



1915

## Two-, Four-, and Six-legged Inhabitants of Our Mission-Hill

Sophie Spieß

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sophnf\\_essay](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sophnf_essay)



Part of the [German Literature Commons](#)

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Spieß, Sophie, "Two-, Four-, and Six-legged Inhabitants of Our Mission-Hill" (1915). *Essays*. 1683.  
[https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sophnf\\_essay/1683](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sophnf_essay/1683)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nonfiction at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Essays by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# Two-, Four-, and Six-legged Inhabitants of Our Mission-Hill (English Translation)

This translation was prepared for the *Sophie* website by  
Cindy Brewer's German 201 class during  
Winter Semester 2006 at Brigham Young University.

## Student contributors were:

**Holly Astle, Andralynn Brown, Matthew Campbell, Emily Davis, Kenneth Dunn, Katherine Fisher, Anne Gordon, Mallorie Guerra, Emily Hudson, Aaron Hunsaker, Lindsay Johansson, Cara Jones, Kali Jordan, Katherine Kitterman, Emily Mitchell, Kip Nelson, Chelsea Peterson, Allyse Robertson, Alyssa Sherman, and Laura Smith**

Two-, Four-, and Six-legged Inhabitants of Our Mission-Hill

By Sophie Spieß

Missionlibrary  
Zurich

Basel  
Published by the Basel Mission Bookstore  
1915

[3] In the year 1912 it once again became necessary, as it so often did during our time spent working among the Africans, for us to gather our things and travel to another mission post. The new post wasn't entirely foreign to us, but my recollections of it were not entirely pleasant. One summer when I made up my mind to spend my vacation with my relatives on the Gold Coast, my path took me across our new mission field. My dear husband had already asked the teachers and Christians of the Peki <<Peki is a city in Ghana, West Africa.>> valley which way over the high mountains would present the least difficulties. The unanimous choice was the Konta way. But once again that showed how different the natives' opinions are from our own in many things. For a black, who is barefoot, carefree, wearing only a little clothing, and can climb up and down the narrow, rocky path like a gazelle, this was the shortest way. But for us Europeans with all our layers of clothes and shoes it is agony to climb in hot midday sun over the rocks and rubble that break loose under our feet.

I looked towards this move with mixed feelings, but everything went better than I thought it would.

[4] It seems to always happen that wherever one goes on the mission trail, one experiences all kind of things that cheer the heart and make the toils of the trip bearable. So it happened this time as well, and under God's friendly care we arrived via a better way, after all kinds of dangers, at our new domain, about whose two-, four-, and six-legged inhabitants this narrative should tell all sorts of things.

[5] With the mention of the six-legged creatures you probably get a mild shiver. But the insects

are not the ones that cause all the problems for our brave troops. While the insects certainly cause mischief in Africa, they come up the stairs of the Mission houses one at a time, only as rare “stowaways” in the belongings of the employees or visitors. I will not explain what I mean by this, so that every gentle reader may figure it out for themselves.

After we had reached our destination with our boxes and suitcases in the dark of night, we had a refreshing night’s rest for the first time. Then we had to set up our living quarters. In doing so, it happened to us, as it does with many moving in Germany, that all sorts of things did not fit into the new apartment. Of course, the furniture stays put, and that is good. Can you imagine the cost of lugging the heavy furniture from place to place? First, it became evident that our curtains for the lower windows of the Peki houses were much too long. The lower panes were so low that my husband could comfortably look in at me from the porch through the casement window. So, quickly I grab my sewing machine and, clickety clack, I pull a piece of the curtain down and give it a new hem. This was the first trick; the second one was not so quickly accomplished.

In Peki the furniture was manufactured at the station out of native wood. Now instead of dressers, which were brought as cargo in the missionary sailboat from Europe, there were cabinets with nice large shelves. I brought beautiful new table runners, but when I put them on top of the cabinet they looked very tiny. But what can you do?

[6] They would have to do until I had time to find new ones, but as long as I was in Peki, I never found them. In the parlor, which should appear welcoming, the little table runners had to stay on top of the large cabinets. And so there were all sorts of nuisances that one had to endure. A person can get used to so many things, but it was harder to get along with the living “inventory,” our servants.

Naturally, our housemaid in Keta could not be persuaded to go so far away from Father and Mother, all the way out in the “Bush”, as the inland stations were called. Only my faithful cook accompanied us and stayed with us until we returned home again.

[7] On the first Sunday in Peki, after the service, we received all sorts of greetings and curious visitors. Among the latter was also a handsome, fairly light-colored girl, who volunteered to come work for us. She had a friendly face and we liked her immediately. In the course of time, unfortunately, this friendly appearance was distorted all too often through her pig-headedness and sullen moods. But I was happy to have found someone so quickly, as the Pekians believe it to be beneath their dignity to serve whites. We also found my second “support” quickly. However, she had a large wound on her ankle and was not able to fully exert herself. My hope was that through good care and plenty of rest the foot would soon heal; however, it did not, and so I eventually had to send her home.

