

THE PYLON

THAT CARRIES THE LIGHT TO AFRICA
 A MAGAZINE OF MISSIONARY PROPAGANDA PUBLISHED WITH ECCLESIASTICAL
 APPROVAL IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY
 CHILD JESUS IN NIGERIA AND GHANA

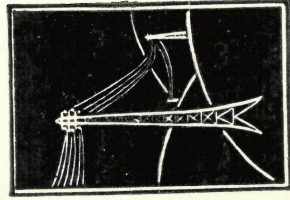
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Autumn 1966

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COVER PICTURE: Reverend Mother Vicar (M. M. Ronald, S.H.C.J.) watches the Legion of Mary at work in Agiga village, Ogoja.



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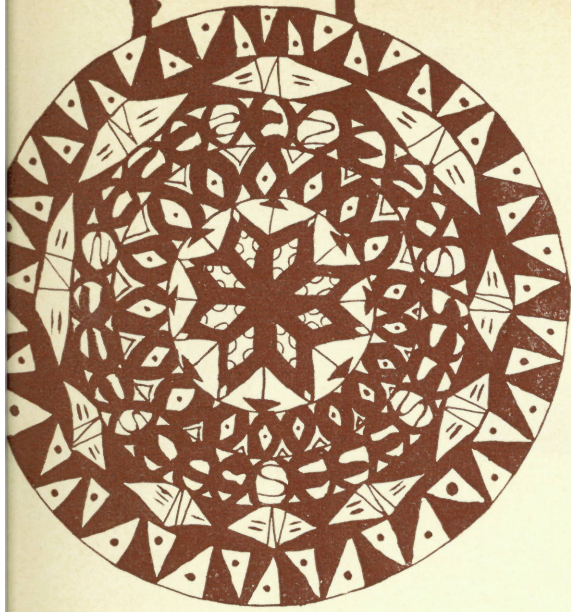
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OGOJA

Quiet again — then piteous cries from a dormitory in the upper compound. A girl has stepped on a scorpion. “Oh Mother, I don’t know where the sting is. I hurt all over, even my eyebrows.”

the nurse on duty discovers the sting and injects a powerful antidoze directly into it. Within a couple of minutes all the pain has subsided.

One of the great blessings here is having the Medical Missionaries of Mary so close to us. They run a hospital and a big leper colony within two or three miles of our school. The girl is rushed over and

A half hour later, the compound is once again slumber bound.

* * * * *

Dawn breaks softly, to my surprise. I had expected something like Kipling’s “thunderous

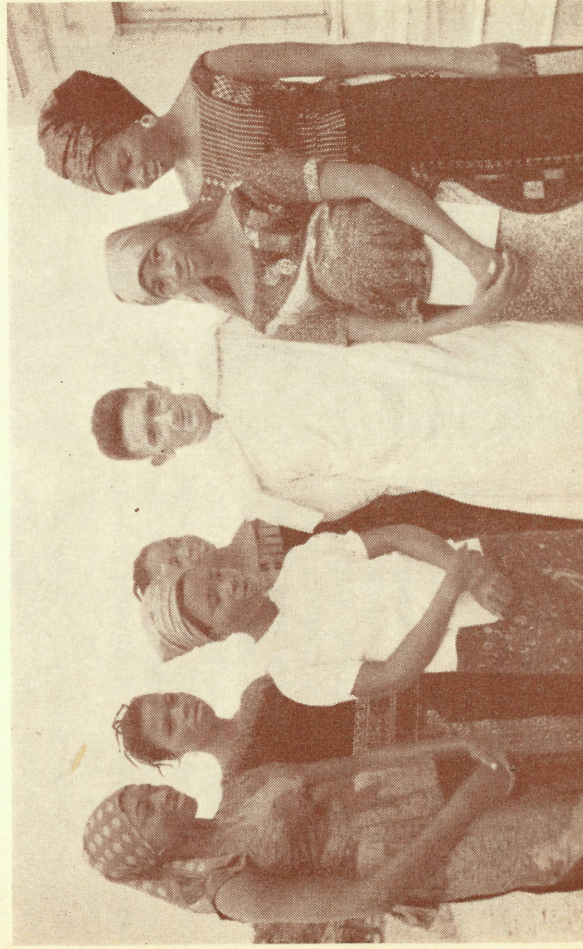
When our mission editor was sent to Africa for a time to assist in the Holy Child secondary school in Ogoja, she gathered up the sights and colors and sounds and poured them into her typewriter in an effort to share the eventful, day-by-day life in a mission.

