

**Citation by the Public Orator, Professor Akintola Wyse for the conferment of the degree  
of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) on  
Davidson S.H.W. Nicol**

Mr. Pro-Chancellor Sir, the salutation from Proverbs XXII, 29 "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before Kings, he shall not stand before mean men," is apposite but vastly inadequate, given his breadth of career, accomplishments, and stature, to introduce our next recipient. He has achieved greatness, greatness has been ascribed to him; he is endowed with greatness. To put it succinctly, he epitomizes the truly gifted, the truly educated Sierra Leonean, meriting a quarter column entry in the International Who's Who.

Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol was born 68 years ago in the mountain village of Bathurst, and received his early education in various parts of Nigeria where his father, Jonathan J. Nicol, served as Chief Dispenser. Very early in his life a very perceptive father discovered in Davidson the potentials of a man of science, and he thus charted his education along those lines. Our honoree was a prodigy, and this was demonstrated countless times in scholastic brilliance which did not admit of any position other than "first!", and which was characterized by double promotions and exemptions in areas where simple mortals like us have to plod through. And not unnaturally, this extraordinary brilliant young fellow with an obvious bias towards the Sciences had to attend the school that was specifically founded to train Sierra Leoneans in the discipline of science - the Prince of Wales School, that impregnable citadel of academic excellence, of royal provenance, which

sends forth truer gentlemen, and a school that has provided this country with the most distinguished and able scientists and doctors, some of the professors assembled here, including this humble orator, our most eminent theologian, the late Prof. Canon Harry Sawyerr, of blessed memory, and mirable dictu, our own Davidson Nicol.

At the Prince of Wales School, he was paraded as a paradigm of academic excellence which every school boy was enjoined to emulate, and he caused a sensation in 1938 when at the tender age of 14 he passed his Senior Cambridge Exam and got an exemption from the London Matriculation. From that point he went on to attain academic laurels as a Poohbah collects titles. The list of these credentials are long, and while time could only allow us to articulate those aspects of the career of our graduand by which he is known and to which recognition should be given, it would be an unpardonable omission not to acknowledge three of the formative influences on his scientific career, apart from his father's. These were C.E. Tuboku-Metzger, the Science Maestro at the Prince of Wales School, who tutored him to pass his Inter B.Sc.(London) and Dr. Mary Gosden, Senior Pathologist and her assistant, who introduced Davidson to the wonders of pathology, when he worked in the Government Laboratory in Freetown on leaving school.

His accomplishments are not identified here necessarily in order of merit or distinction, but let us examine him as a writer. He is a prolific writer. The man can write. He has to his credit about 7 full length books and innumerable articles and lectures on most subjects. So it would never be said of Davidson Nicol as it was said of the great Aggrey who never wrote a book:

Thy greatness we despise not

Nor doubt we thy merit  
 Despite all knowledge got  
 No book by thee was writ  
 This neglect we do complain  
 Oh Aggrey! It gives us pain

Rather we will say:

Thy greatness we do admire  
 Thy merit is recognized afar  
 Suffuse with knowledge begot  
 Many a book thy hand has wrought  
 By this thou hast made us proud  
 Oh Davidson! It gives us Joy.

Well may we rejoice, and feel gratified by the literary accomplishments of our distinguished graduand. He has essayed into the realms of folklore, writing under the pseudonym Abioseh, because he was born on a Sunday, and churning out such gems like The Truly Married Woman: The Devil at Yolahun Bridge, The Leopard Hunters, and bagging the Margaret Wrong Prize and Medal for literature in Africa(1952). He has also traversed the world of politics and history. His Africa: a subjective view, (1964) explains the new emergent Africa, its hopes and expectations, nay its limitations. And like many eminent scientists in whom one often suspects lurks a historian, he temporarily deserted Hippocrates, the God of Medicine, for Clio, the muse of history. And in the process has put out studies on Africanus Beale Horton, whose career has a remarkable resemblance to the author's and

the Revd. Edward Jones, the first black Principal of Fourah Bay College, which may have even evoked the envy of professional historians.

Indeed, his competence and proficiency in his main discipline are incomparable. The array of qualifications associated with it I imagine are not strange to the cognoscenti. But let me remind you: 1st Class Honors degree in Natural Sciences, B.A. (Cantab), M.A., M.D. in Nutritional and Tropical Medicine, Ph.D. (1958), Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists (London), and of the West African Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, as well as of the Ghana Academy of Sciences. His outstanding brilliance as a medical scientist is attested by his major contribution in two publications on the development of insulin, both in its human structure and biological activities, while he was at Cambridge. He has also worked on bone cancer. Only two other Sierra Leoneans have equalled this achievement. Dr. Farrell Easmon who discovered Black-water Fever in the 1880s and Dr. Jenner Wright who identified certain vitamin deficiencies in the diet of Africans. Our graduand has given succor to the sick and the physically distressed as a physician, and as an analyst of disease and the deceased, he offered his services and was appointed Senior Pathologist in Sierra Leone, 1958 - 1960. From the consulting room to the laboratory and the classroom our luminary gravitated to the boardroom and the highest seat of academe. On returning home from lecturing at Ibadan University via Cambridge, he was appointed Principal of the 133 year old Fourah Bay College, one of the youngest ever and the first Sierra Leonean to hold that position. Six years later he became the first Vice-Chancellor of a newly created University of Sierra Leone (1966-68), and Chairman of the West African Examinations Council (1964-69). He combined these academic positions with a clutch of directorships on

