TRAVELS IN WEST AFRICA
(CONGO FRANÇAIS, CORISCO AND CAMEROONS)
Mary H. Kingsley

Sample

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Travels in West Africa
(Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons)
by Mary H. Kingsley

To my brother, C. G. Kingsley this book is dedicated.

First published 1897

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**About the Author**

Mary Henrietta Kingsley was born in London on October 13th, 1862. Her father was George Kingsley, a doctor and travel writer; the writer Charles Kingsley was her uncle. Mary had access to her father’s large library of travel books, and was fascinated by his tales about his long and frequent travels, but having to look after her chronically ill mother her own life was largely confined to the house and garden. When both her parents unexpectedly died in 1892, Mary Kingsley traveled to Africa on a scientific quest for fetish and fish (the term “fetish” referring to religious customs and belief systems), but also, as this book bears witness, driven by a deep passion. Her biography by the *Royal African Society* tells us that in a private letter she said she had gone to West Africa “to die” but instead found that “West Africa amused and was kind to me, scientifically interesting and did not want to kill me just then.”

Mary Kingsley returned to Africa in 1895 for a second journey on which, among other adventures, she lived with the Fan cannibals, went up the Ogowé river and climbed Mount Cameroon — almost incredible feats at that time for a woman traveling on her own. It is this journey about which she gives us a faithful, sweeping and often breathtaking account in *Travels in West Africa*.

Equally impressive as her travels are her writings. With great narrative skills she demonstrates her stunning composure even under the most exceptional circumstances, her remarkably un-prejudiced perceptiveness, her intelligence and intuition — and last but not least her hilarious dry humor, never daunted by discomfort nor deadly dangers.
In 1899 Mary Kingsley went to South Africa to volunteer as a nurse in the Second Boer War, intending to go back to West Africa afterwards. She caught typhoid fever from the patients she nursed, and died in Simon’s Town on June 3rd, 1900. She had asked to be buried at sea, and was the next day, with full military honors.
About this Edition

There are two different versions of Travels in West Africa which both were first published in 1897. This e-book contains the complete text of the first, unabridged edition, with only two articles from the appendix having been omitted: Dr. A. Günther on Reptiles and Fishes, and Orthoptera, Hymenoptera and Hemiptera.

The abridged version does not include chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 16, 17, 18 and 28. The author’s Preface to the Abridged Edition has here been added to the appendix. Not included in this e-book are the illustrations of the original edition.

Translations of German expressions and quotes are provided for the present edition in footnotes marked with *.

Differing spelling and capitalization of some words and names within the text have been harmonized, and spelling has cautiously been modernized (e.g., today instead of to-day); punctuation, with minor exceptions, follows the original.
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Preface

To the Reader. — What this book wants is not a simple Preface but an apology, and a very brilliant and convincing one at that. Recognising this fully, and feeling quite incompetent to write such a masterpiece, I have asked several literary friends to write one for me, but they have kindly but firmly declined, stating that it is impossible satisfactorily to apologise for my liberties with Lindley Murray and the Queen’s English. I am therefore left to make a feeble apology for this book myself, and all I can personally say is that it would have been much worse than it is had it not been for Dr. Henry Guillemard, who has not edited it, or of course the whole affair would have been better, but who has most kindly gone through the proof sheets, lassoing prepositions which were straying outside their sentence stockade, taking my eye off the water cask and fixing it on the scenery where I meant it to be, saying firmly in pencil on margins “No you don’t,” when I was committing some more than usually heinous literary crime, and so on. In cases where his activities in these things may seem to the reader to have been wanting, I beg to state that they really were not. It is I who have declined to ascend to a higher level of lucidity and correctness of diction than I am fitted for. I cannot forbear from mentioning my gratitude to Mr. George Macmillan for his patience and kindness with me, — a mere jungle of information on West Africa. Whether you my reader will share my gratitude is, I fear, doubtful, for if it had not been for him I should never have attempted to write a book at all, and in order to excuse his having induced me to try I beg to state that I have written only on things that I know from personal experience and very
careful observation. I have never accepted an explanation of a native custom from one person alone, nor have I set down things as being prevalent customs from having seen a single instance. I have endeavoured to give you an honest account of the general state and manner of life in Lower Guinea and some description of the various types of country there. In reading this section you must make allowances for my love of this sort of country, with its great forests and rivers and its animistic-minded inhabitants, and for my ability to be more comfortable there than in England. Your superior culture-instincts may militate against your enjoying West Africa, but if you go there you will find things as I have said.
Introduction

Relateth the various causes which impelled the author to embark upon the voyage.

