

'To Follow Wherever He Leads'

Sister Mary Teresita.

Teresa Okure is the first Nigerian girl to enter the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. She comes from Anua, Eastern Nigeria and was educated in Cornelia Connelly Secondary School in Uyo. An older sister is also a religious, Sister Mary Liguori, H.H.C.J.

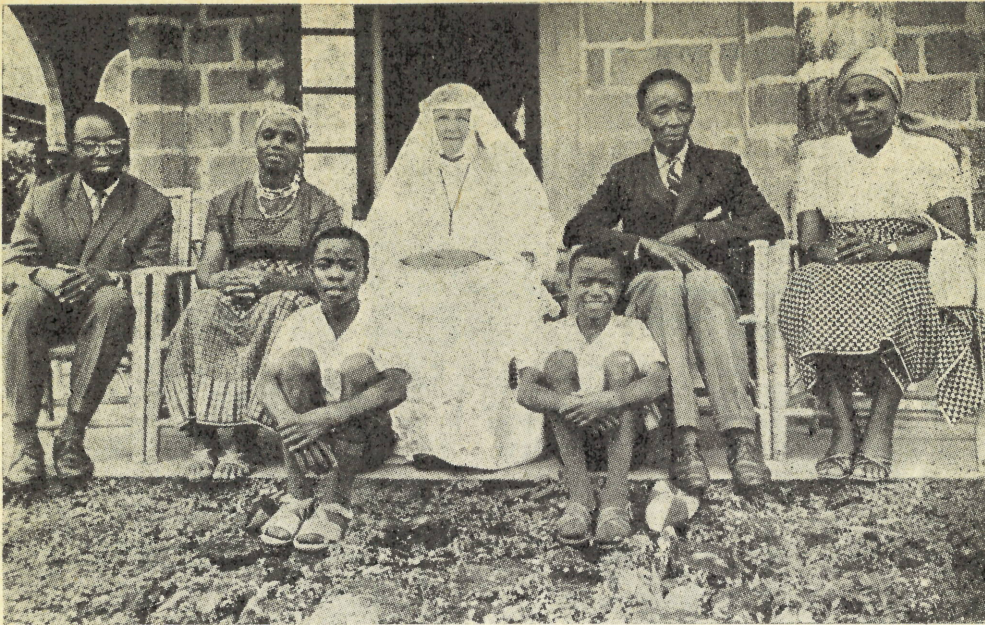
On her way to the novitiate in England in August, 1962, Teresa stopped over in Rome for a brief visit to the Mother House. Here is her own account of what happened after she took off in an Alitalia plane for the great Adventure . . .

From the plane window I could see the golden dome of St. Peter's and I knew that something of me was staying behind in Rome. The atmosphere and everything else in that Eternal City had deepened my awareness of the Church as something living and I would have loved to stay there were it not for the Holy Child novitiate being in England. We skimmed over the Alps, over the English Channel which seemed to be sandwiched in between England and France, and finally - London!

It was difficult to make our way through the busy crowd in Victoria Station. Why did everybody move so fast? I did my best to keep close to Reverend Mother Mary Bernard and Mother Mary Helen who had

brought me all the way from Nigeria. It was dark when we arrived in Mayfield and the nuns were waiting to take us to the convent. We were home at last and what a very warm welcome awaited us. My weariness soon disappeared, especially when I was tucked into a warm bed with blankets, hot water bottle and an eiderdown.

On a tour of this historic Mayfield the next morning, I grew to love the place, and that love deepened during each of the three years that I was there. It is an early medieval building, once a country palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury, set in many acres of beautiful rolling country land. The heart of it now, of course, is the tomb of Reverend Mother Cornelia Connelly, our Foundress, through whom the



During her stay in Uyo, Reverend Mother General receives a visit from Sister Teresita's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Okure, their older son and his wife, and two younger sons.

Old Palace was restored in the middle nineteenth century.

During the period of waiting for the hooding ceremony, we helped in the sacristy and were introduced to the different after-dinner walks that took the place of the Nigerian siesta. They had wonderful names such as *Cat's Eyes*, *Barking Dogs*, *Little Whirley*, *Switzerland* where an ancient windmill is still standing and where one can get a magnificent view of the Sussex Weald.

