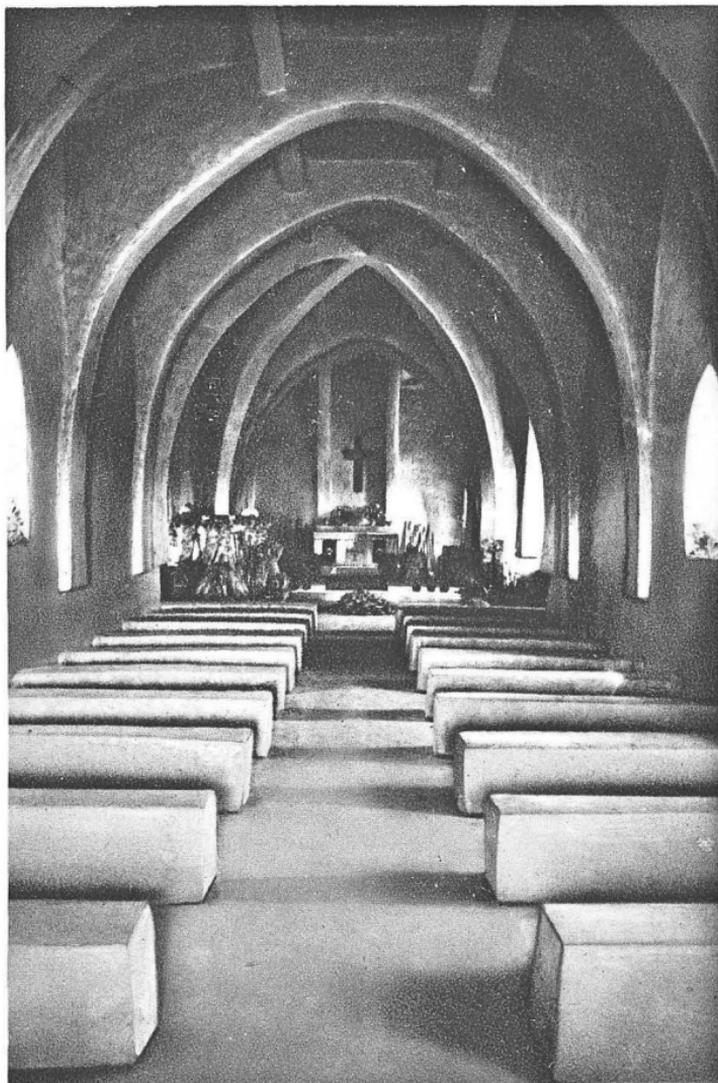
At about eight o'clock the children leave their work and come to breakfast. Each child brings his own bowl of corn porridge and soup from the kitchen to the dining room. After singing Grace they tuck into their breakfast. Any one coming in late sings Grace solo; this was a penalty imposed by public opinion in the kindergarten, and they are ruthless in their criticism of solo singing. Those

who can sing are accepted in silence, but "growlers" —well, it is the best cure for being late!

Breakfast being over each child washes his own basin and spoon, and puts them away in his box, but not before those who are taking quinine or medicine for coughs or colds have produced their bottle from the medicine cupboard and demanded their dose. Four nine-year-olds wash down the tables and sweep out the room.

Every one then changes into school uniform which is lilac-coloured; frocks and head-ties for the girls, and similar long loose jumpers for the boys. The school bell rings and there is much shouting to late comers, or for missing books and pens, as they scamper off to school chapel in the next block of buildings. The children in the infant classes remain behind in the dining room where they are joined by other infant day scholars. Only those in the primary classes join the older children at school prayers, after which they all divide into their several classes in separate rooms.

In the kindergarten classes the morning is given up to number, reading, and writing, and the afternoons to Bible stories, singing, story lessons, and some form of handwork or occupation. They have lessons for only three and a half hours each day. Children in the primary classes learn history, geography, hygiene, and nature study, besides "the three R's," and Scripture, Prayer Book, and singing. From Standard II they learn English, and the boys in Standard IV do leatherwork.



The church at Wusasa, decorated for Harvest Festival



Picking cotton



The end of a row of garglers

From eleven to twelve o'clock they are back in their own house busily continuing the morning's work, or playing their own games. The bigger children begin to grind the corn for to-morrow's breakfast, or start school preparation which must be finished before the morrow.

At 12.30 they put away their tools and toys, and bring their bowls and spoons into the dining room for their mid-day meal of pounded corn and milk ; after which, having washed up the dishes and cleaned up the room, they all rest or sleep in their dormitories until the bell rings for two o'clock school. At half-past three they return to the house for a variety of occupations until half-past five. They finish grinding their corn, preparing their lessons, some of the girls do needlework, knitting, or crochet, while the babies play by themselves.

On Friday afternoons the whole school goes to choir practice in preparation for the Sunday services.

Three children, girls or boys, take it in turn to cook the evening meal, which consists of boiled rice or sweet potatoes with palm oil, or on special occasions of rice and honey. This is usually done under the supervision of the matron, but now, whether she is there or not, they all know their turn and accept it as routine. Some years ago, before this routine was established, the matron was delayed in the market three miles away owing to a tornado. About six o'clock, when the storm was over, I went down to find the eldest girl, then

about nine years old, to suggest a few preparations which she might make for the evening meal before the matron's return. I met her in the courtyard and was beginning to explain to her, when she said very shyly: "It is ready." I followed her into the kitchen, where to my amazement were the pots of rice and oil boiling merrily over the fires. All through the storm that industrious little soul had busied herself with cooking. No one had helped her, but she knew what had to be done and went steadily on with making fires and boiling water, washing and stirring the rice!

It is usually at the evening meal time that a visitor is struck by the sight of a long queue of children each carrying a bowl of food. A queue is the outward and visible sign of controlled passions! The Hausa has (from our point of view) an abnormal desire for salt; where we should be content with a pinch, these small bairns need a dessert spoonful or more. Left to their own devices the bigger ones used to help themselves to the lot and there was much waste, so a six-year-old girl was appointed as *mai-gishiri* (the owner of salt) and the rest of the house learned to wait in a queue. One by one each receives his salt; there is no fighting and grabbing now. The law of the house being established, the children themselves teach all newcomers to observe it.

