



BOOK REVIEWS

AFRICAN HISTORY IN TRANSITION

The Journal of African History edited by R. A. Oliver and J. D. Fage. Vol. 1. Number 1, 1960. Published by Cambridge University Press, 30s. per annual volume of two parts.

Old Africa Rediscovered by Basil Davidson. Published by Gollancz, 1960, 25s. Published in the United States under the title 'Lost Cities of Africa' by Atlantic Press, Little, Brown & Co., \$6.50.

THE publication of the first number of the *Journal of African History* marks a new phase in the development of African studies; it is quite free from that 'parochialism' which has so often dogged them in the past. The Advisory Editorial Board is international, contributions are in French as well as English, and the subject is Africa as a whole and its history during all periods. Its contents illustrate very perfectly the transition that is now occurring in the technique and presentation of African historical research.

The first article on "The Niger and the Classics" represents one of the oldest traditions in African historical study; that of the English administrator or educationalist with a sound classical training. If it fails to bring conviction, it is only through the tendencies inherent in that tradition; too great reliance on the factual accuracy of that strange compilation "Ptolemy", perhaps too little interest in archaeology, certainly too little interest in Islamic sources (Idrisi is referred to as writing in 1254). Again, "Patterned Walling in African Folk Building" by Mr. James Walton has both the strength and weakness of a pioneer effort; it opens new horizons, and the photographs are admirable even if the sketch map is quite inadequate. But his conclusion—"that pattern walling in Africa is an architectural device introduced by the Berbers"—is as sweeping and untenable as that of any nineteenth-century diffusionist. It is a pity that he ignores the problem of patterned walling in Ethiopia and the existence of the herring-bone and chevron patterns on such fourteenth- and

fifteenth-century Tanganyikan sites as Songo Mnara. In "Christian and Negro Slavery in Eighteenth-century North Africa", there is an anecdotal approach as old as Sir Lambert Playfair and very little on the quite different economic structures of the Barbary States.

In contrast, the article by Dr. Vansina on the oral history of the Bakuba is a masterpiece by a Master of the New Techniques. There is a brilliant study by Margaret Priestley and Ivor Wilks on eighteenth-century Ashanti Chronology, and this is only rendered possible by a new union of history and anthropology. "East African Coin Finds and their Historical Significance" by Dr. Freeman-Grenville summarises the numismatic discoveries that are revolutionising modern conceptions of the political and economic history of the Coast; while Dr. Philip Curtin's survey of the archives of Tropical Africa is indispensable for more modern historians. Perhaps most important of all for the future development of the Journal, there are nearly 40 pages of reviews uniformly of high standard.

The first review is that by the great Raymond Mauny on Basil Davidson's "Old Africa Rediscovered". He terms it both an "important" and an "excellent" work; this is true enough, but above all it is a courageous one. For it is the first book in any language to provide a survey of the history of Africa in the light of recent archaeological discoveries. Reading it and re-reading it, I have found emphases with which I personally disagree; and yet I have been increasingly impressed by the mass of detailed research it presupposes and by the compelling enthusiasm with which this is presented. It covers the whole of Africa from the Sudan to the Transvaal and from Nigeria to Tanganyika. Its central theme is "the African metal age of the last 15 or 20 centuries." Therefore, it fittingly begins with the Sudan, before passing to West Africa. Both sections are admirable, though personally I am more ready to believe in Meroe as an African Birmingham than as an African Athens, and I am sceptical of the traditions of race migrations into West Africa from the North East.

The fourth chapter, "Between the Niger and the Congo", is the most slender; clearly there should have been a fuller treatment of Ife and of that strange experiment in hybrid culture—the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian Kingdom of Congo. This also is the point at which Mr. Davidson might have discussed the economic importance of the Katanga lead workings in the pre-European period, for this may yet prove to be the clearest

link between west and east and south. Then, as the survey reaches towards the Indian Ocean it once again grows more detailed. The chapter on the Zimbabwe and on Mapungubwe, "The Builders of the South", is as masterly as that on the "Kingdoms of the Old Sudan".

Part of the novelty in Basil Davidson's approach lies in his emphasis on the importance of social and economic factors as determinants of African Culture. It is a relief to escape from the old racial hypothesis of wandering and enlightened Hamiest. But this is a line of approach that will necessitate a far closer co-ordination than now exists between anthropologists and historians and a closer attention to the minutiae of barter systems.

Part of the novelty consists in his full use of the sporadic archaeological discoveries which are now being made throughout Africa. But again African archaeology will only make its full contributions to African history if it is linked with a study of those African oral traditions for which it provides the only check. In West Africa it must also be studied in relation to art forms, and everywhere in relation to the development of techniques. In Africa an archaeologist should also be an Africanist. The methods may be adapted from those used on Roman Britain; the problems are utterly remote.