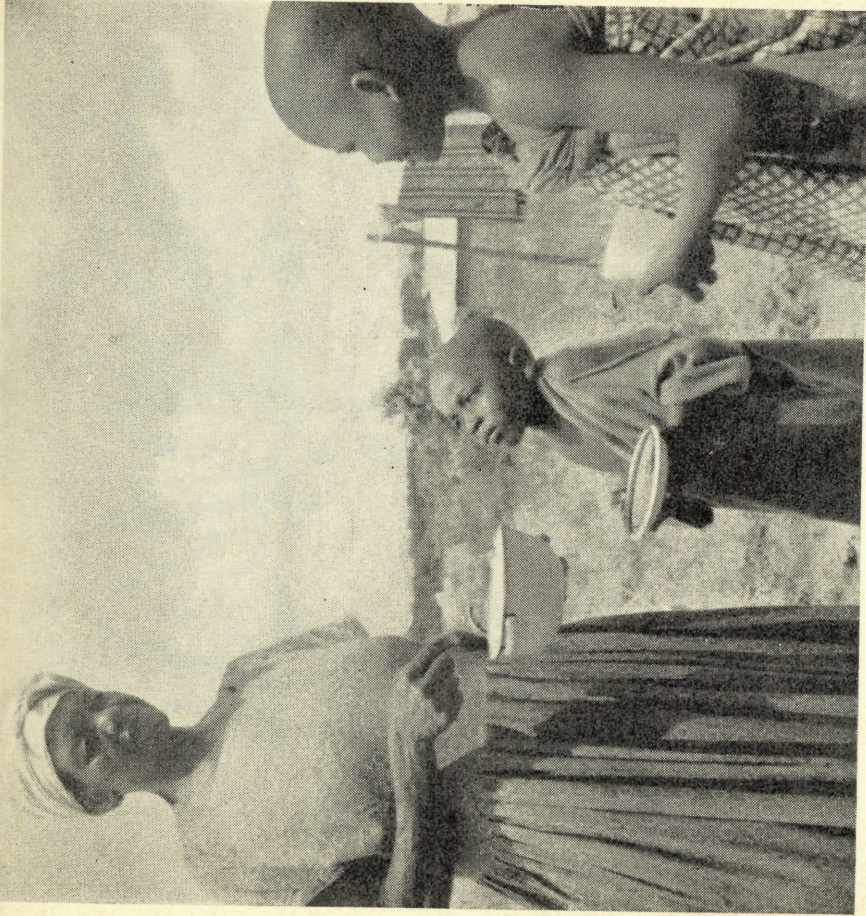
The night is quiet, lit by a blazing tropical moon. The children, all one hundred and forty-seven of them, are presumably asleep under the mosquito nets in the cottage dormitories. Then the drums begin in the villages which almost surround the big mission compound. Tiny villages they are, tucked away in the dense bush, and many of them pagan. But the drum-beat is just another night sound to the missionary like the rustle of bat wings overhead and the swelling symphony of seven million insects (or maybe it’s seventy million).

