

A visit to the King of Benin made in 1889

Made by me Cyril Punch, accompanied by Hy. Powys who was afterwards murdered with others by the Benin people in Jany. 1897.

Cyril Punch.

The prevailing rage for trusts and syndicates having reached the W. Coast of Africa an Amalgamation of Liverpool firms are trying by paying losing prices to drive out the outside traders in our River. This being so nothing remains but to sit down and look on until somebody tires of the game, meanwhile sitting down in an African River and watching the tide ebb and flow past the gloomy banks of mangrove swamps is apt to become monotonous. Hence the idea arises why not make another attempt to see the King of Benin? This potentate is perhaps the most influential of chiefs on the West Coast. If not so in fact at the present day, the prestige of his ancestors still surrounds him, the prestige of a sovereignty which extended from the banks of the Niger to Ashanti. The late king Adola died some eighteen months back, and his successor Obbah. Adubowa, after sending some 400 slaves to accompany his father to wherever he may be located, is now firmly settled on the throne.

Years ago white traders did business in the city of Benin but owing to a habit of the king's of sampling everything they had for trade and then making it "juju" for anyone else to buy of what he had sampled, trade languished. Finally there were some trifling difficulties at the passport office and the white men on several occasions found it very difficult to get out of H.M.'s dominions, back to their factories at the river mouth. In consequence, intercourse was broken for many years. Five years ago Vice Consul Blair and some of the traders made an attempt, with Nanna's assistance, to visit the king and to take him certain presents sent out by the government. Unfortunately delays occurred at Egwatun the place where the journey by water ends, the vice consul was taken ill with fever and the party was obliged to return to the river, where, alas, the poor vice consul died two days after their return. Twelve months ago another party of the traders started in a steam launch to visit His Majesty. The walk from Egwatun to Benin when accompanied by baggage takes about 15 hours, but there is another town on the river bank called "Icrow"* nearer to the city. At this place the party, guided by a Jacreeman, landed, but in doing so crossed the trail of a "juju". Icrow is a town set apart for juju purposes and the Benin people do not want white men there. The party reached the town of Benin and stayed there several days, but the king put them off from day to day & would not see them and they finally returned in disgust.

The Jackrimen are the people who live at the River mouth and are the middlemen who trade between the white men and the producers, and are naturally averse to any attempt on the part of the white men to come in direct contact with the people of the interior.

* [Handwritten footnote: Ikoro on the River Ovia (Osse), where many of the Bini dead are buried.]

In spite of the treatment of Jaja whom Vice Consul Johnstone took away from Opobo for stopping the road to the markets, and of Consul Hewitt's laws on the subject, Nanna, the Jakri head chief and holder of H.M.'s stick as governor of Jackri flatly refused to give us any assistance. Other Jackrimen were afraid of going counter to his wishes & our expedition seemed likely to be nipped in the bud.

After a good deal of talking over the pros and cons we came to the conclusion not to be frightened out of our plan, so after sending a formal protest to the Vice President of our governing council we set to work to fit up our native canoe more Jakri with a plank deck and a mat roof, and decided to make a start, trusting to our own Kroo boys to paddle and our own "What the South Americans call 'tino' to find the road. Of course we had some hints and names given us by Jakri friends sub rosa, but as a Jakriman has simply no idea of what a map can possibly mean, our instructions as to the road were rather vague. We packed up the presents intended for the King in boxes, the tobacco in bundles, with two canvas beds to carry with us to Benin, and bags of rice and bread for the Kroo Boys, making in all twenty packages each of which is one man's load, & some are too big for one to carry. The cases we locked up and marked and number as though for shipment & one must not forget our English ensign. It has been constructed after much painful consideration by our Accra washerman. The result is gorgeous but it is slightly marred by his having sewn the Jack together with some of the quarters turned the wrong way & the whole looks rather like a chinese puzzle put together in a hurry. Our canoe is about 60ft. long, 4ft. wide and 3ft. deep. There are two platforms made on top of the thwarts, one forward for the crew and one aft for ourselves. They have bulwarks about 10in higher to keep us from falling overboard & the whole is covered by a roof of native mats and is lighted by candle lamps; between the forecabin (platform) and saloon is a well used by the natives for bailing out water they also make here their fireplace, which is a slab of red clay supported on sticks. We retire to sleep about 8 o'clock having got all our impedimenta on board, leaving instructions to Selby, (our cook, steward, navigating officer, and drill sergeant combined) to wake us as soon as the flood makes, and enjoy four hours' sleep on beds and mattresses, the last for 12 days.

Wednesday Dec. 4th. 1.30a.m.

We get up and superintend on board the packing of our own luggage, guns, etc., and finally embark about 2.15 a.m. The saloon with its mattresses, pillows and candlelamps looks quite inviting, and as we hope to continue moving we are not afraid of the mosquitoes.

The flood tide quickly takes us to the mouth of Egwatun Creek, after which we fall asleep to the accompaniment of the Krooboys singing. By dawn we are awake looking out for the first signs of high ground. All we can see is a thick curtain of African smoke. Like somebody's port wine it is thick and its wet but it is not sweet, and as it is composed mostly of malaria we are not sorry to wrap ourselves in our rugs and wait till the sun has dried it up. The early bird in Europe may catch the worm. In Africa in the dry season he is more likely to catch the

fever. As the sun gets up the smoke slowly dispels and we find we are still in the region of swamp, salt bush, and mangrove.

At 6.30 we come to a small creek, and as the flood tide has now finished we tie up and proceed to breakfast. Mr. Selby soon has a fire built on a piece of corrugated iron supported on sticks amongst the roots of the mangroves, and we are shortly taking in supplies of hot tea and fried bacon. Afterwards a rest, and then at 11 a.m. we proceed on our way, but only very slowly as the ebb tide is still strong. We christen the creek Jubilee Creek in memory of our beach.

The stores, etc., have been packed in cases duly marked and numbered and a proper manifest made out in a pocket book. This pocket book soon acquires an undue amount of specific gravity which invariably takes it, when wanted, to the bottom of a box of clothes. Hence arises a phrase often afterwards heard on the journey, 'In what number did you say that beer was?'.

