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Welcome, Beauty Walk

The Booma Boys

THE NIGERIAN warriors came home from the Burma war filled by the same impatience with the past that flung their English comrades into Clement Attlee's grim embrace. Among them was a residue of restless souls whose misconduct in Lagos won them the name of "Burma boys." When the late 1940's raced into Nigeria (as they never did to war-sodden, static, "welfare" England), this name became "Booma," and the "boys" really boys: for a new generation of good-bad lads sprung out of the Lagos pavements who were too young to have fought overseas, but old enough to demand that the future happen quickly now. Many of these vivid scamps, innocent as rogues under twenty-three can be, were suddenly gripped by a deep urge to know the world; and as swallows do, they took off from Africa for England with nothing but a compelling instinct as their baggage, stowing away, signing on and deserting, sometimes cajoling minimal fares from rightly reluctant families. Their landfall was in the big English dock cities, and they loped ashore blithely confident that the world loved them and owed them a treasure.

This was the first mass exploration in reverse: the encounter with Englishmen and women not as they appeared in Africa, but as they are. It lasted until the early 1950's by which time the Anglo-Booma boys had prospered, floundered, died or drifted home, and Nigerian emigration had become regulated, with motiveless journeys hindered by both governments. Properly so: for these English Nigerians were good citizens of neither country—only of a precarious realm of their own creation which had nevertheless the beauty that in spite of squalors, it was the only honestly integrated Afro-English society. It was because they had "no reason" for coming to England that these wild ones had the best.

Never again will young Nigerians know this shock of a first confrontation; nor will young Englishmen.

Into the London chapter of this community I happened a decade ago without conscious intention, and I cannot remember how: only that one summer day I knew no Nigerians, and a few months later, scores. From these exiles I heard constantly of Africa long before I went there, so that names of tribes, regions, cities, and even streets grew familiar though unknown. One day in this novitiate, a Yoruba friend brought with him an Ijaw countryman who said (not exactly "asked") he was looking for a place to stay, and how about if he stopped with me a while? This was Hawton, who was brave, intelligent, generous, selfish, and slothful save in emergencies...the ideal temperament for a soldier and a leader, which he would have been if his manhood had come in other times than tired peace. With him as guide and guarantor, I learned the bush paths of Afro-London, and how to address its denizens appropriately on strange occasions. After a year of staying for a while, Hawton "cut out" from London and settled in Manchester, Moss Side: the most homogeneous and least unwelcoming African reservation in the Black Man's Grave. Two years ago now, pneumonia (which is for Africans what malaria was for us) drowned one of his lungs, and the other the next day; and life that he enjoyed so much, and scattered so much of on his friends, abandoned him in thirty-six hours, surviving only in his infant Afro-Mancunian daughter.

Lagos Interiors

LAKE STREET, Lagos, was as Hawton had evoked it in his tales of waterfront scallywaggery—a comfortable slum behind the

Marina, blocked from sight of the lagoon by modern offices. I passed several times before the house wondering how, or whether, to announce myself. I knew Hawton's mother lived there with his elder and younger brothers Easter-day and Eugene, but not if they knew of my existence or would welcome memories. Faltering along Broad Street, my doubts were resolved when with a great shout of "Collins!" Jihmon erupted, a cherished old-timer of the London scene, the first of many I re-met in Lagos who belonged to the old boys' club of Tottenham Court Road before the deadline when the Paramount was closed down. Jihmon, who knew Hawton, made off to Lake Street to explain matters, and next day I found myself facing Hawton's mother: she uncomprehending and remote. It seemed I and my story had scant reality, did not connect up with the reluctantly believed and unproved fact of her son's death in that place "England." I told her what I could, which Jihmon "translated"—that is, re-phrased in Afro-English, for he being a Yoruba and she an Ijaw, no intimate translation of my words was possible.

Later I met the brothers and a seaman cousin, and everything fell into focus—thanks greatly to this seaman relative. All I had told the family about my friend convinced them I knew Hawton well... and yet some token of physical reality was missing. Eyeing this mariner, I suddenly recalled that Hawton had once brought home to Camden Town a relation from a ship who saw I was limping with a dislocated toe, asked leave to look at it, and had immediately (and without permission) seized it and set it straight: an incident I could scarcely have invented and he fail to remember. It was indeed the same man: incredulity vanished, and this cousin became the essential witness who had seen Hawton and me in London when he was still alive. Afterwards, by their unspoken wish, I had separate sessions with each brother. Easter-day is a good man carrying a sorrow: which and why? He had gone into the police force where Hawton's father had been a prominent and successful figure, had come unstuck, and the love-affair with a career—perilous for a young man—had turned sour on him. My guess is that Easter was born a trusting man, and that this instinct had been shocked and wounded... so that though he exudes confidence and strength, it is Samson's when his locks were shorn. He was deeply and patiently concerned about all the circumstances of Hawton's death—and obses-

sively so about his daughter. I was soon manoeuvred into the role of emissary to the Lancastrian mother, to ask her if the child could be surrendered and adopted by its African relations. I asked Easter-day had he thought if the girl herself would like to be in Africa? An infant Mancunian suckled on telly, cold rain, and rock-salmon with soggy chips? And I warned him not to expect her to be grateful, or to be astonished if she hankered for England later on... Easter-day bowed his head to all this European sagacity, and asked me to write him when the child could come.

Eugene, the junior brother, is a Nigerian angry young man (non-literary): startlingly like Hawton physically, but with more practical energy and less glamour. Independence delights him, as it does everyone in the Federation; but the emerging political-social set-up makes no appeal. Again and again I heard this from the young: good work is scarce, all wages are too low: the drop in status from the few rich to the poor millions is catastrophic; and they are looking beyond the national revolution to the economic, and despise the new Nigerian bourgeoisie. It is sad so late in the day—and after it has fulfilled its historic task so valiantly and done so much for one and all—to have to write yet again with disparagement about this persecuted class; but I must record that the Lagos bourgeoisie is quite sensationally unattractive. To begin with, because aggressively vulgar ostentation coupled with complacent ignorance of everything except export and import prices, is so uncharacteristically African: for though Africa has known brilliant traders always, commercial suburbanites are a horrid novelty. Worse still is that though technically a "bourgeoisie" in the Marxist sense, this Lagos lot is culturally petty-bourgeois in the extreme: their social tone corresponding conveniently and disastrously to that of the outgoing managerial "expatriates" (polite local term of hostility) whom they imitate in many ways while striving to eject these helpful aliens more rapidly ("Nigerianisation"). Of new-rich clubs in the federal capital, I append this last malicious vignette: of the sight of dozens of stout young men robed in shapeless curtain material, thickly bespectacled in little bonnets set at jaunty angles on fat heads, shouting at servants and laughing loud and heartlessly before rolling off fast and noisily in tank-like cars: the international hall-mark of the philistine parvenu in every rich society, irrespective of its political belief. (Car owners of the world, unite:

you have nothing to lose but your manners and someone else's life.) In spare, tense contrast was Eugene, his voice kind and furious, plagued visibly by a frustrated idealism and a dangerous generosity. What independent Nigeria offers to the youth it has excited, is bureaucratic posts which many will delight in; but Eugene and his sort peer over the heads massed in celebration, scanning Africa for a vision.

