



KINGDOM OF LIGHT AND GRACE

'... that Thy kingdom of grace may advance in us daily more and more, and Thy kingdom of glory come to us at last.'

The advance of Christ's kingdom in Africa is at once a joy and a challenge as Reverend Mother General pointed out after her recent Visitation there. Below is an account of the second half of the tour, taken from the notes of Mother Mary Arthur, her companion. (Part One appeared in the Autumn, '65 issue.)

Three thousand miles every month

Thick forest pushes in on the road from Abakaliki to Afikpo, then suddenly gives way to land cleared for farming. Eastern Nigeria is a place of growing things where the people love their good earth. "That farm belongs to the family of one of our teachers and she is helping to pay for the improvements on it," explained Rev. Mother Mary Hubert who knows every inch of the territory. Each month this veteran missionary travels three thousand miles by car and *kay-nu* to supervise the rural schools under her direction. More than five

thousand primary grade pupils attend these twenty-two schools.

"They form a link," she pointed out, "with the government schools in the surge forward in education. The teachers themselves are caught up in this surge, for the government is steadily upgrading its teaching requirements." Rev. Mother M. Hubert, besides being the only woman on the Board of Education in Eastern Nigeria, is Superior of the Holy Child Convent at the Teacher's Training College in Afikpo.

The compound here is on a gentle slope surrounded by rolling hills and the mission church is

across a narrow valley. The celebration of the Feast of Pentecost under its thick beams was something of a revelation. It was so evident that the light and fire enkindled by the Holy Spirit had penetrated deeply into the spiritual consciousness of these once-pagan people. In the fervor of their faith, they seemed like a twentieth century counterpart of the early Christians.

Whit Monday brought a visit to Ugep. This is a large bush station near the Cross River, reached by pontoon — and rich in memories

for many a Holy Child missionary. For Reverend Mother General, the ten-minute crossing contrasted vividly with the hour-and-a-half it took in her early missionary days when the pontoon had to travel far down the river and then up again to reach the opposite side.

As the nuns neared the landing, gay welcome tunes broke out from the boys who lined the road up to the village under the St. Patrick Fathers' direction. The girls waved greetings from the road to the school where many people had gathered

Congratulations! Reverend Mother General with one of the leading members of the cast of 'This Is Our Chance' - performed by the budding teachers in Afikpo.



from all around. Several chiefs in full regalia, and their wives were on the reception committee with the Fathers. From the vantage point of a small palm-thatched shelter which had been erected for the occasion the Visitors enjoyed the children's concert done with an almost professional skill.

The progress of Ugep is typical of many bush stations. When the old tribal queen was alive, the town could count only two baptized persons. (She herself was baptized just before her death because she wanted to go to the "heaven of the Mothers.") Now, the town has a flourishing Christian community, a fine new church, and two Fathers to run the Mission and all the outlying stations and schools.

African Kaleidoscope

Colorful pictures crowd the memory in writing about Africa. Pictures of small children in the Afikpo primary school making deep, dignified curtsies to Reverend Mother General and a few moments later breaking into an Irish jig on a rough floor in bare feet... Of a procession of these little people carefully balancing on their heads huge containers filled with eggs, fruit and vegetables as a *dash* (gift), for the Africans are truly a grateful people... Of Ibo dances and songs in the flickering shadows cast by the bush lamps...

Then there was the three-hundred mile round trip to Onitsha in one day to see an old friend, Archbishop Heerey. Sitting in his house, looking out at the blue expanse of river that gives Nigeria its name, the Archbishop and Reverend Mother reminisced about the early days of seed-planting in this Eastern Region. Today, some of the rich harvest is evident in the vital and militant faith of the Ibo people.



She knows every inch of the territory. Rev. M. M. Hubert (Afikpo), a veteran missionary, travels many miles each month supervising more than five thousand primary grade children.

Southeast Nigeria has only 20 % of the nation's total population, but it embraces 70 % of Nigeria's total *Catholic* population. Much of this is due to the labors, the zeal, the discernment of Bishop Joseph Shanahan, the giant-hearted apostle who worked in this area for so many years. To him the Church owes the systematic building up of schools and teacher training colleges, for his penetrating vision saw them as the most effective means of planting and sustaining the Faith. "To the bush!" he would say to his fellow-workers, "to the bush!" And from these simple beginnings has spread the vast network of Catholic institutions in Nigeria today. Bishop Shanahan's tomb in the nearby Cathedral has become a place of pilgrimage, a hallowed spot where Ibo Catholics gain renewed courage to fight the good fight for their Faith.

The Prince of Peace

Ifuho, the Vicariate "mother house," is about a two-hour drive

from Afikpo. The apostolic works in this beautiful compound reach out in many directions but they converge daily - and find their inspiration - in the Prince of Peace Chapel.

The primary school children are there... with a surprising singleness of purpose...

The young teachers in training are there (almost two hundred of them)... with a sincere yearning for the apostolate.

The African and other lay faculty members are there... with a strong consciousness of mission...

The Handmaids are there - Novices, drawing deeply from the Mysteries of the Hidden Life... Professed... seeking and finding Him in the hidden recesses of bush...

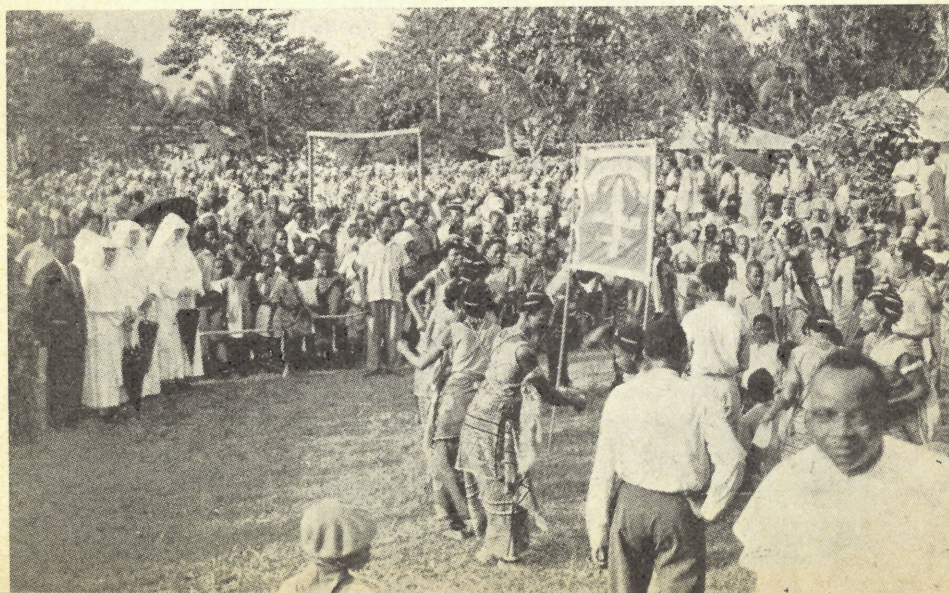
And the Holy Child nuns are there, formed in the strong maternal spirit of Mother Cornelia Connelly... their capable hands directing, their love guiding...



Play director M. M. Anita encourages Joseph Sami, a talented young artist, in painting the scenery for the gypsy operetta 'Chonita.'

On Trinity Sunday the students sang High Mass. The liturgy was carried out in full for it is much appreciated by the Nigerians. In the afternoon, Bishop Ekandem invited all the nuns to a reception in the Mission in honor of Reverend Mother General. He was the first Nigerian to be raised to the episcopate and he is an indefatigable worker among his people. Following the Bishop's beautiful address

A dance of welcome in the Ifuho compound. At the right is Fr. Sylvanus Etok, the first young man from this area to be ordained a priest in Rome.





Hoop-la! Small primary grade children entertain the Visitors and Rev. Mother Vicar (left).

of welcome and gratitude, leading members of the various Catholic Action groups were introduced, and gifts presented. A moving little incident occurred when the laborers in the Ifuho compound gave Reverend Mother a Mass Offering accompanied by a note which read in part, "We hope you will receive this little gift in happiness . . . Then we beg you, the Reverend Mother General, to pray to God for our children to become Sisters and Fathers so that we may have those who will direct us in the things of God . . ."

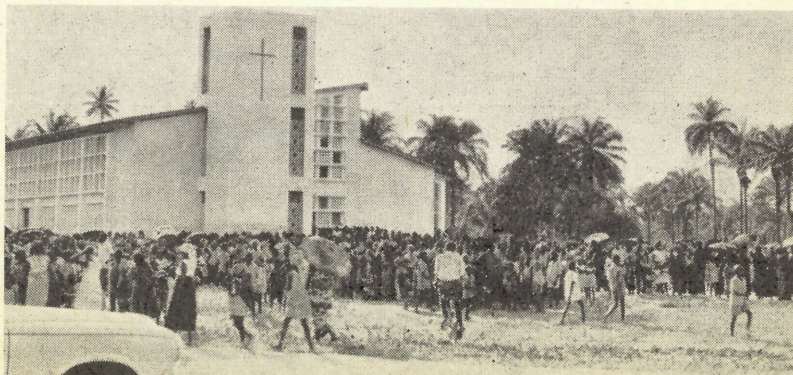
Up a bush road

A narrow road swings off the main highway through tangled underbrush and up a hill — and sud-

denly there is the vast Uyo compound. It has to be vast to accommodate the more than three hundred girls in the Cornelia Connelly Secondary School. They live in small groups in home-like cottages; they study in the undisturbed quiet of the country in a school noted for its scholastic achievement; and they enjoy many an extra-curricular activity, including the drama club. A delightful operetta, "Chonita," based on the music of Franz Listz, was presented one evening for the Visitors. Joseph Sami the exceptionally gifted young artist who painted the scenery, first met the nuns in Uyo when he came to attend a Young Catholic Students meeting. He attends Regina Coeli Secondary School for boys and plans to follow an art career.