By 2p.m. the foliage begins to betoken terra firma. The melancholy mangrove with its dull green leaves begins to give place to the palm-like ejekoo. Here and there patches of high ground form foothold for varied trees of the hardwood kind. The Aalueji or king stick with its red leaves and many others with their varied foliage making a refreshing change to the eye wearied with the monotony of the river mouth, with its clean ruled banks of mangrove and salt bush. Sometimes an enormous creeper has covered a mass of trees and seems to be poured out from the top in a cascade of foliage. At others the foliage is densely packed together and stands up in clean ruled lines, giving the appearance of some ivy-covered ruin at home with its walls and battlements. The mud laden water of the swamp too disappears, giving place to the clear fresh water of the interior bearing on its surface groups of white lilies and other water plants. The atmosphere, too, seems changed, and to have a brightness unknown at the River mouth. At 3 o'clock we halt to give the boys time to chop their rice. We pass a creek on the left in which are some Jakri canoes, and don't feel quite sure whether we ought not to follow it, but finally decide to keep up the main stream. At 5.30 we arrive at a spot where the river seems to branch into two. The question is which are we to take. After much discussion 'Tino' advises the right hand and we find later on that the division is really caused by an island, and the two branches reunite. Such a trifling feature as an island is, of course, too small an event to be mentioned of by a Jakri informant. At 7 o'clock we meet with another creek on the left hand, and decide to encamp here for the night. We get some slices of cold boiled bacon for 'chop', and, having solved the question 'as to what number the beer is in', we light our pipes, fix up a mosquito bar (curtain) over the saloon and doze away, listening to the Krooboys in the fore cabin grunting and slapping themselves where the mosquitoes bite, and accompanying their country songs with a native banjo. This is a triangular frame with the long side fixed into a gourd, the strings are of grass. At about 10 o'clock a Jakri canoe comes into the creek and after being regaled with biscuits and grog

inform us much to our relief that we are on the right road. That the creek we are in is called Ubbo and that Bagilligilli and Egwatun are not much farther on continuing up the same stream.

Thursday 5th. Dec.

The boys got under weigh before I was awake and proceeded up stream, the river gradually narrowing and the foliage getting more varied. Here and there a clearing on the banks would give us a glimpse of the red clay of which the land is composed. At 6a.m. we arrived at Bagilligilli. The approach to this is a creek about six feet wide. Once inside we are boarded by Ouilli the head man of the town. Bagiligilli is a settlement of Ejoe men in the Benin country. The head man Ouilli seems a quiet sort of a body, and as he can speak the Jakri 'mouth' we took him with us to Egwatun to interpret to the Benin people. We arrived at Egwatun at 8 o'clock, and were bitterly disappointed. We expected to find a nice beach to land at with a nice bluff of red ground on top of which would be the town. Instead of this the stream narrows down to less than 60 ft. and a bend forms a sort of pool surrounded with impenetrable jungle growing out of the water. The landing is up a narrow creek which is dry at low water.

Breakfast had again to be eaten on board our ship, but was pleasingly varied by a fresh fish which had just been taken from the water and 'dashed' to us. We must say a word for the manners of these natives. We poor traders who are brought into daily contact with the spoilt child the Jakriman find it agreeable to come across these people at Egwatun. We told them we wanted to be alone to eat our breakfast and they all retired to a respectful distance to wait. They didn't beg and when we gave them a trifle absolutely said 'thank you'. A Jakriman doesn't do any of these things. Breakfast done, we decided to go ashore and interview Ahoorakoo the kings lieutenant. Alas for the sandy beach and high bluff, our landing was this wise. From our own canoe, which lay like a miniature Cunarder in the stream we embarked, about 8 of us, in a small tender canoe with about 1/2 in. freeboard, and were paddled up the narrow creek leading to the town. From the canoe we transshipped to a native's back, and from the state of my garments when we arrived ashore I fancy the red clay bluff spoken of before must have been dissolved in a small creek of palm oil and the mixture applied to the natives' skins. After wading through about 100 yards of mud and water we were landed at the foot of a rough ladder, up this we climb and find ourselves on firm ground. Farther on we pass a mound before which is placed a brass basin of water in which we wash our hands. We are informed this ceremony is performed in honour of Assige* a predecessor of Ahoorakoo and that the customary fees will be one gall of rum per head for the hand washing, having agreed to this we proceed into the town.

Some years ago Egwatun was a thriving market but the late king made up his mind to divert the trade elsewhere. His method of doing this was 'coercion' pure and simple. He pulled down

* [Handwritten footnote: Oba Esigie c.1517-1550 A.D.]

the houses, removed the population, and took paternal care of any Jakri slaves found there until the celebration of the next big juju play, when doubtless they came in useful to save expenditure of home produce. A juju man and a few Benin people were left in charge to attend to the morals of any Jakrimen charged with witchcraft and sent up to Benin to "chop sauce wood"*, and the trade came down to the river by other roads. The present king is re-opening the place for trade, and I fancy the headquarters of the sauce brigade has been removed to Icrow.

The houses are built of red clay, thatched with plantain leaves. The reception room is after the model of Spanish houses, that is to say the roof is open in the centre and the water drains into a pluvium. Round the sides are alcoves in which are placed mats, and low doorways lead to other apartments. In Benin City much care is taken of the houses, but at Egwatun things at present seem to be in a state of chaos. The whole population attended us to the chief's house and entered with us. When we were seated a door was opened and Ahoorakoo entered, one small boy without garments but with an ornamental sword called an addah walked in front of the chief with the addah held aloft; a second small boy walked behind with a green silk umbrella held over the chief's head. The latter sat down in a raised alcove, and we then informed him that we had come to give the king service, that Nanna and the Jakrimen would not help us, and that we had come in our own canoe. Would he 'send mouth' to the king of our arrival so that if the king wished to see us he could send messengers and carriers. Ahoorakoo would do what we wanted but did not seem to think we need wait for any answer from the king as we were sure of a welcome. Of course all this was arrived at with some difficulty, as we understood not a word of Benin mouth and not many of Jakri. We then regaled ourselves with tombo and returned on board the canoe. The afternoon was now advanced so we paddled down the stream past Bagiligilli to a clearing on the bank. This place is called Ubaricpe. It is a spot of very high ground composed of red clay. The Jakrimen quarry the same and take it away in canoes for building purposes. After making the canoe ready for the night we went ashore and enjoyed the luxury of a good bath and a square meal. While on shore a Jakri friend and trader named Akissa paid us a visit. He stayed to 'chop' and then we went on board again and tried to get as much information out of Akissa as we could over a glass of whisky and water. We asked him to lend us a boy to go to Benin with us as interpreter, but he was afraid to do anything in consequence of Nanna's refusal to assist us. At 10 o'clock he left us to go home very pleased with his reception.