Suddenly there is a soft but penetrating *eyah, eyah* from below the convent balcony. Night-watch emerges from the shadows, a calm,

He is a Hausa man from the north, a Moslem and of powerful build. The people in the villages are afraid of him for they know he carries poisoned arrows and a gun. This is excellent insurance against petty thieving in the compound. Now he has a squirming small object firmly grasped by the arm. The school principal, Mother Mary Julian (Philadelphia born and bred), has been correcting a set of Fifth Form Latin exercise books and she steps out to hear the complaint. “Mudda, he go for back. Him run.” It turns out that the boy merely wanted to take a short cut across the compound to his home. Reluctantly, night-watch lets him go at Mother’s bidding.

Fresh from the waters of Baptism in the convent chapel: Nancy Takon (left front), Stella Duke and Veronica Ina (Form II) with Fr. Dermot Nolan, S.P.S., who instructed and baptized them. Their godmothers (back row) are Elizabeth Nwudu, Margaret Agba and Rose Essien.





Chop time: Nothing quite so good for dinner as *fu-fu*! Mama Josephine, head cook, sees to it that these children from Agiga village have generous helpings. More than twenty people from the neighboring villages receive free *chop* each day from the mission.

dawns" in this region. But no, just a gentle glow spreads over our little world, and the neighbors' chickens, dozens of them, come wandering in for breakfast off the school land. So do the sheep and the lambs and the goats. Why forage in thick bush, they seem to ask, when we can get our *chop* off twenty-three acres of cut grass and young plants? But they do not spoil the Harmattan lilies which are in full bloom right

now, bordering every path like rays of orange-gold. How any flowers can grow in the hard, sun-baked earth is a miracle. Dust lies on the road, inches thick, during this dry season (from October to April). What the smog is to Los Angeles, the Harmattan is to Ogoja. It is a combination of the Sahara sands and top-soil from the savannas and it hangs like a gray veil between earth and sky. Doors warp. Wells run dry.

"Mudda, our *weel* he has only two feet water this morning," says Vincent, who is in charge of things mechanical. The new electric pump is his joy but even such a marvelous contraption must have something to pump.

Mother M. Julian is more than equal to such situations. She has been the principal of this school for twelve years, setting a high scholastic standard, keeping the children on their toes, being monitor and spiritual mother — and taking every emergency in stride. "Until the rains come," Mother decides, "the children will have to take buckets to the spring or the river every day." So off the children go for the mile jaunt with buckets on their heads and singing a river folk song. Some members of the Explorers' Club (science) have an idea. "Maybe we can pick up some paramacia in our buckets to begin that culture..."

* * * * *
 These small monkeys that leap about the coconut trees and bushes make amusing pets — sometimes. And sometimes, like Benjy, they have distinct behaviour problems. Benjy was one of the three tail-curling pets that lived in an enclosed yard behind the Peace Corps cottage. Being of an exploring nature, he managed to get out quite successfully. The first day he investigated the laboratory and ate all the tender biology specimens just as they were ready to use.

The second day he saw that Mother M. Julian was annoyed with him and he hid discreetly until she left her office. Then

he went in and with gleeful malice broke everything that was breakable. Ink bottles and vases lay smashed on the floor, the contents of the record box were scattered far and wide. Someone rushed in just in time to save the portable typewriter from being hurled out the window and Benjy escaped to the top of a tall tree.

The third day before breakfast he went into the children's dining hall, which Mama Josephine had just opened, and ate the tops off one hundred and fifty bananas. Then he sampled the other food. Naturally, the children refused to touch it and all that food went to waste.

Now, Benjy doesn't live here anymore.