It was in 1893 that, for the first time in my life, I found myself in possession of five or six months which were not heavily forestalled, and feeling like a boy with a new half-crown, I lay about in my mind, as Mr. Bunyan would say, as to what to do with them. “Go and learn your tropics,” said Science. Where on earth am I to go, I wondered, for tropics are tropics wherever found, so I got down an atlas and saw that either South America or West Africa must be my destination, for the Malayan region was too far off and too expensive. Then I got Wallace’s Geographical Distribution and after reading that master’s article on the Ethiopian region I hardened my heart and closed with West Africa. I did this the more readily because while I knew nothing of the practical condition of it, I knew a good deal both by tradition and report of South East America, and remembered that Yellow Jack was endemic, and that a certain naturalist, my superior physically and mentally, had come very near getting starved to death in the depressing society of an expedition slowly perishing of want and miscellaneous fevers up the Parana.

My ignorance regarding West Africa was soon removed. And although the vast cavity in my mind that it occupied is not even yet half filled up, there is a great deal of very curious information in its place. I use the word curious advisedly, for I think many seemed to translate my request for practical hints and advice into an advertise-
ment that “Rubbish may be shot here.” This same information is in a state of great confusion still, although I have made heroic efforts to codify it. I find, however, that it can almost all be got in under the following different headings, namely and to wit: —

The dangers of West Africa.
The disagreeables of West Africa.
The diseases of West Africa.
The things you must take to West Africa.
The things you find most handy in West Africa.
The worst possible things you can do in West Africa.

I inquired of all my friends as a beginning what they knew of West Africa. The majority knew nothing. A percentage said, “Oh, you can’t possibly go there; that’s where Sierra Leone is, the white man’s grave, you know.” If these were pressed further, one occasionally found that they had had relations who had gone out there after having been “sad trials,” but, on consideration of their having left not only West Africa, but this world, were now forgiven and forgotten. One lady however kindly remembered a case of a gentleman who had resided some few years at Fernando Po, but when he returned an aged wreck of forty he shook so violently with ague as to dislodge a chandelier, thereby destroying a valuable tea-service and flattening the silver teapot in its midst.

No; there was no doubt about it, the place was not healthy, and although I had not been “a sad trial,” yet neither had the chandelier-dislodging Fernando Po gentleman. So I next turned my attention to cross-examining the doctors. “Deadliest spot on earth,” they said cheerfully, and showed me maps of the geographical distribution of disease. Now I do not say that a country looks inviting when it is
coloured in Scheele’s green or a bilious yellow, but these colours may arise from lack of artistic gift in the cartographer. There is no mistaking what he means by black, however, and black you’ll find they colour West Africa from above Sierra Leone to below the Congo. “I wouldn’t go there if I were you,” said my medical friends, “you’ll catch something; but if you must go, and you’re as obstinate as a mule, just bring me —” and then followed a list of commissions from here to New York, any one of which — but I only found that out afterwards.

All my informants referred me to the missionaries. “There were,” they said, in an airy way, “lots of them down there, and had been for years.” So to missionary literature I addressed myself with great ardour; alas! only to find that these good people wrote their reports not to tell you how the country they resided in was, but how it was getting on towards being what it ought to be, and how necessary it was that their readers should subscribe more freely, and not get any foolishness into their heads about obtaining an inadequate supply of souls for their money. I also found fearful confirmation of my medical friends’ statements about its unhealthiness, and various details of the distribution of cotton shirts over which I did not linger.

From the missionaries it was, however, that I got my first idea about the social condition of West Africa. I gathered that there existed there, firstly the native human beings — the raw material, as it were — and that these were led either to good or bad respectively by the missionary and the trader. There were also the government representatives, whose chief business it was to strengthen and consolidate the missionary’s work, a function they carried on but indifferently well. But as for those traders! well, I put them down under the dangers of West Africa at once. Subsequently I came across the good old coast yarn of how, when a trader from that region went thence, it goes without saying
where, the Fallen Angel without a moment’s hesitation vacated the infernal throne (Milton) in his favour. This, I beg to note, is the marine form of the legend. When it occurs terrestrially the trader becomes a Liverpool mate. But of course no one need believe it either way — it is not a missionary’s story.

Naturally, while my higher intelligence was taken up with attending to these statements, my mind got set on going, and I had to go. Fortunately I could number among my acquaintances one individual who had lived on the Coast for seven years. Not, it is true, on that part of it which I was bound for. Still his advice was pre-eminently worth attention, because, in spite of his long residence in the deadliest spot of the region, he was still in fair going order. I told him I intended going to West Africa, and he said, “When you have made up your mind to go to West Africa the very best thing you can do is to get it unmade again and go to Scotland instead; but if your intelligence is not strong enough to do so, abstain from exposing yourself to the direct rays of the sun, take 4 grains of quinine every day for a fortnight before you reach the Rivers, and get some introductions to the Wesleyans; they are the only people on the Coast who have got a hearse with feathers.”

My attention was next turned to getting ready things to take with me. Having opened upon myself the sluice gates of advice, I rapidly became distracted. My friends and their friends alike seemed to labour under the delusion that I intended to charter a steamer and was a person of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. The only thing to do in this state of affairs was to gratefully listen and let things drift. They showered on me various preparations of quinine and other so-called medical comforts, mustard leaves, a patent filter, a hot-water bottle, and last but not least a large square bottle purporting to be malt and cod-liver oil, which, rebelling against an African temperature, arose in its
wrath, ejected its cork, and proclaimed itself an efficient but not too savoury glue.