But I had, however, so much voluntary help in my school, that we managed the work just fine. There was no greater joy for the little girls and boys than if they were permitted to help Aveno (the school-teacher). The children struggled, however, with the European materials, like brooms and knives. They didn’t understand them and one after another had to try their skills at sweeping, until the stairs were reasonably clean. For this great effort there naturally also had to be a reward, and the victors proudly distributed their prize, a little piece of “Jesus bolo” (bread from the white people), among their comrades who asked for it. It provided only enough for everyone to have just a few crumbs, but the awareness that they had once again enjoyed European bread was entirely sufficient.

Now it was necessary to make visitations.

[8] First of all was the ruler of the Peki Valley, Fia Kwadzo the VIII. It was one year since he had risen against the former chieftain and come to the throne. His predecessor was a cruel, greedy person, who tormented his people and took money from them until they became outraged. It went so badly that the European government had to send in the black army to help. How

unfortunate for the goats, sheep, and chickens that let themselves be seen in the paths and open courts at such a time.

[9] Countless numbers of them found their way into the cooking pots of the defense troops. Finally, the decision was made against the old king. It also didn't help him that he secretly had a small buck butchered and its blood deposited in front of him. He wanted to make people believe that a hemorrhage had so weakened him, that it was impossible for him to leave the seat of government and go into exile.

If the old ruler was too severe, the new one was too weak. He was simply governed by the old advisers, and his behavior caused some offense. And so one morning, a note was found, attached to a tree, upon which could be read: "It would be better if the king would put on women's clothing. Apparently he has absolutely no dignified behavior. Recently he was even seen, personally bartering onions at the market, a thing which even the poorest of his subjects have only their wives or servants do."

We visited said king in his half-finished, mud house. You had to go through some window- and timber-less construction before you could arrive at the royal earthen hut. Yes, it is true; some of his poorest subjects had nicer houses than he. It was much nicer at the homes of our presbyters, where we were going next. First, there was the noble, smart Amos, a diligent man who had learned carpentry, but gave it up because of his many fields. He tried to run his home with structure and order, which his son Christian didn't like. He would rather hang around and do nothing instead of working. But, I remember him fondly.

[10] At the time when my husband was so sick in bed, I wanted to send word to Ho << Ho is a city in south east Ghana and is the capital of the Volta Region >> about it. But, the bordering river was swollen so high because of the heavy rainy season, that no one would cross it. I begged for a messenger in vain until Christian eventually volunteered. He tied the parcel of letters on his head and swam across the torrential river with it.

Both of Amos' little girls belonged to my "Häschen-hüpf" <<Her children's group was named after a song about a rabbit.>> religious children's group. Mathilde should certainly have gone to the 'big-kid' school already, but she had 'Dzobu', a very bad skin rash. Often, when one passed the hut, one would hear a pathetic cry coming from the bathroom. That was her father cleaning the pus-filled wound of his child with a hot herb poultice. That certainly caused terrible pain. Little Christine would rather have been at home watching out for her little sister, than be at kindergarten. I couldn't blame her, there is nothing as adorable as a little chubby cuddly-coo. But order must be. He who is registered for school must also come.

How are the children supposed to learn about the Savior if they do not hear about him. That is why the missionaries began the children's school.

If I now sent one of the children to call Christine, then the child would return quickly with the task uncompleted, telling me very excitedly that the rascal had cursed and even scratched when one wanted to touch her. Out of that cute little mouth with its pearly white teeth came the ugliest words so that no one wanted to go there anymore. So I had to go there myself. She ran around the farm naked most of the time, and I had to search through the heap of clothes for something for her to wear, since nudity was not permitted at the Station hill.[11] At the farm next door, I was able to find a lazy little child. There David lived peacefully, together with his large family, dogs, goats, chickens, and sheep. I often had to think of the image of poor Lazarus when I went over. The one-eyed father sat there in front of his meal pot, clothed only in the essentials. And when the dogs were not licking his boils, they licked the father's naked legs, or his meal pot. His housewife was a skilled potter, and I sometimes watched the way she would turn out large water pots from a wet lump of clay. She used only her hands and the remnants of a cob of corn, with which she mixed out the grains of sand from the clay form. For the outside

cleanliness of the farms and their inhabitants, this business was hardly beneficial, with the children crawling about in the wet clay. Yet now and then during the rainy season, the rain finished the cleaning quickly and cheaply.

The oldest son of the house stole, through his idleness, the days that the beloved Lord had set apart for work. Instead of helping his Father in the fields, he preferred to run around the village or climb in the trees. Talking to him did not help; so God, who does not want people to become spoiled, took matters into his own hands. Once again David shirked fieldwork and climbed in a tree. As he picked the fruit, he leaned too far forward and the branch broke and the youth fell down.

