

New Talent Discovered in Literature

By ABIOSEH NICOL

THE diary of Antera Duke, an Efik chief of the eighteenth century, published by the International African Institute, must be one of the earliest Nigerian writings extant. It gives a clear picture of life in the southern eastern regions with trade booming, guests (both European and African) lavishly entertained and traditional customs, some happily past and long forgotten.

Literary in Portuguese is mentioned by seventeenth-century writers like John Ogilby among the Bini and earlier among the Owerri. There were pamphlets in the nineteenth century by various hands; and there were translations of the Scriptures into Yoruba by Adjai Crowther—the first non-European bishop since the Reformation—which helped to earn him an honorary doctorate in divinity from Oxford. Crowther epitomizes the fact that during the nineteenth and early twentieth century religious bodies were responsible for what education there was in Nigeria. These were Christian in the south and Muslim in the north. The educated Christian Nigerian novelist African was naturally better known because he had contact with Europe through traders, clergy and administrators. This admirable trio of men could hardly be expected to evoke or foster a passionate desire for creative writing in Africans. Their duties, if not their inclination, did not lead them to this direction. On the other hand, the educated Nigerian felt a sense of duty towards his people and not to literature. This expressed itself in books on history, on the political scenery of Nigeria and on the move towards independence. It was necessary also to show that pre-European Nigeria (in most places, this is nineteenth century) had some virtue, not always apparent in the writings of Europeans. These tendencies started by the Nigerian historian, the Rev. S. Johnson in his *History of the Yorubas*, have reached the more concrete stage of scholarship. Okonkwo is away in temporary exile of the present day school of local historians, best represented in the recently published *Eminent Nigerians of the Nineteenth Century* and by highly technical books on legal matters by Nigerian jurists.

Attempts to treat politics at a more academic rather than a demagogic level were made by Dr. Azikiwe, during and after his tenure of the office of Professor



Okonkwo's grandson, Obi. He belongs to the present generation and takes an honours degree in Britain. He falls in love with Clara, an Ibo nurse, on their way back home from England. Unfortunately she is an Osu, that is, she belongs to an outcast family, completely unacceptable in marriage to average Ibo; and even in this case to Obi's parents, who are devout Christians. Completely upset, he slowly becomes demoralized and yields to bribery and corruption. Does this then mean that Achebe feels that all has not fallen apart and that enough of the past remains to arise and destroy the uneasy present? Is this in fact so, or is this novelist following unconsciously the footsteps of disaster, decadence, brevity of life and good intentions with which European writers like Joyce Cary, Robert Hollis and Graham Greene have endowed West Africa in fiction?

No Longer at Ease gives us a picture of sophisticated Lagos life at a higher social level than the more cosmopolitan *People of the City* by Cyprian Ekwensi, another writer of ability. Ekwensi's sweep of the country is wider and he is equally at home with Ibo, Yoruba or Hausa characters. His short stories and novels are both picturesque and picturesque, but he does not attempt to delve deeply into the emotions of his characters. He is content to tell us what they do and not why they do it. His two short novels, *The Drummer Boy*, are set respectively in Northern Nigeria, and in the Western Region.

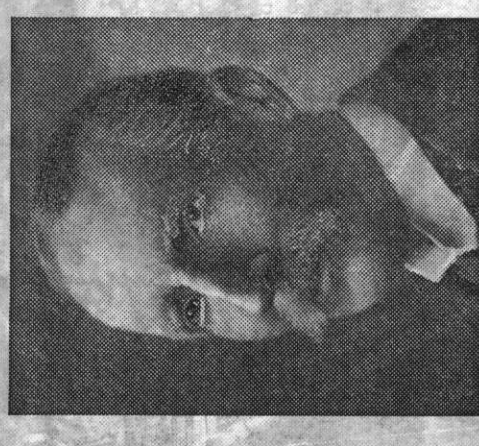
JUNGLE DESCRIPTIONS
Amos Tutuola's novels have gained wide recognition for both himself and his country. His first book, *The Palm Wine Drunkard*, includes many Yoruba folk-tales, but the others, such as *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, *The Brave Archer* and *Huntress, Simbi and The Story of the Dark Jungle*, are more original and have real merit. The pictures of the jungle that Tutuola paints and enlivens with his imagination are unforgettable. Apart from Tutuola's unorthodox exercises in demonology, there is only another Yoruba novelist, Timothy Aluko, whose book *One Man, One Wife* deals with the effect of evangelism on a Yoruba community.

