

PRELUDE TO WHITE DOMINATION OF THE CHURCH
MISSIONARY SOCIETY (C.M.S) NIGER MISSION

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Introduction

As the author of this paper succinctly observed,¹

The Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Niger Mission is remarkable in being staffed almost entirely by Africans right from its foundation in 1857 to 1890 which marked the beginnings of its white domination.

Writing in the same vein, Emily Headland after surveying the activities of the Mission prior to 1890, declared:²

There is greater proportion of Native work in the Niger Mission than in any other African Mission, and experience has thus been gained with respect to Native Churches.

The purpose of this paper is to dwell on the circumstances which not only led to the introduction of a regular staff of British Missionaries in the field but also resulted ultimately in white domination of the Mission.

A Mission is Founded: Messages of Hope and Difficulties

After two unsustained attempts in 1841 and 1854,³ to embark on missionary activity in Southeastern Nigeria, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) of the Anglican Church at last commenced effective missionary enterprise in that region in the first half of the 19th century when on 2nd August 1857 a band of acclimatized Africans, who left Sierra Leone on 13th May 1857, began preaching the Gospel at Onitsha. The Mission that was born in consequence of this epoch-making enterprise went by the name of The Church Missionary Society Niger Mission with headquarters at Onitsha in Central Igboland. Included in this band of acclimatized Africans were the Rev. John Christopher Taylor and Mr. Simon Jonas both of whom were liberated slaves of Igbo parentage. In the party were also three catechists, a Yoruba Mohammedan and freed slave named Kosomo who was to be in Northern Nigeria the interpreter of the Rev. Samuel Adjai Crowther based in Lagos and appointed leader of the Mission party. Crowther's bold plan included carrying the Gospel from Igboland to the Moslems of Northern Nigeria.

In sending out these Africans to commence missionary enterprise on the Niger, the C.M.S. Missionary Committee looked up to the Sierra Leone Mission founded in 1804 to supply the labour force needed for the piloting of the new mission. To use the very words of the Editor of the main organ of the Society, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*:⁴

We expect to hear of a great movement in Sierra Leone towards the Niger, and we trust there will be no restraint put upon it, no narrow feeling permitted, which would leave the Niger unoccupied.

As events continued to unfold themselves, it became increasingly clear that the Committee went too far in its expectation of staffing the new Mission with sufficient indigenous workers from Sierra Leone.

The harbingers of the Gospel at Onitsha were particularly pleased to observe that the people they had come to evangelize were very receptive to their message. Hear Taylor in his report on a Sunday service he conducted on 13th September 1857:⁵

I preached in the morning from Matt 30-34 to about 200 persons; in the afternoon to 300 persons from Isaiah XLIV 9-18. The Congregations were pleased with what they had heard. While I was speaking of the folly of idol-making and the superstitious rites of fetishism and the goodness of God, the word of God darted into their minds like fire, and they felt the force of that word Deliver me, for thou art my God. The time will come when the Tshuku (gods) of Abo and the Ibos in general shall fall down before the Gospel, as Dagon fell before the Ark. Their multifarious shrines shall give way for the full liberation and introduction of the Gospel to their forlorn, degraded, long-bewitched, but ransomed people of God.

The above is typical of the numerous thrilling reports from Onitsha which led Salisbury Square (the Headquarters of the C.M.S) to the belief that the Niger Mission was one of the finest of its foreign fields.

Meanwhile more missionaries from Sierra Leone had joined the Mission in 1858. They were the Rev. Cole and Thomas. Having endured, during their journey from Sierra Leone to the Niger, grueling experiences which exercised an unhappy influence on them, they were unable to withstand the difficulties and hardships engendered by the founding of the new Mission. The two men got chilled and disheartened and eventually returned to Sierra Leone before the end of the year without the slightest intention of returning to the field,⁶ thereby acting like the biblical John surnamed Mark. They told their brethren the most disconcerting stories about the Niger Mission, stories calculated to scare African Clergymen missionary enterprise. Not only were they from volunteering to go to the Niger for few mission stations understaffed, but in order to keep the Mission going Adjai Crowther was compelled to recruit whoever volunteered to serve in the Mission regardless of their character, and many of these volunteers like Romaine, Langley, Phillips, and During were poorly educated even though they were ordained priests. Some of them, as we shall soon see, had questionable characters.

