[1553] But of force and not of will brought be the ships before the river of Benin, where riding at an Anker, they sent their pinnas up into the river 50 or 60 leagues, from whence certaine of the merchants with captaigne Pintado, Francisco a Portugal, Nicholas Lambart gentleaman, and other merchants were conducted to the court where the king remained, ten leagues from the river side, whiter when they came, they were brought with a great company to the presence of the king, who being a blacke Moore (although not so blacke as the rest) sate in a great huge hall, long and wide, the wals made of earth without windows, the roofe of thin boords, open in sundry places, like unto lovers [louvres: ventilators] to let in the airc.

And here to speake of the great reverence they give to their king, it is such, that if we would give as much to our Savior Christ, we should remoue from our heads many plagues which we daily deserve for our contempt and impietie.

So it is therefore, that when his noble men are in his presence, they never looke him in the face, but sit crowing, as we upon our knees, so they upon their buttoks, with their elbowes upon their knees, and their hands before their faces, not looking up until the king command them. And when they are comming toward the king, as far as they do see him, they do shew such reverence, sitting on the ground with their faces covered as before. Likewise when they depart from him, they turn not their backs toward him, but goe creeping backward with like reverence.

The first extract is from Richard Eden's memoir of Thomas Windham's voyage to Guinea and Benin, 1553, in Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation (1598-1600), VI, p. 145. The second is from Richard Eden's memoir of John Lok's voyage to Guinea in 1554-1555, in Hakluyt, VI, p. 154.

And now to speake somewhat of the communication that was between the king and our men, you shall first understand that he himselfe could speake the Portugal tongue, which he had learned of a child. Therefore after he had commanded our men to stand up, and demanded of them the cause of their comming into that countrey, they answered by Pintado, that they were merchants travelling into those partes for the commodities of his countrey, for exchange of wares which they had brought from their countreys, being such as should be no lesse commodious for him and his people. The king then having of old lying in a certaine store-house 30 or 40 kintals of Pepper (every kintall being an hundred weight) willed them to looke upon the same, and againe to bring him a sight of such merchandizes as they had brought with them. And thereupon sent with the captaigne and the merchants certaine of his men to conduct them to the waters side, with other to bring the ware from the pinnas to the court. Who when they were returned and the wares seen, the king grew to this ende with the merchants to provide in 30 days the lading of all their ships with pepper. And in case their merchandizes would not extend to the value of so much pepper, he promised to credit them to their next returne, and thereupon sent the countrey round about to gather pepper, causing the same to be brought to the court: so that within the space of 30 days they had gathered fourescore tunne of pepper.

Gold and Ivory

They brought from thence at the last voyage [1554-1555] foure hundred pound weight and odde of gold, of two and twentye carats and one graine of finenesse; also sixe and thirtie butts of gainses, & about two hundred and fiftye elephants' teeth of all quantitities. Of these I saw & measured some of nine spans in length, as they were crooked. Some of them were as bigge as a man's thigh above the knee, and weyed about foure-score and ten pound weight a peece . . .

They are very wary people in their bargaining, and will not lose one spark of golde of any value. They use weights and measures, and are very circumspect in occupying the same. They that shall
have to do with them, must use them gently; for they will not traffic or bring in any wares, if they be evil used. At the first voyage, that our men had into these parties, it so chanced that, at their departure from the first place where they did traffic, one of them either stole a muske-cat, or took her away by force, not mistrusting that that should have hindered their bargaining in another place whether they intended to go. But for all the haste they could make with full sails, the fame of their misusage so prevented them that the people of that place also, offended thereby, would bring in no wares; insomuch that they were inforced either to restore the cat, or pay for her at their price, before they could trafique there.

WILLIAM TOWERSON

Metal Goods

All their cloth, cordes, girdles, fishing lines, and all such like things, which they have, they make of the bark of certaine trees, and thereof they can worke things very pretty, and yron worke they can make very fine, and all such things as they doe occupy, as darts, fishhookes, hooking yrons, yron heads, and great daggers, some of them as long as a woodknife, which be on both sides exceeding sharpe, and bended after the maner of Turkie blades, and the most part of them have hanging at their left side one of those great daggers.

From the memoir of William Towerson's first voyage to Guinea, 1555-1556, in Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, etc. (1598-1600), VI, p. 377.

JOHN HAWKINS

Towards the Slave Trade

The following is from a remarkable document, running to about twenty-two thousand words, which provides a detailed and graphic account of Hawkins's slaving voyage of 1562, and was very possibly written in the Jesus, Hawkins's ship, during that adventure. Its great interest for African history lies in its illustration of the way in which early European traders and idlers on the Guinea Coast—in this case what is now Sierra Leone—found it possible to make common cause with African potentates who were otherwise far too strong to be challenged; and of how this military partnership led on to the slave trade.

There came two ambassadors with one message (to our general ... One) of them from where the King of Serra Lion (had his town, and) the other from Yhoma, King of the Castros, (to ask his aid) against Zacina and Zetecama, two kings which (fought with them in the) warres. These two kings desired our ge(nerall, as they ha)d besieged the other[kings] in a towne called Conga, ... that our generall wolde ... (assault) it by the river and batter it, and for his m(erit) they would) help him to negros.

This towne was b(uilt after the) use of that countreye verye warlike, and was wal(led round with) mighty trees bounde together with grete wythes (and had) in it soldiers that had come thether 150 leages. The (kings within) it had in it of principall soldiers negros 6000, bes(ide thereo)f innumerable sight of other memne, women and ch(idren. Our) generall, thowe it was a harde enterprise, yet by(cause) he must have departed to the Indias with the negros (above) mentioned, grawuted that he wolde ayde the said kings, (and) with this awnswered the ambassadors,