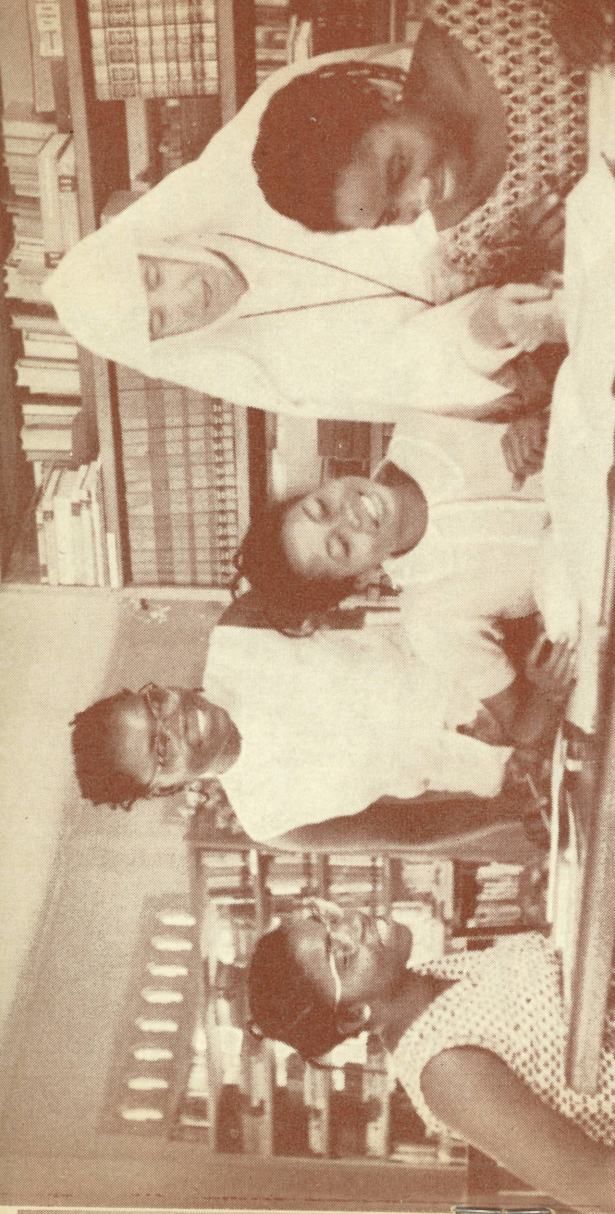
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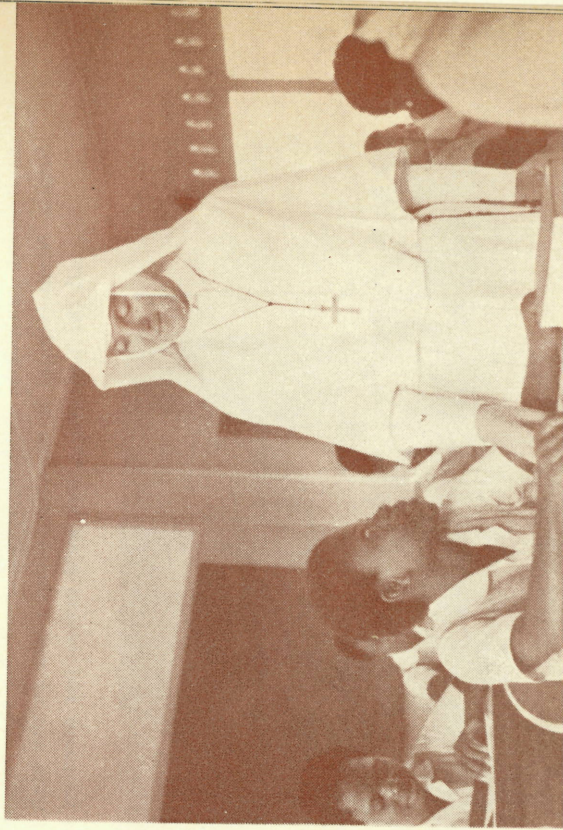


'Do we sound like that!'
'Hear yourself as others hear you, speak no word in idle jest...' Mother M. Ignatius (Chicago), monitor of the Debating Club, has tape-recorded the 'spontaneous speeches' of Juliana Odo and Rose Essien and the results titillate the air. Who knows, they may be future members of the Assembly...



Eunice Okwesili Mercy Nwachukwu Perpetua Nebuwa M.M. Julian Florence Obuckwe

Research, study and more study: *These Fifth Form students are getting advice from M.M. Julian, the school principal and their class mistress. Preparing to take the W.A.S.C. examinations in December is no easy matter.*
Incidentally, this school library is one of the best in Eastern Nigeria, thanks to those who responded to Rev. M. M. Hubert's request for books several years ago.



Rev. Mother Gabriel Dolores, the new Superior in Ogoja, gets acquainted with Form II.

Sunday mornings are special. We go to the Cathedral for Mass and become part of the teeming parochial life. Small children with a "junior" brother or sister tied on back smile up at us shyly. Ma Janet, in her bright Nigerian "lapa", dusts the front seat for us. Two-year-old Angelina, with the liquid brown eyes, climbs up on my lap and is promptly snatched away by her mother with whispered apologies. It's easy to love these people.

They come from many tribes, including Ishibori, Yala and Ibo and there are some fifty-nine dialects spoken in the area. "Bush" English and the English-you-learn-in-school are the *lingua franca*. During the sermon, two catechists stand to face the congregation and strive manfully to put Father Reagan's words into the Ibo and Yala tongues. Father is telling the women that on *Bekwara* market days they should bring their chil-

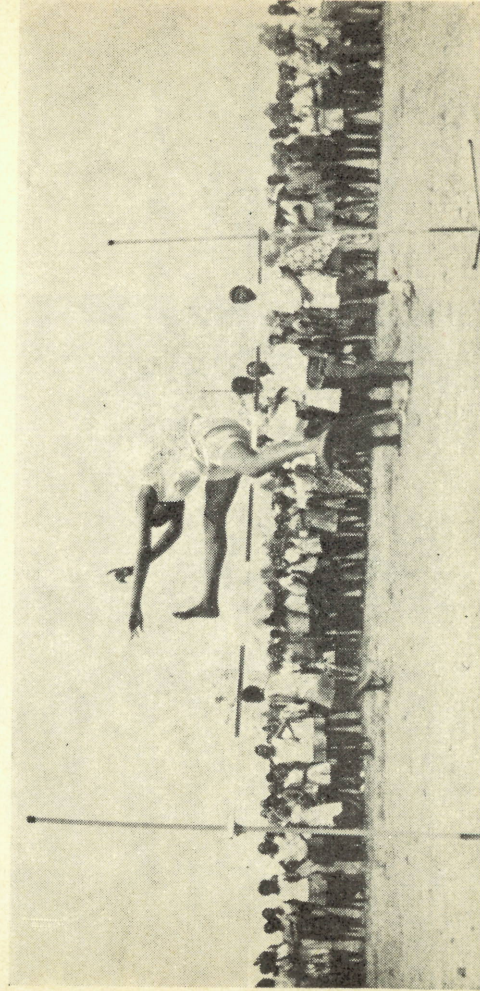
dren to the hospital of the Medical Missionaries of Mary for free examination by Sister Doctor. Ma Janet nods her head in approval. The Father asks the congregation to pray for the teacher in Alifokpa who died suddenly leaving his wife with six small children. "And I am happy to say that the people of Alifokpa have acted like true Christians," Father concludes. "We held a meeting there last night and they said they would make a farm to support the teacher's widow and children."

"*A-yah, a-yah,*" breathes the congregation appreciatively.

This section, like most of Nigeria, is made up of small farms. The Cathedral itself, very attractive and modern in every detail, is flanked by fields of yams and cassava. The bell tower is like a beacon of faith and security in a region that still knows much darkness.

* * * * *

Field Day: Sports play an important part in all Nigerian schools. When Sharon-Izzi came up from Abakaliki to compete with Holy Child School, Ogoja, the excitement ran high. Cokes were served by the dozens — and mangoes. Here, Emilia Ntem (Ogoja) is winning second place in the high jump. Sharon-Izzi won all the honors . . . but we'd better not mention the scores . . .