the boards of companies, including SLST and the Central Bank of Sierra Leone. As an inheritor of the colonial system he had much to do to meet the challenges posed by the Deputy Visitor, Sir Maurice Dorman, when he presented the Royal Charter establishing Fourah Bay College as the University College of Sierra Leone in January 1960. The new Principal was innovative, progressive and devoted. His caring concern for scholarship, his uncompromising commitment to academic freedom and the solicitous help and support he gave to faculty and students alike as well as his indigenization policies made him a successful principal. To be sure, if we have today the John F. Kennedy Building, the Faculty of Arts Building, the Mary Kingsley Auditorium and a refurbished and rehabilitated Kortright House, we should acknowledge the imprint of Davidson Nicol. As one who was privileged to be a student during his Principalship, I know how much we respected and valued our honoree. His rapport with students is difficult to parallel. Of course, there may be more than one opinion on his principalship, but, to us, Davidson Nicol was irreproachable. Prudence advises however that I should point out that what follows should not be construed as making unfavorable comparisons, and to further observe, that attitudes, personalities, dispositions and situations change with time. But what Principal could identify and champion student issues, to symbolically empathize when youthful zeal burst out in demonstrations, of which we have seen quite a few, even violent ones in recent times, and yet was strong enough, self assured of his unimpeachable authority to chastise students when they went to excesses, and be applauded for that! How electrifying was that velvety voice of his when he would address his boys and girls with this salutation: "Students of Fourah Bay ..." that commanded instant attention. And so when he retired in 1968 such was the extent

of Davidsonmania that every room on campus was decorated with his picture. One of the halls of the male students was honored with his name, while his intellectual reputation has supplied the local wits with material to immortalize him: "you sabi buk lek Davidson", being one, and for the more cynical "den say Bailor Barrie, you say Davidson Nicol", to differentiate untutored materialism from disciplined education.

Like the inimitable crooner Frank Sinatra, our graduand has done things his own way. After Fourah Bay, he plunged into diplomacy and International relations, serving successively as our country's Permanent Representative in the UN during which time he served as President of the Security Council (September 1970), and Sierra Leone's Envoy at the Court of St. James in London. He then went on to work full time in the UN system, holding senior positions such as Executive Director of UNITAR, Under Secretary-General of the UN (1972-82), and President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (1983) with distinction and competence. Never failing to put the case of Africa forcefully in global arenas, he has also made outstanding contributions to international relations with significant publications in that area. After returning from the United Nations, his boundless energy and commitment to scholarship took him back to the classroom and the lecture circuit as a Cambridge don and a Visiting Professor in a good number of campuses of high repute, including the University of Sierra Leone. He is currently a lecturer of M.Phil. students in International Relations at the Faculty of History at Cambridge University and Visiting Professor of Government and International Studies at the Byrnes International Center, University of South Carolina, where he is preoccupied with a study on Edward

has completed a two-volume autobiography which is to be published next year. I look forward to it with avid interest.

Our graduand has been considered worthy over the years to receive meritorious decorations and honors in academia and in other areas including the Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel; Grand Commander of the Star of Africa, awarded by the Liberian Government; and a C.M.G.; nine honorary degrees, including a D.Sc. from Laurentian University in Canada and citations, for example, from the City of Los Angeles, for a "distinguished career as a diplomat, educator and scholar" and in particular for his contributions to International Relations. The Kyung Hee University of Korea awarded him the Korean Medal of Highest Honor for his contributions to World Peace, for which achievement he also received the Gold Medal of the Indian Federation of United Nations Association.

Yet, the service he continues to give, the advertized as well as the unannounced, deserves recognition for his many sided activities. On the other hand, Mr. Pro-Chancellor, Sir, I confess that this subject is too large to be concluded in one afternoon, and I apologize for this admission. So I will crave your indulgence to permit me to present to you for the conferment of the award of the degree of Doctor of Science, Honoris Causa, of the University of Sierra Leone on Dr. Davidson Sylvester Hector Willoughby Nicol, intellectual par excellence, scholar, diplomat, extraordinary writer and essayist, medical scientist and international civil servant, for his remarkable and extra-ordinarily outstanding achievements as a Sierra Leonean and for his significant contributions to World Peace, Science and Education.