[12] No one was far or wide. Everyone was busy in the cocoa fields, and so he laid several hours unconscious, until someone walking by found him. Now he raised a loud wailing and the Father ran fast to me, to ask my help. I used the time that I had to spend in the mornings wrapping the head wound to talk to him earnestly about his conscience, and had the result that David looked for a position as a scribe after his recovery. So far he just couldn't overcome his laziness enough to help out his own family in the fields.

The one who I searched for at the farmstead was called Nikolas. He used to be one of my best little students, who gave me much joy through his clever answers. But off and on the thirst for absolute freedom seized him so strongly, that one had to downright drag him to school. The process had to be very carefully applied; otherwise the clever one slipped away from us through one of the many holes in the fence that were on his father's farmstead. So my assistants carried him triumphantly high over their heads to school, with him fidgeting all the way. His parents could not help me. When I talked to them they only shrugged their shoulders. "nuka wo ge mia la egbe", "what should we do", they said, "he just won't". I knew what they could do. We had nice, thin bamboo sticks growing in our garden, only waiting to perform a dance on the backside of naughty boys. Other than the two boys there was a nine-year-old girl who was helping her mother industriously. She helped collect dry grass bushels for the burning of the china and she helped in getting the food.

[13] Unfortunately her schooling suffered because she spent so much time helping her mother, and therefore the tall Monika was still sitting with the beginning readers. Her peers were all allowed to come to my place for craft hour, which made the child feel bad. Learning to crochet, knit, and embroider was the greatest wish of the girls from Peki. Unfortunately sewing didn't get their attention as much, because that was originally considered men's work. Only the men sewed the long, hand-woven, multicolored cotton strips together to make pieces of cloth and hunting garb. Of course, since then sewing machines have been introduced to Africa, and because of that the people are better dressed according to Christian customs. The young women also make a good living.

Now we must move on to the next farm, in order to be finished with our visits.

This one is located behind the chapel, a long narrow building, which is used for church worship on Sundays and for school on weekdays. Often when we arrived at church, a big chart with the ABC's still hung behind the preacher's table. It was not exactly uplifting, so it was quickly removed.

[14] The church elder Samuel, whom we will visit next, lived with his wife, a small daughter and the old mother in a nicely furnished hut. The floor was always beautifully and smoothly polished and the door frame was trimmed with stripes of red earth. The old mother, who could hardly walk, only needed to sit on the elevated walkway in front of the kitchen, that way she heard the sermon perfectly through the opened chapel window. She could hear it so well that it was as if she was inside. The oldest son was a teacher at the next mission outpost and had a nice little school there. The young daughter was her Father's favorite. She was always nicely

dressed. She wore clean cloths or little dresses, with pretty leather sandals on her feet, in the way the Hausa <West African Tribe>, the Muslim traders produce them. I could only get her at the school around Christmas time when the big drought caused the field work to cease. Otherwise she always accompanied her father on the plantation, a small gourd with water and a small hoe on her head. They often remained there from Monday to Saturday, slept in the simple field cottage covered with banana leaves and cooked themselves their simple meal between a couple of stones. Only the housewife had to go back in the evenings, to look after her chickens and goats. As a result of the week's work, it became very hard for the old man to sit still in the church on Sunday. On the elevated platform, which was taken by the church elders, he took one nap after the other, and it was very hard for his neighbor to discreetly bring him back to reality.

[15] But oh how wretched is the sleeper in the pews of the church, upon whom the just-opened eyes of the clergyman fell. Either he would be called by name, so that he would arise and remain standing until alert or the church elder would rise with dignity, and toss the fallen corner of his Sunday shawl over his shoulder as he walked slowly down the center of the aisle towards the offender. Naturally, however, the wrong-doer has already been awakened -- startled out of his dreams by the friendly nudges of a neighbor.

Fortunately, the black preachers are not so easily ruffled, otherwise many preachers in the Peki chapel would have lost the threads of their sermon.

Laura Smith, extra credit:

And now we come to the last Presbyter, another Samuel, who was distinguished from the first as Rosa fofo, (Rosa's Father).

[16] He was a proud man, a real Pekian, despite his being small. He had sent his oldest daughter to the "All-Girls High School" in Keta expressly for her education. It cost him quite a bit. Because she was well educated and was such a quiet, friendly girl, I gladly would have employed her as an elementary school teacher. Her father, however, thought that she was more needed for field work. Thus, I received the second Rosa daughter, instead. A very pretty, slim, girl: the smartest in class and the most efficient in her handiwork. Naturally, she was still just a child, whom I could not leave alone. Often, when I was occupied a bit longer in the pharmacy, she came and said, "Aveno, I have finished telling them the bible story and quizzed them about the picture on the wall; now I don't know anymore, what I should do next with the children." Or she lamented that her charges were so mad at her when she tried to restore order. I then had to quickly run over there and restore peace. But I was also grateful to Rosa's father, that he convinced her mother to let Rosa work with me for six months.

For now, we have to take our leave the Peki Station people, whom I hope you have come to love as much as I do. The little book is already full of writing. A second part will follow that should recount all that could not fit here.