By the close of 1859, information had reached Salisbury Square that all was not well with the Niger Mission.⁷ In 1860, regretted that it had not been possible to send white personnel to the Niger. It would appear that the situation on the Niger was getting worse, for three years later (1863) Salisbury Square expressed great sorrow that it had not been humanly possible to introduce white missionaries in the Niger Mission.⁸ Indeed from the various reports in 1863 to 1876, the Mission was like a Chinese dance, two steps forward and a step backward. The initial enthusiasm with which the Gospel was embraced had begun to fade. Salisbury square was scarcely aware of how slippery the ground had become for the Mission.

In August 1877 Bishop Crowther made a visit to the stations in the Niger Mission. He was accompanied by Mr. Ashcroft whom the C.M.S had employed as an industrial agent for West Africa. During that visit which took the Bishop to all the mission locations, Ashcroft observed several weaknesses in the Mission and sent a report to Salisbury Square. One of the weaknesses had to do with a serious lack of regular and thorough supervision of the Mission.

Indeed right from its foundation the Niger Mission had continued to suffer serious set-backs owing to the lack of enough supervision for which poor communication was largely responsible. The head of the mission, Bishop Adjai Crowther, had his residence in Lagos, a distance of over four hundred

miles. In visiting these mission locations on the Niger, he depended entirely on commercial vessels plying up the River Niger. More often than not these vessels went up the Niger only once a year during the rainy season when the volume of water was sufficient to carry sailing crafts. Though of indomitable character and imbued with a flaming spirit of evangelism, the most Crowther could do was to visit these stations only once a year, and there were years he was not seen at all.

Furthermore because the sailing of the commercial ships greatly regulated his movements, Crowther more often than not had not the opportunity to stay in the Mission and discuss with the missionaries as long as he would have liked to, for he had of necessity to move and stop whenever the craft moved and stopped. On several occasions, "he spent only a few hours at a station that needed the labour of weeks, and many days at another place where there was little to be done."⁹ There were even occasions when during his visits Crowther had not the opportunity to discharge his spiritual duties. The editor of the Church Missionary Intelligencer noted:¹⁰

Even when the Bishop was able to pay a hurried visit to a station, there were supplies to be landed, accounts to be settled, buildings to be examined with a view to repair, and many other secularities to be attended to, leaving often no time at all for the work of a Bishop in the Church of God.

Thirdly, because they knew that Crowther was most likely to visit them only during the wet season, the missionaries endeavoured to be up and doing during this period only in readiness for the visit and for the rest of the year; they exhibited a lax attitude in their work. The prevailing situation was therefore not the type that could augur good for the Mission.

Salisbury Square viewed this aspect of Ashcroft's report with great concern. In order to consolidate and extend the influence of the Mission and to ensure its effective super-vision, they provided the Bishop with a steamer to enable him to travel up and down the River Niger regularly. The steamer which was placed at the Bishop's disposal was named The Henry Venn in memory of the Rev. Henry Venn who was the Secretary of the C.M.S from 1830 to 1872.

The other aspect of Ashcroft's report had to do with the quality of the missionaries who, it should be recalled, were all Africans. Ashcroft accused these missionaries of moral debasement. The accusation sent Salisbury Square reeling in dismay. In order to ascertain the true position of the Mission detailed the Rev. J. B. Wood to go on the Niger for on-the-spot assessment.

Wood's Investigation and Report

An Englishman, the Rev. J. B. Wood, joined in 1857 the Yoruba Mission which was founded in 1843. He was not one of the pioneer missionaries to Yorubaland but certainly a contemporary of the founders of that Mission. He had laboured for eight years in Sierra Leone before coming to Nigeria. His first station was Asbeokuta where he had laboured in various capacities before his new assignment in January 1880.