Not only do the things you have got to take, but the things you have got to take them in, present a fine series of problems to the young traveller. Crowds of witnesses testified to the forms of baggage holders they had found invaluable, and these, it is unnecessary to say, were all different in form and material.

With all this *embarras de choix* I was too distracted to buy anything new in the way of baggage except a long waterproof sack neatly closed at the top with a bar and handle. Into this I put blankets, boots, books, in fact anything that would not go into my portmanteau or black bag. From the first I was haunted by a conviction that its bottom would come out, but it never did, and in spite of the fact that it had ideas of its own about the arrangement of its contents, it served me well throughout my voyage.

It was the beginning of August ’93 when I first left England for “the Coast.” Preparations of quinine with postage partially paid arrived up to the last moment, and a friend hastily sent two newspaper clippings, one entitled “A Week in a Palm-oil Tub,” which was supposed to describe the sort of accommodation, companions, and fauna likely to be met with on a steamer going to West Africa, and on which I was to spend seven to *The Graphic* contributor’s one; the other from *The Daily Telegraph*, reviewing a French book of “Phrases in common use” in Dahomey. The opening sentence in the latter was, “Help, I am drowning.” Then came the inquiry, “If a man is not a thief?” and then another cry, “The boat is upset.” “Get up, you lazy scamps,” is the next exclamation, followed almost immediately by the question, “Why has not this man been buried?” “It is fetish that has killed him, and he must lie here exposed with nothing on him until only the bones
remain,” is the cheerful answer. This sounded discouraging to a person whose occupation would necessitate going about considerably in boats, and whose fixed desire was to study fetish. So with a feeling of foreboding gloom I left London for Liverpool — none the more cheerful for the matter-of-fact manner in which the steamboat agents had informed me that they did not issue return tickets by the West African lines of steamers.

I will not go into the details of that voyage here, much as I am given to discursiveness. They are more amusing than instructive, for on my first voyage out I did not know the Coast, and the Coast did not know me, and we mutually terrified each other. I fully expected to get killed by the local nobility and gentry; they thought I was connected with the World’s Women’s Temperance Association, and collecting shocking details for subsequent magic-lantern lectures on the liquor traffic; so fearful misunderstandings arose, but we gradually educated each other, and I had the best of the affair; for all I had got to teach them was that I was only a beetle and fetish hunter, and so forth, while they had to teach me a new world, and a very fascinating course of study I found it. And whatever the Coast may have to say against me — for my continual desire for hair-pins, and other pins, my intolerable habit of getting into water, the abominations full of ants, that I brought into their houses, or things emitting at unexpectedly short notice vivid and awful stenches — they cannot but say that I was a diligent pupil, who honestly tried to learn the lessons they taught me so kindly, though some of those lessons were hard to a person who had never previously been even in a tame bit of tropics, and whose life for many years had been an entirely domestic one in a University town.

One by one I took my old ideas derived from books and thoughts based on imperfect knowledge and weighed them against the real life
around me, and found them either worthless or wanting. The greatest recantation I had to make I made humbly before I had been three months on the Coast in 1893. It was of my idea of the traders. What I had expected to find them was a very different thing to what I did find them; and of their kindness to me I can never sufficiently speak, for on that voyage I was utterly out of touch with the governmental circles, and utterly dependent on the traders, and the most useful lesson of all the lessons I learnt on the West Coast in 1893 was that I could trust them. Had I not learnt this very thoroughly I could never have gone out again and carried out the voyage I give you a sketch of in this book.

Thanks to “the Agent,” I have visited places I could never otherwise have seen; and to the respect and affection in which he is held by the native, I owe it that I have done so in safety. When I have arrived off his factory in a steamer or canoe, unexpected, unintroduced, or turned up equally unheralded out of the bush in a dilapidated state, he has always received me with that gracious hospitality which must have given him, under Coast conditions, very real trouble and inconvenience — things he could have so readily found logical excuses against entailing upon himself for the sake of an individual whom he had never seen before — whom he most likely would never see again — and whom it was no earthly profit to him to see then. He has bestowed himself — Allah only knows where — on his small trading vessels so that I might have his one cabin. He has fished me out of sea and fresh water with boat-hooks; he has continually given me good advice, which if I had only followed would have enabled me to keep out of water and any other sort of affliction; and although he holds the meanest opinion of my intellect for going to such a place as West Africa for beetles, fishes and fetish, he has given me the greatest assistance in my work. The
value of that work I pray you withhold judgment on, until I lay it before you in some ten volumes or so mostly in Latin. All I know that is true regarding West African facts, I owe to the traders; the errors are my own.

To Dr. Günther, of the British Museum, I am deeply grateful for the kindness and interest he has always shown regarding all the specimens of natural history that I have been able to lay before him; the majority of which must have had very old tales to tell him. Yet his courtesy and attention gave me the thing a worker in any work most wants — the sense that the work was worth doing — and sent me back to work again with the knowledge that if these things interested a man like him, it was a more than sufficient reason for me to go on collecting them. To Mr. W. H. F. Kirby I am much indebted for his working out my small collection of certain Orders of insects; and to Mr. Thomas S. Forshaw, for the great help he has afforded me in revising my notes.