To return to the day's routine. At 5.30 when-

ever possible, the gramophone is brought down to the quadrangle, and a very energetic and enjoyable time is spent in rhythmic movements, skipping, country dances, and singing games. By this time the children are thoroughly tired. They trot off to their evening bath and come to the dining room for prayers at 6.30; they then have their supper, retire to their dormitories, spread their mats, roll into their red blankets and slip into dream-land.

The routine on Saturday and Sunday is somewhat different. Saturday is "spring-cleaning" day; rooms are turned out, mats and blankets sunned, properties checked, night dresses and towels washed, and the older children take turns to go with the matron to the market to buy the week's supplies. It is also the day for the weekly performance of ironing uniform. This is done by eight nine-year-olds, four boys and four girls. At first I had to divide the work between them myself, but now they do it themselves without any squabbling at all. Occasionally there is a little heated argument over the irons, but as a rule they do it without much fuss. Their irons are small and so are not too heavy for their small hands. There is great rivalry over folding; each child invents his own particular style. Sometimes the result looks more like a box of Christmas handkerchiefs, so intricate are the folds. It serves

its purpose, of course, for on Sunday morning when fresh uniform is given out ready for church, if any one finds iron marks the culprit is known by the style of folding !

Sunday is even more simple. After the morning routine work, clean uniforms are given out, and off the children go to church—four little crocodiles join end to end to make one big “croc” as they go down the road. A visitor once described them as a “bunch of violets” when he saw them all collected together outside the church. After the morning service there is the usual mid-day meal and a long rest until Sunday school. Then follows a ramble round to see their friends, an early meal, and bed.

Educationists reading this book will realize how nearly this school in the savannah of Northern Nigeria has got back to the simplicity of the kindergarten system as propounded by Froebel and his predecessor, Pestalozzi. They held that development was based on self-activity, which principle underlies the day's work in the Junior House. Froebel, in particular, laid special emphasis on the study of nature and practical gardening, an emphasis observed at Wusasa as the following chapter will show. Thus we are experimenting with their theories in an African environment, and evolving from them means by which the Kingdom of God can be extended in the Hausa country.

CHAPTER VI

“ BETHLEHEM’S ” FIELDS

“ Behold, a sower went forth to sow.”

FOR months past the parched, dry fields have been scorched up in the sunshine. The herds of Fulani cattle, the goats, the sheep, and the donkeys have browsed over them, trying to find fodder among the stubble. The ponds are baked dry, and the few streams are reduced to streaks of liquid mud. It is verily “ a barren and dry land where no water is.”

For days we have watched the billowy clouds roll up from the south-west and pass over us. In the evening they heap themselves up, angry and purple, in the east. We watch their formation anxiously and the weather prophet says: “ No, the storm won’t come. It’s too far south.” Later in the evening we see the southern sky lit up with lightning, and we know that some fortunate place is being blessed with rain.

Our wells are dry. We cannot dig deeper because of the rock. For the last fortnight we have begged water from people with better wells.

“We need water badly,” I say to an old farmer. “The rains are late this year.” “Truly; but in God’s good time they will come,” is the patient answer.

Then one April afternoon, when coming out of the Middle School at five o’clock, I see the tornado has gathered further to the east than usual. I go back to the Junior House, hurry on to the roof and look towards the east. Zaria town, a mile or so away, is enveloped in a sand storm; houses and trees are blotted out in thick, yellow-ochre dust which is rising in dense clouds and driven onwards in the fury of the tornado. It is coming straight across the plain to Wusasa; in five minutes it will be here.

I call from the roof to the children and tell them it is coming. Their excitement rises with the wind. There are blankets to rescue from the line; buckets to retrieve, which are bowling across the compound before the wind. Small girls run to bring in armfuls of dry wood for the fire. Down below in the dormitories other children are helping one another to clamber up to bolt the windows.

Looking across the plain I see that the storm has burst over the hospital compound, and I call to the children to hurry still more. The sand storm bursts over Wusasa rock; the “J.S. Bairns” dive into the dormitories like rabbits into their burrows, and I retire from the roof.

The storm bursts over us. From a sheltered window I watch the sand storm sweep by for about twenty minutes. A moment's lull in the wind, and then the deluge! “Thank God!” say a hundred different people each in his sheltered corner of Wusasa, “the rain has come!”

Above the roaring of the wind and rain, and the crashing of the thunder, rises the sound of the children beneath. Their spirits have risen with the gale. They are drumming on the cupboards to rival the thunder; others are singing and dancing. In answer to the lightning and the thunder there are wails and cries from the littlest ones who do not remember tornadoes.

Half an hour later it is all over. The wind has driven the rain clouds before it, and all is still. The children burst from their rooms with shrieks of delight. They rush out into the compound and dance in the puddles. They seize their buckets and run to the flooded drains for water. They take off their clothes and splash the water over each other. Never has there been such a glorious hour since this time last year!

Then, the excitement over, they prepare for evening prayers. We thank God for the rain, and at supper afterwards there is a perfect babel of voices, all holding forth in the typical African manner—speakers and audience together at one and the same time—on that never ending theme, farming.

The next morning, when routine work is over, the children line up in the courtyard, and the hoes are borne eagerly and joyfully from the store. Last year's farmers take their hoes and retire to their places. Hoes are given out to newcomers, but best of all, honour awaits those who were too small to be given a hoe last year, but who may now be deemed worthy of such a prize. The first stage out of babyhood has been reached!

Now comes the test and revelation of character. I choose the eight best farmers—four boys and four girls—and in turn they choose their "men." I stand aside and learn from them. Farming is a serious business. Ali may be a most amusing companion and very popular, but is useless on a farm; with downcast looks he sees that he is passed by. Rabi may be very good at games, but she is a town girl and knows nothing about handling a hoe. "Youth" is no handicap. Often the fives and sixes are chosen before the eights and nines; if any query is raised the head farmer says gravely: "He is able."

There remain the rag, tag, and bob-tail from the farmer's point of view. There is an awkward pause; the remainder look depressed to the point of tears, the farmers stand firm and dignified. "What about these?" I venture. "Sani eats our ground nuts." "Yakubu only plays." "Idi spoils our crops." "Mariya won't work."