Wood visited the various mission locations on the Niger, got in touch with the missionaries manning these locations, and held useful discussions with them in order to become informed first hand of their character, resourcefulness, dynamism, and achievements. On the completion of his investigation, he submitted a voluminous report on his findings. The report brought very serious charges against virtually all the missionaries. The missionaries whose conduct was found particularly deplorable included the Revs. Thomas C. John, J. Buck, C. Paul, and Messrs Joseph S. P. Johnson, P. Williams, W. F. John, J. Williams, H. Spencer, Jeremiah Johnson, and Garrick.

The Rev. Thomas C. John based at Ilokoja was accused of gross immorality. In Wood's report John was compelled by Bishop Crowther to marry his wife because the woman was with child by him. The Rev. C. Paul was charged with materialism because he had a piece of land for his own use. Mr. P. Williams based at Kipo Hill was accused of being very quarrelsome. He was also charged with being too deeply involved in commercial transactions. Mr. W. F. John based at Onitsha was accused of brutality and inflicting most barbaric injuries on an innocent Igbo slave girl. Mr. S. P. John was blacklisted for general unfitness for missionary enterprise. Mr. H. Spencer based at Asaba was also accused of deep involvement in trading transactions. Mr. Jeremiah Johnson was represented as wallowing in debt and also charged with immoral conduct.¹¹

Shocked by Wood's disconcerting report, Salisbury Square immediately instructed its Missionary Committee to send out a two-man deputation to confer with Bishop Crowther on the prevailing situation in the Niger Mission. The two men, the Revs. J. B. Whiting and E. D. Hutchinson, held their meetings (popularly referred to as the Madeira Conference) at Madeira. The Bishop was accompanied to the meeting by his son, Archdeacon Danderson and Mr. Boyle, the Catechist/Schoolmaster at Bonny.

Also present at the meetings was Mr. Ashcroft. The participants deeply regretted the absence of the Rev. J. B. Wood who could not attend for grave reasons.

The first meeting was held on Thursday, 10th February 1881 at 2 O'clock. But there were no serious deliberations. As Whiting and Hutchinson put it.¹²

The afternoon was spent in quiet intercourse, the opportunity being taken by each of us to ascertain fully what the feelings of our friends were in connection with the general character of the report of Mr. Wood, and how far their own personal knowledge supported or neutralized his judgements.

It was on Monday, 14th, that the Conference went into real business. Starting at 11 O'clock in the morning the meeting lasted till 5.30 p.m. The first job of the Conference was to determine whether the charges brought against the missionaries as contained in Wood's report were founded or not. If founded, they were to determine appropriate action to be taken. The absence of Wood created great difficulties for it was not easy to ascertain the sources of his information. The sources, if they were known, would have greatly enabled the participants to determine the truth of his numerous charges.

The cases of the missionaries brought to book were taken up one after another. Bishop Crowther deflated the charge of immorality brought against the Revs. Thomas C. John and S. Joseph. He marshalled out points to prove convincingly that both men married in strict conformity with the laws of the Church. Both the Bishop and his son disagreed vehemently with Wood on the charge of immorality brought against Mr. Jeremiah Johnson. In the words of Whiting and Hutchinson:¹³

With regard to Mr. Johnson of Brass, both the Bishop and Archdeacon Crowther stated that they had never heard of the report mentioned by Mr. Wood as to immoral conduct, and we felt that as Mr. Wood regarded the report as mere hearsay, it was not necessary to give any formal instructions to the Bishop on the subject.

The Bishop considered the charge of involvement in commercial transactions brought against Messrs P. Williams and H. Spencer to be

unnecessary. He argued that since the missionaries were provided with supplies and as trade by barter was by and large the prevailing system of buying and selling, the bartering of one commodity for another necessarily had to involve some trading transactions. The Conference agreed with him and was of the opinion that it was unnecessary for Wood to have brought that charge against any missionary whether ordained or not.