Life in a mission is never monotonous

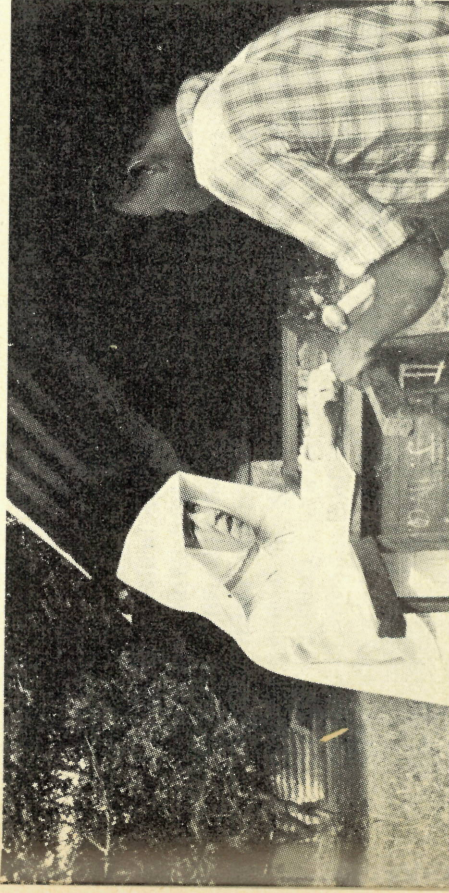


Above:

M.M. Kentigern (Melrose, Mass.), in charge of the compound, gives pointers to Inaku on how to prune a neem tree.

Right:

Palm matting makes a good fence. ' But, Ntakpa, don't let it sag!



Michael, the young mission carpenter, repairs a chair for Mother.



'Mother, let us show you how we plait our hair.' This is a decidedly feminine art in West Africa. But only the Fourth and Fifth Forms are permitted to wear plaits.

Monday morning and we are intent on reading a descriptive paragraph of Thomas Mann's in English class. A vagrant thought has just occurred to me that I might almost be back teaching in St. Walburga's in New York when a shrill "ee — ee — eek!" from the children startles me out of my chair. They are bolting for the door. "Snake, Mother, snake!" I lose no time in joining them. In fact, Mother is still running when the children return with stones. The snake has slid down from the louvre window and is on the ground again. Fortunately, it cannot move fast because it has just swallowed a frog. Teresa Opara, one of our African teachers, comes out of the staff room to investigate. She is a small, gentle person with an amazing amount of resourcefulness. Stick in hand, she approaches the horrible, wriggling

thing and pounds it until it lies quite still.

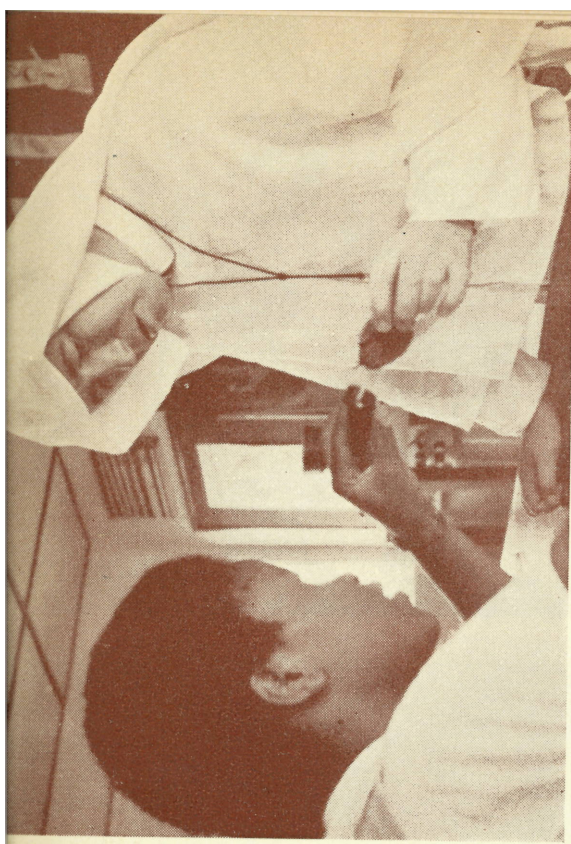
"What kind was it, Teresa?" "Please, Mother, we call it a 'brown house snake.' It is very poisonous."

