... the less work, says the African lady; and I have known men who would rather have had one wife and spent the rest of the money on themselves, in a civilised way, driven into polygamy by the women; and of course this state of affairs is most common in non-slave-holding tribes like the Fanti. But then there is that custom which, as far as I know, is common to all African tribes, and I suspect to Asiatic, which is well known to ethnologists, and which once caused a missionary to say to me: 'A blow must be struck at polygamy, and that blow must be dealt with a feeding-bottle'.

* He was a practical man, so there are a gross or two of Alexandra feeding-bottles at a place on the Coast; but they don't go off, and the missionary has returned to America.

Polygamy is the institution which above all others governs the daily life of the native; and it is therefore the one which the missionaries who enter into this daily life, and not merely into the mercantile and legal, as do the trader and the government official, are constantly confronted with and hindered by. All the missionaries have set their faces against it and deny Church membership to those men who practise it; whereby it falls out that many men are excluded from the fold who would make quite as good Christians as those within it. They hesitate about turning off from their homes women who have lived and worked for them for years, and not only for them, but often for their fathers before them.

One case in the Rivers I know of is almost tragic if you put yourself in his place. An old chief, who had three wives, profoundly and vividly believed that exclusion from the Holy Communion meant an eternal damnation. The missionary had instructed him in the details of this damnation thoroughly, and the chief did not like the prospect at all; but on the other hand he did not like to turn off the three wives he had lived with for years. He found the matter was not even to be compromised, by turning off two and going to church to be married with accompanying hymns and orange-blossoms with number three, for the ladies held together; not one of them would marry him and let the other two go, so the poor old chief worried himself to a shambles and anybody else he could get to listen to him.

His white trader friends told him not to be such an infernal ass. Some of his black fellow chiefs said the missionary was quite right, and the best thing for him to do would be to hand over to him the three old wives, and go and marry a young girl from the mission school. Personally they were not yet afflicted with scruples on the subject of polygamy, and of course (being 'missionary man' now) he would not think of taking anything for his wives, so they would do their best, as friends, to help him out of the difficulty. Others of his black fellow chiefs, less advanced in culture, just said: 'What sort of fool palaver you make'; and spat profusely. The poor old man smelt hell fire, and cried 'Yo, yo, yo', and beat his hands upon the ground. It was a moral mess of the first water all round. Still do not imagine the mission-field is full of yo yo-ing old chiefs; for although the African is undecided, he is also very ingenious, particularly in dodging inconvenient moral principles.

I am unsympathetic, for reasons of my own, with Christian missions, so my admiration for [the Mission Évangélique] does not arise from the usual ground of admiration for missions, namely, that however they may be carried on, they are engaged in a great and holy work; but I regard this one, judging from the results I have seen, as the perfection of what one may call a purely spiritual mission.

* A reference to the custom whereby a man forgoes sexual relations with his wife so long as she is suckling, and infants are kept at the breast for up to three years. (III)