While Akissa was being entertained in the saloon the boys in his canoe alongside were endeavouring to abstract tobacco from the hold. This is proper Jakri fashion. Krooboys were slightly inclined to murmur about the want of accommodation but we daren't send them ashore as Akissa says that there are leopards in the neighbourhood.

* take poison. (Punch's footnote)]

Friday 6th. Dec.

In the morning luxuriated in another bath and an alfresco breakfast under the trees on top of the bluff. I don't think anyone can imagine how delightful it is to us dwellers upon beaches, for so is called the scrap of made ground on which our factories are built, to go on shore on fine high ground among forest trees and flowers. One has always the longing on an African trading beach to be able to get out and walk. Jack, (a fox terrier) also enjoys the trip, he has been ailing on the beach evidently affected with African fever, but from the breakfast we all three eat there can't be anything serious the matter. At ten o'clock up anchor, or rather pole, and paddle to Egwatun. Here we land and enquire if the messengers have arrived from the king. They have not, but Ahoorakoo looks as much as to say 'Why wait, all is quite in order' or, to put it into the English of the coast, 'Which way you wait, suppose you go one time no palaver live'. Somehow we feel we should like something a little more definite than this, so we decide to get our goods and chattles ashore and settle down in the village for the night. Ahoorakoo shows us round some claybuilt hovels and tells us to take our pick. It would want a very Ruskin of a critic to decide which is the most unsavoury. We finally select the largest of the lot, and all hands turn to pass up goods and stores from the canoe. This is at last accomplished in safety. One of the Bagililli men however is detected opening a case and taking something out. We frighten his life out by telling him that the box contains presents for the king and that we shall inform his majesty; after much begging we forgive him for this time only, and having arranged the hovel as much as possible sally out with Ahoorakoo to see the town. The first thing we are taken to see is the new house Ahoorakoo is building. I have no doubt it will be a very commodious residence when finished, but the ground plan as traced out in mud walls is not impressive. We return to our abode, and fancy we shall get a few minutes' privacy, but apparently that is not the opinion of the Egwatuniuns who immediately follow us indoors. If we have to bear Egwatun company we both decide that outside is good enough, so after waiting inside just long enough to find out what number we said the beer was in we have three camp chairs placed outside and with Ahoorakoo between us we hold a levee of the town. We are taken to see a place to bathe in, and are much obliged but prefer water to mud for washing purposes. We note, on the way, rubber vines, tell the people we want to buy the water from them, learn that the Benin name for them is 'Ubbo', and that they are plentiful, and then return to town, where we assist at an entertainment given by the juju men of the town in our honour. The juju is never spoken of as 'him', always 'it'. In the present instance 5 jujus put in an appearance. We ought to be impressed, but tell it not in Gath. I am afraid they might patrol the London streets from the 5th. of a certain month to the middle of the next and then I doubt their having collected the price of a pint. They are covered up and padded out and covered over with strips of bamboo leaves in order to hide from sight the garment which covers them. A big head-dress is worn, painted and made grotesque with feathers, scraps of coloured cloth, looking glass, etc. The arms and hands are covered and muffled up, in fact the tout ensemble is an undefinable something covered with long streamers, which is still unencumbered enough to be able to dance, and, save the mark, sing.

The indeterminate pronoun 'it' is descriptive enough of what they mean to express. At sundown we retired to our house, and having with some difficulty got rid of the Egwatun people sat down to a cup of tea and a dry biscuit by way of a dinner. Half our krooboys we sent back to the canoe and half we kept in the house. After a time Ahoorakoo paid us an evening visit, and as the rest of the population took the opportunity of coming with him, our abode was something like a penny bus on a wet day, 'full inside'. Ahoorakoo was very delighted with the mechanism of a Winchester rifle, but still more so with the dog Jack, who made himself agreeable by sitting on his hind legs and shaking hands all round. At 10 o'clock we suggested bed and Ahoorakoo left us. We made our tressle beds and tried to sleep, we did not succeed. In the first place the five jujus came back and brought another five worse than themselves. The party thus formed marched up and down the village and stopped outside our abode each time to give us a serenade. Inside there were still more jujus, these were of smaller size and dropped from the roof of plantain leaves or crept up the legs of the trestles, but they were just as irritating as the party outside. The result was a sleepless night and we were not sorry to see the daylight.

Saturday 7th. Dec.

Up early and commenced packing. Ahoorakoo informs us that the messengers have not returned but it is of no consequence. We can start when we like and he will find carriers for our goods. Breakfast done we take all the packages out into the open and suggest making a start. The carriers are not visible. After much talk four small boys take up four very small packages and start off into the bush. We send Selby to look after them, and look despairingly at the twenty and odd large packages which nobody seems inclined to take hold of. After much more shouting and swearing these are gradually picked up one by one and the carriers trail off into the bush, leaving us planted with the big case containing our rifles and another package belonging to the kings present, whose contents, in deference to Exeter Hall, I shan't mention. These Ahoorakoo promises shall follow tomorrow. We do not care about leaving our guns in their charge, as rifles to be of much use should be in the hands of those who want to empty them. Still, we do not anticipate any occasion for their use, and so set out on our march at about 4p.m. Ahoorakoo, with his sword of office and silk umbrella accompanies us to the boundaries of the town. The road after leaving Egwatun is a mere bush path and during the wet season is converted into a running stream. Our party consists of two white men, seven Kroomen and about twenty-five carriers from Egwatun. We pass several juju houses in the forest. No one apparently lives in them. They are situated in round clearings, the ground of which is always swept clear of leaves. The entrance from the path is between trees left standing so as to form a kind of gateway, and from tree to tree across the opening is hung a fringe of split bamboo leaves. There is a spot where the offerings to the juju are thrown, and these consist mostly of egg-shaped pieces of some grey stone-like substance. We ask what it is composed of, and are told that it is the country chalk, and that it is medicine (or juju). Kola nuts are also thrown on the heap as offerings.