It is impossible for me even to catalogue my debts of gratitude still outstanding to the West Coast. Chiefly am I indebted to Mr. C. G. Hudson, whose kindness and influence enabled me to go up the Ogowé and to see as much of Congo Français as I have seen, and his efforts to take care of me were most ably seconded by Mr. Fildes. The French officials in “Congo Français” never hindered me, and always treated me with the greatest kindness. You may say there was no reason why they should not, for there is nothing in this fine colony of France that they need be ashamed of any one seeing; but I find it is customary for travellers to say the French officials throw obstacles in the way of any one visiting their possessions, so I merely beg to state this was decidedly not my experience; although my deplorable ignorance of French prevented me from explaining my humble intentions to them.

The Rev. Dr. Nassau and Mr. R. E. Dennett have enabled me, by
placing at my disposal the rich funds of their knowledge of native life and idea, to amplify any deductions from my own observation. Mr. Dennett’s work I have not dealt with in this work because it refers to tribes I was not amongst on this journey, but to a tribe I made the acquaintance with in my ’93 voyage — the Fjort. Dr. Nassau’s observations I have referred to. Herr von Lucke, Vice-governor of Cameroon, I am indebted to for not only allowing me, but for assisting me by every means in his power, to go up Cameroons Peak, and to the Governor of Cameroon, Herr von Puttkamer, for his constant help and kindness. Indeed so great has been the willingness to help me of all these gentlemen, that it is a wonder to me, when I think of it, that their efforts did not project me right across the continent and out at Zanzibar. That this brilliant affair did not come off is owing to my own lack of enterprise; for I did not want to go across the continent, and I do not hanker after Zanzibar, but only to go puddling about obscure districts in West Africa after raw fetish and fresh-water fishes.

I owe my ability to have profited by the kindness of these gentlemen on land, to a gentleman of the sea — Captain Murray. He was captain of the vessel I went out on in 1893, and he saw then that my mind was full of errors that must be eradicated if I was going to deal with the Coast successfully; and so he eradicated those errors and replaced them with sound knowledge from his own stores collected during an acquaintance with the West Coast of over thirty years. The education he has given me has been of the greatest value to me, and I sincerely hope to make many more voyages under him, for I well know he has still much to teach and I to learn.

Last, but not least, I must chronicle my debts to the ladies. First to those two courteous Portuguese ladies, Donna Anna de Sousa Coutinho e Chichorro and her sister Donna Maria de Sousa Coutinho,
who did so much for me in Kacongo in 1893, and have remained, I am proud to say, my firm friends ever since. Lady MacDonald and Miss Mary Slessor I speak of in this book, but only faintly sketch the pleasure and help they have afforded me; nor have I fully expressed my gratitude for the kindness of Madame Jacot of Lembarene, or Madame Forget of Talagouga. Then there are a whole list of nuns belonging to the Roman Catholic Missions on the South-West Coast, ever cheery and charming companions; and Frau Plehn, whom it was ever a pleasure to see in Cameroons and discourse with once again on things that seemed so far off then — art, science, and literature; and Mrs. H. Duggan, of Cameroons too, who used, whenever I came into that port, to rescue me from fearful states of starvation for toilet necessaries, and lend a sympathetic and intelligent ear to the “awful sufferings” I had gone through, until Cameroons became to me a thing to look forward to.

When in the Canaries in 1892, I used to smile, I regretfully own, at the conversation of a gentleman from the Gold Coast who was up there recruiting after a bad fever. His conversation consisted largely of anecdotes of friends of his, and nine times in ten he used to say, “He’s dead now.” Alas! my own conversation may be smiled at now for the same cause. Many of my friends mentioned even in this very recent account of the Coast “are dead now.” Most of those I learnt to know in 1893; chief among these is my old friend Captain Boler, of Bonny, from whom I first learnt a certain power of comprehending the African and his form of thought.

I have great reason to be grateful to the Africans themselves — to cultured men and women among them like Charles Owoo, Mbo, Sanga Glass, Jane Harrington and her sister at Gaboon, and to the bush
natives; but of my experience with them I give further details, so I need not dwell on them here.

I apologise to the general reader for giving so much detail on matters that really only affect myself, and I know that the indebtedness which all African travellers have to the white residents in Africa is a matter usually very lightly touched on. No doubt my voyage would seem a grander thing if I omitted mention of the help I received, but — well, there was a German gentleman once who evolved a camel out of his inner consciousness. It was a wonderful thing; still, you know, it was not a good camel, only a thing which people personally unacquainted with camels could believe in. Now I am ambitious to make a picture, if I make one at all, that people who do know the original can believe in — even if they criticise its points — and so I give you details a more showy artist would omit.
Chapter 1
Liverpool to Sierra Leone

Setting forth how the voyager departs from England in a stout vessel and in good company, and reaches in due course the Island of the Grand Canary, and then the Port of Sierra Leone: to which is added some account of this latter place and the comeliness of its women.