The charge of brutality and inhuman treatment of an Igbo slave girl brought against Messrs. W. F. John and J. Williams sparked off serious searching of hearts. Mr. W. F. John, the Conference discovered, was in fact no longer a missionary of the C.M.S during Wood's investigation. He was appointed a lay missionary by Bishop Crowther in 1875 and stationed at Brass. Some years later the Bishop dismissed him on grounds of immorality but later on took him into his own employment as a clerk and general assistant and stationed him at Onitsha where he committed the crime of which he was charged. Before the Madeira Conference was convened, John had been missed from the C.M.S and had returned to Sierra Leone. The Conference was unable to determine the extent of Mr. J. Williams's involvement in John's crime. In any case Mr. Williams had already tendered his resignation which had been accepted by the Bishop and like John had left the Mission.

With regard to Mr. P. Williams, the Bishop disagreed with Wood's assessment of his character. On the contrary, he described him as an energetic man, a great asset to the Mission and went ahead to recommend his advancement to the ministry. From what was heard, the Conference was inclined to believe the Bishop. It declared:¹⁴

Mr. Williams appears to be making good progress in the Igara language, and we are of the opinion that under kindly and wise superintendence, Mr. Williams may become a valuable Agent.

With regard to the charge of debt brought against Mr. Jeremiah Johnson, the Bishop explained in a most plausible manner how the debt arose from Johnson's non-acquaintance with the peculiarities of the barter system of trade when he first joined the Mission. The conference reasoned with him and suggested that a grant be given to Johnson to relieve him of his debt. But the Conference agreed with Wood that Mr. Jackson stationed at Kipo Hill was very quarrelsome and suggested he should be dismissed if his dismissal would not overtask the energies of his conferees.

The Conference had every reason to believe that Wood's report was greatly exaggerated. It deposed:¹⁵

There can be no doubt that many statements hostile to the Native Agents* are in circulation in the River; these are in many cases much exaggerated and bear the character or reflect the thoughts and feelings with regard to missionary work of those who make them. It will be seen that Mr. Wood in his report does not indicate his sources of information in any case, with the exception of one; indeed he speaks of these statements as evil reports current in the river. It appeared to us as possible that some of the information which reached Mr. Wood was of a questionable character.

On the other hand, the Conference observed that from every indication it was absolutely necessary to overhaul the Mission to ensure its consolidation and to accelerate the rate of expansion. It went on:¹⁶

* Salisbury Square usually referred to African Missionaries in the Niger Mission as Native Agents.

The present condition of things is due first of all to want of care in the original selection of the Agents and then in the lack of that constant and efficient superintendence which the special circumstances of the Niger Mission so urgently required. We feel therefore that the real remedy lies in placing the Niger Mission upon an entirely new footing and within the lines laid down in the instruction of the Committee. These instructions were read to the Bishop at the Conference and he expressed himself entirely satisfied with, and thankful for the arrangement suggested.

The Conference then went on to recommend as follows:

1. That all the Missionaries must keep away from trading.
2. That a Conference of missionaries with the Bishop as the Chairman should be formed immediately. The conference should meet either biennially or quarterly and its proceedings must be forwarded through the Niger Finance Committee to the Parent Committee.
3. That the Mission should be divided into two Districts. One District should embrace all the Delta Stations while the Second District should embrace all the stations from Ossomare down to Onitsha. An active Superintendent should be appointed for each District.
4. That a white man should be appointed general Secretary of the Mission. The appointee who should be of high educational qualification should not only act as the Secretary of the Niger Finance Committee but should also be the representative of the Parent Committee in the Mission.

The appointment of superintendents for the two Districts and a General secretary for the Mission was to ensure more effective supervision of the Mission, to give advice and stimulate energy, and to transfer to these men some of the functions hitherto executed by the Bishop. Indeed in a personal letter it sent to the Bishop, the Conference declared:¹⁷

It will naturally follow that in many matters in which up to the present time, the Agents have been accustomed to look to you for direction, they will now be advised or directed by the superintendents of the District or the Secretary of the Mission.