The annual festival of the arts and literary programmes of the Nigerian Broadcasting Services have unearthed talents like Gbemil Mabel Imbikhele, Epelle and Wole Soyinka who has had a play produced in London at the Royal Court Theatre. The field of poetry seems at present to be more promising in the translation of use of folk-lore themes, as exemplified by the Yoruba poets, Babalola and Lasebikan. There are individual poets like Denis Osadebay with a book of collected poems, *Africa Sings*, and Kumble Akinnaso, *Local literary journals* such as *Odu* and *Black Orpheus* maintain a high standard with an international

advisory board, although their appearance tends to be at irregular intervals. The regional *West African Review* carries an occasional poem or short story by Nigerian writers. It is unlikely that there will be a sudden appearance of West African writers of the same dimension as during the past 10 years with West Indian writers. There will be no dearth of descriptive, journalistic or scholarly writing. These are steadily increasing, but with creative writing one comes up against the hurdle of a lack of facility in using the English language. Tutuola, paradoxically, has surmounted this, and in fact made himself unique by doing so. It is a phenomenon that may not be easy to repeat. On the other hand, by the same token vernacular writing will increase, especially among the three great language groups Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo. What writing there will be in English will always be welcome, however, not only in England but also in Nigeria itself, where English remains the only common form of expression among the many indigenous groups.

time when economics were much less the fore than now, all point in a very different direction. The structure of Nigeria today is not in the least like anything he expected or intended; but the difference itself bears testimony to the strength of the foundations he laid.

JOHN FLINT: *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Modern Nigeria*. 340pp. Oxford University Press. 30s. It has taken a great many years for Nigeria to achieve her independence; but it took far longer—and was done with far more reluctance—for Britain to establish political sovereignty over present-day Nigeria. This reluctance clearly brought out in Dr. Flint's otherwise rather disappointing book. Sir George Goldie came to Nigeria as a trader in 1875; at that time little was known of the huge hinterland behind the



Sir George Goldie.

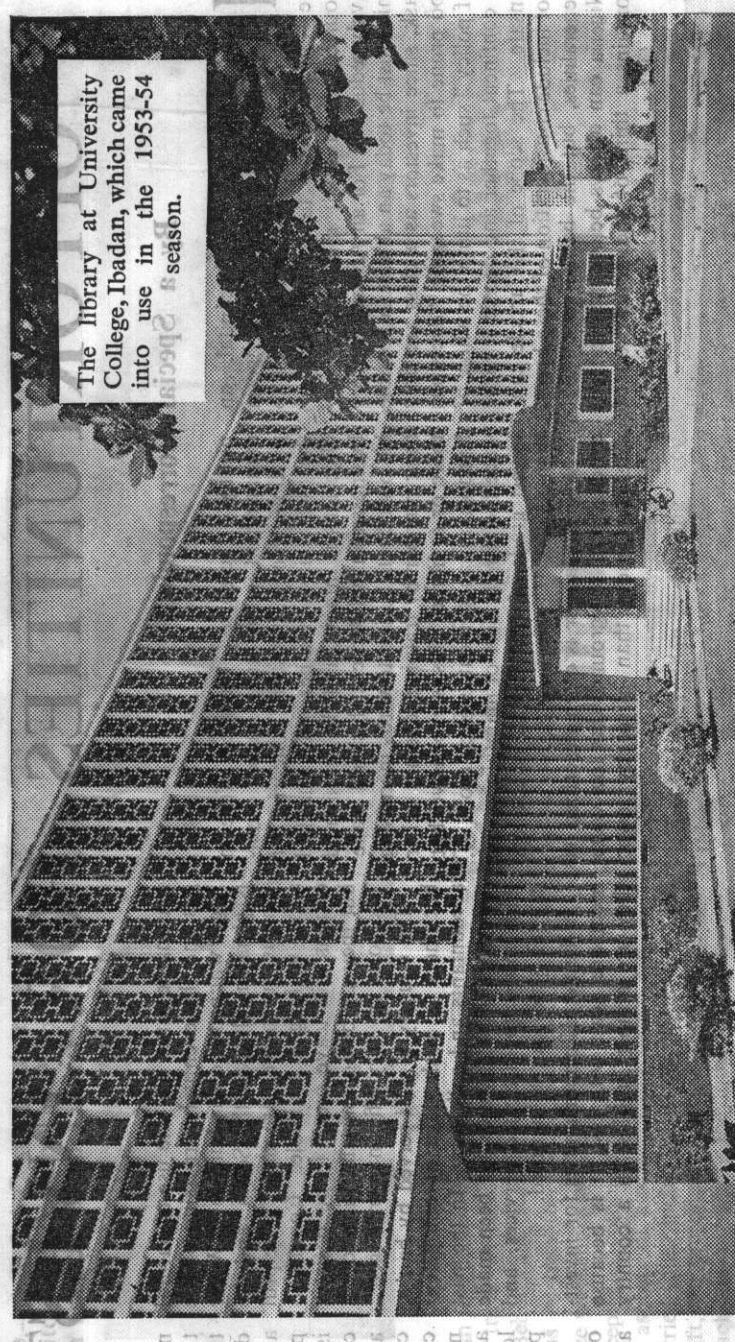
River Niger estuary, and British traders were content to buy their palm produce and shea butter from the African middlemen who brought it to the

