

The Nigerian Holy Child Teacher

by JOSEPHINE ADIE

Sometimes you come upon it suddenly out in the bush or along the highway: a sign that says "Convent H.C.J. School." The Holy Child nuns do not actually teach or live in these primary schools but that sign is like a symbol of the close union and the spirit of the teachers who have been trained by them.

In my own case, I have been a Holy Child girl for thirteen years. Up until 1954 I had never heard of these nuns. The only ones I knew were the Medical Missionaries of Mary who had been my guardians since my father's death in 1951. Then one day Sister Gabriel Mary (M.M.M.) told me that she was sending me to the Holy Child Convent School in Ogoja as a boarder. Obudu, where I had been living with the Sisters, is only forty-five miles from Ogoja but it seemed a thousand miles away from the people who had been so motherly to me. All my fears of losing my friends, the Sisters, were expelled after a few days however because I got the same motherly affection from these new nuns.

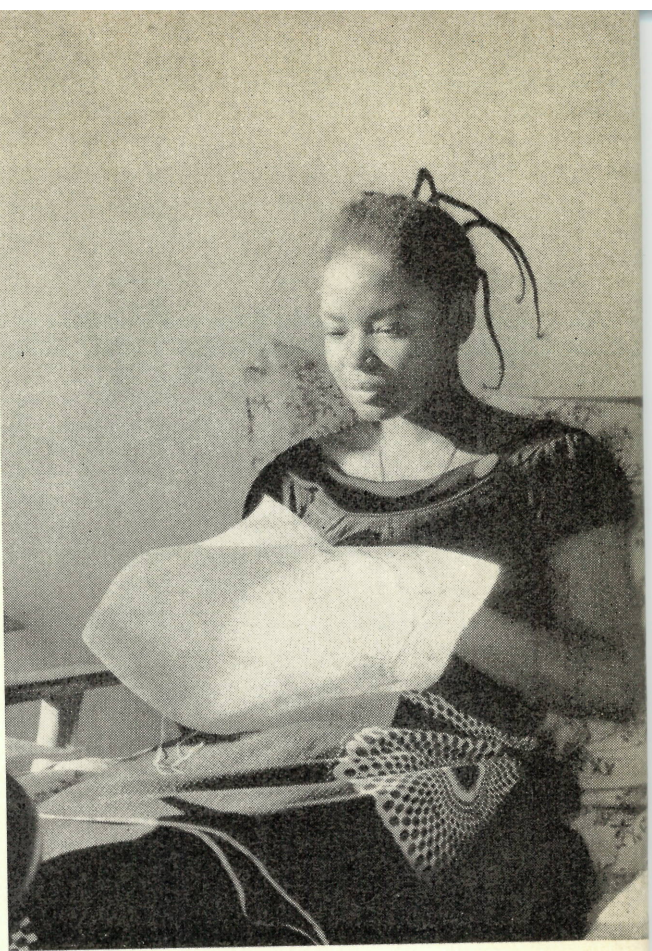
They were teachers, I discovered, not nurses like the M.M.M.'s. By the end of my first year in the Holy Child School I had changed my mind about becoming a nurse and decided to be a teacher.

That is why, instead of going on to secondary after my primary school, I chose to go to the Preparatory Training Centre for a year. It was on the same compound... so after a while I was teaching in the same place I had entered in 1954!

The two years I spent in the Holy Child College in Ifuho, two hundred and fifty miles away, were a break from Ogoja — but not from our Mothers. 1965 and '66 found me right back in Ogoja, this time to teach in the secondary school which has now replaced the primary school and Training College. It is most interesting, and makes me feel very old, to see that the first set of girls I ever taught in my life are doing their W.A.S.C. Examinations in this very school this year!

Since the work of the Holy Child nuns is to educate girls of all

In the tutors' bungalow, Ogoja. Late afternoon finds Josephine Adie relaxing with some embroidery work... Then a bell rings and she goes out to the hockey field to supervise sports or to the auditorium to coach a play.



tribes, you can find our Alumnae doing interesting work in all parts of Nigeria. Those who teach can be found in even the most remote parts of the Eastern Region. In Ogoja alone, we have no less than thirteen primary schools; some of them are so big that they have up to fifteen teachers on the staff in contrast to the small two-teacher schools in the "bush" stations as we call them. These small schools are usually the most challenging in which to teach.

The two or three teachers usually live either in the small building provided on the school compound or right in the village with the natives. Even though these two or three may be unused to the dialect at first and to the way of

life, they soon adapt themselves and become great friends. In a case where the teacher is very good to the natives, they become so attached to her that they go to great lengths to keep her happy. They bring presents of vegetables and other food from the farm for her and from the market. They may even sell things to her at a cheaper price. Most times, the owner of the compound on which the teacher lives gives her a piece of land to farm on and she plants such things as okra, pumpkin, spinach, peppers, corn, groundnuts and yam. She really saves a lot of money by getting her food supply from her own farm. The teacher usually has a little girl or two (often a relative) to help