Salisbury Square endorsed the Conference's recommendations. First, the Niger Mission was split into two and two Superintendents were appointed for both. The first District going by the name The Upper Niger District was entrusted to the Rev. Henry Johnson while the Rev. Danderson Crowther (Bishop Crowther's son) was placed in charge of the other called The Lower Niger District.¹⁸ Both Danderson and Johnson were experienced African clergymen. Secondly, in 1882, the Rev. T. Phillips was sent out as the first English Secretary of the Niger Mission.

Phillip's term of office was short-lived, for he was invalided home in 1883. But before he left the Niger, he had visited the various mission locations and interacted with the missionaries manning these stations. What he saw and heard confirmed a lot of statements which Wood made as regards the conduct of many of these missionaries. Take for instance the case of the Rev. E. Phillips (not to be confused with the Rev. T. Phillips the white missionary secretary). He was stationed at Asaba. Phillips found him a drunkard - drunkenness being the very offence with which he was charged by Wood. Said Phillips concerning him:¹⁹

It would be almost impossible to place a young man here to assist him. None would be found to bear the jealousy and the coarse treatment which he would receive from this Agent. I found in settling his account with the United African Company that a large quantity of spirits were included in the supplies which tends to confirm the report of the Rev. J. B. Wood as to his habit of intoxication.

The Rev. J. Durning was a quiet apathetic man. He was stationed at Onitsha and was about sailing to Sierra Leone when Phillips personally got in touch with him. He applied to the Secretary for the reimbursement of the sum of 13^s6^d (the equivalent of 36 heads of tobacco) which he claimed to have paid to labourers for conveying his luggage from his house to the river-side (the port of embarkation), a distance of a quarter of a mile. The Secretary found the claim most unrealistic for as he reported:²⁰

At this place (Onitsha) a labourer receives 2 heads of tobacco valued at 8d for a whole day's work, thus showing that either he (Durning) appropriated some to his own purposes or that the natives have grievously imposed upon him the former. I have some proof the latter is most unlikely. I am sorry to see the amount of ingenuity and skill which he displayed when I reasoned with him on this matter, but there was as I have so frequently seen in these native Agents of the society an utter want of truthfulness where he thought truth would not serve his purpose.

Mr. P. J. Williams was the lay missionary in charge of Gbebe station. In October 1882, he applied to the Secretary for what he claimed to be the arrears of 12 months salary due to the station's interpreter. When the Secretary said he would like to see the interpreter, Williams explained that the man had left just three days before, but that he could receive it on his behalf. There appeared to the Secretary something suspicious in the way Williams replied to his enquiries and on investigation, he was told that there had been no interpreter at Gbebe for more than a year. When he confronted Williams seriously a few days later, the latter confessed that what he told him was all false. Mr. Williams had also told the secretary that he had made several evangelistic trips to the interior and gave a most interesting description of each trip. But the Secretary took these stories with a pinch of salt. He wondered:²¹

What guarantee can the Society have that he was ever a mile from his own house in the direction he speaks of or that there is a single word more of truth in these statements than in those made to me?

Mr. J. Thomas was a lay missionary working the station at Lokoja. He was advanced in years. Shortly after taking up work as the Society's new Secretary, Phillips received a letter from him asserting that he had never received certain supplies meant for him in July 1881, and demanded that the amount he paid for these supplies should be refunded to him. But on investigation, Phillips found that Thomas had received the supplies, his signature having been duly obtained at the time he collected them.²²

On 17th July 1883, the Niger Finance Committee held a top level meeting and resolved that the missionaries whose conduct fell below expectation should be dismissed from service.²³ The Resolution was immediately communicated to Salisbury Square. On the strength of the Reports from both Wood and Phillips and the recommendation of the Niger Finance Committee Salisbury Square was convinced that prompt action was absolutely necessary to save the Niger Mission from further deterioration. Accordingly, it instructed the Society's Secretary, Mr. Lang, to issue out letters of disconnection to those affected.