The night I left Lagos, he took me late over to the mainland to see Rose, Hawton's beloved sister he spoke of so often as if of a guardian angel. We reached the house after midnight, and Rose and her husband and two children were already sleeping. After a minute or two of knocking and of parleying with Eugene, the door was thrown open and there they all were: children tucked tidily away, wife and husband dressed and ready for conversation, all in one room: a deft illustration of three African graces—the faculty for instant, unconditional hospitality; the effortless cohesion of the family unit, the children always in evidence but never in the way; and the sublime ability to receive you wherever they are, simply, without any “explanation” or apology. Rose as a young matron is superb: as a girl she must have been a startling beauty. She is also, as not so many African women are, engaging in her manner; for most of her sisters lean heavily on the stark fact of being female to amaze the male. (It is not surprising to find policewomen rampant in the largely non-Muslim south; bossiness from a static position of strength coming naturally.) Rose, once initial courtesies were cleared away, was concerned only, as her brothers were, with Hawton's child: she brushed aside politely any hint of legal obstacles, and told me to get things moving, please. I am struck by the paradox of this family's instinct to retrieve part of their flesh, and of their neglecting, for two years until my arrival, any practical measures to ensure this.

Boy Born to Riches

THE Yoruba are the chief tribe of the Western Region, numbering millions, and they are incontestably one of those peoples born exceptionally gifted, like the Jews or Greeks. Their culture is as ancient as our own (I speak here of the English), their arts and social organisation complex and sophisticated, and their society traditionally urban: most of the big towns in Nigeria are theirs, and Ibadan, their present (though not historic) capital, is the third

city of the continent. I think that to understand their culture one must realise that the Yoruba have known “primitive,” “advanced,” and “decadent” periods long before Europeans made any contact with them. This fact reveals itself, in their company, by a characteristic blend of energy and nonchalance, of avid curiosity and languid self-assurance, of a passion for novelty coupled with an attitude of “we've seen it all before.” Many of the Nigerians I knew in London had been Yoruba: and among them Afolabi of the Ambrose Campbell band. Ambrose (“Bless you, my brother”), a man of generous temperament and of great authority among English as well as African musicians, led for many years the best Yoruba group in London, of which Afolabi was a drummer. The fame of these exiled artists travelled back to their native land through their recordings, and a few years ago they went home to perform on tour; but alas, in their country these prophets had little honour, and they came back disconsolate amid the alien London maize, leaving Afolabi behind in Ibadan.

He was out when I called, but burst in on my siesta at the Paradise Hotel with a cry from outside the door of, “This rascal! I know he has come here to rob us;” and when he came in, “Lord have mercy! You make me twenty years younger. Look! I have put on my European dress so as not to frighten you.” We filled in the gaps of several years, and I learned that Afolabi, though he does arrangements for younger musicians and sometimes sings on the radio or television, is no longer a full-time professional; but works in the Lottery department (“Loitering department”) of the Treasury. How had this happened—to one who had sacrificed so much, as African musicians must in London where there is little understanding of their art? Afolabi told me he had stayed in Africa because “they spoke to me of my old mother, whom I would never see again if I went back to England, but look! I have grown older and she is the same as ever!” I sensed a deeper reason—a pang of disappointment at the band's reception; and as I walked round Ibadan with Afolabi in the next days and nights, I felt the sorrow of his position. He is an artist in a country where artists now have no status: have lost the esteem of the old tribal society, and have not yet won respect (and decent incomes) in the new one: no longer bards, and not yet stars, they are simply entertainers underpaid by upstart café owners. But at this point one may pause to blush

and ask—what have we Britons done for them? Nigeria is outstandingly rich in dancers and musicians, especially the majestic drummers whose subtlety and dynamism make Latin-American and even jazz performances seem monotonous and pallid. (I believe their technical “secret” is that they can create melody at will, even as they make fantastic rhythm.) Except for incidental performances by visiting Nigerian troops at English military “tattoos” (how truly a British way of presenting “colonial” arts!), we have seen and heard nothing of these glories in the years when we held power in Nigeria. This is disgraceful: the more so when one remembers the immense success in Europe and America of the African artists brought over from (former) French Guinea by the initiative of a local impresario (who has since become a minister in the independent government). However, recalling that no major exhibition of Indian art took place in England until after independence, I predict a growing vogue for Nigerian dancers and musicians shortly after 1st October, 1960.

“Yes, indeed,” said Afolabi, “they did not give me the correct name—‘born to riches’—at my christening. Never mind—this is the City Hall: you wish to write your name on the roof?” We entered, escorted by a tropical copper, passed by a meeting of a sub-committee in session on the concert stage (whose members paused in their deliberations to exchange cordial greetings with Afolabi), and climbed up to the heights where the copper provided helpful chalks for our roof-top vandalism. The view was superb: Ibadan, like Rome and Kampala, is a hill city whose generous dimensions are due to its ancient urban status; and from any of its hill-tops, splendid panoramas of card-house corrugated iron roofs rise and fall in groups of Chinese elegance. At night, from these summits, the town glitters like a nest of fireflies from electric flares and street vendors’ oil lamps, car lights always at full blaze and, indeed, from fireflies in person. “Lord have mercy,” cried Afolabi, as we returned from a late night visit to a Yoruba combo of drummer-singers, entirely traditional (yet as entirely contemporary) save for the accepted anachronism of the leader’s electric guitar. (I beg some qualified person to explain why this instrument, in the past two decades, has become the queen-siren of pop music everywhere.) “Lord have—take care, please, of that bullshit there!” He had seized my arm as I had almost trod, at the dark inter-

section of two highways, on a bowl of charms set out by someone to do something to somebody. The mystic silence of this encounter was shattered, round the next bend, by the mystic din of a band of hooded, gesticulating Engungun men accompanied by ambulating drummers and a throng of followers: “masqueraders” they are frankly called these days, but were once apparently authentic spirits, and still may be such to some. Outside the hotel Afolabi told me, “Well, I shall not walk home through all this magic,” and he borrowed some small change for a part-share in a taxi.

Scholar, Priestess, and a Holy Man

TEN years ago Ulli Beier, a Berliner who completed his education in London, joined the University College of Ibadan as lecturer on phonetics, and then in the new department of extra-mural studies. Asked to unfold to Africans the splendours of European literature, he soon found that, lacking points of reference and comparison with anything of their own, his words had little meaning to his students: whereat, with unacademic brain and imagination, he set about searching in the traditional arts of the Yoruba people to see if he could find any helpful analogies; and by a study of their songs and oral literature, he found so incomparable a richness that very soon (as all—that is, few—good teachers do) he was learning from his pupils. He has since become joint founder and editor of *Black Orpheus*, the only literary-artistic revue yet to come out of Nigeria, and which embraces all African (and indeed Caribbean and U.S. Negro) arts in general; and also of *Odu*, a journal specifically of Yoruba studies. The colonial, and then Western Regional governments, which provided publishing facilities without perhaps quite realising yet what they were publishing, passed, in their reactions to these periodicals, through the phases of indifference, alarm, and then, as their world-wide reputations became apparent, an attitude of possessive pride.