After about two hours' march through dense forests we arrive at place called Igbakoo, here the carriers drop their loads and seem disposed to take up their residence. The head man of the town presents us with some good tombo with which the Kroomen and ourselves relieve our thirsts. The two white men also indulge in some soda water slightly flavoured with something out of a bottle. While on the subject of drinks we have both lived over six years in the West African swamps and have seen a good many people both teetotal and otherwise. Our opinion is 'Live on the Coast as you ought to do at home'. There is no juju in teetotalism any more than there is in flannel belts. Live well, eat drink and be merry, and you will stand the best chance of keeping your health, for we hold that the man who eats too much or drinks too much won't be merry, and that the man who deprives himself of his bottle of beer in the hopes of escaping malarial fever is like the ostrich who hides his head in a bush and thinks all's well.

Igbakoo seems to be a flourishing plantation. On all sides we see palm trees growing and groves of plantain and banana. It is, I fancy, a centre of the oil producing country in Benin. Our carriers seemed disposed to sit down here and wait events, and we have much trouble in getting our caravan again under weigh. At last we see them all on the track except three who are natives of the town and refuse to go any farther. We bring up the rear and re-enter the forest. We regret not being botanists or to be able to detail all the wonderful plants with the long Latin names ending in 'ensis'. As it is we can only admire the noble trees with their clinging vines and flowering undergrowth and enjoy their cool green shade which makes walking a possibility in latitudes somewhere about 6 N. The sun is now on the decline, and as we are nearly always walking on our shadows we agree that the track from Egwatun must be very nearly true E. Two hours more and we reach another clearing, being the entrance to a town, Iguaami. We refuse to enter the town but (the) carriers throw down loads and sit down with an air as much as to say 'There, that's done, now I'll have three months' rest'. As we won't go in and see the town the town come out and see us. They are civil, beg for nothing, and bring us tombo to drink, so we fraternize, and try to (carry) on a conversation by signs. After what we consider a long enough halt we brace ourselves to overcome the vis inertia of a party of African travellers, and with much persuasion and some mild profanity get them at last on their legs for the last stage of our day's journey.

The last hours' walking is beginning to tell and it is with feeling of gladness we enter the clearing which marks the entrance to Ugbibi. On the road we pick up Ahoorakoo's two messengers to the King advising him of our arrival. The messengers tell us that the king will be glad to see us, so our minds begin to feel more at ease about the success of our undertaking. Arke, the head man of Ugbini has evidently been told to welcome us. The whole town turns out and wants to shake hands. The approach is rather fine, a broad avenue has been cleared of trees and is kept daily swept. At the entrance a treble row of trees are left standing for a gateway, battens are interlaced across at a certain height, and evidently later on each alternate space is to be filled with red clay, and the whole will thus form a gateway to

the town. The broad avenue continues for about 100 yards, when we are in the midst of the town. On the right stands the juju house, which is still unfinished. On the left is a gateway similar to that at the entrance to the town. We pass through with the population accompanying us, till we arrive at the chief's house, and then sit down on camp chairs till he comes. After a short wait we are told that quarters are assigned us in this house, and that the chief will wait to receive us until we are rested. This sounds as being rather considerate on the part of an African nigger. We enter our abode which I shall not describe as I hope to describe a Benin residence later on, and one description suffices. Sergeant Selby soon has the baggage arranged in the centre of the apartment, beds out, and pots boiling in the court yard. Meanwhile a salute of nine guns is fired in our honour and the chief's boys enter, bearing earthen pots of 'Palm oil chop'*, 'froo froo'** and 'tombo'***.

Unfortunately no water or room for a wash, so a dry rub with a towel has to suffice, with change of flannels. Afterwards we expressed ourselves as ready to pay our respects to the chief. We are shown to an adjoining room and in an alcove well nigh hidden in the growing darkness are seated three old black men. They look rather owl-like but are very civil, and after exchanging compliments express as much as to say, 'Well, we are sure you must be quite tired after your long walk so please don't wait any longer'. We return to our canvas beds and try to sleep. There are none of the small jujus that troubled us at Egwatun, but the whole town makes holiday. During the night a band of tomtoms serenades us. It begins in the distance and gradually approaches the house, a big crowd seems to come, and when they stop outside the house the noise is deafening and banishes sleep. Early in the morning we are up and go round the town to see the sights. There is not much to see, but there are some fine goats and cows. After breakfast we pack, send in a present to Arke the chief, and having said farewell make a start for Benin 10.30 a.m.

Sunday 8th. Dec.

First halt made at Utuoker, a small juju town, head man receives us and wants us to enter his place, we resist the temptation, and after the usual amount of palaver get the loads lifted and the caravan started. At 12 o'clock, another hour's walk we reach Igoru passing on the left a small bush path leading to Icrow, the place from which the last expedition started to visit the king. The head man of Igoru is, like him of Egwatun, called Ahoorakoo, and he also has carried before him an addah. I begin to think Ahoorakoo is not the name of a man but of an office. However the Ahoorakoo of Igoru and a woman who seemed to be of some importance made us very welcome and regaled us with fresh tombo and cocoanut water. I cannot imagine anything more refreshing than the latter to a thirsty man. We left Igoru at 1.30 and started on the last stage of the road to Benin. On the way the road changes from a path through the bush to a track through a deep ravine. The red clay is very hard and has almost the appearance of a

* Meats cooked with herbs and fresh palm oil, very savoury to those who like it.