high among the political figures in this newly independent nation. His absorbing autobiography tells a proud story of a long struggle against daunting odds. After a humble and happy childhood in the small Ijebu town of Ikenni, which came to an end with his father's death, his story reveals qualities of courage and perseverance and the emergence of a powerful intellect which, fed on a legal training in England, led to a successful practice at the Nigerian Bar and, finally, to high political office.

If there is any jarring note in this book, apart from a natural but well-modulated bias creeping in here and there, it is Awolowo's usually slighting references to administrative officers. He seems to overlook the fact that they and he were dedicated to the same task, though necessarily working from opposite directions. Past clashes have obviously left scars, which time will no doubt heal. They do not substantially detract from Chief Awolowo's stature, which is admirably benefited in his writing and which should benefit Nigeria for a good many years yet.

THOMAS HODGKIN: *Nigerian Perspectives*. 340pp. Oxford University Press. 30s. Mr. Hodgkin has collected together valuable sources of Nigerian history in an anthology that cannot fail to enrich the reader's understanding of this vast and diverse country. The extracts included vary from the records of Arab geographers in the ninth century to those of modern European travellers, from diplomatic correspondence to traditional songs and praise-poems, from the writings of those involved in the making of Nigerian history to the comments of outside observers. Together they provide a collage, ending at the beginning of the twentieth century, that surprises by its "ceased to nurse any doubts about British sincerity on the question of early independence for Nigeria." He urges that Nigeria should regard power politics as "poison" and choose welfare politics, arguing that "in a de-

loping country with slender means well-fare politics and power politics do not mix." Like other Nigerian leaders, he strongly supports Nigerian membership of the Commonwealth and also, rather surprisingly, believes that Nigeria may remain a monarchy. Not less strongly does he come down on the side of the western democracies as against the communist block, but he has little to say for pan-Africanism, which he regards as "visionary."



The library at University College, Ibadan, which came into use in the 1953-54 season.

FOUR BOOKS OF NOTE

ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE
A convinced federalist, it was largely due to Awolowo and his Action Group party that the residuary legislative powers of the Nigerian constitution were vested in the regions instead of at the centre. While he advocates the grouping of Nigeria into various autonomous states or regions, purely on an ethical basis, he acknowledges that this can only be an ultimate objective and that, for financial and other practical reasons, much larger groupings must, for the time at least, constitute the basic components of the Federation. He does, however, criticize the present regional division of the country and argues the case for the creation of three new states—mid-west, COR (Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers), and middle belt.

In his concluding reflections, which display a statesmanlike grasp of affairs far beyond the boundaries of Nigeria, Chief Awolowo attributes the smoothness of Nigeria's transition to independence to the "constructive nationalism and constitutional agitation on the part of Nigerians, and liberalism on the part of the British Government". Since, in 1953, self-government was guaranteed to any region that wanted it, he had no reason to nurse any doubts about British sincerity on the question of early independence for Nigeria. He urges that Nigeria should regard power politics as "poison" and choose welfare politics, arguing that "in a de-