The missionaries disconnected were the Revs. J. C. John, I. Buck, and J. Daring and Mr. R. A. Fyne.²⁴ The reason advanced in every case was that the Society "had been constrained to realise the fact that your influence has not been and is not such as to give them any hope that it will be for the furtherance of the Gospel to retain you in the service of the Mission."²⁵ After the disconnection of these men new hands were recruited from Sierra Leone to replace them. The action taken by Salisbury Square was long overdue. On the reason why the agonising Niger problem was allowed to linger for so long before a solution to it was attempted, Hamilton and Touch who succeeded Phillips at different periods had this to say:²⁶

These steps ought to have been taken long before, but they (the authorities of the Society) were misled by those in authority in the Mission.

As already indicated, the Rev. J. Phillips who was the first European to work in the Niger Mission, was invalidated home in 1883. His place was taken by another European the Rev. J. Hamilton who became the second European to work in the Mission. His appointment as Phillip's successor was another attempt made by Salisbury Square to station a white man on the Niger as a source of strength to the Bishop in the administration of the Diocese.

The disconnection of the men mentioned above scarcely changed Salisbury Square's opinion of the Africa personnel on the Niger as revealed by the instruction delivered to Hamilton shortly before he proceeded to the Niger. Said the instruction, inter alia:²⁷

Your first and principal duty will affect the staff of our Native Agents. There is reason to fear that the character of several of the Agents still in the Mission's employ is far from satisfactory. In the present grave crises of the Mission, it is absolutely essential that every agent employed be above suspicion.

Hamilton sailed to the Niger in 1883 in company of Dr. Percy Brown. Brown was the first medical missionary sent to the Niger by the C.M.S. The two men took up residence at Lokoja. In July 1884, Mr. J. Burness joined the Mission. A seasoned mason, he was sent out primarily to take charge of the Mission's construction work as the following instruction given to him shortly before he left England for Nigeria reveals:²⁸

The dilapidated condition of the buildings at the several mission stations, and the absence of well qualified builders able to undertake the superintendence of the repairs of existing buildings and the erection of new ones has been a source of serious inconvenience and material loss to the Mission.

The Bishop's time has been unduly occupied in connection with the superintendence of the buildings. He as well as the Committee has felt the need of some qualified European to relieve him of this duty.

The Introduction of White Missionaries on the Niger

Although occasionally there were signs of progress, the position in the Mission remained basically the same for years after Wood's investigation. On 5th July 1887, for instance, the Rev. A. Robinson called for immediate energetic measures to wake up the Mission from its deep slumber.²⁹ In April 1888, the Missionary Committee, basing its information on a letter from Archdeacon Johnson, reported that things were really bad on the Niger.³⁰

The 1888 Annual Report on the Mission said, inter alia:³¹

The spiritual state of Onitsha shows little sign of improvement. Since 1883 there has been a painful declension in zeal. The Canker that is now eating out the spiritual heart of the Onitsha church is polygamy. From small beginnings, the evil is spreading with alarming rapidity and unless timely arrested, will prove the ultimate ruin of the church.

The 1889 Annual Report on the Mission was even more distressing. It observed:³²

The report from Onitsha is more discouraging than ever. Those who were formerly members and communicants of the Church, but who have relapsed into heathenism, have proved the too-successful instruments of the Tempter, and have by charges of disloyalty and by threats of violence, carried nearly the whole body of professing Christians into complicity with idolatry.

The projection of the Niger Mission by the avalanche of discouraging reports from the field as a fast-sinking boat was agonizing enough to compel the Society to take further measures to revamp the ailing Mission. After long *deliberation, the Society came to the conviction that the only thing that would solve the nagging problem on the Niger was the introduction of white missionaries there. Said the Society's Committee of Correspondence in its resolution of 30th July, 1889:³³

Therefore the Committee feel that they must no longer hesitate to write English missionaries of spirituality and devotion to help in raising the Niger Mission to the spiritual level which is essential to real success.