The West Coast of Africa is like the Arctic regions in one particular, and that is that when you have once visited it you want to go back there again; and, now I come to think of it, there is another particular in which it is like them, and that is that the chances you have of returning from it at all are small, for it is a Belle Dame sans merci.

I know that from many who know the Coast, there will be a chorus of dissent from the first part of my sentence, and a chorus of assent to the second. But if you were to take many of the men who most energetically assert that they wish they were home in England, “and see if they would ever come to the etc., etc., place again,” and if you were to bring them home, and let them stay there a little while, I am pretty sure that — in the absence of attractions other than those of merely being home in England, notwithstanding its glorious joys of omnibuses, underground railways, and evening newspapers — these same men, in terms varying with individual cases, will be found sneaking back apologetically to the Coast.

I succumbed to the charm of the Coast as soon as I left Sierra Leone on my first voyage out, and I saw more than enough during that voyage to make me recognise that there was any amount of work for
me worth doing down there. So I warned the Coast I was coming back again and the Coast did not believe me; and on my return to it a second time displayed a genuine surprise, and formed an even higher opinion of my folly than it had formed on our first acquaintance, which is saying a good deal.

During this voyage in 1893, I had been to Old Calabar, and its Governor, Sir Claude MacDonald, had heard me expatiating on the absorbing interest of the Antarctic drift, and the importance of the collection of fresh-water fishes and so on. So when Lady MacDonald heroically decided to go out to him in Calabar, they most kindly asked me if I would join her, and make my time fit hers for starting on my second journey. This I most willingly did, but I fear that very sweet and gracious lady suffered a great deal of apprehension at the prospect of spending a month on board ship with a person so devoted to science as to go down the West Coast in its pursuit. During the earlier days of our voyage she would attract my attention to all sorts of marine objects overboard, so as to amuse me. I used to look at them, and think it would be the death of me if I had to work like this, explaining meanwhile aloud that “they were very interesting, but Haeckel had done them, and I was out after fresh-water fishes from a river north of the Congo this time,” fearing all the while that she felt me unenthusiastic for not flying over into the ocean to secure the specimens.

However, my scientific qualities, whatever they may amount to, did not blind this lady long to the fact of my being after all a very ordinary individual, and she told me so — not in these crude words, indeed, but nicely and kindly — whereupon, in a burst of gratitude to her for understanding me, I appointed myself her honorary aide-de-camp on the spot, and her sincere admirer I shall remain for ever, fully recognising that her courage in going to the Coast was far greater
than my own, for she had more to lose had fever claimed her, and she was in those days by no means under the spell of Africa. But this is anticipating.

It was on the 23rd of December, 1894, that we left Liverpool in the Batanga, commanded by my old friend Captain Murray, under whose care I had made my first voyage. We ought to have left on the 22nd, but this we could not do, for it came on to blow a bit, such a considerable bit indeed, that even the mighty Cunard liner Lucania could not leave the Mersey; moreover the Batanga could not have left even if she had wanted to, for the dock gates that shut her in could not be opened, so fierce was the gale. So it was Sunday the 23rd then, as I have said, that we got off, with no further misadventure save that, owing to the weather, the Batanga could not take her powder on board, a loss that nearly broke the carpenter’s heart, as it robbed him of the pleasure of making that terrific bang with which a West Coaster salutes her ports of call.

On the 30th we sighted the Peak of Teneriffe early in the afternoon. It displayed itself, as usual, as an entirely celestial phenomenon. A great many people miss seeing it. Suffering under the delusion that El Pico is a terrestrial affair, they look in vain somewhere about the level of their own eyes, which are striving to penetrate the dense masses of mist that usually enshroud its slopes by day, and then a friend comes along, and gaily points out to the newcomer the glittering white triangle somewhere near the zenith. On some days the Peak stands out clear from ocean to summit, looking every inch and more of its 12,080 ft.; and this is said by the Canary fishermen to be a certain sign of rain, or fine weather, or a gale of wind; but whenever and however it may be seen, soft and dream-like in the sunshine, or melodramatic and bizarre in
the moonlight, it is one of the most beautiful things the eye of man may see.

Soon after sighting Teneriffe, Lanzarote showed, and then the Grand Canary. Teneriffe is perhaps the most beautiful, but it is hard to judge between it and Grand Canary as seen from the sea. The superb cone this afternoon stood out a deep purple against a serpent-green sky, separated from the brilliant blue ocean by a girdle of pink and gold cumulus, while Grand Canary and Lanzarote looked as if they were formed from fantastic-shaped sunset cloud-banks that by some spell had been solidified. The general colour of the mountains of Grand Canary, which rise peak after peak until they culminate in the Pico de las Nieves, some 6,000 feet high, is a yellowish red, and the air which lies among their rocky crevices and swathes their softer sides is a lovely lustrous blue. I used to fancy that if I could only have collected some of it in a bottle, and taken it home to show my friends, it would have come out as a fair blue-violet cloud in the gray air of Cambridge.