Ulli Beier and his wife Susanne Wenger entertained me for a day in Oshogbo, where they live in a “Brazilian” house of fine proportions—so-called because this neo-baroque style was originally brought back to Africa from Latin-America by descendants of those sent there as slaves. I had ventured to “date” this house at first sight of it as late 19th century, and was disconcerted to learn it was in fact mid-20th: so exactly have the Yoruba craftsmen conserved

a rustic Latin elegance of building. I had met Susanne Wenger for an instant when she had shown in London the cloths she has designed and made in Oshogbo, using re-discovered techniques of dyeing and of printing that have been largely ousted by those of imported fabrics; and much more strangely, depicting in them emblematic scenes which reveal her deep knowledge of Yoruba pre-Muslim and pre-Christian religions. For though this may seem incredible, Susanne Wenger is not "merely" a remarkable artist who has penetrated so far as any European probably can into some of the recesses of the Yoruba soul, but she is even accepted, I was told, by such Yoruba as still adhere to them, to be a priestess of their antique cults. She is a familiar of their holy men, and is admitted to participate in the mysteries of their most sacred surviving shrines.

I am sorry to record that my sojourn in Oshogbo consisted almost entirely in disputations with my hosts. The difficulty, of course, is that to assess the entire value of Suzanne Wenger's work—and even that of the less hermetic activity of Ulli Beier—one would need to know as much of Yoruba culture as they do. It is also apparent that to have studied, lived with, and brought honour to ancient alien arts and cults—ignored by Europeans, and rejected or forgotten by so many of the modern Yoruba themselves—is a rare and brilliant feat. However: my own obsession (since one is oneself) happens to be to try, in so far as a writer can at all hope to do so, to stick to the lurching European ship and help it by self-awareness to find courses that may keep it off the reefs among fresh trade winds and new currents; and not to wave it a censorious farewell from the refuge of any enchanted isle. Susanne Wenger, if I understood her, thinks our continent is doomed, and that such real life as may survive can best be re-found in old religious wisdoms. Ulli Beier's position, I believe, is somewhat intermediary, since his encouragement of modern African arts is as active as are his investigations of the old ones. What at all events seems to me indisputable is that the instinct both he and his wife share to make us learn from Africa, and for heaven's sake stop "teaching" it, is wholly right: for the almost total absence of curiosity about, and of respect for, African cultures (I mean as something immediately valuable, and not merely as supposedly dead material for curious examination) is the greatest, and most obstinate European fault; and the vulgar contempt for its

social, but non-mechanical, cultural achievements is a shallow betrayal of what, in European culture itself, has worth far above our practical schoolboy skill in gadgetry.

In the afternoon, Ulli Beier drove me to Ede nearby, where Susanne Wenger has decorated two Yoruba shrines with mural paintings. Of these I must say that while they seemed to me splendid both as works of art and in the tact with which the murals were married to the exterior shrine walls (of their religious iconography I cannot, of course, speak at all), they also seemed to me to make these shrines less shrines: to be, by their foreign exoticism, yet one more indication of the decay of this old faith. While these subversive thoughts were passing through my brain at Ede, the priest himself suddenly appeared: "appeared" is the word; for at one moment he was not there and, at the next, he was: an old man of "oriental" more than African physique, stepping towards us with a sort of dainty, enamelled simplicity, totally dignified, and enfolded in a sly, cordial, distant courtesy. (Anything less like what might crudely be called a "witch-doctor" it would be impossible to imagine.) There were bows, murmurings, and graceful genuflections; and from the priest emanated what I can only call a most apparent tenderness. He disappeared into his cavernous house, and returned bearing a gift of kola nuts. I immensely admired the dexterity with which Ulli Beier contrived (with only two hands) to take the proffered bowl, remove the nuts without dropping any, hold them securely, and yet then grasp, as is the custom, both the priest's hands in a gesture of gratitude and farewell. (And I also could not but wonder how the precursors of this holy man might possibly have greeted us in the days when their status could inspire in strangers other emotions besides respectful pity.)

To give myself a last word on all this: the day before my visit to Oshogbo, I had been present, in Ibadan, at the opening of an exhibition which Ulli Beier had organised of photographs and of carvings from adjacent Yoruba shrines. This was inaugurated by the Timi of Ede (for a highly-placed chief, a highbrow, who contributes learned studies to *Black Orpheus*) amid a gathering of Yoruba and European personalities and television cameras. As an exhibition it was wholly wonderful: the photographs, in particular, of priests, chiefs, children, and of domestic and ritual architecture, taken by Ulli Beier himself, were a revelation; and yet....

In Europe, we have come to accept that exhibitions and museums of "primitive" cultures rise from the very ruins of these old arts, and almost feed on the sad fact of their decay. Was this not happening here in Ibadan in an even more cruelly poignant manner? Where not far from this British Council building was still to be found the exhibition's just surviving raw material—the arts and people and the holy sites themselves?

High Drama in Old Calabar

I FLEW far east to Calabar partly because of its name, and partly because Mrs. Elspeth Huxley told me to. In the salt water days before land and air transport, it was a chief port of the country; but now, being landlocked between the Cross river and the mountains of the Cameroons, it is in woeful decline. To the casual visitor it has the aspect of a township in the Somerset Maugham country: wide, turgid, river overhung by authentic "jungle," battered steam ferries amid photogenic clusters of Efik trading boats, "torrential" rains, and a decayed architecture of immense tumble-down balconied and shuttered wooden palaces. Film companies should abandon Zanzibar immediately, and cross the Continent: they would find their sets and supers waiting for them.

I was driven from the airfield to a hotel which I must call (it will soon be apparent why) the Star of Ind. This seemed ex-sumptuous and vaguely derelict; and oddly in the charge only of two grave Efik youths, one of them, he told me, called U C Ukpog: no owner, no manager and, still more bizarre, no manageress. Sprawled about in the most comfortable easy-chairs, there were seven or eight decorative young Africans, relaxed but somehow seeming interlopers; and no other guest whatever. "Thank God you have come," U C Ukpog said fervently and mysteriously as he demonstrated the mosquito net.

I walked into the old town which totters steeply downhill to the river. From a passing truck a voice shouted, "White man die here!" and I caught sight of the gesture of a finger drawn expressively across a throat. Disturbed, I entered the rococo Zorro Side Bar: three-quarters given over to palm-wine drinkers, with a little sector reserved for beer lovers, strangely enmeshed in wire net. As I cautiously ordered something, one of the picturesque youths from the hotel appeared. I was full of questions, and

he readily sat down to solve these perplexities for me. The wire-netting was to protect the beer customers if the palm-wine addicts hurled any bottles. Did they do so often? No, but there were "many ruffians" in the town. And he and his friends at the hotel? They were musicians of the Rogers Jumbo and his Top Bop orchestra (I am not inventing any of this except for the hotel's name), engaged to play at the weekly dance next evening. He himself was Charlie "Parker" (rather confusingly, since he played drums) Jegbefume, his father had been a chief, he had 114 half-brothers (I thought he was kidding me, but I checked later and this is not impossible), and he had abandoned his studies in agricultural science to follow the call of jazz. The Rogers Jumbo group were wandering minstrels from various tribes and regions, who worked along the coast (in "France"—i.e., the Cameroons and Dahomey—as well as in Nigeria) wherever they could find engagements. And things at the hotel, I asked? Ah! Here was the scenario. The owner, an old Indian (rare in Calabar, where most Asians are Syrians), was lying ill and abandoned... ("Ill of what?" "Ah...") at the Star of Ind, what time his wife, a local Efik beauty, had made off to "another house he has built for her" (it would seem imprudently) to join her stalwart Efik lover, who has told one and all that he is now owner of the hotel! From his sick-bed, the Indian has riposted by warning the police his rival must be kept off the premises at all costs. And at the dance tomorrow night, Charlie "Parker" foretells, the lover will appear in glory with the erring mistress.