“ Gwamma can’t do anything.” It is a serious and tense moment. If the boat train went by unexpectedly, no one would so much as glance in its direction. I explain to them that every one must learn to farm and that they must be patient with one another; that it would be a terrible thing to grow up and be useless to others, to be incapable of growing food crops, or flowers to make their houses look beautiful, or cotton for the market. The offenders say that they will really try. They are solemnly drafted into the groups, and the whole crowd troops across the playground to the farm land. Plots are chosen, boundaries are set, and merrily they set to work to clean up the land.

After two days the land is baked dry again, as hard as ever. You would think that there had never been any rain at all. There is nothing to do but to put away hoes and wait, perhaps another fortnight, for the next tornado. The morning following the second tornado the sowing takes place—maize, millet, guinea corn, and ground nuts. Each child brings his, or her, own contribution. Later on, when the wet season is well in, other things are planted—sweet potato, cassava, pepper, gourds, and English flower seeds gathered from all kinds of sources.

Day by day the work goes on, hoeing weeds and manuring. There is great rivalry because prizes

are given at the height of the season for the best gardens. Each group tries to outdo the others in enterprise and produce, so much so that last year one young farmer of seven seasons lifted bodily from my own small flower bed a choice carnation, and set it boldly among his ground nuts and potatoes.

At last October comes ; the rains cease, and the corn settles itself down to the business of ripening. There is a lull in the farm work until November, then comes the excitement of harvesting. To these little people of three to four feet high, cutting down corn twelve to sixteen feet high must seem a tremendous business. Armed with matchets they slash away at the base of the stem with the energy of woodcutters. It is then left to finish drying on the ground, and a few days later, the heads of corn (they are certainly too enormous to be termed "ears") are chopped off and bound up into short, dumpy sheaves.

Cotton, from the communal cotton farm on which they all work, has to be picked before the strong winds scatter it over the countryside. Every day after morning and afternoon school, the children wander up and down the deep furrows among the cotton bushes and pluck the soft, white "wool" from the bursting capsules. Each child fills his own bag or basket and then tips it into the sack. When the sack is full to overflowing,

it is sent as their contribution to the hospital where it is used for dressings. They then begin to fill the second sack, and so on.

Ground nuts have to be hoed up and spread out to finish drying in the sunshine. They are then gathered into large open baskets or sacks.

On a certain day, each farm brings its produce and we compare quality and quantity. There is much heartsearching over the ground nuts. “ They have been eaten,” says a young farmer. “ Yes, but who ate them ? ” And by the time they have all finished telling who, by whom, when, where, and why, there is no one left guiltless in the whole community ! I tell them that they cannot possibly take the residue to the harvest thanksgiving as people would only laugh at them ; next year they must try to remember to save them carefully. After further discussion it is suggested that the four best corn sheaves shall be sent to the harvest festival and four smaller ones to the principal and the doctor as a present for their horses. They are borne off triumphantly ; the farming season is over.

CHAPTER VII

INCREASING IN STATURE

“ Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God ? ”

MEASLES, mumps, and the rest come to the Wusasa Kindergarten as to any other school; it is then that the medical officer orders gargling. A solitary African child of seven on being told to gargle would probably think it a most dangerous and difficult operation, as the instructions are “ not to swallow it ”; but for the Junior House bairns it is an exciting social event. They queue up for the “ medicine,” and then retire *en masse* to the shady tree in the centre of the courtyard where they proceed with gurgles of delight to rival each other in producing the loudest “ gargle.”

Small children readily respond to suggestions concerning the “ temple of the body.” They understand that they have a duty towards it. It is a little house in which the Spirit lives, and each one must keep it clean to prevent disease from

destroying it, and they must help it to grow strong so that they can work with it.

At the morning parade before prayers, the following type of conversation is often heard.

“*Tutalaki* (Little fat boy)! You have not washed your ears. Where is *Tutalaki*'s big brother? Why has not *Tutalaki* washed properly? You remember what happened once before? You let his ears get dirty and they got ill, then he had to go to hospital. He could not hear the lesson he had to learn when he went to school, neither could he hear you at play, and he couldn't hear the birds singing. Now you are spoiling his body. Why has God given you ears?”

“To hear with.”

“And how can *Tutalaki* hear with ears like that?”

“*Asma'u*, your eyes are never washed in the morning! You let your eyes get sore and ill, and then you are too lazy to wash them. God has given you a lovely pair of eyes to see all kinds of beautiful things, but you make them dirty and spoil them. Do you want to be blind like the old rope seller?”

“No,” says *Asma'u*, aged six, “I will wash them with medicine quickly.”

They are running races and *Yakubu* hides in the background.

“Where is fat Yakubu?”

He shambles forward. “I have a bad foot.”

“But a week ago I gave you a note to go to hospital every morning after school.”

Yakubu shuffles uneasily.

“Have you been?” He shakes his head.

“Where is the bandage?”

“In my box.”

“Then you’re a stupid, lazy little boy! The doctor looked at your sore foot, the nurse put medicine on it and bound it up for you to make it better, and you have let the dirt get in again and make it worse. That is very stupid of you; now you can’t play with the others. You’re too lazy to look after yourself! When the others are working you sit down because you can’t walk about quickly. Now go and find your bandage, wash your foot with hot water from the kitchen, and tie it up yourself, and after school go down to hospital.”

The children are jumping and one boy jumps lamely.

“What is the matter with your foot, Haruna?”

“There’s a thorn in it.”

“Then sit down and pull it out before you get a bad foot like Yakubu.”

It is the wet season and coughs are prevalent.

Only people who have lived in close touch with a family of forty small children can have any idea how infectious, annoying, and tiring coughs can be. The Wusasa medical staff are quite sure I water the ferns with the cough medicine! They send me a fairly large bottle, half full of the precious cure, and it is gone in two days. I politely ask for more. The bottle comes back refilled with medicine, plus a note informing me that there are eighty doses contained therein, with a now-throw-that-away tone about the note. I make a rapid calculation as I read on the label the medical refrain of "Three times a day after meals." Well, thirty children need medicine; $3 \times 30 = 90$, so the bottle won't last us one day! This is rather difficult! I explain the situation to the doctor, who says: "Well, we can't afford it! It's *frightfully* expensive, and we haven't much left."

Well, I think to myself, that doesn't help. The question of expense is irrelevant, and after all, a certain amount of medicine can only cure a certain number of coughs. However, something must be done about it.

I go back to the children. After evening prayers I talk to them.

