

Two of our Nigerian Missionaries. THE REV. W. AND MRS. NORCROSS.

By THE Rev. J. G. BOWRAN.

MISSIONARIES! How the word thrills us! There is something in the name which moves the heart and kindles the mind as few other words in our language. The thrill we know is inspired by the lives of all the great who have consecrated themselves to missionary service. It was Robert Moffat, and David Livingstone, and John G. Paton, and William Carey, and Alexander Mackay, and scores of other men and women who have made the name "missionary" illustrious and precious. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!" There is a sense in which the feet of the explorer and the traveller and the pioneer are beautiful. It is magnificent for men to pierce hitherto unpenetrated lands, traversing deserts, venturing into the dark recesses of forests, discovering lakes and mountains, bringing to light to the modern world the things which for long had been concealed.

We see how the Royal Society and the Scientific Societies all appreciate the service rendered by these adventurers in the hidden places of the world. Their feet are beautiful, but there are none to be compared to the Christian missionary. He is inspired by the purest and the most unselfish motives. He is engaged in the divinest of all missions, and he takes with him the most glorious message that man can ever speak. We are all conscious of awe in the presence of the true missionary. We reverence his character; we admire his service; we appraise his motives; we feel that he is amongst the great on earth.

For nearly half a century we have been engaged as a Missionary Church in Africa, and during these years we have been fortunate and honoured by the devotion of missionaries who have grown up in our fellowship, and who have found it the joy and pride of their life to be our representatives to the dark children of Africa. We have had our martyrs and heroes, and happily in these more modern days we are being served, and the Kingdom of Christ is being promoted, by a company of missionaries gifted in mind and equally noble in heart. Of the glorious company of whom we think, the Rev. W. and Mrs. Norcross have an established place.

Mr. Norcross was born in Preston, and, until becoming a student at Hartley College, spent his years in that Lancashire town. In the early years of his life he was in connection with the Anglican Church, but, by and by, began a desultory attendance at our Deepdale Mill Sunday school. He was converted at a Tent Mission, conducted under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., and immediately joined our Church at Deepdale Mill.

Here, as he frankly confesses, he found a congenial sphere. He became a teacher in the Sunday school, a member of the choir, the secretary of the Band of Hope, the leader of the catechumen class, and a little later a local preacher. He gratefully acknowledges that he owes everything to this Church. We are glad to pen that statement. The greatest honour that can come to any Church is for some youth or maiden to be inspired within it for the service of Christ on the heathen field, and we can quite imagine the satisfaction and pride of the officials and members of this Church that their life was such in Christ Jesus that William Norcross found in it the impetus to the missionary career. Of the ministers who influenced him and helped him in these most important years, he makes grateful reference to the Rev. J. Dodd Jackson and the Rev. R.H. MacFarlane. We can imagine also that they too will have gratification in every recollection of this devoted missionary. Our friend's parents died while he was young, but he cherishes the memory of their goodness to this day.



After his sessions at Hartley College, he left there in 1910 for Livingstone College to receive his special training for the African field. In March, 1911, he sailed with the Rev. E.E. Pritchard for Africa. He has spent three terms abroad. Bende and Ikot Ekpene were the scenes of his labours during his first term. Our readers will recall that Mary Slessor was surprised to find the latter town in the possession of the Primitive Methodists. His second term, when he opened the new centre at Oyubia, gave him opportunity for real aggressive and pioneer work. This mission was formed in December, 1913, by the transference of eight out-stations from the great Oron station. During his third term six months were spent at the Oron Institute, after which he returned to the station with which his name has become so intimately associated. Oyubia has provided him with a magnificent sphere. It is partly a testimony to the eagerness of the Nigerian people for the Gospel and education, and also a fine tribute to the zeal of Mr. Norcross that now on the Oyubia Mission there are thirty out-stations, together with twenty day-schools.



Mrs. Norcross, who is the eldest daughter of Councillor R. Durham, the circuit steward of Preston II. Circuit, has served with her husband these last two terms. Fortunately, they have both had excellent health, and have been able to give undivided time and service to the extension and consolidation of the work.

Some idea of the diversified character of the work, and of the successes that are being achieved in Nigeria, may be gathered from words which we are glad to quote: "We are gripped in the glory of an onward march in less than twenty years the Word of God has travelled through a hundred towns like a flame Religious services, sacraments, class-meetings, and work among the catechumens and in the day-schools have all been attended to as time and opportunity would allow. To further all these converging interests we have sought intercourse with the people in systematic visitation of stations, and, where possible, seeing them in their homes. Contact with individuals is a factor of outstanding importance with a missionary There are more earnest inquiries concerning deeper things which reveal a seriousness we welcome."

After referring to the War, and the difficulties which the War has made, Mr. Norcross says: "We are firmly of opinion that this present time of difficulty is making for a strengthening of character and purpose, the fuller fruit of which will be seen when peace returns to the earth. We have striven diligently to maintain that healthy law which asks that people help their own work forward all they can by consecrating gifts to Church funds. That they should not be a heavy burden upon home funds is the lesser of two motives. That they strive to become self-supporting and actively self-propagating is our worthy ideal." For the year ending February, 1917, the local income of the Oyubia Mission was three hundred and fifty pounds.

Many of our readers will know that Mr. and Mrs. Norcross are now home on furlough, and they will be welcomed by the Churches in every part of the land. There is great eagerness to hear them.

Reference

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