Next night he indeed did: a sullen, peremptory Don Juan, who opened the ball with the handsome and equally commanding wife. The Jumbo band played energetically, terrific in the rhythm section and in its vocalists, highly defective in the melodic brass—who played in tune all right, but in what seemed to me different tunes... but maybe my hearing was defective, because an untrained ear can mistake deliberate "discordancies." Visually, at all events, they were delightful: Rogers Jumbo himself with an Ellingtonian princely boulder's dominance of his excited public, the singers casual and intent, the drummers self-hypnotised, and pint-sized David "Chico" Nwagu out in front of the band, neatly shaking his maraccas and tracing a deft pattern of infectious footsteps. The dancing, as African dancing is unfailingly, was a joy to see: the couples moving face to face not touching

(yet so much seeming to), then each hiving off to perform little individual solo sequences, connected nevertheless with the counterpoint of the partner's equivalent embroideries: subtle and sensual without a blush—indeed sex, for Africans, after dancing, must be an anti-climax. I was forced by fatigue to leave reluctantly in the small hours, and found on my pillow a note (the first of several) from U C Ukpong. It was touching and futile—the story of his young life and hard times, and could I find him a job or, alternatively, give him a substantial sum to make his fortune with? It is impossible for a European to “resent” or to feel condescending about such requests: for to U C Ukpong I was a multi-millionaire, and any European is known to be a dispenser of jobs and perquisites. I know no people like the Africans who have the gift of asking the most outrageous favours entirely without abasement, or apparent resentment if these are not forthcoming. (As Kenny Graham, who knows them as a jazz leader far better than I do, once so exactly said to me, “They ask you for anything, but they never give you a hard-luck story.”) Saddened and frustrated by the thought of U C Ukpong's hopes, I retired, but not to rest. For at first I was woken by a party of boozy fellow-countrymen (Scots, need I say) who shouted through the door that they had driven in from a distant oiling station to the dance, and wanted to drink my health; I declined, and they tried to climb in through the ventilators. The next disturbance was a really colossal row outside the hotel, as if of an uprising. I disentangled myself from the mosquito net and staggered anxiously to the windows, whence a seething mess of cars, bicycles, quarrelling customers and onlookers could be seen deployed. The cause of this (I learned next morning) was that towards 2 a.m. the Top Bop combo, having played for six hours non-stop, called for the habitual refreshments from the management. The owner's wife (or the usurping owner?) sent them four half-bottles of Krola (soft drink) for eight musicians. Rogers Jumbo, in the finest tradition of the recalcitrant jazz artist, had spurned this meagre offering, requesting something adequate, or else. When no more was forthcoming, the band had downed instruments, at which the frustrated dancers demanded money back and, on refusal of this, had streamed angrily into the outer air amid the crash of breaking glass. But as those who have witnessed African public rows will know, there is usually a strong instinct to fight with verbal

weapons, and with a kind of non-lethal lurching, scrumming, and wild gesticulation, before any fatal issue is unfortunately joined. To look at, the scene seemed perilous; but no blood was shed, and when the customers' rights and energies were vindicated and appeased, the din suddenly subsided and their rage evaporated in the night.

I spent the next day with the musicians, who were in some doubt whether a state of strike or of lock-out existed at the hotel, since the wife had arrived in the morning (without her lover) and had silently impounded all the instruments (which belonged to the hotel), leaving the critical matter of payment in suspense until next day. Charlie “Parker” had now adopted me as “his” European: to whom, when they do this, Africans are solicitously protective, which one may attribute to interest or affection, as one pleases. We visited together the City Bar to see a performance by The Austin King Joe of Fedral, a magician colleague of his; but though arriving at the advertised time, and lingering for an hour after it, we saw no more than preliminaries by a boys' band of singers, all with little drums like tambourines. Charlie “Parker”—I could see it coming—dreamed of visiting England: a Mecca I should have thought shop-soiled by now, but it would seem not to be so yet: for “London-trained” is advertised as a recommendation for almost anything; and your own London address, so often earnestly requested, seems to be cherished like a talisman. As he laid bare his hopes, and told me of the frustrations of an African jazz troubadour, his voice was soft, wily, insinuating, and candid. He had about his whole person that particular grace and *chic* which is a gift to so many Africans from their gods—of movement, of gesture, and of dress (even when this is minimal; and what other people could ride their bicycles in the rain with mackintoshes intelligently worn back to front, or bear an umbrella hooked practically over one shoulder, or twine a piece of cloth round their middles and seem neat—and dressed!—without looking absurd—and, in fact, looking exactly right?); and elegant most of all by a quite indefinable attitude in human intercourse that one can only call, for want of an apter word, “distinguished.” His favourite phrases were “Exactly!” (agreement of spirit beyond reason), “It matters not” (to brush any care in the world aside), and “At all” (meaning something like, “Think nothing of it”). He introduced his odd European friend easily into African interiors

(and from his point of view, I reflected, how strange my own arrival in the midst of this little crisis must have seemed!), and though gentle to a degree, cracked down in sudden fury when, for instance, an inquisitive immigration official (so he said he was) accosted us in the street importunately. At the airport there was one of those farewells to which I had become accustomed—for over the joy of an African greeting there soon hangs a sorrow at the thought of your departure: which, if it is not authentic, seems so much so that there is no difference.

A People and its Poet

OF THE Eastern Region, the capital is Enugu: not an old city like Ibadan since the Ibo, chief tribe of the east, were a village people, and the town was at first a railhead for the nearby mines. But the setting, backing on mountains, is attractive, and for a new city it could not have found a better time to build itself. During the last decade, the “modern” style—which seems custom-built for Africa—and the notion of generous town layout, have become a happy commonplace; and Enugu has profited by both.

Before I came there, I knew little of the Ibo and was told that they are, so to speak, the Lowland Scots of Nigeria—go-getters lacking graces, with a passion for commerce and for education. If this is as true as any racial cliché, one must surely allow that the Ibo virtues are vital ones for modern Africa: indeed, one may even have the impression that this people has been waiting for the late 20th century fully to deploy their inborn gifts. It is of course delightful to be received, as a visitor, by practised charmers; but no less so to find men who in practical affairs are brisk and accurate. Their hunger for knowledge is most evidently worthy, and one is much abashed to find one’s hotel “boy” studying shorthand or arithmetic when one summons him to wash some socks. (Bookshops in Enugu—as indeed throughout both the southern Regions—are as plentiful as sweetshops in England; and none I entered had nothing at all worth reading.) As for the love-affair with money, this has its vexatious aspects, certainly; since it would seem to be the custom to confront the luckless European with a demand not for two or three times what the thing or service may be worth (which would be fair enough), but (I do not exaggerate) for up to twelve times or more. This necessitates not

Port Said haggling exactly, but perfecting a tactical technique whereby one manœuvres, if one can, one’s rapacious adversary from a position of strength (in which Africans are not always, I think, at their best) into one somehow vulnerable. (How often, during such exercises, I recalled the explorers’ tales of endless arguments over lengths of copper wire.) I do not know whether, in international as in petty local trade, it is African practice to propose to foreigners a starting price 1,200 per cent above what may ultimately be expected: if made to Europeans, such demands might be regarded as a partial restitution of percentages no less extortionate extracted by white men in the past; but if the custom should be general, I imagine it must cause to any prospective foreign buyers whose pasts are innocent, a good deal of bemused surprise. In small transactions, at any rate, the notion that if you offer a fair price you win and hold a customer, does not seem to have caught on at all. I would add to this that, in so far as I could see at second-hand, though not so wildly exacting to one another, Africans, who are outstandingly humane and lavish in their human contacts, can also, in financial contexts, be ruthless and blatant exploiters of their fellows. I must also make haste to add that these tetchy generalisations by no means apply exclusively to the Ibo people.