"Oh." . . . New York, at that moment, seems very, very remote.

* * * * *

Six-thirty P.M. and black clouds are looming in the east for the first time in months. The two Peace Corps Volunteers come up from their cottage to show us their bridesmaids' dresses. There is to be a Peace Corps wedding at Obudu this weekend and Avis and Pat are the bride's attendants. The dresses, pink and white embroidered, look charming. Avis Eisenmann is from California and teaches biology at a boys' school six miles away. Patricia Bonifer comes from Indiana; for five hours every morning she strives to make

Biology class: student inspects the eyes of a snail through the microscope while M. M. Kentigern holds the little creature. (N.B. Some forty-odd snails were captured for this class but they escaped from their container and had to be re-captured from the walls and windows!)



French and history take on new dimensions for our children. Almost every one of the Holy Child missions has a Volunteer on the staff. They are of inestimable benefit and service.

Shortly after Avis and Pat disappear down the road, the storm breaks, the first of the season, and it is a miniature tropical tornado. But it freshens the air and the harsh dry earth seems to soften visibly. (Summer is the cool season in Nigeria.)

* * * * *

The back gate of the mission compound opens onto a strange, almost fantastic scene. This "bush primeval" probably has not changed much in two thousand years; something murky and mysterious lies in its heavy undergrowth and in the tangle of trees. Bent on C.C.D. work, Teresa Opara, some students and I follow a footpath in Indian file. Small *picnics* pop out of nowhere to join us, friendly and curious. Presumably we are

headed for Agiga village. "But this *is* Agiga," explains Maria Joseph, president of the praesidium of the Legion of Mary. Several small compounds, half hidden in the bush, make up Agiga. Sheep, goats and chickens roam about at will in front of the picturesque mud houses with their cone-shaped roofs. (I recognize the black hen that tried to lay an egg in the work sacristy yesterday and we exchange unfriendly glances.) A ju-ju shrine stands at the entrance of each compound like a tiny African doll house. Sacrifices, mostly chickens and yams, are offered here by the head of the family to appease the evil spirits and to honor the dead relatives. A child rushes up to us and says something quickly. Will we visit the sick woman in his compound? That is how we come to meet Maria. She is a young woman, pitifully emaciated and with tragically beautiful eyes. She speaks no word, simply looks at us with those tragic eyes and con-



It looks nice: Teresa Opara, (left) monitor of the Legionaries, and Maria Joseph help the sick young woman to dress in her new cloth.

Teresa will soon be carrying on her apostolic work in another continent for she plans to enter New Sharon, the Holy Child novitiate in Pennsylvania.



tinues to cover herself with clay as protection against the heat. From this moment on, Maria and her mother are part of our mission family. (There are more than twenty people living in the bush and unable to provide for them-

Legionaries Cecilia Ende and Maria Joseph wait for the mission car to take Maria and her mother to the hospital.

