

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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From Oyo to Cambridge and Back.

May 30, 1964.

The Centre for Afro-Asian
Studies,
Cambridge University,
Cambridge, England.

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Thirty five miles west of the University of Ibadan, on the outskirts of the ancient Yoruba city of Oyo, lies the small village in which Ojetunje Aboyade was born. It was in Oyo, one of the most important historical cities founded by the ancestors of Nigeria's more than five million Yorubas, that Aboyade embarked upon an educational pilgrimage that carried him through the elementary and secondary schools of Baptist missionaries, down the halls of Hull University and finally out of the gates of Cambridge University with a Ph.D in his hand. An economist, he is now on the staff of the thriving, fifteen year old University of Ibadan, an institution that didn't exist when he started his long journey to higher knowledge. This year, he is at the University of Michigan as a visiting professor.

Since his Ibadan appointment he has often travelled the short miles to home and Oyo. One day, in both the spirit and words of Robert Frost, he told me, "You come too".

As we drove along, Aboyade spoke of the history of the surrounding countryside. A few miles out of Ibadan, he pointed out how the lush rain forest of the coastal areas gives way to a more open forest, the kind that provides man with an environment infinitely more favourable than water soaked coastal vegetation. It was no accident, he said, that the highly organized Yoruba kingdoms had reached the peak of their glory in that area.

The open rain forests in turn give way to open savannas. This was a geographical fact that had had its impact on the history of Aboyade's people. The open savannas around Oyo are extensions of Northern Nigeria's great belt of grasslands. It was on these flat rolling lands that the Moslem Fulani of the North successfully unleashed their formidable calvary in the 19th Century jihad that brought Islamic culture and Moslem rule to the Yoruba. Indeed, the Oyo we journeyed to was New Oyo, for in the jihad Old Oyo was captured and sacked by the Fulani. New Oyo was the creation of refugees who had fled before the religiously intoxicated Hausa and Fulani tribesmen.

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While the countryside and contemporary Oyo show no visible signs of the great jihad, there are impressive signs of another successful, but more peaceful, religious invasion of this part of old Yorubaland. On the highway just outside of the city, a gleaming and modern Baptist secondary school dominates the landscape. Within the city limits signs point to a Baptist academy, to a Baptist seminary and to a Baptist grammar school once attended by young 'Tunje Aboyade.

A few miles beyond Oyo was the village home of the Aboyade's. As we drove through the streets the villagers on recognizing him joyously waved their hands, called greetings, and rushed to tell their neighbors he was home. Asked why their greeting was so effusive, he replied with pleased embarrassment that it always was, even though he came home quite often. He suspected it was their tribute for a "local boy who made good." This was a part of the truth; the rest of it was that he who "made good" did come often and that he consistently applied some of his new knowledge to his family's old problems of livelihood and health. In one of his education and prominence, such loyalty and love of family was a source of joy and pride for the whole village.

Aboyade's widowed mother met us at the door of the family home. It is a structure that is large in size, rambling in character, rough and rugged in amenities, and warm and loving in atmosphere. Mrs. Aboyade, a leader in the village's Baptist Church, spoke Yoruba and her son translated for us. Her gentle welcome and jocular teasing of her son, was a poignant reminder of a long dead, very dear grandmother. (This sensation was a repeat of similar experiences my wife and I have shared with other Negro Americans in Africa: the glimpse of a face that is also the face of a Negro friend or relative back home in America, a concrete kind of "déjà vue.")

Behind the house were two installations that demonstrated Dr. Aboyade's care for his family, a chicken hatchery and a vegetable garden. The hatchery, full of baby chicks, had the usual modern accoutrements of regulated temperature, scientific feeding processes, and specially developed foods. The garden was more dramatic, for it was not only evidence of his concern for his family's welfare, but also of Aboyade's understanding of the need to prove the validity of new methods to persons whose lives had been built upon the reliability of older modes of doing things.