Two short trips from this com-

In the fervor of their faith, these Nigerians seem like a twentieth century counterpart of the early Christians. This new church, built by the Vincentian Fathers in Ikot Ekpene, is crowded to overflowing each Sunday.



pound awakened a host of memories for Reverend Mother General. One was to Anua, just a short distance from Uyo. It was here in the early 'thirties that Reverend Mother spent one of her years on the Missions. The house that served then as our Convent is occupied now by the Medical Missionaries of Mary. Reverend Mother was able to identify the room that had been the oratory, the area that was dignified with the name of "refectory," and the small quarters used as sleeping rooms. How long ago that seemed now, and how small the seed . . .

As guests of the M.M.M.'s the Visitors toured the hospital and they marvelled anew at the dedication and generosity of these spiritual daughters of Mother Mary Martin. Close by is a large primary school run by the Handmaids of the Holy Child. Their Aspirantship numbers fifty young African girls who are located in four different centers for the present. At Anua, almost half of this group is being educated and slowly introduced to the basic principles of religious life.

The second trip took the Visitors to the secondary school that the Handmaids conduct. This is St. Theresa's at Edem-Ekpat, hidden in heavy bush. As the car emerged from the brush, an almost unbelievable sight greeted the nuns: a beautifully landscaped compound, very modern new class-room buildings, and sparkingly fresh cottage-dormitories. It was long cry from the "open-air-under-palms" classroom in which Reverend Mother had taught catechism at Edem Ekpat. The one hundred-and-eighty students gave a program with the finesse and charm that would have delighted Mother Connelly. The concluding part of their address held special significance: "We promise to use our education to bring a better life to our people."



At the end of day, a market woman comes to pray in the Calabar Cathedral. The rosary is a universal language spoken by every devout heart.

Back to the beginnings

Calabar - where the Holy Child nuns established their first African mission in 1930 - can be reached by launch from Oron. It is a two-hour run on the Cross River, past dense mango groves, swampy inlets and occasional fishing villages perched on stilts. The scene has changed very little since that day when Reverend Mother made the journey to Calabar as one of the little band of tyro missionaries shepherded by the great Bishop Shanahan. A fellow member of that band, Bishop Moynagh, was on the dock now, heading the welcoming committee. A torrential downpour did nothing to dampen their enthusiasm. With the Bishop were Rev. Mother



Handmaids' Day in Calabar. Reverend Mother General with Rev. M. M. Arthur and Rev. M. M. Vianney are guests of the Superior General of the Handmaids, Rev. Mother M. Gertrude (on right of Rev. Mother General) and some of her Sisters.

M. Gertrude, Superior General of the Handmaids, and some of her Sisters; the Holy Child nuns from Marian Hill and rows of students in blue uniforms.

On that hot October day in 1930 when the little band had landed, they had walked some two miles up a dusty road to the sparse Mission compound. Now, a majestic Cathedral dominates the site and overlooks the whole town. The first Holy Child convent to be built in Nigeria has been taken over by the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, a daughter society made up of African Sisters, as their mother house. It was here on "Handmaids' Day" that they prepared a festive dinner with Bishop Moynagh as special guest of honor with Reverend Mother General. Many former pupils and friends of Reverend Mother's flocked to see her at the reception given later by the Holy

Family Association. One of them proudly displayed a medal which "our Mother-Mother" had given her thirty-four years before. No one is better able to evaluate all that has been accomplished in the missions since that microscopic beginning than Reverend Mother General herself for she was the first American Holy Child missionary in Africa. Her joy and gratitude to all are boundless.

But the work yet to be done presents a challenge of powerful dimensions. The two African Cardinals Rugambwa and Zoungrana have summed up it with terse directness: "*The work that missionaries have still to do in Africa is even greater today than yesterday.*"

In Lagos, shortly before Reverend Mother General boarded the plane for Rome, an elderly Yoruba woman placed this picture in her hands. 'This is my son. He prepares to be a priest in Rome. You will see him?' And that is how the Roman community became acquainted with the fine young seminarian from Propaganda College, Anthony Okojie.