Unburdened of this characteristic European (and tourist’s) grouse, I turn sharp about to record that my first visit in Enugu was to an Ibo whom I admire extremely, and this is Chinua Achebe, whose books *Things Fall Apart* may be called, with no excessive praise at all, a classic; and I implore any reader who may not yet have the good fortune to know of it, most instantly to procure a copy (Heinemann, 1958). *Things Fall Apart* is the story of Okonkwo, a tragic village hero at the end of the last century, whose life is defeated by the weaknesses of his strength, and whose downfall is the symbol of the disruption of Ibo life when we Europeans first brought to it our blessings and our curses. To evoke tribal existence so that it seems at once life-loving and wanton, and to describe the white incursion without malice though with fitting irony, is an amazing feat for so young an author; all the more so when one reflects, almost with a start of disbelief, that the measured lyric prose is that of a writer for whom English is not the mother tongue.

In this journal some time ago (ENCOUNTER, October, 1959), Mr. Dan Jacobson, whose

opinions I respect as greatly as I do his novels, suggested that writing by Africans in English is unlikely to be fruitful. I can hardly believe this, for the chief reason that, while so many African tongues themselves are (I am told) entirely adequate vehicles for a writer, there also now seems to me to exist an "African English" just as there does, for instance, an American or a Caribbean: each of these new English languages having been re-fashioned out of the old primal one by a local genius, and being in no sense whatever "bad" or "broken" tongues. African English is the fruit both, I imagine, of happy transpositions from indigenous languages, and even more, of a dexterous joy in verbal wit that no ear can possibly mistake: the old English tongue is taken, turned inside-out by lively and inventive brains, and magically reformed: a process which our language, so flexible and hoveringly imprecise, most readily abets in the mouth of anyone who really loves to use it. I do not, of course, speak of African political-journalistic English, which is almost as dreadful as our own, nor of African "Babuisms," nor even of the kind of oddity that so many admire (often with inner patronage) in the work of a "natural" like Amos Tutuola; but of what is by now an entirely autonomous linguistic re-creation. One may also observe the sensational flowering of West African prose and poetry written in French, and perhaps be allowed to deduce that if so much has not yet been written so well in English, this may be due to the very different kinds of encouragement that French and English educators and "authorities" have given, in their former African territories, to any literary endeavour. One will also see that in fact, whereas even five years ago very little had been published by English-speaking Africans, in the last few years (thanks, among other causes, to the germinal presence of Ulli Beier) a great deal by playwrights, novelists, and poets very suddenly has: of which *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most striking instances. No one who has frequented Africans can have failed to notice their delight in verbal play, or to admire their Grecian skill at its performance. It is quite possible, among them—and even on quite critical occasions—to score a resounding victory by apt speech alone (one reason for the civility of African disputes already noticed). It is true that this talent has sometimes the defect that an artful sophist can mask acceptably the superficiality of his ideas by deft verbal gambits; and one must also record an almost

Khrushchevian aptitude to settle any serious intellectual argument by using the sledge-hammer of some hoary proverb. Nevertheless, the true gift is there; and with no disrespect to any creation there may be in the African tongues themselves, I pray that writers in English—since they have so much to tell us of which we know less than nothing—may grow in strength and prosper: so that Orpheus be black, and not only called so by sympathetic Europeans; also revealing Africa to herself in ways only a writer can: for it is sad for a gifted nation to admire none but politicians and athletes, the only public heroes at the moment.

Rascal City by the Niger

THIS was how Toby, "boy" (as a matter of fact, in this case he was one) at the hotel in Enugu, described the celebrated market town of Onitsha, when I told him I was going to drive there. Though large tracts of the old open-air market still survive, its centre is now a vast Italianate emporium packed sky-high with bewildering cascades of goods, mostly consumer and imported. Stumbling through avalanches of textiles and perfumery, beset by hordes of insistent siren salesmen, I suddenly came out on the Niger: a wonderful moment, for it looks so exactly what it is, one of the great rivers of the world; and while many lose their hearts to seas and mountains, I know no excitement like the first meeting with an illustrious river. A terrace of huge steps, which the waters mount and cover at the ending of the rains, falls in a wide arc down to the fast, wide, yellow-ochred stream, with craft and busy watermen abounding on it. In Onitsha, more than anywhere as yet, I was made conscious of how cosmopolitan Nigeria is, since traders from all its tribes of thirty-six million peoples make their way there. The market seethes; and one senses its age even as one is struck by its modernity: in one of the new roofed stalls a galaxy of gleaming tools, in a plot outside, a lad with an alarming glare selling charms in his little area of magic. From a bookseller's mat I bought tales enthusiastically misprinted by local moralists intoxicated (as our own were after Caxton's day) by access to a press; and among them, *The World is Hard*, *Drunkards Believe Bar as Heaven* (both by S O Olisah), and *Young Harlots a Shame to a Country* by Miss Shalma (whom I strongly

suspect to be a man). Quotes (all from *The World is Hard*):

Wife argued before husband, "I shall not part with you unless you renew my body as it was before."

He became poor because he could not manage his property. Secondly, he was confused by the attractive skin of his wife.

The wife said, "I don't care, you caused my breasts, which pointed as nails, to collapse."

But in E Uba's novelette, *The Broken Heart*, is much Babu:

After the refreshments had been taken, we repaired into his inner enclosure amidst series of kisses and compromising mutual irregular motions of the flesh and displays. It was all satisfaction.

On the journey back to Enugu, Andrew, the piratical driver in a Homburg, alarmed me by turning 180° to admire attentively any succulent young wayfarer (and aroused grudging admiration by the enterprise with which he turned the car I had hired into a district bus for such suppliants as could meet his price). The constant procession along the road verges in Africa is an everlasting pleasure; best enjoyed, of course, on foot, when one can sense more intimately a vivid instance among so many of that peculiar plasticity of African movement. The women with babes at their backs and ant-loads on their heads (but nothing antlike in their motions), the men in robes, shorts, or next to nothing, the trick-cyclists with gowns billowing like butterflies, the republic of children (often carrying each other), and the auxiliary goats and laden donkeys, all weave and glide among themselves with the ease of swifts in flight, making patterns alternating endlessly as the birds do. The white man is greeted with "Good morning" (irrespective of the hour of day) or, most attractively, "Wel-come!" (If he stumbles, there are—even more pleasurably—immediate cries of "Sorry!" from persons in no way responsible for his mishap.) The children—to whom it would seem we are at once figures of fun as well as of possible menace—cry out shrill choruses of "white man" or "European" in whatever is their language; and heal any vexation this might cause by waves or bold sallies to extend a confident or cautious hand. Of African children, it is hard to write with moderation: their charm is overwhelming, since they combine tremendous self-assurance and an air of "You may be bigger, but look! I am I!" with almost histrionic deference when this is felt to be appropriate. Europeans are apt

