



BOOK REVIEWS

Contributions au Congrès des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs.
Published by Présence Africaine, Paris. 1957.

THIS volume is further and important evidence of the new phase that has opened in the growth of African scholarship. Africans are discovering themselves.

Until recently Europeans alone were occupied in the process of exploring, recording, dissecting and interpreting African cultures. These anthropologists and missionaries had the advantage of a wide perspective and comparative sociological knowledge; but they suffered the handicaps of standing outside the society, studying it through the medium of a foreign language, and sharing the prejudices of their own group.

The older generation of African scholars, such as J. H. Soga, followed in the missionary tradition. They viewed their customs and institutions sympathetically, but apologetically, and without any doubt as to the superiority of the White man's way of life.

All this is now a thing of the past. The Africans, West Indians and American Negroes who took part in the First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, held in Paris in September, 1956, reject such evaluations with varying degrees of emphasis. Racial differences, declares C. S. Tidiany, do not justify, on any ground, hierarchical evaluation of cultures. African culture is different, but not inferior in relation to time and place.

So, in the first place, Africans are concerned to record and explain the inner meaning of art forms and philosophies: Benin bronzes, Senegal dances, Ewe semantics, Dahomey animism, Negro theatre. The Conference gave much of its time to papers on these and allied themes, both for the sake of the subject matter and as a corrective to misconceptions. As

Ladislas Segy pointed out:

"The accumulation of this information about the background of African art brings us to new conclusions. We learn that what was considered as 'superstition' is a valid solution to psychological conditions. The old concept of a 'savage' way of life, acquires a new light in this context, and we understand that under similar conditions much the same type of rituals has been installed and practised through the world and throughout the ages."

This concept is not unfamiliar to social scientists, but its recognition by Africans reinforces their objection to imperialism and colonial expansion. For, as Assane Seck remarks, these have been justified in terms of an alleged racial and cultural inferiority in Africans. An assertion of African values involves a repudiation of such arrogance and intolerance.

How far is the repudiation to go? Must we 'develop along our own lines'? Some, like J. Holness, say yes: "There is only one solution for this problem and that is to work amongst our own people; let us put forward our contribution through our national aspirations and culture." In keeping with this sentiment, Tidiany stresses the historical ties between Egyptian civilization and Negro Africa: the 'wonder that was Egypt' is the *Miracle Nègre*, which preceded and gave rise to the glories of Greece.

But modern Egypt is backward and undeveloped. Africa needs science, technology, a trained civil service. Why not take what we need from Europe, Asia or America, and adapt it to our conditions?

Peter Abraham's contribution—originally published in 1954—makes a significant comment on African attitudes to Western values. The educated leaders in the Union, he says, have accepted these values more fully than Africans have done elsewhere, with the possible exception of the African *élite* in French colonies. It is the African who is fighting for the realization of Western ethical principles, and the White racist who rejects them in an attempt to preserve power and prestige. In Kenya, on the other hand, Kenyatta and other African leaders 'reject all European ways and institutions' because the White settler has rejected the African.

I think that Abrahams misrepresents Kenyatta's attitude and succumbs uncritically to colonial propaganda in condemning him and accepting the official version of 'Mau Mau'. But the contrast he draws between Africans who reject and those who demand the realization of European values is meaningful.

One may sympathize and yet disagree with ardent 'Africanists, who, in their desire to free themselves of 'cultural imperialism' think of building a new society on an authentic, ancient African heritage. Traditional art forms, animism and ancestor cults do not constitute an adequate base for a progressive society. The foundations of new economic, technical and political institutions must be laid. Scientists and technicians are needed for this work, as well as writers and artists. Knowledge and skills are available outside as well as in Africa, and we have a right to draw freely on all sources. Africa, which gave the world its first civilization, will not suffer humiliation by claiming a repayment of the debt. Let us hope that scientists as well as artists will be represented at the next Congress, to place the prospects for African society in a full and balanced perspective.

DR. H. J. SIMONS.

Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa—by *Dr. Roland Oliver*. Published by Chatto & Windus, London. 1957. Price 30s.
Quest for Africa—by *Dr. Heinrich Schiffers*. Published by Odhams Press, London. 1957. Price 25s.

ONE of the most significant themes in contemporary history is the throwing aside of the 'White man's burden', in the shape of imperialist domination, from the shoulders of colonial peoples all over the world. For Africa, the overwhelming weight of the burden began to be felt during the crucial years of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when, at a steadily increasing pace, the Great Powers of Europe carved up the hitherto largely untouched Continent amongst themselves.