"There's no more cough medicine than this for you as yet, but you must stop coughing. Some of you could if you tried. Some of you cough so much that you can't sing nearly so nicely as you

did. How can you go to church on Sunday and praise God with singing if you have been foolish and spoilt your voice with coughing all the week? Some of you got coughs by playing in the rain and sleeping in wet clothes. Your body doesn't like wet clothes; they make it ill."

I leave them till Sunday morning. After prayers I pick out three or four with bad coughs. "Now, these children cannot go to church this morning." There is dead silence. "They've been coughing all the time we've been praying, and they can't sing for coughing! If they go to church they will hinder people from hearing God's Word and the *malla*m praying; they will worry the preacher, and they can't sing; so they must stay at home."

The following Sunday there are no more coughs.



House-building, a great joy



Some junior inmates of "Bethlehem"



Country dancing



Juniors on the march

CHAPTER VIII

GROWING IN HUMOUR AND UNDERSTANDING

“Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

SOME years ago, when I was travelling down the Niger in a river steamer, I thought as I saw the beautiful silver and gold sandbanks: “Why ever don’t the children play on them! I’m sure English children would.” I expressed this thought aloud to a travelling companion, whose crushing retort was: “Probably would—and be eaten by crocodiles!” Being a “bush woman” from the hot, dry plains of the north, I had not been brought up to think in terms of rivers and crocodiles.

Wusasa is five miles from a river bed, which in the wet season is a swirling, muddy stream. So the yan kindergarten have to content themselves with the aforesaid pond at the bottom of the compound. Many a happy hour is spent in this swamp. The frogs, the fish, and the grasshoppers give endless entertainment; there are also birds’ nests in the reeds. All kinds of little creatures are

caught and imprisoned in tins and jars, and secluded behind boxes in the dormitories.

After the rains the water dries up rapidly; the reeds are cut down and a grass playhouse is made. The floor of the pond has excellent clay for making mud pies, and the Junior School building season begins. Busy little hands make every kind of house you can think of. Some are quite well proportioned and have an upstairs as well as a ground floor. A few of the children make pottery after their own fashion. Mention has already been made of the sand pit where the littlest ones roll and dig to their hearts' delight.

There are fashions in games in the Hausa country as in England. Empire Day celebrations always stimulate the boys to play soldiers. Then there is the hoop-bowling season, the "hoops" being made of strong wire or old bicycle wheels. High jump and long jump are the most popular form of sport; whatever the fashion may be for the moment, the bairns always come back to these. Hockey and football, unorganized, also have their day.

The girls play far more of their own Hausa games than the boys. They love the handclapping, the singing, and the dancing, but the boys' games are not nearly so entertaining; they find European games much more absorbing.

With the boys the most popular Hausa game is

hunting with bows and arrows. One morning, when I was teaching in the Middle School, I looked out of the window and saw a very excited crowd of children with bows and arrows under a large tree in the Junior House drive. A shout of victory arose and they pounced on the prey. I went out to them.

“What are you doing?”

“Hunting . . . shooting,” they said, with cheerful smiles.

“What have you shot?”

“A dove.”

A small boy of eight produced it.

“Did you shoot it?”

“Yes.”

I admired his skill. I could not have hit a turkey ten feet off.

“What are you going to do with it now?”

“Eat it!”—in chorus, and a dozen pairs of eyes said: “What a silly question!”

“Now listen,” I said. “That little bird is not very useful as food. There is not enough meat on it for even one of you.” They all looked at the bird questioningly.

“Don’t you like all God’s pretty birds in the trees round our house?”

They nodded assent.

“They sing to us; they eat the insects and mosquitoes that trouble us. Once upon a time we

had no trees and no bushes here, and there were no birds. Now the trees are growing up the birds have come to live with us and are our friends. If you shoot at them, you will frighten them away. Do you understand ? ”

“ We do.”

“ So remember, if you want to do real hunting you must wait until Saturday ; then you can take your bows and arrows and go away into the bush and shoot big birds. But the birds that live with us, you must not hurt them.”

“ Thank you,” they said politely, all bowing together.

One night I was on my Good-night round, and as I passed the boys’ dormitory I noticed that they had all shifted their positions. They were lying with faces towards the centre of the room, and every blanket sheltered a pair of bright, black eyes intently watching some object round the corner. As I approached the door, a little, dark, furry thing moved down the room.

“ What’s that ? ”

“ It’s Ibrahim’s,” came the evasive answer.

“ Is it yours, Ibrahim ? ”

“ Yes.” The dormitory sat back on its heels.

“ What is it ? ”

“ A baby rabbit.”

Ibrahim darted after it and brought it to me. It

was the sweetest, smallest baby rabbit I had ever seen. He told me that a labourer had caught it on a farm and given it to him two days ago, since when he had kept it in his box and given it his mid-day milk to drink.

The wee thing sat in my hand with room to spare ; its long ears lay along its back.

“ Well, Ibrahim,” I said, “ you can’t keep it in your box in the dormitory. We must find a suitable place for it to-morrow, but to-night we will put it in a basket in the store.”

He followed me out to the store, and the rabbit was installed in a basket.

In the morning, as I was dressing, I had an idea. There was an ideal home for a baby rabbit in the form of a storied mud house, built by the children down by the cotton farm. After breakfast I went to the store but the rabbit had gone. In fear and trembling I asked where Ibrahim was.

“ Ah ! ” they said, “ he has taken his rabbit down to the house by the cotton farm ! ”

Very much relieved, I went down to the little mud house, no bigger than a doll’s house, and there was a group of children delightedly watching the rabbit, which, in a very human way, was running from the ground floor up the stairs to the upper story, and turning round and waving its whiskers to them out of the door. The rabbit loved its house ; after a time it became so tame that it

would run out into the compound to the children. I was afraid the dogs would find it, but all went well.

Then I forgot about the rabbit for some time, until one morning, after the third or fourth tornado, I suddenly remembered the poor little thing would get drowned in the flood. I went down and found Ibrahim drawing water at the well.

"Ibrahim," I said, "now the rains have come, you can't leave your rabbit in that house; don't you think . . ."

But at the word "rabbit" he nervously dropped the bucket and there was a dead silence. The other children looked at me shocked and horrified. "How can you mention it!" their eyes said. I felt exceedingly awkward and guilty.