** Yams beaten and pounded with a stick into a dumpling.

*** Native beer. (Punch's footnotes.)

rock. We are not sorry when we again emerge onto the level ground. At 5p.m. we approach the town, and Ourong**** and Osaje, the two head men of the carriers insist on carrying our rifles and looking as important as they can. At last we emerge from the bush into open ground and are taken to a house belonging to a chief called Edohim; he is very polite, but as we are both nearly done up with the walk and as thirsty as two sponges we could dispense with his politeness to get our final resting place. However he produced a large jar of fresh tombo which is quickly emptied. We again start and hope it is the last time. Much to our disgust we are led back to another house, the owner of which, Ejomun, is second in importance to the king. We are shown into a large courtyard at one end of which is a verandah with a large collection of odds and ends, including some old teeth of ivory, carefully piled round a kind of altar. Here we sit down and wait. We grow impatient and somewhat angry but apparently Ejomun is a man of great importance and both Ourong and Osaje impress upon us that we must wait to see him. At last, after much passing to and fro, from a small gateway on one side a stir amongst the crowd betokens his approach. First a company of his adherents issue out of the gate attired in the 'big cloths', (the usual dress of the gentlemen of the country). After these a large number of youths, completely nude save for a necklace of the country coral, and last, attended by his immediate adherents, two of whom support his arms, the big man walks in with great dignity and importance and takes his seat in the verandah in front of the juju. He does not shake hands, in fact his supporters continue to hold up his arms in a manner which reminds one forcibly of the picture of Moses at the battle of somewhere or other. The chief is a man of yellow tint. As with all black men it is impossible to tell his age from his appearance, but from facts we are told he must be approaching old age. Anything more unlike the popular idea of a negro could not be imagined. An air of perfect dignity and self-possession combines with a manner of rather cold reserve, as one who knows his own position and means to inspire respect even into the breasts of two of the all powerful white folk. It is rather difficult to uphold the white man's superiority when you feel ready to drop with fatigue, and are conscious that you are covered up to the eyes in dust from a 15 miles march in the tropics. A basin of water is then produced and we are informed that it is the custom of the country for strangers on entering the town to have their feet washed and for this ceremony they are expected to pay a certain fee. As we have heard of this custom before starting we submit, and to say the truth, after the struggle of pulling off rather tight riding boots is accomplished by two Krooboys, the rest of the ceremony is rather a refreshing one to one's swollen feet.

After this at about 6.30p.m. we are allowed to move on our way. Ourong* and Osaje escort us to the house set apart for us and we arrive at its door just as darkness falls.

The house is in utter darkness. We stumble through a courtyard into a dark passage which leads into a small apartment with an open roof, and from thence into a second of similar

**** Handwritten footnote: Oron (a name?)

* Handwritten footnote: same name as on p. 24, 25 spelt differently.

construction. Our cases and baggage are carried into the second; here we sit down in the dark while Selby gropes about to find a box of matches. When we get a light we turn all the Egwaton people into the outer chamber and sit down, take stock of our position. The Kroo boys evidently don't think very highly of it, and sit huddled upon the cases, both miserable and a trifle scared. There is no water to be had and there is no fire for them to boil their rice. Altogether it is not cheerful. The appearance of the alcove where my bed is placed is, to say the least, uncanny. Hanging from the roof over one's head are all kinds of smoke dried jujus. Queer shaped bags containing indescribable sundries, which may be human knuckle bones or vertebrae. Long shaped packages something like mummy shin bones, and others of the sort too numerous to mention, all submitted to the contact of smoke until they are of funereal blackness and squalor.

We called in Messrs Ourong* and Osaje and burst out on them. Is this the way the king treats his visitors etc. No fire, no water, no accommodation. They disappear for about ten minutes, and when they come back they usher in a train of servants from Ejomun carrying dishes of Palm Oil Chop, boiled yams, tombo, and last but not least, water, and further with the news that if we can make out here for the night tomorrow a better house shall be found for us. Under the altered state of affairs the Krooboys cheer up and make a deck with their cases to sleep on, light their pipes, and even get up a smile at some witticisms on our part about my grandfather's shin bone. We retire for the night and the jujus do not keep me long awake, though the small jujus which bite and irritate did their best.

Monday 9th. Dec.

After a very distracted night (the lizards would crawl about among the jujus and keep me in terror of a string breaking and letting my grandfather's skull down on top of mine) we wake up to find our apartment crowded with visitors who have come to inspect the white men. An old person calling himself Liverpool and speaking English comes with a pretended message from the king. He is a fraud, as also is a person calling himself Tom, of Lagos nationality, who has somehow settled down in Benin. When the royal messengers do finally arrive, four in number named Idehan, Agbe, Agurramasse and Nagboi, they also are treated with scant courtesy. However we make it understood that we want to see the king, and that if he wants to see us he must send someone who knows English. Why doesn't he send a stick or sign of some kind? Finally that we are obliged to leave at the latest in two days. They depart, and after a scant wash in some liquid mud we eat what breakfast Selby can get together. Breakfast done we move into our new house. It certainly is a little superior in style but is too small for comfort. One advantage it has, namely a backyard, to which we can retire for a rest sometimes. The apartment supposed to be ours is full from morning to night with visitors. They are excellently behaved, not one of them begs for anything, all they want is to shake hands with the white men, sum up their appearance, take a pull or two at a long pipe filled

* Handwritten footnote: Same as p. 24, 25, 26

with native grown tobacco, flavoured with some kind of salt, get up, shake hands "Owo oebo" (goodbye white man) and off they go to make room for more. We sit in state all the morning shaking hands and saying 'how do you do', or rather 'Owo', and wait the king's good pleasure. We stroll a short way to where a market of country produce is being held, and become an object of attractions to some hundreds of ladies who are doing their marketing. At a certain point we are stopped and told it is not right to go beyond the land belonging to our host, who is called Edubo and is of the royal family. On the walk home we inspect one of the blacksmiths' shops. The iron worker is a great man in Benin, and turns out some fairly tempered tools, he also does some ornamental work as we shall describe later on. In the afternoon Osaje starts up a false notion that we are to go at once to see the king. After getting on our solitary suit of clean clothes we find it is all a mistake and that we are not to see him until tomorrow. We pull off our fine clothes and sit down to dinner in the back yard. Afterwards we go into the house, imagining it will be empty, but find it far otherwise. All the Egwatun carriers have come into our room. Our own Krooboys are there and also many townspeople. The atmosphere in five minutes is killing, but as we wish to get good opinions we stand it for two hours and then turn them out and try to sleep,

Tuesday Dec. 10th.