The same resolution directed that appeal should at once be made for men specially qualified and willing to volunteer for such responsible work.

Bishop Crowther gave full support to the new arrangement. He agreed whole heartedly with Salisbury Square that the Niger territory required a large number of missionaries, that there was no way Sierra Leone could meet the manpower needs of the Mission, that owing to the death of personnel only few areas had been won for Christ and that the African missionaries needed greater supervision and encouragement. But the new arrangement did not go down well with these African missionaries who dismissed it as most unprogressive.³⁴

It is true that the society had sent to the Niger four Europeans. But all of them went out on special assignments and not primarily to discharge the normal functions of a missionary. By the beginning of December 1889, men had been invited to serve on the Niger as missionaries and men had been appointed to go out to work side by side their African brethren, while endeavouring to lead them on to more vigorous and spiritual methods of work.

Among the first to be appointed were Messrs W. G. Wilmont Brook, Eric Lewis, P.A. Bennett and the Revs. C. F. Harford Battersbury, F. N. Eden, and H. H. Dobinson. All these were sent out in the first months of 1890. Their going out marked the beginnings of a sustained effort to staff the Niger Mission with white personnel. In 1891, six were sent out, two of them being females. In December of the same year, Bishop Crowther died and a white man, the Rev. Joseph Sidney Hill was consecrated as his successor. Thus, the Superintendence of the Mission was entrusted to an expatriate thereby placing the destiny of the Mission completely in the hands of European personnel.

Coming out in December 1893 to assume office, Bishop Hill took with him as many as twelve missionary recruits. By the end of the decade (1900), not fewer than thirty-seven Europeans had left the shores of Britain for missionary enterprise in the Niger Mission.³⁵

While the number of white missionaries continued to increase annually, the number of African missionaries kept decreasing. Eden who became secretary of the Mission no sooner than he arrived in the field, had in August 1890 dealt ruthlessly with more of these African workers. Those on whom the axe fell included the Revs. H. S. Macaulay dismissed for laxity, C. Paul disconnected for unproductivity and non-aggressiveness in missionary work, S. J. Smart laid off for being unsatisfactory as a missionary and Mr. D. C. Strong sent on compulsory furlough and the question of his ordination deferred for allowing his congregation to yield to the temptation of idolatry. Indeed in the sacred returns for 1895 in respect to the Mission, the column for African missionaries was left vacant, an indication that there were most probably no more missionaries from Sierra Leone working in the Mission.

Summary and Conclusion

The Church Missionary Society Niger Mission was born in August 1857. For thirty-three years, the Mission was manned by Black Missionaries from Sierra Leone, some of whom were liberated slaves of Igbo stock.

To boost their ego, the missionaries for several years blew their achievements out of proportion, thereby giving a false image of the prevailing situation of things in the Mission and falsely leading Salisbury Square to the belief that the Mission was steadily gaining strength and increasingly making an impact on the modus vivendi of the indigenous population.

Truth is always the first casualty. But truth is stubborn fact and it vehemently refuses to yield to destruction. Thus when Hamilton visited the Niger in August 1877, he was able to discover that put on the scale of truth, many of the reports from the Niger to the Home base represented the lie of half truth if not the lie of boasting.

On the strength of the report submitted to it by Hamilton, Salisbury Square sent to the Niger one of the most experienced white missionaries in the Yoruba Mission the Rev. J. B. Wood for on-the-spot assessment. Wood's report indicated that for many of the missionaries, Christianity was simply a label and not a way of life. The first step taken to put the Mission on the right path was to divide it into two districts with Superintendents appointed for both Districts. Secondly an English Secretary was appointed for the Mission. Thirdly in a major personnel shake-off many missionaries were disconnected from the Mission. Fourthly and more importantly, the Society in 1890 embarked upon a policy of sending white missionaries to the field, and deemphasized the importance hitherto attached to Sierra Leone as the source of supply of workers for the Mission. It was the paucity of personnel and the incompetence of the African missionaries that necessitated the introduction of European missionaries in the field.