Above all, the archaeologist in Africa is an explorer. In some sense every study of pre-European Africa is still an exploration. It is perhaps precisely because he has the zest to explore that Basil Davidson has achieved so outstanding and so exciting a book.

GERVASE MATHEW

Brief Authority by Charles Hooper. Published by Collins. 21s.

WHAT really went on in Zeerust during 1957-8? We heard that African women were burning their passes, about chiefs' huts burned down, about police raids, about assaults and murders . . . Some brave reporters for 'Golden City Post' entered the area in an attempt to find out what was happening—and were assaulted, with police connivance (if not encouragement), for their pains. The Government iron curtain descended, and then we had nothing to go on but rumours, atrocity stories, and the usual hand-outs to the press, from the Department of Native Affairs, about agitators, "loyal chiefs" and turbulent

women. The proof that something was profoundly amiss came when scores of men, women and children of the Bafurutse tribe fled over the border into Bechuanaland. The official Government Information Service at first denied that there were any such refugees; then later grudgingly admitted that there "could have been 250". One English paper in Johannesburg gave the figure at 4,000; this may have been exaggerated, but certainly in one week alone a thousand fled to the Protectorate, and at least another thousand left for others parts of the Union.

Among the "agitators" alleged by the Government to have been stirring up the African people, especially the women, were two white people, the Anglican Rector of Zeerust, Fr. Hooper, and his wife. They were vilified in the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the "troubles", and were finally served with a banning order which prevented Fr. Hooper from entering the "Native Reserve" even to take Holy Communion to the sick, to celebrate Mass, or to visit the dying. Fr. Hooper had to be transferred from Zeerust; and two years later—1960—himself also became a refugee, escaping from the Union into Swaziland at the time of the State of Emergency in South Africa.

Now, at long last, we have his account of the stirring and terrible events that went on behind the Government's iron curtain in the Zeerust area. A brief foretaste of it was given to readers of this journal in an article two years ago entitled "Diary of a Country Priest".† Now he gives us the full story, and it is as gripping as we had expected. We learn of the reign of police terror; of the attempts by the authorities to prevent even accredited witnesses from appearing for the African women whose only crime, often, was to have been assaulted by the police. Even the Hoopers themselves were at one moment threatened with an ambush—and there is a hint that this threat was itself not unknown to the police.

I have heard people dismiss Fr. Hooper as "another of these political priests". This is quite untrue. He was a pupil of mine at the Theological College in England during the time I was Vice-Principal, so I know him well; and he has never had the slightest leanings towards being of the "left-wing parson" type. And in South Africa, though he had long believed that apartheid was a non-Christian attitude, he was never drawn to such bodies as the Congress of Democrats. In Zeerust he became involved, almost against his will, because as a priest he could not simply stand by and see some of his own people—

† See Vol. II No. 4, July—September, 1958.

originally, some of his own Anglican women, though it soon extended to any African women, Christian or heathen alike—being wounded, tortured, hounded. What started by a simple carrying out of a certain command in the New Testament about “a cup of cold water”, ended in a total involvement in the Africans’ cause. Though even to the end Fr. Hooper never took sides in the sense that, for example, he advised the women to refuse to carry “passes”; indeed, he told them that they had a prima-facie duty to obey the law, and he sometimes had to rebuke them for behaving like “thugs and tsotsis” themselves.

He writes crisply, wittily and with a wonderfully accurate ear for conversation. Seldom have the wisecracks, the metaphor-laden language, the pungent proverbs of the African people been so faithfully and vividly recorded. We get to know his villagers, his Mothers’ Union, his African children, his catechists, from their relaxed conversations long before the “troubles” start. And we find, not surprisingly, how much the black people know about the white—and how understanding they are of the white man’s problems. “Judge these people (the whites) leniently”, says one of his African friends. “They wear blinkers like mules. . . . They have been frightened inside ever since they could walk. Now you frighten them worse. . . . Their fear is a hole in the bucket of their joys. Be sad; but do not be angry.”

And of course, the reaction of the South African Government to such a book as this is simple: ban it! This has been done. What else can you do to a truth that challenges you, and which you know you cannot refute, than to suppress it? But truth takes a lot of suppressing: ’twill out. And out it is, here among us. We must take it and spread it fast: sooner or later it will soak back into the land from which it has been expelled.

FR. MARTIN JARRETT-KERR, C.R.

BANNED IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHARLES HOOPER’S book, with introduction by
ALAN PATON

Brief Authority

Trevor Huddleston ‘The book to read for those who really want to understand the way Sharpeville occurred.’

Illustrated 21s.

Collins