Awoke nearly stifled with the bad air and had our beds moved into the open. After breakfast put on our Sunday clothes and started off to see the king. We are first taken to see an old chief named Arribo, and afterwards to another named Ewagwe. Ejomun is really next in importance to the king, but there seems to be some politics in the air, and Arribo and Ewagwe belong to the king's side. Ewagwe's house is really worth a visit. It is built of red clay. A doorway gives entrance to a passage exactly like the *zaguan* of a South American Spanish House. This in turn leads to what answers to a patio in a Spanish house only somewhat smaller and having instead of rooms round it only alcoves. Another short passage leads into a second room of similar proportion, but evidently it is the reception room of the chief; in the centre, under the opening in the roof the floor is sunk like the *pluvium* of a Pompeian house and there is a drain to carry off the rain water. Ewagwe stands at one end of the room under the thatched roof with his henchmen round and receives us with proper dignity and state. While talking with him news arrives that the king's messengers have gone to our house to summon us and are coming on after us. Ewagwe and his people retire to another room and we are left alone. The juju altar in front of which he has been standing is worth seeing. Arranged in a row are seven or eight carved heads standing on the floor. They are overlaid with plates of brass hammered on to follow the carving and then fixed with rivets of brass wire. At first I was inclined to think they were gold, as they are kept burnished, but close inspection shows they are only brass. The head thus covered affords support to a large tooth of ivory carved all over with jujus in high relief. Between these are brass bells of a square shape. They are evidently cast, not hammered and are covered with a close fish scale pattern of minute workmanship with medallions in the centre of each side of human heads. We notice that the

old Greek pattern forms a very favourite border in all their ornaments. After a short stay Ewagwe calls us into an interior apartment of the same shape and we regale with fresh tombo and cocoanut water, kola nut and slices of cocoanut. While here the king's messengers arrived headed by a gentleman calling himself George. He says he was some years ago steward on a white man's beach in the river, and is now interpreter for H.M. King Obbah, or, as his own name really is, Adubowa. It is the custom for the king, when he ascends the throne, to change his name from that which he has hitherto borne. Thus Adubowa the crown prince becomes Obbah the King. We are told the king will see us today but is not ready yet. After this we take farewell of Ewagwe and return home. The king's messengers return with us and we give them cigars to smoke and glasses of liqueur. They are particularly delighted with Jack, who has to stand on his hind legs and shake hands all round till he gets tired and retires growling into a dark corner. Jack is rather a source of anxiety; he has evidently recovered from his dose of fever and is perpetually hungry. The goss, skulls and my grandfather's shin bones are a source of grievous temptation to him and we are in constant dread of finding some favourite juju utterly demolished and Jack sitting on top of the altar graciously licking his chops, and, like Oliver, begging for more. After some time the king's messengers go away and we have half an hour's nap in the back yard. At 4.30 p.m. we are finally summoned to see the king. We cross a kind of common, pass down some streets, and finally arrive at a courtyard with a high wall of red clay. We pass through a gateway and find ourselves in a large open court one end of which is covered over and (in) the centre of this we can distinguish teeth of ivory springing from heads as in Ewagwe's house. There is a large standard of wrought iron supporting a basin - this is really a lamp used on occasions of the 'king's plays', as they facetiously call it when they massacre a score or two of human victims for the king to make his father's* will. We are led up to this lamp and told to stop. The crowd forms a lane up to within a respectable distance of the covered shed. In one part of this is an arrangement of red bast like the box of a theatre. Seated in this we can dimly see a figure in a large hat which we are told is the king. We take off our hats and bow, but think that bowing to a graven image thirty yards off in the twilight is hardly worth taking a journey 60 miles, half in a native canoe and half on foot with the thermometer at 90. The messengers now come down the lane of populace and inform us that the king sends greeting, he is glad to see us, have we been properly treated while in his country? George the interpreter gives us the hint that the correct method of salutation in this country is to raise the right hand. Not wishing to appear ill bred we do so, but I fancy one of us thinks it a trifle infra dig. We reply that we have been well treated, we are obliged, etc., but would like to see His Majesty at closer quarters. After much talking, (he wants to put off the interview till tomorrow and we inform him that we have to depart in the morning), he finally agrees to a less formal meeting. We are again led through several more courtyards each with its wrought iron standard lamp, and led up to one of these and told to wait. By this time it is dark, and light is obtained from native made lamps made of

* Handwritten footnote: cf. Bradbury, 'Father & Son in Edo Mortuary Ritual': Settling down his father's ghost.

iron in the form of a basin with four chains to hold by. Some palm oil is put in the basin, and a wick of some fibre. It is lighted, while to prevent the flame spreading down the wick another piece of iron is placed on the wick. There is an iron scoop for keeping the wick wet with oil. We are kept waiting for about half an hour in the dark. We think these constant waits and shiftings of house are done with the purpose of impressing us with a sense of the king's dignity, so we make up our minds to be patient. We have dressed our bodyguard of five Kroomen in new red flannel singlets and as they are big men they look well, Selby and Yellow Will are the two head men, one keeps behind each of us holding our Winchester rifles. At last we are told that the king is ready, and we are led through a gateway into what, I suppose, is his house. It is of the same shape as the other Benin houses only larger and loftier. A number of people are assembled in the first hall or court, but we are ushered into a second, into the king's presence. The scene which meets our view is weird and bizarre enough to be described by Rider Haggard. The hall is of considerable size and height, the roof is open as usual. There is a large well or bath in the centre of the floor to catch the water from the roof. At first in the hazy light of the smoky palm oil cressets we only notice a large hall with people crowding round it. But as we look up the length of the hall we see the king standing on a raised step, with his arms supported by members of his court. On his right along the hall are arranged the personal attendants of his household. None of these are allowed to wear as much as a waist cloth, but all have necklaces of Benin coral or agate. On his left are the nobility of this court, their costumes consist of silk or cotton skirts padded out in some way to look big, with the upper part of their bodies bare save for many necklaces both of European coral and the native agate stone. Right in front of the king on the raised part at his end of the hall is a juju altar composed of some white compound, the top studded with nail-like protuberances, in the centre of this and smeared with a red compound which we take to be blood but find to be palm oil, lies a human skull, looking ghastly in the dim light. On our side of the altar, painted on the floor, is a juju hieroglyphic, and up to this we are led, but told not to go beyond. Behind us are ranged our Kroo boys, and then the profanum vulgus which has entered with us. Our interpreter stands beside us but does not address the king directly. He communicates with the four messengers who pass it on to one of the big men, and the latter tells it to the king. The king is dressed in a cloth of gold tinsel and is covered with coral necklaces. He is a man about thirty with an intelligent, or rather amiable face. Certainly to look at no-one would suppose him capable of slaughtering some hundreds of people as a sacrifice to the shades of his father. He is very pressing for us to stay in his town, and says he has many things to show us and talk about. He wants to know the truth of the statement that Nanna is stopping the small boys from trading, and grasping everything in his own hands. We tell him we are forbidden by the big Queen to carry tales or make mischief among the natives. That Nanna refused to help us on our road, and that Dudu who was willing to do so was afraid. We ask him to let us take back some small thing to Dudu as a sign from him that we have really seen him. He says he will do so, meanwhile as a satisfaction gives me his stick which he seems to think Dudu will recognise. Finally we consent to stop over tomorrow

