

let was in the Bight of Benin. In 1832 and 1841, two ill-starred expeditions were organized and sent to explore and trade on the Lower Niger, but returned with a loss of from thirty to sixty per cent of their crews and little profit. MacGregor Laird — the energetic Liverpool merchant and chief promoter of these enterprises — was not discouraged; but fathered a third well-equipped party of scientific and experienced men, under the direction of Dr. William B. Baikie in 1854. This went out in the *Pleiad*, carrying some missionaries and a mixed cargo, and explored the Lower Niger and the Benué successfully. From 1857 to 1864 a consular agent — Dr. Baikie — was maintained at Lokoja (at the confluence of the Niger and the Benué),<sup>1</sup> and a number of companies began to send ships there at irregular intervals; but no real progress was made by the British in developing the trade of the region till the seventies.

In 1877, George Goldie Taubman (later Sir George T. Goldie) accompanied an exploring expedition to the Niger. He soon saw the fallacy of attempting to create a prosperous trade through the medium of a few poorly equipped trading posts and of a number of weak and rival trading corporations, engaged in a cutthroat competition, yet unable to maintain a steady intercourse with the chief trade centers. These steamship companies possessed neither the capital, the resources, nor the influence requisite for the opening of such a large territory to the commerce of the world. After considerable manipulation, he succeeded, two years later, in uniting all the various interests on the Niger into one organization, known as the "United African Company," with a capital amounting approximately to £125,000.

Its success was rapid. A regular system of trading stations was established and a fair-sized fleet of ships was kept busy on a regular schedule between Great Britain, the West

<sup>1</sup> See map on p. 171.