to attribute such African infant—and adult—graces to a gift of nature: well they may be, but so much hints at immense care in upbringing, mastered through centuries, and made of a sage blending of intemperate love and severe discipline. For example: Ulli Beier has told me that though African parents are most strict, no child must ever be punished privately; but hauled into the open where a throng of witnesses gathers instantly to whom the enraged parent must justify the punishment to come. An intercessor will appoint herself counsel for the defence, and the mother's wrath must be publicly agreed to be well-founded before she strikes the child in front of this communal jury; and if there is no such general agreement, it is not unknown for a parent deemed unjust to be forced to apologise to the child: a contrast, to say the least, with our own canings by appointment behind closed doors, and quite evidently a procedure of great psychological and social wisdom. Where polygamy exists (I quote Ulli Beier once more), a young mother will not approach her husband again until the child is weaned, so that all her emotive, and even erotic love is centred on the infant: young Oedipus without a rival—or a complex. While this custom is not perhaps transferable to Europe, undoubtedly a great many ancient skills of African upbringing most profitably would be; and I long for the day when among the fatuous piles of books about Africa that explain nothing but their writers' pre- or misconceptions, there will appear just one well-informed study of African education in the home; with a companion volume to explain to us how Africans contrive to respect their old men and women and find them honourable tasks, without having, as we not occasionally do, to banish them into single rooms and public "homes."

Back at Enugu, I was changing for supper when through the window came strains absolutely unmistakable: those of Victor Silvester and his saccharine strict-tempo dance music. When listening, in England, with fascinated horror to his radio programmes, I had always found it hard to believe that the endless fund of letters from his fans in Africa, quoted and mispronounced so confidently between one-steps and cha-cha-cha, could ever really have been penned by so many distant Nigerian lovers of the English ballroom style. Throwing open my windows, I could doubt no longer. For there, on the concrete open-air dance floor of the hotel, an exclusively male class of Silvester addicts was

in session: some sailing round in pairs, some moving with solo preoccupation holding an instruction sheet, others being admonished and encouraged by a plump instructor. They performed these ghastly gyrations, I must say, very prettily indeed; and as for their invisible mentor, I must allow his was the only English music of any kind I heard extensively in Africa. And yet I shuddered: will the day come, I wondered, when Africans in white tie and tails, and with numerical placards plastered on their backs, will twirl dark belles in leg-revealing tulle and flounces around huge palais, as may be seen in English temples of the Silvesterian art—occasions which resemble a vast terpsichorian congress of head-waiters and female hairdressers? Will this be the new English cultural penetration to carry on, in even more insidious form, the ground-work of the missionaries and of the British Council? I fear so; for Toby, who now appeared, said admiringly, "Just like we saw it in the film! And to think that my grandmother danced like this!" Whereat the little monster sketched a grotesque parody of an African dance (which is, with Indian, the finest in the world): I had to remember his long hours bent over his shorthand manuals to forgive him.

Soon Gabriel Okara arrived, the Ijaw poet, and at dinner I asked him much about the strange delta country that he and Hawton come from, where the great Niger splits and spills into a thousand creeks and estuaries as it soaks itself finally into the sea: a Jeremy Fisher land of dreamy birth-streams that I long to visit—and indeed, the Ijaw are believed to be the oldest inhabitants of Nigeria, driven among their islets and lagoons when peoples like the Yoruba and Ibo came down from the east and north. Britons in Africa love to "pick" tribes, as they might football teams, and constitute themselves their supporters; and if I am to do this too, I renounce tribes more strikingly alluring, and elect the Ijaw, moving among their salt and fresh water swamps in canoes and launches (and even, as I imagine them, at times semi-submerged—though Gabriel Okara deprecated this fantasy). We went together afterwards to a boxing-match of hammer-and-tongs ferocity, where I was as much struck by the referees (changing at each bout) as by the dynamic pugilists. Their skill, patience, fairness, and ultimate authority over the boxers, and the at times frenzied audience, were absolute: watching them, who could doubt for a moment that Africans know how to rule themselves? When a

notable local champion, Francis Ibe, made, amid shouts of rapture, his triumphal entry, I found I was surrounded by a wild nest of his juvenile supporters: one of whom, trembling with joy and admiration, wore on his head a cap bearing on its front the new Nigerian flag and the magic date in October, and at the back the date of independence once again with, underneath it, the words BEAUTY WALK.

In Quest of the Fulani

FROM the east I flew up to the largest and largely Muslim Northern Region, whose chief city (though not its capital) is Kano, well known now to travellers as an international air junction. Kano is four towns, really: the old city, still enclosed by twelve miles of crumbling walls; a squalid but vivacious "township" built a mile away for the exiled immigrants from the south-east and west; the (former) European "reservation" (the word makes one think of the Red Indians); and a new light industrial city—which, it is not difficult to predict, will soon become the real Kano as the old city declines into a sort of decorative and derelict Soho or collegiate Oxford. Linking all these are vast avenues leading in the wrong directions, so that the contrast of extreme modernity and of deliberately preserved antiquity recalls that of the ancient cities, with their new French annexes, in Morocco. It would seem that the European is fated to fall heavily for the glamour of Islamic culture, or else to be repelled by its hermetic timelessness. I must confess to belonging to the uncomprehending party, though the visual attraction of an old Muslim city has, of course, an immediate four-star Michelin appeal.

Kano City, seen from the air or on Cinerama, looks terrific; close to, architecturally, it is something of a disappointment—a red mud town, to be quite frank. But this impression may soon change again: for the size and homogeneity of the orange and cream buildings are impressive, and the new mosque, which one may at first view condescendingly with superior memories of old Islamic glories, does gradually win you over: its size and scale and siting in a huge open space are so very right, and its green dome and twin white minarets look sensational from anywhere, with vultures, so unsavoury from near to, wheeling like sail-planes far above it in the blue. But it is really the perpetual spectacle of the inhabitants that seduces you, if you're going to be seduced at all. These are the Hausa, the great

tribe of the north, tall, tough, and at first approach seeming haughty—a notion due, I believe, more to their flowing robes and stately mien than to any undue severity of nature. They are great traders, as the sight of them sitting protectively on chests of bullion on a bank's mosaic floor, or their cordial man-handling of you if you venture inside their markets, will bear witness. The rich, who till recently owned camels, now chiefly own U.S. cars: thus switching, in a decade or so, from the most ancient and disagreeable form of transport known to man, to the most disagreeable and contemporary. There is also a great vogue for luxury bicycles, shining like those of circus artists: a Pepsicola vendor told me, with no modest pride, that his tall, glimmering machine cost him £40. When not working (which seems fairly often), the Hausa drape themselves in comely groups and postures upon mats. (Africans sit on their spines, not their buttocks, and use their bottoms as a cushion.) There are also the poor, hordes of them, toiling desperately like . . . like themselves; and of lepers, and the deformed, and the blind led by boys with bowls, there is a terrible profusion. I contrived to sleep in the old city (all the hotels are in the new towns), to see what the interiors of the red mud warren might be like. You enter the "compound" wall through a porch whose interior door is hidden from the outer one, are leisurely examined by a guardian armed with a torch, and make your way through an intricacy of starlit courts into a womb-like maze of small roofed halls from which rooms may be entered through low corrugated iron doors covered with hanging curtains. The inner room itself has uncovered mud walls (very hard), a minute Lady of Shalott casement window, mats or linoleum on the earthen floor, and the nocturnal couch is of course the daily divan: nothing is more than a foot high, and you must recall from childhood how to live close to the ground. Rain plopped gently through the mud and lath ceiling of the one I sampled, and the illumination was by oil; but this may not be typical. It seems very cosy, agreeably simple, and slightly claustrophobic.