At least, on September fourteenth, our hooding day arrived. There were twelve of us and at six p.m. the little white hoods were put on us by Reverend Mother Provincial. It was grand to feel that we were now a part of the community — really “in” the Society at last. But we have come to realize that each goal reached becomes another beginning, still it *was* a big step forward.

As postulants we were much cherished by the Society, receiving kindness and consideration on every side. Besides our spiritual training and formation, we were taught Church and Sacristy work, other domestic works and sewing so that we could have the joy of making our own habits later on. We also had lessons in Scripture, Church History, Theology and Church Latin. The first great event to which we looked forward was Christmas as being the special feast of the Society. The whole atmosphere of preparation was quite new. There was the ‘Advent Wreath’ ceremony, for each day of the four weeks of Advent, which consisted of lessons and readings, mainly from the Old Testament, prayers and a verse or two of the ‘Rorate.’ Instead of the various native plays such as one is used to in Nigeria during this season, the children presented a Nativity play, and most impressive of all was a ‘live’ Crib scene in the



Happy day . . . Bishop James Moynagh of Calabar, an old friend of the Okure family, presides at the Clothing ceremony in Mayfield.

village for all the villagers and strangers to see. It was so different, so very thrilling to spend Christmas in religion in the S.H.C.J. When the first snow came that day, the peace and joy of the season seemed complete. For the first time, the carols about "winter snow" became meaningful to me.

The summer months brought our Clothing which took place on the Feast of the Visitation. The ceremony began at two p.m. and we were dressed as brides in long white robes and veils for the solemn betrothal. After the usual interrogations by the officiating prelate, we processed out of the Church again to put on our habits which

had been blessed by the Bishop. We were very privileged to be clothed by the Right Reverend James Moynagh, Bishop of Calabar, Eastern Nigeria, who happened to be on leave at this time and was invited to preside by Rev. Mother Provincial. His presence was like an extra benediction for me.

With the Clothing came our first real initiation into the life and spirit of the Society. Not that life in the Novitiate was - externally at least - very different from what it had been in the Postulantship. As First Year Novices we were under strict enclosure so that nothing distracted us from building our

spiritual life in, for and with Christ. It was a bit of heaven. The second year we returned to our studies, and the spiritual formation grew stronger. It was now our turn to take care of the new Postulants and to take them out for walks. Some of us helped to teach catechism to the little Catholic children of Mayfield Village. We also had the great privilege of helping in the Cause Room, typing, stamping, and sorting out documents so closely connected with Reverend Mother Foundress.

Profession Day is a day set apart in a lifetime. Ours came at last on August twenty-ninth and a very special incident is connected with it. The Mayfield Chapel was under repairs at the time so we made our first Vows at St. Leonards-on-Sea, the cradle of the Society, where the last Profession had been in 1885! The Profession Retreat had been at Mayfield but on that Sunday morning all of us - novices and some of the Professed - climbed aboard a forty-one seater coach to go to St. Leonards. The Church was very full when the ceremony began at 11 a.m. It was a source of joy to all, especially to the old nuns who had not been able to see a Profession ceremony in a long time. And who can put into words what it was to us who received the black veil and the ring...the first real sealing of that covenant of love which God had offered to us.