"Where is it?"

"It is not here," answered Ibrahim politely.

"What have you done with it?"

Tears rolled down Ibrahim's cheeks in silence. At last one bold spirit said: "Samuel did it."

Then bit by bit the story came out. Ibrahim had gone down and rescued his rabbit at the first tornado. He brought it back to the dormitory and put it in his box, but the rabbit, having grown bigger and more lively, refused to stay in the box. Here was a predicament! Ibrahim knew I did not like them to keep animals in the dormitories, and the rabbit was racing round the room and causing

such excitement that they might be heard! There was only one way of keeping the rabbit in the box, and that was to pile so many things on top of it that it could not possibly get out! Which they did, with the result that the next morning it was found suffocated. Ibrahim would have buried his rabbit and said nothing; but Samuel thought it a terrific waste of good meat, so he skinned it and cut it up, and three of them ate it raw!

“O you little cannibals!” I said to the three, “you shall not eat any of my meat for a week, because you ate your friend and playmate!”

CHAPTER IX

GROWING PAINS

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

ONE morning I went down into the children's dining room and found a huge pool of ink in the middle of one of the tables. The tables had been washed for breakfast, the room had been left spick and span, but some one at a very early hour had already been busy with the ink. Now the law of the house is, that when these accidents happen, as they most surely will, you must clear up the mess yourself before any further damage is done.

The children came in for morning prayers; there were many surprised whispers about the ink. I asked who spilt it but no one answered. Did any one know anything about it? No one. I searched their faces; they all looked innocent. Then I realized that a small seven-year-old was missing, and light dawned!

“Go and find Osman,” I said to the head of his dormitory.

We waited in silence. The boy returned without him. "He is coming," he said.

"Where is he?"

"In the lavatory!"

Ah! I smile to myself. How typically English to get into mischief and retire to that unget-at-able stronghold. However, we waited patiently for him, knowing that he must eventually come out. Presently he sauntered into the room trying to assume a careless, I-didn't-know-you-were-waiting-for-me air. Guilt was written all over his face.

"Did you spill this ink?" I asked as casually as he had walked in.

"No," came the prompt reply.

My heart sank.

"Do you know anything about it?"

"No,"—with a face as black as thunder.

I had never known him lie before. Whatever spirit could have entered into him this morning? I chose a suitable hymn and we proceeded with prayers. Watching him from the corner of my eye, I could see that shame and pride were having a fearful struggle in that one small soul. By the end of the hymn he was on the verge of tears, but by the time prayers were over he had pulled himself together again.

"This is very sad," I said to them all. "It isn't a sin to spill ink; accidents will happen, but whoever does it must clear it up quickly. Some

one here this morning has been too lazy to clean it up, and now he is telling a lie about it to try to hide his fault. It makes me very unhappy, and we can't have any breakfast until whoever did it comes and tells me. You had better all go out to the field and gather in the hay."

They went out talking in subdued voices and moved off to the playing field.

Five minutes later, when I was busy in one of the dormitories, I heard a little movement by the doorway, and turning round I saw young Osman hugging the doorpost in a most woebegone manner.

"Well?" I beamed at him.

"I've come to tell you I spilt that ink," said a small voice. Tears began to trickle down his cheeks.

"I *am* so glad you have come! Now we can all be happy again. Why on earth did you tell a lie about it?"

"I don't know why."

"You've never told me a lie before, and you mustn't tell another."

"No, I won't."

"Well, go and get some water, and sand, and soap, and a brush, and wash the table quickly. The children will be wanting their breakfast."

Everybody in the Junior House was "exhibition

mad." A handwork exhibition was to take place shortly, and the kindergarten was a hive of industry. Toys were being made of corn stalks, mud houses were being built, all kinds of strange and wonderful things were being created by sewing, knitting, and crochet. There was also drawing (of sorts!).

Entering a dormitory one afternoon, I found Enoch, a wisp of a lad with the expression of a cherub and the artfulness of a fox, busy painting. He was stretched on a mat surrounded with a diverse collection of paints, coloured pencils, crayons, a few unopened books, a large English Bible opened at Proverbs (of which he could not read a word), a broken ruler, and a dirty piece of rubber. Before him was a large sheet of drawing paper and he was rubbing furiously. He gave me a go-away-and-don't-interrupt-me look.

"Dear me!" I said, deadly serious, "you are busy!"

He ignored me for a second, and then remembering his manners, scrambled into a sitting position and saluted me.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm drawing for the exhibition."

"How splendid!" I said, but it did not ring true as I was gazing at a very lurid text he was endeavouring to copy.

A few days later, when saying good-night, I said to one of the girls: "Where is the drawing

you were doing for the exhibition?" She looked at me in dismay.

"I can't finish it," she said, "because Enoch has used up all my paints and pencils!"

"But why did you let him?"

She looked at me amazed and stammered out: "But . . . you said . . . he said . . . he came and said I was to give them all to him, and that you said so!"

"Oh, that cunning little bag of tricks!" I said. "Let me bring him here!"

I hauled him out of bed, and we talked it out, there and then, under the stars. At last I concluded: "You must never tell a lie about me again, and you can't send that drawing in for the exhibition now as it is dishonest work."

"What is the meaning of 'impudent'?" asked Rahila, one day when we were busy in the compound. She is the matron's eldest daughter and my right hand in the house. I explained the word to her but she was not satisfied.

"But," she persisted, "it says in the Bible that a harlot is impudent to her husband. What does that mean?"

I groaned inwardly and grasped the situation. She has an insatiable desire for knowledge, and books being few, she had now started delving into the more obscure parts of the Old Testament. I discussed the question with her as unemotionally

as if I were explaining the habits of mosquitoes, and she seemed quite satisfied.

A week later, she came to my office and presented me with her drawing for the exhibition. I gave it a hasty glance, thought hard about something else, and dismissed her. When she was at a safe distance I gave vent to my feelings. I picked up the "drawing." Drawing is certainly the last thing Rahila should attempt for a handwork exhibition. Along the top of the page and hanging down each side she had drawn what was meant to be a festoon of pink roses. The words in the middle looked as if they had been thrown on the paper from the top of Wusasa rock; besides being crooked, they were badly spelt and wrongly divided. All the letters were written with different coloured crayons. This is what (with difficulty) I read: "Wine and women make a man of understanding to fall, and he that cleaveth to a harlot shall become impudent." (For example see 1 Kings xi. 1-9.)"