Just before the sudden dark came down, and when the sun was taking a curve out of the horizon of sea, all the clouds gathered round the three islands, leaving the sky a pure amethyst pink, and as a good-night to them the sun outlined them with rims of shining gold, and made the snow-clad Peak of Teneriffe blaze with star-white light. In a few minutes came the dusk, and as we neared Grand Canary, out of its cloud-bank gleamed the red flash of the lighthouse on the Isleta, and in a few more minutes, along the sea level, sparkled the five miles of irregularly distributed lights of Puerto de la Luz and the city of Las Palmas.

I will not here go into the subject of the Canary Islands, because it is one upon which I foresee a liability to become diffuse. I have visited them now five times; four times merely calling there on my way up and
down to the Coast, but on the other occasion spending many weeks on them; and if I once start on the subject of their beauties, their trade, and their industries, why, who knows to what size this volume may not grow?

We reached Sierra Leone at 9 A.M. on the 7th of January, and as the place is hardly so much in touch with the general public as the Canaries are.\(^1\) I may perhaps venture to go more into details regarding it. The harbour is formed by the long low strip of land to the north called the Bullam shore, and to the south by the peninsula terminating in Cape Sierra Leone, a sandy promontory at the end of which is situated a lighthouse of irregular habits. Low hills covered with tropical forest growth rise from the sandy shores of the Cape, and along its face are three creeks or bays, deep inlets showing through their narrow entrances smooth beaches of yellow sand, fenced inland by the forest of cotton-woods and palms, with here and there an elephantine baobab.

The first of these bays is called Pirate Bay, the next English Bay, and the third Kru Bay. The wooded hills of the Cape rise after passing Kru Bay, and become spurs of the mountain, 2,500 feet in height, which is the Sierra Leone itself. There are, however, several mountains here besides the Sierra Leone, the most conspicuous of them being the peak known as Sugar Loaf, and when seen from the sea they are very lovely, for their form is noble, and a wealth of tropical vegetation covers them, which, unbroken in its continuity, but endless in its variety,

\(^1\) Sierra Leone has been known since the voyage of Hanno of Carthage in the sixth century B.C., but it has not got into general literature to any great extent since Pliny. The only later classic who has noticed it is Milton, who in a very suitable portion of Paradise Lost says of Notus and Afer, “black with thunderous clouds from Sierra Lona.” Our occupation of it dates from 1787.
seems to sweep over their sides down to the shore like a sea, breaking here and there into a surf of flowers.

It is the general opinion, indeed, of those who ought to know that Sierra Leone appears at its best when seen from the sea, particularly when you are leaving the harbour homeward bound; and that here its charms, artistic, moral, and residential, end. But, from the experience I have gained of it, I have no hesitation in saying that it is one of the best places for getting luncheon in that I have ever happened on, and that a more pleasant and varied way of spending an afternoon than going about its capital, Free Town, with a certain Irish purser, who is as well known as he is respected among the leviathan old Negro ladies, it would be hard to find. Still it must be admitted it is rather hot.

Free Town is situated on the northern base of the mountain, and extends along the sea-front with most business-like wharves, quays, and warehouses. Viewed from the harbour, “The Liverpool of West Africa,” as it is called, looks as if it were built of gray stone, which it is not. When you get ashore, you will find that most of the stores and houses — the majority of which, it may be remarked, are in a state of acute dilapidation — are of painted wood, with corrugated iron roofs. Here and there, though, you will see a thatched house, its thatch covered with creeping plants, and inhabited by colonies of creeping insects.

Some of the stores and churches are, it is true, built of stone, but this does not look like stone at a distance, being red in colour — unhewn blocks of the red stone of the locality. In the crannies of these buildings trailing plants covered with pretty mauve or yellow flowers take root, and everywhere, along the tops of the walls, and in the

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2 Lagos also likes to bear this flattering appellation, and has now-a-days more right to the title.
cracks of the houses, are ferns and flowering plants. They must get a good deal of their nourishment from the rich, thick air, which seems composed of 85 per cent of warm water, and the remainder of the odours of Frangipani, orange flowers, magnolias, oleanders, and roses, combined with others that demonstrate that the inhabitants do not regard sanitary matters with the smallest degree of interest.

There is one central street, and the others are neatly planned out at right angles to it. None of them are in any way paved or metalled. They are covered in much prettier fashion, and in a way more suitable for naked feet, by green Bahama grass, save and except those which are so nearly perpendicular that they have got every bit of earth and grass cleared off them down to the red bed-rock, by the heavy rain of the wet season.