when he promises to see us more privately and then retires, leaving us to be regaled with tombo. The meeting then breaks up, and it is a rather strange sight to see the different parties spreading over the common with their odd shaped Oron lamps. On arrival at home we find Edubo and all his friends the Egwatun friends and our Kroo boys filling the house, again we have to put up with two hours' suffocation.

Wednesday 11th. Dec. '89

Many people to see us after a cup of tea and some fried bacon. The king's messengers call for us and take us out to see the sights of Benin. We are first taken to a juju house the spirit of which is contained in a pile of old guns which would, I think, be acceptable in the Tower of London. They are very old, so old that I don't remember seeing anything like them in the Tower, or anywhere else save in pictures of guns belonging in the Tudor period or even earlier. They are old breech loaders of a very primitive make. The barrel is long and narrow and strengthened with rings, the breech is simply an opening to put a cartridge in, and a block of iron to close it. two slots in the side through a pin would be passed to jam up the breech block.

I fancy in the early days of the discovery of the New World the pioneers, buccaneers, etc., used to call down the bights and pick up a load of slaves to help work their ships; if so it would account for the presence in this out-of-the-way place, of guns which we feel sure are centuries old. The Benin people evidently hold them in great veneration, as the king's messengers and Kroo boys are made to stand outside the court where they are, and only the two white men and juju men are allowed to see them. Tombo is produced and kola nuts, some of each having been offered to the juju by being placed in the breeches of the rusty old guns. We are regaled with the rest. After sitting here some time we are taken to visit the king's courtyard and houses. There are many of the courts, each of which is dedicated to some former monarch or defunct member of the royal family. The entrance is through a gateway, the frame of which is of carved timber, either Greek pattern or interwoven scrolls. Once inside, the first thing attracting attention is the wrought iron standard lamps. These are as much as 20 ft. high and are ornamented with casting and hammered work. Close by on the ground is a utensil I couldn't make out the use of. It is a basin of bronze supported on a tripod of twisted snakes. I do not for a minute pretend that the workmanship was as perfect as that of the bronze tripod in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, but it certainly is very wonderful as the work of Benin black men. After this we arrive at the covered shed which runs alongside with a raised floor; the centre of this is evidently the shrine. I would like much to have got a photo of one, but the camera was not viewed with eyes of favour. Instead of the carved heads overlaid with brass there are eight, 9, or ten heads of cast brass, each supporting a tooth of ivory some 10 feet high and covered completely with carvings of men, horses and crocodiles, etc. in high relief, between the teeth of ivory are more of the square shaped bells of brass and also iron castings of men on horse back, men in armour, and other things of most minute and, I think, artistic workmanship. In the centre is usually one larger head surrounded

by carved sticks like sceptres, in the top of which is a loose piece of wood which rattles when the stick is struck on the ground, and this noise, the king told us that evening, causes the juju to approach quickly. We are taken to the court dedicated to the late king. Terrible horrors must have taken place in the enclosure during the last twelve months. We have heard stories from the Jakrimen of hundreds of slaves being caught all over the Country, carried up to the Capital and slaughtered by the king for the purpose of what they call 'making his father' and also of 'chopping king' i.e. fulfilling the rights and ceremonies required before a new king is considered as properly seated on the throne. A horrible object close to the path is a human being lately sacrificed and now suspended between two trees. We ask if he is a criminal, but are told not at all, he has been killed for juju. In one corner of the court is a deep pit, the mouth of which is covered with two sheets of galv'd iron. This pit is called Iya, and into it are thrown the bodies of the victims. At present it is empty. The bodies are not left there altogether, but are removed and burnt and the ashes spread out on the ground in front of the big juju. It was noticing that we were standing on a grey ash that made us ask questions. After a time when sufficient victims have been sent to keep the dead king company the pit is closed. It was only in the court dedicated to the late king that we saw such a pit. On the other side of the court was a heap of bamboo - ladders or hurdles, and we could not quite understand whether they were used to carry the bodies to the pit mouth or as a means of descent. By this time we were both feeling faintly sick and glad to move on. Missionaries and others may say what they please about the number of gallons of spirits poured into Africa by the unscrupulous trader, etc. etc. but one thing they seem to forget - that when English commerce sits down and takes possession these horrible human sacrifices and bloody jujus sicken, fall into the back are smothered up and eventually die, and this without the necessity of either Chartered Companies or Liverpool monopolies. The next exhibition was of a much more pleasing character, we were taken to a house which is given up to the casting of metal we were not allowed to enter but many specimens were brought out and shown to us. They were mostly statuettes and plaques in deep relief, portraying scenes in the history of Benin, and commemorative tablets of dead kings. There are no horses in Benin now, but fifty years ago there were many. Some of the castings were, I think, very old. One, especially, seemed to me to represent a Roman Catholic priest kneeling. I asked if it was meant for a white man's jujuman, and from the replies could tell I had hit the right nail. If so, it must be a relic of some hundred years back, when the Portuguese combined missionarising and slave hunting in the Bight of Benin. Of this time the only existing traces are a tradition of a monastery in Benin City, a few avocado pear trees and sweet oranges not indigenous to the country, and perhaps this casting which was shown to us.

Our next move was to the hall where we were received last night. Somehow in the daylight it did not look half so big, nor did the skull look so ghastly. We were told to sit down and wait, but after some time the king sent a message that the sun was too hot for him to see us now, he would do so in the evening. We grumbled a good deal, and made a few remarks of very republican sentiments, but there was nothing for it but to go home. At 4.30 we were again

called for, and returned to the reception hall in the king's house. Here we were kept waiting for a long time, while all sorts and conditions of black man came, and had a look at us, amongst others two beings who greatly struck us. They seemed to be either insane or else temporarily so with excitement. One of them had a drum on which he performed with much dexterity. Neither of them spoke, and after posturing about in the hall for sometime they left. We especially noticed that they picked out the biggest men to dance to, and that the latter invariably joined in and stepped a dignified measure on the floor between the juju hieroglyphic and ourselves. We were not sorry to see the last of them, he with the drum was especially distasteful. We thought he was either about to be made a juju of and was trained up to the occasion with excitement, unbounded licence, and palm wine, or else he was one of the juju executioners and merely played the tom tom in his lighter moments. We could not decide whether he was received with feelings of pitiful toleration and condescension due to some slave about to become a sacrifice, and, vulgarly speaking, allowed first to have his fling, or whether looked at askance but with enforced respect as a man might be who combined the offices of king's jester, public executioner, and perhaps private informer to an inquisition such as the juju fraternity doubtless forms in Benin. He left us, and as his tom tom throbbed and died away in the distance I am sure the question that arose in both our minds was 'To that same measure how many unfortunate lives have throbbed away in horror and torture? How may hearers have been exhilarated and maddened to the morbid state when the sight of horrors becomes a pleasure, and the indulgence of a state of insane and brutal mystery can be looked on as an act of religion?'

After his disappearance we were taken to another court where the king was seated. He wanted to know why we were in such a hurry to go away. If we didn't like our present house he would find us a better, in fact wanted us to make a long stay. We told him nothing would please us better, but unfortunately the white man's steamer would not wait for anyone, and that we must be back in river to write 'book' for same. He saw the force of this but was anxious for our quick return and for us to open trade at Egwatun. After this he showed us some of his treasures. The most notable of these was a state hat made by himself for his father. It was shaped like some of the helmets belonging to the Chinese and was composed entirely of coral beads. I estimate its value at over £100. There were also two coats made in the same way. Some native tapestry or needle lace was worth seeing. He caused to be brought the new teeth of ivory he is having carved in his father's honour. They were some 10 feet long. One was only half finished, and we looked carefully to see if the pattern is drawn before being chiselled. Apparently it is not, and the artist proceeds with a chisel and file without any design. After seeing some other things, and arranging about making a place for trade at Egwatun he asked what would we like as a present. We modestly suggested a small string of Benin coral such as he gives his people. He laughed and said this was too small. To our delight he produced two (tiny?) teeth of ivory, and on our expressing our thanks had them removed and two larger ones brought in their place. After more talk we make our adieux. Much to his amusement we insist on shaking hands English fashion, which after some demur

he eventually does, and we take our leave. On return to our house we despatch the present brought for him, and then retire for our last night in Benin City.

Thursday 12th. Dec.

Up and packed our baggage, and despatched presents to several of the chiefs. Breakfast finished we make a start. We are stopped by King's messengers with a complimentary farewell from H.M. As the sun is getting high we cut them short. We pay Egomah a farewell visit and give him a present. He also is very anxious for us to stop for a bit but we make our excuses and get under way. We leave the open ground of the town and enter the bush. Our last impression of Benin is not a pleasant one. The burial ground is 'anywhere', the bodies are wrapped in mats and thrown into the bush. Our last glimpse of Benin is of two dead bodies almost lying across the path. I, for one, am not sorry to leave the place. We have been royally received and treated, but the trail of the juju is over it all. It is a land of blood and poison, of slavery, superstition and tyranny, and I feel I can eat my food with better appetite and breathe the air (fresh?) now that one is on the way back to a place where the red flag waves, even if it is only over an African trading tract.

It was our intention to sleep again at Agbini, but night catches us at Atokur, and we camp in the open in the cleared space round the juju house. We receive an unwelcome visitor in the shape of a poisonous snake in our midst. He is soon despatched with machet, and then we light big fires and go to sleep.

Friday 13th. Dec.

We wake feeling all the better for our night in the fresh air and proceed to get breakfast. The head man of the town is very angry that we would not sleep in his town, and says that as one of his women supplied us with fire on the night previous, after our departure he is going to have all the women flogged. We have to go to beg them off - I try to take a photo of the encampment and another of the juju house, but unfortunately make a mistake, and take one on top of the other on the same plate. We get under weigh at 11 o'clock, carriers are getting very quarrelsome about the heavier packages, and at every halt making a fresh start becomes more of a trouble. We threaten all kinds of things if they make any stop at Ugbini and do succeed in arriving as far as Iguabani at 1.30p.m. We arrive at Igbakoo at 3.15, but some of the party having been taken to a small bush turn off the track, we are here half an hour before we start on the last stage to Egwatun. We arrive here at 4.30p.m. and Ahoorakoo meets us at the entrance with his state sword and umbrella to escort us into the town. After a cup of tea we pay off the carriers, and remembering the fearful night we spent here before, hurry on toward the canoe and paddle down to Abariopi, where we put in for the night.

Saturday 14th. Dec.

At 1.30a.m. the Kroo boys ask to be allowed to make a start, which we accordingly do. As we now know the road and the boys are anxious to get home we come down stream very quickly,

and by 10a.m. anchor at mouth of same creek where breakfasted on our way up to Egwatun. Breakfast done, we start again, and arrive in the River at 3.30p.m. It takes us another two hours to arrive at Jubilee factory, but at 5.30 we are at home, and then proceed to soak in baths till by dinner time we are able to appear like white men again.