Later, I called Rahila.

"That was not a good drawing you gave me. The spelling was wrong, the printing was crooked, you hadn't measured your words correctly. You must do a better one for the exhibition; I couldn't let you send that in! And I should choose a nice verse from the Beatitudes, or 1 Corinthians xiii if I were you."

"Thank you," said Rahila politely, "I will."

CHAPTER X

A NEW BIRTHDAY

“ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things.”

THE Hausa do not record their birthdays. When a child is brought to the school, efforts have to be made to fix the age of the newcomer. The most helpful relatives will tell you that it is so many wet seasons, or harvests, or Ramadans—this is as accurate as one can hope them to be. The usual type of bush woman will be delightfully vague in giving such information as: “ Oh, it was the day I was hoeing potatoes in the field and there had been a big storm . . . ,” or: “ Her father had just gone to the market to sell some grass and Laraba had just come in to tell me her sister was ill” Having tracked down a child’s age to the nearest possible month, we leave it at that for the present for purposes of registration. The celebrations of all the birthdays are kept on a certain day in July, which is also the birthday of the House; thus they rejoice together over the

blessings of growth and count their years also in this new stage of development since they came to the Junior House.

The children prepare for this event some days beforehand. Haruna, who seems to be made entirely of indiarubber, is busy at the jumping stands every day after school. He can clear four feet in the presence of his friends but wants to make sure of it when shy and nervous in front of the excited crowd. Tubby Tatalaki and Idi are seen endeavouring to clear twelve inches, while some of the smallest girls stop dead in front of six inches with a most reproachful expression as if they had been asked to jump over the moon!

Every one, from the smallest toddler to the eldest boy or girl, trains for the sports. No one is allowed to be left out; the knowledge that they must all take their part encourages those who are inclined to be lazy to make the extra spurt. There is a strong sense of *esprit de corps*. Every boy and girl practises high jump and long jump, flat racing and skipping. They learn dances and songs for the outdoor entertainment. Extra care is also given to the farms, as the birthday is a prize-giving day.

The day is fixed and invitations are sent out to parents, the elders of Wusasa, the mission staff, and European friends at the station. The Resident's wife is asked to distribute the prizes.

The children spend the morning in preparation.

The compound is given an extra clean up ; flags are set up on the playing field ; seats and mats are arranged for the spectators in the courtyard and on the playing field ; prizes are arranged on a long table and covered with a cloth ; little messengers run all over Wusasa bringing borrowed cups and saucers, plates and mugs, teapots and jugs for the afternoon gathering ; the tables are prepared in the dining room. At mid-day they all go to rest until three o'clock when they get up, bath, and put on new *kampes* (small shorts), clean jumpers, and frocks, and wait impatiently in the dormitories.

Meanwhile, the guests gather for tea. The squash in the dining room becomes worse each year ; Africans love a squash, but I am not sure that the European guests appreciate it quite so much ! When it is time for the programme to begin, the children troop across to the field and the guests are ushered from the dining room to the seats on the playing field. The boys toss off their jumpers and do everything in their *kampes*. They divide up for the running and jumping according to ages.

The events begin. The inter-dormitory flag race stirs up great excitement, and the comic races, such as horse racing and rabbit jumps, cause much amusement. There are also races and jumping for " Old Bairns "—those girls and boys who were once in the kindergarten but who have now grown up and passed on to the senior houses.

The sports being over, every one returns to the quadrangle; the children take their places in the centre and the guests sit round by the walls. Then follows nearly an hour's entertainment in the form of rhythmic movements and dancing to the accompaniment of the gramophone. There are also skipping competitions, and the programme comes to a close with the singing of songs.

After the entertainment the Resident's wife distributes the prizes, which are all gifts sent by some of our many friends in England. Prizes are not only given for the sports, but for the best farms, good needleworkers, good houseworkers, and for conduct in general. In fact, unless any one happens to be very bad, or very new, practically all have earned something by the end of the day.

The prize-giving ended, all rise and sing "God save the King," and the gathering breaks up. The children rush round to display their prizes to friends and relatives. There is much interchange of salutations, prolonged and vigorous. After a quarter of an hour of this excitement, I call the children into the dining room where they tuck into their treat hungrily and happily. The quantities of tea, lemonade, bread and jam, cake, biscuits, and oranges which disappear in half an hour would rival any Sunday-school treat in England.

When all is done we stand and sing Grace; then bulging with tea and bread and jam, they slowly and contentedly prepare for bed.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT WILL THEY BECOME ?

“ Now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.”

THOUGH life is absorbingly full at “ Bethlehem,” the minds of these small people are also busily occupied with the various happenings in the larger Wusasa world around them. They are members of a Christian village. The kindergarten is the stable door through which they enter upon a new and fuller life within the fellowship of the Church. Islam has been left behind and they are following in the Christian way. Baptism and confirmation of older brothers and sisters are landmarks to be noted and followed in the new life.

No one can tell what these children will ultimately do with their lives ; many a promising seedling never reaches the flowering stage, let alone the fruit. The kindergarten is content to supply the right atmosphere for this nursery of the Church, and to be the means of creating in the hearts and minds of these children the desire to serve God with their lives.

There had been a baptism service at the church in the afternoon; some of the older boys and girls of the school had been baptized. The children were discussing it freely round the kitchen door while waiting for the bowls of rice to be put out for their evening meal.

"I want to be baptized," says Osman to me, pushing his way through the crowd.

"I have been," says Haruna. "They poured water on my head when I was a baby; my mother told me so."

"And they made a cross on my forehead." Gado continues the story and demonstrates with his forefinger.

Osman shakes my hand to attract attention. "But why can't *I* be baptized *now*?" he asks impatiently.

I endeavour to explain to him why he must wait until he can answer for himself; he is silent but not satisfied.

Another evening the conversation turned on their future professions!

"When I leave school," says Haruna, hopping from one foot to the other, "I am going to be a mallam."

"What sort of a mallam?" I ask.

He stops hopping about and says solemnly: "A church mallam."

“How splendid!”

“Yes,” he says confidentially, “my mother says it’s the best work of all.”

I bless his mother there and then on the spot; she is one of those rare Christian women who combine saintliness with common sense.