The shops, which fringe these streets in an uneven line, are like rooms with one side taken out, for shop-fronts, as we call them, are here unknown. Their floors are generally raised on a bed of stone a little above street level, but except when newly laid, these stones do not show, for the grass grows over them, making them into green banks. Inside, the shops are lined with shelves, on which are placed bundles of gay-coloured Manchester cottons and shawls, Swiss clocks, and rough but vividly coloured china; or — what makes a brave show — brass, copper, and iron cooking-pots. Here and there you come across a baker’s, with trays of banana fritters of tempting odour; and there is no lack of barbers and chemists. Within all the shops are usually to be seen the proprietor and his family with a few friends, all exceedingly plump and happy, having a social shout together: a chat I cannot call it. There is usually a counter across the middle, over which customers and casual callers alike love to loll. Some brutal tradesmen, notably chemists, who presumably regard this as unprofessional, affix tremen-
dous nails, with their points outwards, to the fronts of their counter
tops, in order to keep their visitors at a respectful distance.

In every direction natives are walking at a brisk pace, their naked
feet making no sound on the springy turf of the streets, carrying on
their heads huge burdens which are usually crowned by the hat of the
bearer, a large limpet-shaped affair made of palm leaves. While some
carry these enormous bundles, others bear logs or planks of wood,
blocks of building stone, vessels containing palm-oil, baskets of vege-
tables, or tin tea-trays on which are folded shawls. As the great majority
of the native inhabitants of Sierra Leone pay no attention whatever to
where they are going, either in this world or the next, the confusion
and noise are out of all proportion to the size of the town; and when,
as frequently happens, a section of actively perambulating burden-
bearers charge recklessly into a sedentary section, the members of
which have dismounted their loads and squatted themselves down
beside them, right in the middle of the fair way, to have a friendly yell
with some acquaintances, the row becomes terrific.

In among these crowds of country people walk stately Mohamme-
dans, Mandingoes, Akers, and Fulahs of the Arabised tribes of the
Western Soudan. These are lithe, well-made men, and walk with a
peculiarly fine, elastic carriage. Their graceful garb consists of a long
white loose-sleeved shirt, over which they wear either a long black
mohair or silk gown, or a deep bright blue affair, not altogether unlike a
University gown, only with more stuff in it and more folds. They are
undoubtedly the gentlemen of the Sierra Leone native population, and
they are becoming an increasing faction in the town, by no means to
the pleasure of the Christians. For, although Bishop Ingram admits that
they are always ready to side with the missionaries against the drink
traffic, here their co-operation ceases, and he complains that they
exercise a great influence over the native Christian flock. He says, “We are disposed to believe that the words of their Koran are only a fetish and a charm to the rank and file of their adherents, and that great superstition prevails among them, and is propagated by them,” but how the Bishop can see a difference in this matter between the use of the Koran and the Bible by the Negro of Sierra Leone, it is difficult to understand; and judged by the criterion of every-day conduct, the Mohammedan is in nine cases in ten, the best man in West Africa. But he is, I grieve to say, not thoroughly orthodox. The Koran I have seen many of them using consists merely of extracts and prayers written in Maghribi characters; and I have grave doubts whether they could read this any better than I could without a dictionary. I have also frequently seen them playing warry, and another game, the name whereof I know not, but it is played with little sticks of wood stuck in the ground, and “something on the rub,” or what corresponds to it; although they must be aware that, by this indulgence in the pleasures of gambling, they will undoubtedly incur the penalty of having donkeys graze upon their graves — yea, even on the graves of their parents. They should think of this, for warry, when all’s said and done, is a desperately dull game.

They are, moreover, by no means strict teetotallers, and some individuals from Accra, whom I once met, shocked me deeply by saying Mohammedans were divided into two classes, Marabuts who do not drink, and Sonniki who do. I do not know where they can have picked up this idea; but I observed my acquaintances were “hard-shelled” Sonniki. Again, the Sierra Leone and Lagos Mohammedans regard working in leather and iron as quite respectable occupations, which is not in accordance with views held in high Mohammedan circles. Very

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3 Sierra Leone after a Hundred Years.
good leather-work they certainly turn out — bags, sheaths for daggers, and such like, to say nothing of the quaint hats, made of the most brilliant yellow, blue, and red leather strips plaited together: very heavy, and very ugly, but useful. Quite “rational dress” hats in fact, for their broad brims hang down and shade the neck, and they also shelter the eyes to such an extent that the wearer can’t see without bending up the front brim pretty frequently; — but then I notice there always is something wrong with a rational article of dress. Then the bulbous dome top keeps off the sun from the head, rain runs off the whole affair easily, and bush does not catch in it. If I had sufficient strength of mind I would wear one myself, but even if I decorated it with cat-tails, or antelope hair, as is usually done, I do not feel I could face Piccadilly in one; and you have no right to go about Africa in things you would be ashamed to be seen in at home.