I must now reveal that my chief purpose in coming north was to visit, if possible, the Fulani. This is a tribe by which one can, if not careful, become obsessed much as many Europeans in East Africa are by the Masai. The Fulani have the peculiarities that they are the only tribe which entered Nigeria from the west (although they probably came originally, like everyone else,

from the distant east); that they are honey-skinned, very tall indeed, and somewhat "Roman" in their countenance; and that a century and a half ago, under Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (1754–1817), they suddenly erupted in a Jihad, conquered almost everybody, and then withdrew abruptly to the wilds and obscurity again—leaving their descendants as dynastic rulers of a great many northern tribes. Being cattle-breeders, and wanting little modern society has to offer, they do not come much even into small and distant towns: which means that anyone inquisitive about them must leave his base and go and look for them.

I accordingly flew 450 miles north-west to Sokoto, where Dan Fodio himself lies buried in a tomb still the object of pious pilgrimage; for though this is a Hausa city, I was told that the Fulani might be found nearby. Sokoto is called disparagingly, by those who do not like such places, a "bush town:" which does mean, for the visitor, that he must rough it just a bit. A touristic digression now on African hotels. There are four types: anonymous international luxury in a few of the larger cities; more modest but attractive and substantial places, mostly frequented by Africans (and strongly recommended); ultra-minimal establishments as in Sokoto; and then, in most towns, what is called the Catering Rest House (C.R.H.), intended chiefly for government officials (of all races, but in fact still chiefly used by Europeans), where any seemingly traveller may also stay. It was sheer pig-headedness on my part, in the interests of culling "authentic" experience, not to lodge, in Sokoto, at the C.R.H. there: since the African inn whereat I floundered was in any case located not among Hausa (let alone Fulani), but in a southerners' annexe-township comparable to that at Kano. The disadvantages of such a choice were the lack of filtered water (or indeed water of any kind, when the yellow Sokoto river failed, as it so often did, to pour from the outside taps); the absence of European food—and try hard as I have for years, the only African thing I cannot love is what comes out of the kitchens—so that I found myself eating meals of *bouillabaisse* and Edinburgh shortbread out of tins; and the rich profusion of insect life—those crazed liberty-takers simply haven't learned yet that man is master of creation; and I believe that, for a European, getting used to Africa is largely a matter of becoming reconciled to an autonomous insect world.

Though Kano market has been famous since

the Middle Ages ("Morocco" leather really came from there by 1,000-camel convoys over the Sahara), I much prefer the market of Sokoto: Kano's is cramped and stuffy, but in Sokoto it extends under trees over a vast irregular field, with camels, donkeys, and horses with silver saddles resting in a parking-lot nearby. The proportion of local (*i.e.*, non-European) goods on sale is also higher: varieties of animals and their skins, and of fruits and vegetables and spices displayed in jewelled assortments on the ground. The movement is restless and continual, and you are soon sucked into it: people assemble, confront one another standing or squatting down, and then drift away, re-grouping again, yet all part of one whole. There are musicians who sing accompanied by melodies beaten on large steel rings, snake-charmers (who also sing, and who had a trick I didn't like of hurling specimens abruptly among the onlookers), dervishes (is that the word?—amiable, menacing, half-naked leaping men), soothsayers and (I believe) prophets, and on the special market day (Friday, also the Muslim sabbath) there was a girl who pranced naked, which none took any notice of save for a dozen children and an expatriate. You yourself—whether you like this sort of situation or not—are one of the accessory attractions: I saw no other European in the market on any day I went there.

This can be something of a strain: even more so in the new "exiles" section of the town than among the more indifferent Hausa. The state of affairs, I think, is this. An immigrant southerner—Ibo, or Yoruba, or whoever he may be—comes north not because he wants to, but in hopes of making, by his skill and enterprise, a modest pile with which to return and set himself up at home. Thus the rapacity, already noted in the south, quadruples (so far as the white visitor is concerned) in the alien north. With this goes a restless curiosity about you. Africans (to generalise once more) are, I would say, inquisitive but not nosy; and one must remember, if one finds this at all trying, that the cult of "minding one's own business" is English more than typically European (let alone Anglo-Saxon); also that to know who the stranger is, and what his business, was, until very recently, a vital matter in daily tribal life. As well as this, the "modernised" southerner has, most naturally, an insatiable desire to find out from a European, if he can, about how the whole white "thing" works. All this leads, among the less naturally discreet, to importunities—which a

white electing to stay solo among Africans quite legitimately invites; and into my room at the Charity Hotel there would come at all hours visitors who would seat themselves uninvited, and put me through an inexorable third degree. It was maddening at times, but very rarely irritating: for to exasperate without actually arousing rage is yet another African achievement—probably because it is all done so very frankly. What one must try to keep in mind, I believe, is that if one admires any quality a people has, one must accept any defect that is its natural companion: one cannot just pick and choose. Thus Africans, divinely unselfconscious, can be inconsiderate to a degree; generously affectionate, they can also be oppressively possessive.

Days passed at Sokoto (I was marooned there for a week by the Mondays-only aircraft), and I had still seen no Fulani. To my dismay, I found there were no taxis to be hired (according to the southerners, because the residents fear that their women would be kidnapped; much more probably, because anyone who needed a car there, had one). Through Mallam Musa, my most promising Hausa contact, I had been negotiating for a private hire, but we were still playing cat-mouse-cat over prices (which had a way of attracting, once agreed on, supplementaries: "And also the needed shillings for the petrol, so my friend says," etc., etc.). Hearing from rival sources (unbeknown to Musa) that the Fulani might appear at the village of Shuni, eight miles distant, on its Wednesday market day, and when a shattering dawn thunderstorm that morning had rinsed out the torrid air, I set off on foot for Shuni. The walk there was a delight: the fresh sky limpid, a breeze, and splendid vistas of the gently rising landscape. (My chief memory of Sokoto is the glory of the pearly dawns and evenings that redeemed the sticky sweltering in between: all life in Africa is made of moments of pure wonder soaring from tracts of trial and fatigue.) I over-shot Shuni, which one reaches up an unsigned track; and when I made it, found it to be a walled village hidden in a glade. I had hardly entered its gates when a man of substance spotted me who, rising swiftly from the shades, beckoned me commandingly to follow him. He led me to a fortress-like dwelling into which he disappeared, first parking me in a lofty entrance-hall among suppliants and pairs of sandals. I realised I was to be presented to the Ardo, or chieftain, whose abode this was. After a fitting pause, and preceded by an inaudible fanfare, the

Ardo made, across the courtyard from his inner dwelling, an Old Vic entrance, flanked by six counsellors or so, and strode slowly until he towered before me (the ground was sloping) with an interrogative and red-toothed scowl. With a clumsy European bow, I said:

MacI: *Worthy Ardo, I am a traveller
Who to famed Shuni's mart has come,
seeking
The wild Fulani.*
Ardo: *And where is your cook?*