“Your mother is a wise woman,” I say to Haruna. He beams and nods assent.

“I’m going to be a doctor,” says Habu, with the feeling that he is being terribly ambitious.

“And I too!” shouts Jibo from the back of the crowd.

Sani, turning somersaults in the rear, stands up and calls out: “I’m going to be a nurse like the Sister!”

“Joseph is going to be a doctor too.”

“Are you?” I ask him, and he nods happily.

“He can pull out teeth already!” continues the informant. “Yesterday he pulled out one of Mariya’s, and last week he pulled out one for Yakubu!”

“How clever of you!” I remark to Joseph.

“I’m going to be a clerk like my father,” announces Gado.

“I don’t think your father would like *you* to be a clerk,” I say to him slowly. “Your father is a clerk because he never had the opportunity of becoming anything else; I think he would like you to be something more useful in the Church.”

"Very well, I'll think about it," answers Gado solemnly.

"I'm going to be a church mallam too," explains Osman, "but I want to be a school mallam first."

"Then you will be of great help to us," I say encouragingly.

And so the conversation goes on until the rice is ready and they go off into the dining room.

One holiday time, there were about a dozen children left in the house. I had been out all the afternoon, and it was dark by the time I returned. I went to find the matron, but to my dismay, discovered that she too was out with her eldest daughter. I entered the dining room and was greeted cheerfully; they were all eating their supper as usual. I had half expected that.

"But what about prayers?" I ventured.

"Oh," said the smiling chorus, "Joseph took them." And Joseph, aged nine, beamed shyly from the end of the table.

"Thank you so much," I said to Joseph. "That was good of you."

And that wasn't the last time Joseph took prayers.

The Christmas holiday had begun. The matron and all the children had gone away except small Osman, whose only home is the Junior House. Before the matron was due to return, I should have

gone on furlough, the cook and steward boy would have been dismissed, the house would be desolate. The picture of one small child left all to himself in this large house and compound struck me as pathetic as well as impossible. Suddenly I had an idea, and sought out the mission secretary in his office.

After explaining the situation I suggested to him: "Now wouldn't you like to take him as your 'small boy'¹ to Bida next week, when you go down for the central committee?"

"Yes; splendid idea, if he's useful. He told me the other day that he was going to be a clergyman when he grows up. Do you think he means it?"

"Who can tell? He's deadly in earnest at present!"

"Well then, I'll take him. He's old enough to begin to find his way about the world."

I went back and explained the situation to Osman, whose eyes grew wider and wider in astonishment. He blushed with confusion, then finally recovered himself, and considered the question very seriously. He spent a week with my cook and steward boy, learning to wash pots and plates, and to carry up dishes without spilling the contents. His outfit was collected; the great day arrived. He had a hair cut, and spent the whole afternoon scrubbing

¹ The boy who does odd jobs and runs errands.

his feet and legs. At half past four I called him ; very gravely he put on the new suit—long, white trousers and long, white jumper. I wound on his turban and gave him final instructions. Then he picked up his bundle, and together we went along to the secretary's house, where the loads were waiting for the lorry.

I left him outside and went into the house, where they were having tea.

“Where's Osman ?” said the *Mai-gida*.¹

“Outside, waiting for you.”

“Call him in and let's see him !” said the *Uwar-gida*.²

Osman came in very solemnly and saluted them gravely.

“You are grand !” commented *Mai-gida*.

“What a lovely turban !”—this from *Uwar-gida* ; then she added, with great emphasis : “I have a very important piece of work I want you to do for me.” Osman looked embarrassed. She went on : “Every time *Mai-gida* goes south, he gets ill. This time I want you to look after him very carefully, and bring him back well.”

He looked at her more gravely than ever. This was a great responsibility ; he had not reckoned on this.

“You look very nice in those clothes,” she said,

¹ *Mai-gida* (*m.*) }
² *Uwar-gida* (*f.*) } Head of the house.

changing the subject. "Don't get them dirty in the railway train, or helping Salihu in the kitchen! Have you seen yourself in the glass?"

"No."

"Now, don't tempt him any further!" I interrupted. Of all the J.S. bairns, he had been the most difficult in the matter of "showing off" in new clothes. But she ventured further.

"If you go upstairs"—with a nod towards the staircase—"you will find a long glass in my bed room, and you can see how nice you look!"

Osman never stirred a foot.

"Go on," she encouraged him.

Still no movement.

"Don't you want to go?"

"No," he said definitely.

"Good lad!" said Mai-gida. "Wait for me outside."

Ten minutes later the loads were put on the lorry. Much against his will Osman was lifted in; he wanted to show them how big he was by climbing in himself. But when the good-byes were said, all his courage left him for the moment; he realized he was going out into the unknown. A careless joke from a steward boy brought tears into his eyes, and he hid his face in his turban. The cook spoke kindly to him, and told him to cheer up. The lorry started down the drive; we called good-bye to him but he would neither look

nor answer. Halfway down the drive he remembered, and a very small hand waved over the side of the lorry.

An hour later, I saw him at the station—hatless, *minus* the turban, and with a very tear-stained face.

“Where’s your turban?”

“The wind unwound it in the lorry so I folded it up.”

“Well, I should put your hat on if I were you. Let’s go and find your carriage.”

He had never been in a train before; the shouting on the platform and the dimness of the carriages were all very confusing. The cook told him to take off his white jumper as the carriage was very dirty. He looked more woebegone than ever, but I tried to cheer him up before leaving him.

The Nigerian Railway winds so much that it is easy to motor back to the level crossing at Wusasa and wave good-bye again to one’s friends after the train has left Zaria station. When Osman passed Wusasa twenty minutes later, his courage had returned and he was waving and smiling to us as the train went past. His first great adventure had begun.

CHAPTER XII

“IMMANUEL . . . GOD WITH US”

“ How far is it to Bethlehem ?
Not very far.
Shall we find the stable room
Lit by a star ?
Can we see the little Child ?
Is He within ?
If we lift the wooden latch
May we go in ? ”

AS the heavenly Child increased in wisdom and stature at Nazareth, growing daily in favour with God and man, so these small children develop day by day in the atmosphere of the Christian school, growing not only in mind and body, but spiritually as well. If “human nature is like a stable,” then to open the stable door is the *raison d’être* of “Bethlehem,” teaching the children in a variety of ways to think on whatsoever is true, honest, just, pure, and lovely. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is.” The door being opened, the “ass of prejudice” is coaxed to one side, the “ox of passion” pushed to the other as the Divine Child is born.