The sending of white missionaries to the field worked the desired miracle. The missionaries injected new spirit into every aspect of missionary enterprise. They pursued vigorously the work of consolidating the few Mission stations already opened and undertook series of evangelistic trips to the interior which resulted in establishing stations in many towns. For instance, stations were opened at Oba (1893), Ichi (1893) and Uruagu Nnewi (1893).³⁶ By 1897, Ogbunike, Akwu kwu and Onitsha-olona had been missioned.³⁷ By the end of 1900, many more towns like Nkpor, Anam, Awka and Ugbolu had been taken possession of.³⁸

The occupation of new areas at remarkable regularity, bore the imprint of the dynamism of the missionaries, which was reported of in virtually every annual proceedings during the decade (1890-1900). For instance, the following report sent to Salisbury Square by Archdeacon Dobinson in March 1896 is typical:³⁹

Some of those who were prominent in heathen dances and ceremonies cannot now be got by their old companies to take their part. In one case, the "band" has suffered because one of the chief pipe-players prefers to study book to blowing the pipes. A few days ago, a good number of the older men met together to discuss the state of affairs in their village. They came to the conclusion that things were going to the bad rapidly. Now they are falling back because their village was not forward as formerly in keeping up heathen festivals and dancings.

The wind of change which blew across the Mission for good during the decade can also be described statistically. In 1890 when white missionaries began joining the Mission, the Niger Mission has the following figures: 474 indigenous Christians, 151 indigenous communicants, 25 baptisms in the year, 6 schools and 186 scholars. But in 1899 when the Mission had already been placed completely in the hands of European missionaries, the Niger Mission had the following attractive results: 1740 indigenous Christians, 313 indigenous communicants, 97 baptisms in the year, 20 schools and 718 scholars.⁴⁰

ENDNOTES

1. F. Anyika, "The Beginnings of the Indigenous Agency in the Anglican Church in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria: The Biography of the Rev. George Nicholas Anyaegbunam." A Paper to be published in *Mission Studies*, No. 11, May 1989, p. 1
2. Emily Headland, *Brief Sketches of C.M.S Missions*, London, James Nisbet & Co. 1890, p. 46.
3. For detailed accounts of these attempts from the Missionary point of view, See (1) *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schon and Mr. Samuel Crowther*, London, C.M.S. 1841. (2) *Samuel Crowther, Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers*, London, CMS. 1854.
4. *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. IX, 1858, p. 93.
5. *The Gospel at the Banks of the Niger*, London, Dawson of Pall Mall, 1968, p. 272.
6. "The Sierra Leone Church", *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. X, 1859, p. 168.
7. Ibid.
8. Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, Vol. 11, London, Church Missionary House, 1899, p. 454.
9. "The Henry Venn on the Niger", *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. IV (New Series), February 1879, p. 97.
10. Ibid.

11. Report of the Deputation appointed by the C.M.S Committee to confer with Bishop Crowther and others on the present position and prospects of the Niger Mission, G3/A2/L5, March 1881, C.M.S. Archives, London.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
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32. *The C.M.S Annual Report for 1889-1890*, p. 40
33. Resolutions of Committee of Correspondence, 92/A3/P3, 30th July, 1889, C.M.S Archives, London.
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35. *Register of Missionaries (Clerical, Lay and Female) and Native Clergymen from 1804-1904*, London, Church Missionary House, 1905, pp. 285 - 456.
36. *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1894*, p. 32.
37. *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1896-1897*, p. 91
38. *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1899*, p. 89.
39. *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1896-1897*, p. 90
40. Compare Statistics of the Mission in *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1890*, p. 32 with that of 1899 in *The C.M.S. Annual Report for 1899*, p. 90