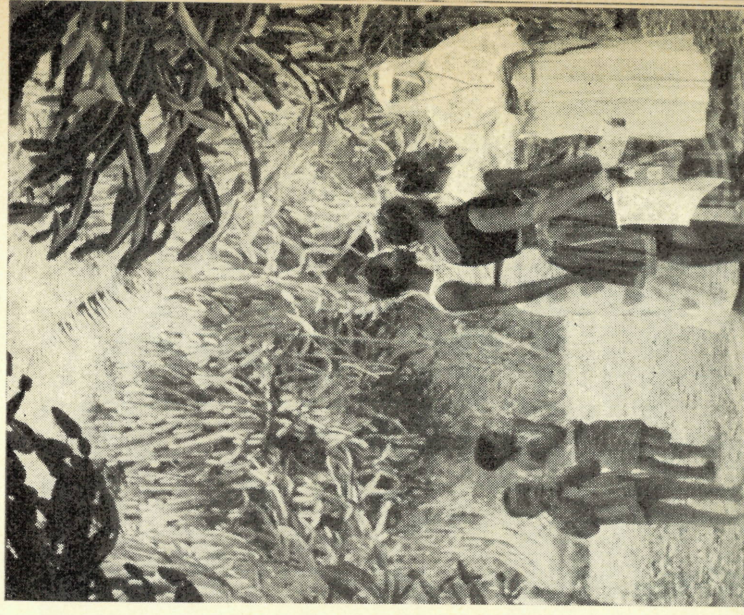


Stealing through the back gate: 'Maybe the Muddas will give us some mangoes.'

selves who look to the Mission for their full support.) Maria's story has a happy sequel. She becomes the special project of Teresa, Cecilia Ende and Maria Joseph. They bring her cloth for *lappa*, pillows and other goods sent by the nuns, and each day one of them sees that she is properly washed and fed. Visits to Sister Doctor become a regular thing and Maria is growing stronger. By summer she is able to speak with something like animation. "Mother, today Maria said 'thank you' to me!" exclaims Maria Joseph. "Mother, it was like a blessing!"

Yes, it is very easy to love these people.

May we ask prayers for Nigeria so that the leaders, who are trying to do so much for the country, may be guided in all things by Divine Providence?



Legionaries with M. M. Julian entering Cactus village. The old chief here wishes to be baptized and is under instruction.

A ju-ju shrine stands at the entrance of each compound like a tiny African doll house: M. Virginia Mary learns about details from her Legionary guides.

•

Below: Close-up of the ju-ju shrine. The wooden doll in the middle represents the little boy's dead ancestors.



In Loving Memory of a Pioneer Missionary

When Margaret Walker left Mayfield (where she had been at school with her sister, Magdalen, who founded the London dockland Settlement of the Holy Child Jesus) she had one desire: to devote her life to the poor. She became an Irish Sister of Charity fully expecting to spend that life working among the poor of England and Ireland. But the plea of the great missionary, Bishop Shanahan, altered everything. "May God send Mothers after His own Heart to care for His children in Nigeria," begged the Bishop, and Sister Mary Charles Magdalen (Walker) responded with eager zeal.

In Calabar, 1924, she found herself faced with the problem of running single-handed a school of some 300 girls in classes ranging from the Infants to Standard VI. Sister introduced the Montessori method with great success and the attendance in the school increased rapidly. On land provided by the mission, and with the loan of some hundred State prisoners, she literally hewed an entrance in the bush to build a school and convent. But it was impossible

Sister
Mary
Charles
Magdalen
(Walker)

to carry on alone. In 1930 the Holy Child nuns came to relieve her of the routine work of the school, and four years later, because of ill health, Sister Magdalen was forced to retire for a while.

In more recent years she has been working in a mission of her Congregation in Zambia where she died last February. "It will not be long before the Lord calls me home. I am eighty-six!" she wrote to her old friend, Mother St. John, H.H.C.J., shortly before her death.

Hundreds of friends attended the Requiem High Mass held in the Calabar Cathedral for Sister Magdalen. She will always be a warm and living memory in old Calabar.

R. I. P.

Mother St. John and
Mother Ignatia, two
of Sister Magdalen's
first pupils, who later
became foundation
stones of the Hand-
maids of the Holy
Child Jesus. The
convent she built is
now their mother
house.