Every year, on Christmas night, the yan kindergarten give a nativity play. It is very short and simple. The words and scenes are taken straight from the New Testament; only salutations are added. A prologue explains the story where necessary; a chorus sings suitable carols after each scene, and the spirit of the play is embodied in the final carol, in which every member of the caste takes part.

December, 1934, came round, and after evening prayers we all sat down to arrange the parts.

“Who was the Virgin Mary last year?”

Affiniki, the matron's second daughter, answered.

“Ah, well, you're a bit too big this year,” I said. “I think you had better look after the angels in ‘heaven.’ Would Eva like to try?”

Yes, and they are both contented.

“We must find a new Joseph because Gado has gone now. Let's try Alhassan.”

Alhassan is not so sure he can do it, but will try. He was not successful, and after a few rehearsals we changed him for Jonathan.

Haruna is chosen for the chief wise man; small Sani is their messenger. Osman was Gabriel last year and would like to take the part again. Enoch is chosen for the Prologue. The chief shepherd is the same as before; also Joseph's donkey boy. (Joseph may have had one; the poorest farmer here always does.) About fifteen of the very

smallest become the heavenly host ; eight to ten girls make the chorus ; the remaining boys are given the parts of shepherds and the wise men's followers. They are all told to learn their parts and carols.

Rehearsals take place every evening in one half of the courtyard. The stable is the extreme left-hand corner, and Bethlehem's fields are the extreme right by the gateway. The chorus is grouped in the middle, against the wall at the back ; the Prologue stands well forward. The heavenly host, with much pushing and piping, are secluded in the large dormitory at the back until it is time for them to burst out with the Gloria. They always need one of the eldest to look after them, as they get rather restless between their first and second appearances.

After one or two rehearsals the two huge fires are introduced, one in the stable area, and one in Bethlehem's fields " where the shepherds lay keeping their sheep." The children need practice in keeping up these fires, as on Christmas night, except for a few dim lanterns as " footlights," there are no other means of illumination.

A few days later the donkey is brought to be rehearsed. We have to find one that is friendly ; it is generally a poor, thin specimen, but its docility gives confidence, and I am sure the children could never control a strong, vigorous animal.

As Christmas draws near we have one or two dress rehearsals, which are really what the word implies, as most of our rehearsals are undress. There is great excitement in putting on long robes and turbans; in wrapping round long cloths and blankets; in putting on a spotless white robe for an angel! And yet it is all so simple, the eastern style of dress being so natural to the Hausa.

At last Christmas Day comes. Among all the festivities of Christmas, I am sure this is the outstanding one as far as the kindergarten is concerned. All the crudeness of rehearsals has been replaced by quiet joy and dignity. Their eagerness has broken through the reserve of the Hausa, and they long for the hour to come when they can present the story of the birth of the Christ Child to the crowd which will gather. Neither is there any atmosphere of abnormal piety; their joy and their dignity are both natural and childlike.

In the late afternoon we prepare the stage and seats for the audience, for not only does the rest of the school come, but most of Wusasa and many friends besides, both Moslems and Europeans. A tin star is cut out and suspended in mid-air. A lamp is hidden to throw its light on the star. The star dances from the roof, and to the players and audience below it twinkles in a very realistic way.

It is now dark. The ass is tied in the stable and given straw and sweet potatoes. The manger is

fixed and the fires lighted. Joseph's household retires to the stable; the shepherds go to the fields; the heavenly host is shut up in "heaven"; the singers take their places; the wise men seclude themselves in the archway; all is ready. We turn on a gramophone record of carols to still the audience. The music ended, I nod to Enoch to begin.

He lifts his voice magnificently to tell the audience why and how this wonder happened. The chorus take up the theme in a carol. Gabriel suddenly appears from "heaven" to the frightened shepherds, who hide under their blankets until they take courage and listen to his message. Then with much eagerness the heavenly host appear from "heaven," surround the shepherds, and sing the Gloria. I am sure that the real heavenly host could not be more amazing than these wee things singing in the firelight. Their part being over, Gabriel ushers them back; the shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem and "see this thing which the Lord hath made known unto us."

The chorus again takes up the story in a carol, and by the time they have finished we see the shepherds saluting Joseph in the stable at Bethlehem. They tell their story, salute the babe in the manger, and return to the fields "praising God."

The wise men are now introduced by another carol, at the end of which their minute messenger

issues forth to announce their arrival. They approach with all the stateliness and dignity of kings. They enter Bethlehem and salute Joseph. Truly they form a magnificent sight in contrast with the humble shepherds of a short time before! The first wise man tells the story of their adventures (their eyes cannot resist that star twinkling above them); they offer the little native brass boxes and vessels as their gifts; they salute the babe reverently and joyfully. After the first wise man has had his confidential talk with Joseph about his dream and Herod, they depart.

The Holy Family settles down for the night. The chorus sings over the babe a lullaby translated from Haydn's *Silent Night*, and all is still. Once more Gabriel appears from heaven and wakens Joseph. Joseph, very sleepy and frightened, is made to understand the danger, and Gabriel departs with a final warning that they must hurry. Joseph then wakens his donkey boy and Mary. Mary is very sleepy, and slow to grasp what is happening. However, the babe is tied on her back in true Hausa fashion; blankets are spread on the donkey's back, and she mounts. The boy leads the donkey; Joseph gathers up the gifts of the wise men and walks by her side. The flight into Egypt has begun.

No sooner have they passed Bethlehem's fields than all the players come to life again. The chorus group themselves on the left, the wise men and

shepherds on the right, the heavenly host emerges and forms up at the back, and together they sing the final carol, inspired by Handel's *Joy to the World*. The Holy Family turns back from Egypt and enters the centre of the tableau. The firelight flickers on their faces, the "Star of Bethlehem" twinkles over them, and God's own stars shine down on them as they sing their own carol :—

Bethlehem is my heart.
O Jesus, come to-day !
O Spirit of God, I beseech Thee,
Let Him be born in my heart,
And let me keep Him there for ever.
Praise be to God eternally !