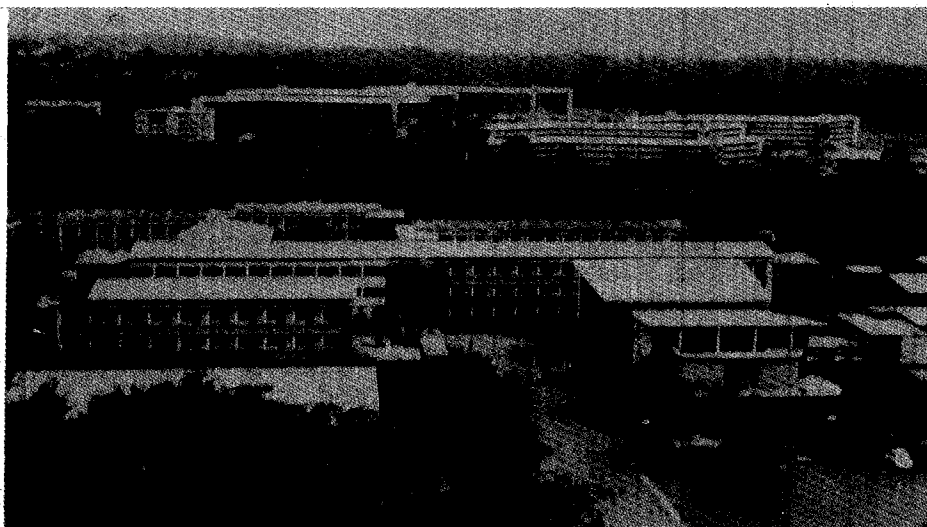
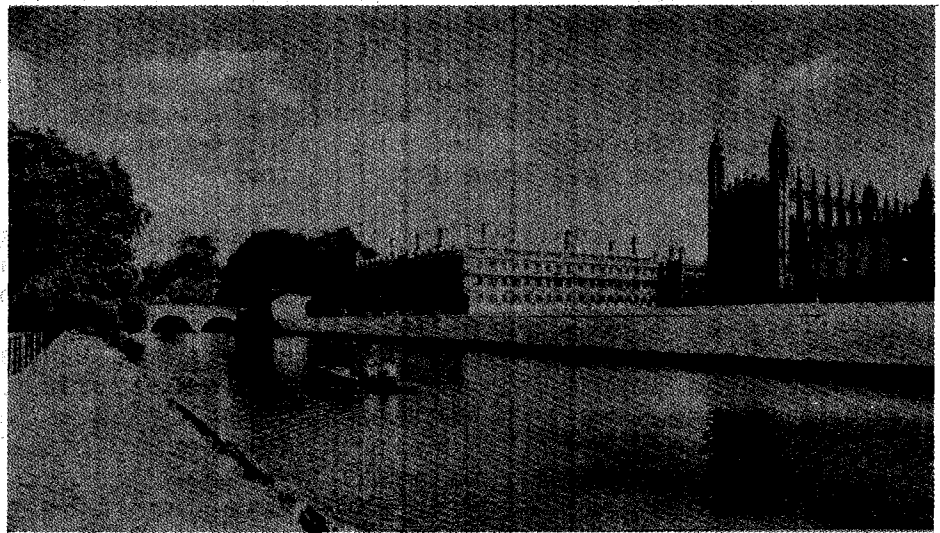
Soon after the hatchery was built, he had tried to persuade his family to use the manure of the chickens to

THE "WORLDS" OF DR. ABOYADE



THE
MARKET
AT
OYO

CLARE COLLEGE
AND
KING'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY



THE
UNIVERSITY
OF IBADAN,
NIGERIA

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fertilize the garden. He made no progress in this effort, for predictably enough, they saw no relationship between the droppings of chickens and a productive garden. Finally, Dr. Aboyade set aside a portion of the garden, fertilized it, and planted it himself. This effort alone was enough to loosen the old modes of thought, but the garden was the real clincher. The corn, melons and tomatoes of the demonstration patch stood tall and ripe above the rest of the garden.

There are two more Aboyade brothers, the youngest is away at secondary school, his fees and tuition paid by his older brother. The second son stays at home and runs a many-acred family farm. Things were not planned that way, for the second son had bright prospects for higher education. However, with the older son thousands of miles away in England, the father dead, the responsibility for the family's well-being settled on the second son. Since Dr Aboyade's return they have carried it jointly, one by the contribution of capital and modern education, and the other by the vigor of his physical labor and love for farming.

The farm is five miles from the village and only a few of its acres are under cultivation. The reason is that it is getting harder and harder to keep young men on the farms in the face of their hopes for a bigger and better life in the city. Rising tides of unemployment in the cities have not stemmed the hopeful exodus from the countryside. In Aboyade's words, those like his brother who really care for farming have to "work like a horse". He perceives prospects for double bitterness in this situation: personal disappointment for those who seek the city in high hope, and long range disillusion for the nation, for Nigeria is now, and for years to come will be, an agricultural country.

Understanding this, it has been Aboyade's goal to improve life where his family is, rather than import them to his university world and put them on a life-long dole at the expense of his own wife and child.

Here in Cambridge there are numerous other Africans travelling the path of 'Tunje Aboyade. Others preceded him by years. For most of them there has been the small village, the Christian Church, the missionary school, the dedicated family and the financial struggle. For all of them, sooner or later, the Cambridge "life", the Oxford "life", the London School of Economics "life" comes to an end and the problem of

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adjustment to family and African culture must be faced. Perhaps some of the young Africans scurrying along Cambridge's Kings Parade with their college scarves and university gowns billowing behind them like some new kind of tribal dress, will find they are "culturally denuded" and developing a "divided self". However, the coexistence in the Aboyade family and in other African families like it, suggests that Mannoni* is right when he argues that a "logic more verbal than real" leads to the supposition that a man who has grown up in two different environments may acquire a dual personality. In actual fact, when the same individual participates in them, two environments are but parts of "one and the same environment", to which people adapt themselves. "European personality" and "African personality" are simply two aspects of the same individual - two parts played by the same actor.

Dr. Ojetunje Aboyade is such an actor. In an Africa still beset with such ancient scourges as malnutrition and grinding poverty, and, in a "new" Africa too highly characterized by some of the worst of Western pretensions rather than the best of Western substance, there is a screaming need for many others like him. He and his family add African blood, flesh and bones to the words of Thomas Wolfe:

"To lose the earth you know, for greater knowing;
to lose the life you have, for greater life; to leave
the friends you loved, for greater loving; to find a
land more kind than home, more large than earth --
Whereon the pillars of this earth are founded, toward
which the conscience of the world is tending -- a
wind is rising, and the rivers flow."

Sincerely yours,


Charles J. Patterson.

Received New York June 8, 1964

*O. MANNONI, Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization.