

The Steward's Account:
Excerpts from the Diaries of Arthur Kerr Slessor (1863-1931)
1887 - 1892

Transcribed and edited by

Mary M. Nash,
B.Sc.(Calgary), B.L.S.(Alberta), M.Lib.(Wales)

Nash Information Services Inc.
1975 Bel-Air Drive,
Ottawa, Ontario, K2C 0X1,
Canada

Telephone: (613) 225 3781
Fax: (613) 225 6553
Email: mnash@nashinfo.com

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Friday, 30 November. Tower Hill barracks. Sierra Leone.

Things here are beginning at last to look a little bit straighter, or at least as straight as they can be got until after the 1st West have cleared out. They embark tomorrow, and sail early Sunday morning. Somehow the *Tyne* always manages to leave or arrive at a place on a Sunday. I'm still in temporary quarters, and so can't regularly settle in, but have unpacked everything, and a pretty mess some of the things were in, too. My tunic, which was in one of the drawers has all the gold lace tarnished; boots, even in tin cases, were covered with mildew; dress clothes spotted with mould, and everything very damp. A large tin-lined wooden case I had was a frightful wreck; all my pictures in it horribly chawed up. It must have been very roughly handled on board; the case was strong enough, and most carefully packed.

We disembarked at 4-30 [pm] on Monday, when it was getting a little cooler. The troops were towed ashore packed into the lighters which were used for the baggage. We fell in upon a flat piece of ground near the landing place, apparently an old quarry and marched off up the hill at the most killing speed. It's little over half a mile up to barracks from the shore, but the hill is pretty steep, especially for the last two or three hundred yards. Cloran [See list of men, Appendix 2] and I, being the two senior subalterns here, had to carry the colours up, and they're no light weight.

Never in my life got so hot as when we reached the top; fingers all wrinkled as if one had been an hour in a very hot bath. It was too dark by the time we were dismissed to see much. No sort of preparation had been made for our accommodation for the night. The baggage was mostly up before us, but there was no time to do much unpacking that night. Some of it was wheeled up in sort of railway barrows, but the majority of it was carried up on niggers' heads. They carry enormous weights that way.

Some people had hammocks to sleep in. I lay down on the bare boards, on top of a coat and a rug, and put in a certain amount of sleep. However, it was not conducive to late rising, and after seventy days of ship life one gets used to early hours in the morning. Was up at 6-0, and went to the balconies to inspect the place. I've never looked out upon so lovely a spot anywhere; both sides of the barracks the view is glorious. In front you have the town stretched out at your feet, 200 feet below, a large straggling conglomeration chiefly of wooden shanties, with vast cocconut palms, mangoes, and all sorts of beautiful trees towering up among them. Then comes the sea, or rather the mouth of the river, with a man-of-war, the *Acorn*, and three or four steamers at anchor. Seven miles across is the low-lying coast of what they call Bullom shore, a pretty poisonous place judging by the look of it. At the back we look on to the hills, which rise up immediately half a mile or so across a valley to a height of 2000 feet. The ground slopes away gently on all sides from the barracks. In fact as a strategical position the ground could not have been better chosen. Not a man could come up it alive under a good musketry fire from above.

There's a very curious old round tower a few yards behind the mess, now used as a water tank, and covered with small ferns and big ugly lizards, like frogs with long tails. It stood here long before our barracks existed, having been build by the original Portugese settlers of the place for a 'reduit', or place of refuge and partly for a watch tower as well perhaps.(3) It's this that gives the name of Tower Hill to our barracks. How the water gets up there I don't know; presumably it's carried in