The full history of the interaction between Africa and its conquerors during this period, which irrevocably transformed African life and will no doubt dominate its future for a long time, has still to be written. Too little is as yet known about this time. Nevertheless, more and more valuable evidence is being accumulated about the detailed course of events during the 'scramble' from the point of view of the scramblers themselves, those Victorian crusaders vitalized into astonishing energy by their conviction that they were the agents of a progressive evolution which would bring profits to the mother-country and civilization to its forcibly adopted children.

It is often mistakenly assumed that British Imperialism arose as a result of the conscious realization of its necessity by the nation at large. In fact, in the heyday of imperialist expansion, in the 80's and 90's, there were powerful interests, both in and out of Parliament, representing the outlook of the earlier Free Trade period, who still regarded colonies as costly and unnecessary burdens. Clear-sighted individuals might see the need for new colonies in the coming period of intensified competition for markets, but Parliament as a whole was very reluctant to pay for them. This conditioned the form that late nineteenth century expansion took. As a result of the unflinching emphasis on economy, transitional stages between the declaration of a 'sphere of influence' and the setting up of a full colonial administration dependent on Treasury aid had to be evolved. Such were the declaration of Protectorates under the control of the Foreign Office, where a Consul 'advised' tribal chiefs who had signed treaties of friendship with the Queen, and the even more drastic expedient of Chartered Companies, which undertook the responsibility of government in exchange for the privileges granted to them by their charters.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the correspondence of Sir Harry Johnston abounds in half-humorous, half-bitter diatribes against the niggardly Treasury, "a Department without bowels of compassion or a throb of imperial feeling." Johnston was one of the most important and interesting figures of his time, unaccountably forgotten to-day, who has been put into his rightful place among the other great imperialists of the period, like Rhodes, McKinnon and Lugard, in a recent biography by Dr. Roland Oliver—*Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa*.

In an age when versatility was not uncommon, Johnston was exceptionally so. He was an accomplished painter, an ardent naturalist after whom several animals were named, a pioneer ethnographer in the field of Bantu languages whose contributions are still acknowledged to-day, and a most prolific and witty author. But these were only sidelines. From the age of twenty, Johnston was an ardent advocate of Imperial extension who spent some twenty years in the service of the Foreign Office in Africa. As Dr. Oliver says, "Johnston's active life coincided almost exactly with the international scramble for Africa, and he himself played with intensity and enthusiasm all the most characteristic parts that fell to the 'man on the spot' . . . explorer,

concession-hunter, treaty-making consul and pioneer administrator."

Johnston's greatest claim to remembrance is perhaps the famous Agreement he signed with the Baganda in 1901, which gave the Uganda Government full powers to force whatever measures it pleased on the Kabaka and the Lukiko, while appearing to give an enlarged Buganda internal self-government; an Agreement under which the Kabaka was deported in 1953.

Dr. Oliver's book is scholarly, detached and extremely readable, and his excellent maps enable the reader to follow with ease Johnston's activities, which were spread over the greater part of Africa. With the aid of skilfully chosen quotations, he brings to life the impish Johnston, terror of Victorian drawing rooms, who yet never lost his earnest belief in evolution. Dr. Oliver also throws new light on many of Johnston's contemporaries, including Rhodes, whose unscrupulous attempts to use Johnston as a tool to extend the political control of the B.S.A. Company make for one of the most interesting episodes in the book.

Quest for Africa also deals with the opening up of Africa, though from a very different point of view. For Dr. Schiffers, Africa is the mysterious and glamorous continent from which something new always emerges, and from the records of an enormous number of journeys of exploration he has created, as his publishers say, an "adventure story on a grand scale". Unfortunately, it is a story which is often very difficult to follow. Dr. Schiffers has not managed to organize his material coherently, and the narrative, already marred by a translation which is very poor in places, sometimes goes aground in wordy, unnecessary asides and flashbacks. It is a pity, too, that, as a geographer dealing with the history of exploration, he should not have included at least one full-scale map of Africa.

Dr. Schiffers is at his best in his graphic descriptions of the strange personalities in African history—Emin Pasha, European convert to Islam, Governor of the Egyptian province of Eatoria, brilliant and irresolute, finally murdered as a traitor by his co-religionists; George Schweinfurth, the explorer, who proved that Aristotle was correct when he said there were pygmies in Africa; or Gerhard Rohlfs, a German doctor who disguised himself as a Moslem and went right across North Africa on foot, in yellow carpet slippers.