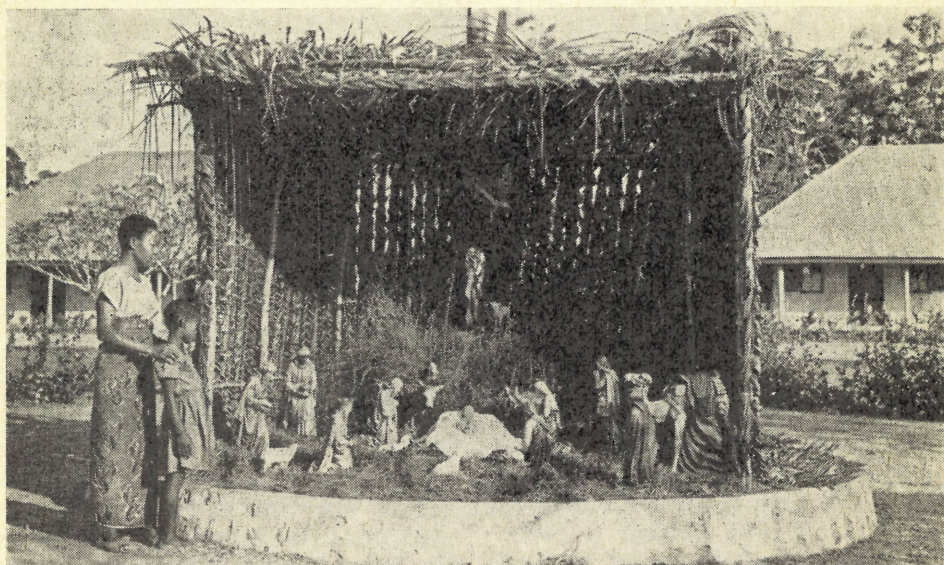
After dinner and the signing of the Vows, we went on a conducted tour and saw for the first time so many things intimately bound up with the life and work of Reverend Mother Foundress; her prie dieu, a prayer book, the actual room in which she died. It made us feel her presence very powerfully and

she seemed to be rejoicing with us on that great day.

The very next day we took the train for London. Now we were bound for the Scholasticate, which is a further two-year course of training. This consists of a deepening and broadening of our spiritual life and more professional training for the work of our apostolate. We go out for lectures on Scripture, Theology and Catechetics and we often help with the catechetical work in parish Sunday schools. We also attend meetings at the Sion Convent where Ecumenical contacts can be made with seculars and religious of all denominations. Although this is a Catholic organization, non-catholics frequently give lectures on a wide range of topics (including Alcoholics and Alcoholism, Superstition and Credulity in Roman Catholicism, the Secularisation of Christianity, Non-Violence in Africa, etc.)

For our walks we now have, instead of the Sussex country lanes, the busy London streets leading to the Public Library, or through the famous Holland Park which is quite near. The White Fathers of Africa, who say our Mass, live just a few yards from us and they often have visiting priests from Africa, so Nigeria seems near again.

London is such a change from the quiet of the noviceship at Mayfield; it takes time to get used to the constant traffic by land and air. Our house is situated in a place where we are very much in contact with people in the world for whom our apostolate is directed. It is good to be here, for these two years of preparation mean so much in view of the work waiting for us when our training is completed.



Above: The outdoor Crib in the Holy Child compound in Afikpo attracts attention from near and far. At night, when it is lit up by flickering bush lamps, many a silent figure comes to worship the Babe.

Left: '... let us pray and let us work, with faith and love, for the glory of God and for the spread of His Kingdom!'

Pope Paul VI

These people in Ghana, newly converted from paganism, have learned the secret of prayer.



Art exhibition in Ifuho. M. M. Helen (left) and M. M. Dermot encourage the young student artists. Some of the work will be shown in the Arts Festival of Eastern Nigeria.

REMEMBER MOTHER HUBBARD!

Would you agree that all nursery-rhyme-age children can be divided into those who are more sorry for Mother Hubbard and those who acquire deep and lasting sympathies for the "Poor Doggie" who had none?

In this context, Mother Hubbard is, of course, the Organizer and the P.D. is *the hungry philatelist waiting to absorb those stamps of yours the anxious missionary who needs to build or buy the important apostolic work waiting to be done.*

Can't you spare your old-and-forgotten stamp collection? Can't you have a box for all used stamps (except the *very* ordinary ones)? Can't you ask the boss to let you have the firm's incoming envelopes once a week? (*M* for Missions, *M* for Monday).

This plea is, naturally, on behalf of The Pylon Philatelic Association, Harrogate, Yorks. England, which helps the Holy Child Missionary work according to supply and demand. Thank you.



A SPECIAL P.P.A. PRIZE has been awarded to Mother Mary Rose, who throughout her long years of illness, has never forgotten to send U.S. First Day Covers. We are most grateful.