The leather-work that meets with the severest criticism from the Christian party is the talisman or gri-gri bags, and it must be admitted that an immense number of them are sold. I have, however, opened at hazard some eighty-seven of these, and always found in them that which can do no man harm, be he black, white, or yellow, to wear over his heart; namely, the beautiful 113th Sura of the Koran, the “Sura of the Day-break,” which says: — “I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the Day-break, that He may deliver me from the evil of those things which He has created; from the evil of the night when it cometh on; and from the evil of blowers upon knots, and from the evil of the envious when he envieth.” This is written on a piece of paper, rolled or folded up tightly, and enclosed in a leathern case which is suspended round the neck. The talismans the Mohammedans make do not, however, amount to a tenth part of those worn, the number whereof is enormous. I have never seen a Negro in national costume without some, both round his
neck, and round his leg, just under the knee; and I dare say if the subject were gone into, and the clothes taken off the more fully-draped coloured gentlemen, you would hardly find one without an amulet of some kind. The great majority of these other charms are supplied by the ju-ju priests, or some enterprising heathen who has a Suhman, or private devil, of his own.

But to the casual visitor at Sierra Leone the Mohammedan is a mere passing sensation. You neither feel a burning desire to laugh with, or at him, as in the case of the country folks, nor do you wish to punch his head, and split his coat up his back — things you yearn to do to that perfect flower of Sierra Leone culture, who yells your bald name across the street at you, condescendingly informs you that you can go and get letters that are waiting for you, while he smokes his cigar and lolls in the shade, or in some similar way displays his second-hand rubbishy white culture — a culture far lower and less dignified than that of either the stately Mandingo or the bush chief. I do not think that the Sierra Leone dandy really means half as much insolence as he shows; but the truth is he feels too insecure of his own real position, in spite of all the “side” he puts on, and so he dare not be courteous like the Mandingo or the bush Fan.

It is the costume of the people in Free Town and its harbour that will first attract the attention of the new-comer, notwithstanding the fact that the noise, the smell, and the heat are simultaneously making desperate bids for that favour. The ordinary man in the street wears anything he may have been able to acquire, anyhow, and he does not fasten it on securely. I fancy it must be capillary attraction, or some other partially-understood force, that takes part in the matter. It is certainly neither braces nor buttons. There are, of course, some articles which from their very structure are fairly secure, such as an umbrella
with the stick and ribs removed, or a shirt. This last-mentioned treasure, which usually becomes the property of the ordinary man from a female relative or admirer taking in white men’s washing, is always worn flowing free, and has such a charm in itself that the happy possessor cares little what he continues his costume with — trousers, loin cloth, red flannel petticoat, or rice-bag drawers, being, as he would put it, “all same for one” to him.

I remember one day, when in the outskirts of the town, seeing some country people coming in to market. It was during the wet season, and when they hove in sight, they were, so to speak, under bare poles, having nothing on worth mentioning. But each carried a bundle done up in American cloth, with a closed umbrella tucked into it. They pulled up as soon as they thought it dangerous to proceed further, for fear of meeting some of their town friends, and solemnly dressed, holding umbrellas over each other the while. Then, dignified and decorated, and each sporting his gingham, they marched into the town. Here and there in the street you come across a black man done up in a tweed suit, or in a black coat and tall hat; and here and there a soldier of the West India regiment, smart and tidy-looking in his Zouave costume. These soldiers are said to be the cause of the many barbers’ shops sprinkled about the town, as they are not allowed razors of their own, owing to their tendency to employ them too frequently in argument.

The ladies are divided into three classes; the young girl you address as “tee-tee;” the young person as “seester;” the more mature charmer as “mammy;” but I do not advise you to employ these terms when you are on your first visit, because you might get misunderstood. For, you see, by addressing a mammy as seester, she might think either that you were unconscious of her dignity as a married lady — a matter she
would soon put you right on — or that you were flirting, which of course was totally foreign to your intention, and would make you uncomfortable. My advice is that you rigidly stick to missus or mammy. I have seen this done most successfully.

The ladies are almost as varied in their costume as the gentlemen, but always neater and cleaner; and mighty picturesque they are too, and occasionally very pretty. A market-woman with her jolly brown face and laughing brown eyes — eyes all the softer for a touch of antimony — her ample form clothed in a lively print overall, made with a yoke at the shoulders, and a full long flounce which is gathered on to the yoke under the arms and falls fully to the feet; with her head done up in a yellow or red handkerchief, and her snowy white teeth gleaming through her vast smiles, is a mighty pleasant thing to see, and to talk to. But, Allah! the circumference of them!

The stone-built, whitewashed market buildings of Free Town have a creditably clean and tidy appearance considering the climate, and the quantity and variety of things exposed for sale — things one wants the pen of a Rabelais to catalogue. Here are all manner of fruits, some which are familiar to you in England; others that soon become so to you in Africa. You take them as a matter of course if you are outward bound, but on your call homeward (if you make it) you will look on them as a blessing and a curiosity. For lower down, particularly in “the Rivers,” these things are rarely to be had, and never in such perfection as here; and to see again lettuces, yellow oranges, and tomatoes bigger than marbles is a sensation and a joy. Onions also there are, and if you are wise you will buy them when outward bound. If you are speculative in the bargain you will take as many as you can get, for here you may buy them from four to five shillings the box, and you can sell them below for any sum between twelve shillings and a sovereign.
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