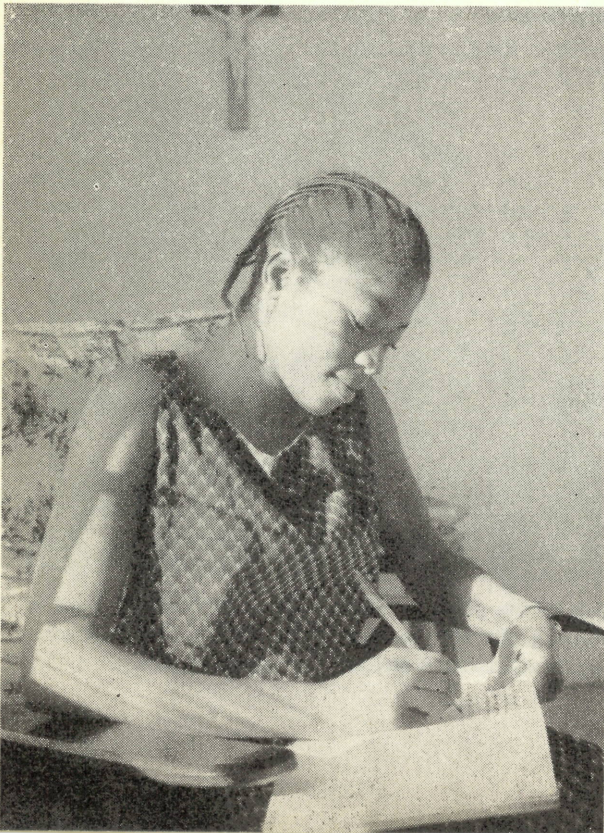


'A small rural school is usually the most challenging in which to teach.'

her and these little ones can be very keen on farming.

The Holy Child teacher has a reputation for being useful in her station by helping the parish priests to give religious instructions, hold-

ing Legion of Mary meetings, and organising seminars for women. The fact that up to five or six women in a village delight in naming their babies after a particular teacher shows how much admiration she



Teresa Inyambe, a friend of Josephine's, teaches in the same school and lives in the same bungalow. In addition, they have a bond of many other common interests.

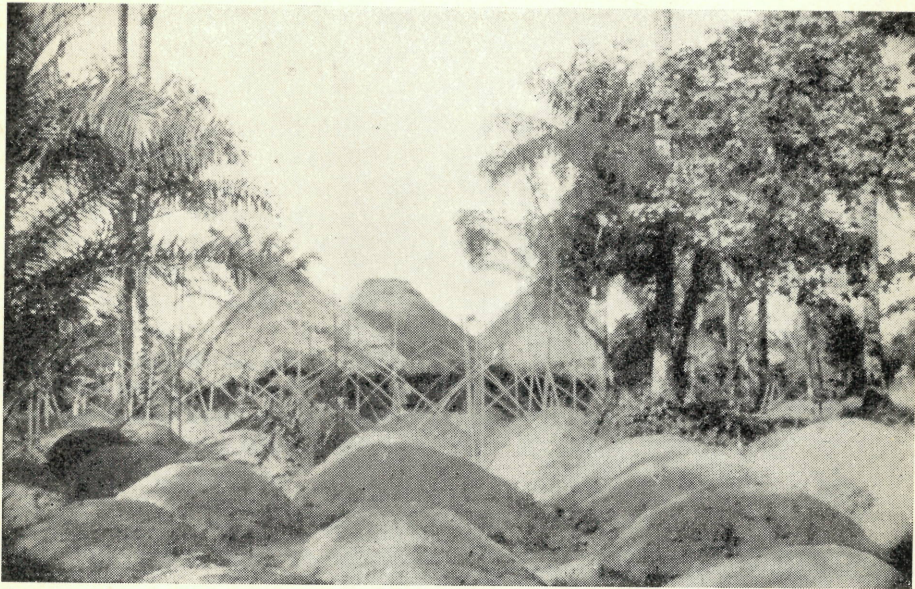
draws from the people. The "bush" teacher has one big difficulty — transportation. Since there are no shops in her station, she has to travel to the nearest town every few weeks for supplies, and the way she travels there is anybody's guess. Some stations are over ten miles from a town and the teacher has to cycle there since most of these places are not "motorable." Aside from this difficulty, she is better off than her "township" counterpart. She saves twice as much money as we do in the town because she does not have to buy food and she gets her firewood right from the bush behind her house.

From time to time the "bush" teacher comes to spend a weekend with her friend in town — or vice versa — and they compare notes. In spite of some minor differences in their way of living, their goal is the same: not only

to teach those in their charge to read and write but also to live truly Christian lives.

The "township" teacher usually belongs to many organizations like the youth and dancing clubs, the N.U.T. (Nigerian Union of Teachers) and perhaps some tribal union. She is a lively person who is well occupied. For both the "bush" and "township" Holy Child teachers a spirit of progressiveness in their work prevails. Wherever extra mural courses are held, our teachers are in attendance. Many of them pursue further studies in universities both at home and abroad.

The relationship between the teachers in a station is not unworthy of mention. In every school of ours, the friendliness of the teachers towards one another can be seen from the way they have their meals together and sit around to chat whenever they are free. From time



The teacher in 'bush station' is often given a piece of land to farm and so is able to grow most of her own food. In the foreground are yam mounds with the village behind them.



Teresa Inyambe and Josephine Adie with young relatives who live with them and attend a nearby primary school.

to time they meet to celebrate someone's success or feast day, and the goodwill is evident from the little presents they give each other on such occasions.

For myself, I cannot imagine a happier place than the classroom. I derive great joy from knowing that I am in a position of trust and responsibility. In what other job, for instance, could I have the privilege of "mothering" thirty different children in a year? Where else could I have found an outlet for my love of drama, games, etc. outside teaching? Where else would I be helping to train souls and mould characters outside the classroom?

I intended getting married at the

end of this year, but I felt I had not gone half-way if I wanted to follow the example of the nuns who never stop learning. I thought marriage might end my career too soon, so I am going to the Federal Advanced Teachers' College in Lagos for a three-year course in English and History. When the course is finished I intend to get married and I hope to continue teaching as well. I won't fail to give my children the privilege of benefitting from a Holy Child education. I want my children to learn in particular the spirit of hard work that is so outstanding in the Holy Child school, and to be as proud as I am of the motto: "Actions not Words."