This disconcerted me, for I had none: nor car, nor any companion; indeed nothing but myself and a white plastic bag containing a raincoat, spare underclothes, and miscellaneous pills. This modest accoutrement seemed not to please the Ardo; who told me, nevertheless, that the Fulani might be expected at some time between dusk and midnight (it was now midday). With this he called on two hefty minions, and signalled to them to bear me off. Our destination turned out to be a circular thatched hut, and my intended fate to sit there for six hours eating spiced rice the Ardo had kindly ordered for me; but I was dying for a drink, and implored them to let me buy some Pepsi. Rashly—being used to finding the dreadful stuff on sale everywhere even when little else was—I had not foreseen that only well water would be available. To drink or not to drink? Five years ago, on a journey to East Africa, though strictly observing every medical admonishment, I had returned home nearly to die after months in a tropical hospital: so what now the greater risk? But even so, the far call of the white witch-doctors was too powerful; and I bade them a brisk adieu and started tramping back to Sokoto. By now, of course, the refreshment of the storm had vanished, and I tottered on like a character of P. C. Wren's. Three miles from a Cola bottle, a huge limousine drew up and I found myself exchanging small-talk through parched lips with an affable minister of education, Northern Region; who told me, with impeccable lack of accent, of his pleasurable sojourns in "the U.K.," and that himself several times pilgrim (but by air surely?) to Mecca, he appreciated the English passion for "a trek."

Two more days went by, and when a treaty with Mallam Musa for a car had at last been initialled, signed, and even ratified, we set out further afield for Wamakko. This expedition seemed more promising, for we soon left the roads and bumped and scuttled over tracks, rivulets and, I regret to say, local crops. At

Wamakko, the same ceremony with its Ardo was enacted; but he seemed a kindlier man (or was it the reassuring presence of my escort?), and he had a wooden throne brought out for me—which I insisted (though I fear violating protocol) that he sit upon himself: anyway, he fitted it, and it him, superbly. He heard us out, and Musa encouragingly whispered that our visit and our purpose pleased him. A guide was appointed, and we departed again over fields (and more crops) to a distant village near which the Fulani and their cattle were encamped. I am most glad to say our incursion among them was an entire success: marred only, from my own point of view, by the prompt disappearance of the Fulani women, of whose striking beauty I had heard so much. But the headman (not chief, for the Fulani—like the Ibo, and unlike the Hausa or the Yoruba—are elective democrats) did us proud: gazing down on me benevolently (I am over six feet), he seemed overjoyed to do the honours. He showed us round the encampment, followed by its male inhabitants, and I was presented to the cherished cattle. Cordial messages, twice interpreted by Musa and then the guide, passed to and fro, and there were constant halts for yells of delighted laughter, which I believe and hope were not entirely due to my behaviour or appearance. The headman was most impressed to learn that the gesture of removing my cap in his presence betokened respect: a custom that must indeed seem odd to a people whose own heads are swathed in decorative cloths, the whole sometimes encased in an enormous bell-like covering of heat-protecting straw. When we came back to the car, I asked if there might be any sick among his followers to whom I would be allowed to make an offering. Two ancient, stalwart invalids were instantly brought forward who accepted their gifts with gestures and glances that seemed (can one ever tell?) unaffectedly and genuinely grateful. I shall never, at all events, be able to forget the gaze these old men gave me as they clasped my arms chattering, seeming to look right across hundreds of miles and centuries at a fellow creature.

Beauty Walk, Farewell

EVEN from these cursory notes of a random excursion, it will be clear that in Nigeria what is taking place is not just a "national" revolution of one people in our historic European sense but, together with this, a political

junction of diverse races in the short space of a half-century. We Britons, who took ages to achieve this among a mere half-dozen peoples, should therefore, I think, speak circumspectly: avoiding, while remaining lucid, that hateful kind of glee with which publicists have pounced (to its entire indifference) on Ghana, while feeling no obligation, as protectors of a Commonwealth conception, to examine as censoriously whatever may have taken place in Pakistan, or England, or elsewhere. And if Nigerian politicians and journalists say odd things, we should remember our own say odder, and that the dignity of a people is never to be assessed by the provincialisms of its public notion of itself; but by its faculty for personal self-criticism, at which Africans—sensitive understandably in the public sector—have well-developed gifts; and mostly, of course, by this people's deeds. Thus we should not expect from Africans any "gratitude" whatever: they see no reason at all for this, deeming our profit from the encounter of our two nations vastly to exceed their own; and being above all (to a degree few Europeans seem to have discovered or imagined) indifferent to us—far, far less preoccupied by our thoughts and customs (save for those that are manifestly practical) than we, who have been so greatly obsessed by theirs. It is their friendship that we should now rather hope to win: which I believe will be given readily enough if we try to help where needed—not at all forgetting our legitimate advantage—and above all, do not meddle. African heroes henceforward will be Africans of the present and the re-discovered past; and it is in Europe that the monuments to Lugard (and to Sir James Robertson, and perhaps to Harold Laski) should be erected—with possibly a *denkmal* somewhere for Adolf Hitler, since the war accelerated sharply the time-table of change; and in Asia, fitting tablets to the real fathers of independence everywhere from British colonial rule—Gandhi and Nehru, and Jinnah and S. C. Bose. And I think most of all we must realise that, in 1960, all Nigerians are preoccupied by social and political alterations in their lives of a swift intensity we can scarcely understand from any similar experience; and that this leaves them with little time or inclination to think up points for cordial abstract chats.

Contradicting my own precepts, I present two

fragments of unsolicited advice; but as these are commercial, not political, they may perhaps be acceptable to any roving African eye. Films: when will these be made by Africans for Africa (and elsewhere)? Everything is there ready to hand. The cinema diet at present is Indian, and tattered transatlantic: a minimal investment (of money, though not, it would be hoped, of talent) could surely yield huge dividends of cash and reputation. Tourism: except in Enugu (American students), I met no fellow tourists whatever in six weeks, ten cities, and 4,000 miles. Yet most aircraft and Kiplingesque trains I travelled in were half empty (in the trains, above third-class), and so were all but a very few entirely adequate hotels. Facilities exist, and the attractions—despite a stiff initial air fare or sea passage—are varied and prodigious. Once again: would an initial investment not quickly multiply?

To the rag-bag of reasons why Africa exerts—when it does—so deep a fascination on the European mind and heart (additionally, that is, to our hope of making money there), I now offer up my contribution. Africa is Eden: loved for what is lost, hated because we have lost it: longed for by distant recollection, despised because by ourselves rejected. Out of the Garden, its last inhabitants now make ready themselves to come forth forever. May they carry into the world a closer memory and warmer gratitude than ours.

Envoi

I END by quoting one of the many farewell letters I was handed by friends made so quickly in so many places that I came to knowing no one.

I hope you will not be so much irritated for informing you that I shall be proceeding to Lagos unfailingly to-morrow.

Because yesterday I was phoned that my Mom is seriously ill and I am sure I shall be back recently.

I thank you very sincerely for the hospitality you have been rendering to me.

May the almighty God be with you surely he will assist you in all your deliberations and undertakings.

May the almighty be with us till we meet again with the greatest joy and happiest amen.

POETRY

No Hatred and No Flag

By Michael Hamburger

THERE is something unexpected, almost anachronistic, about the appearance of an anthology of war poems in 1959, and an international, tri-lingual one at that.* I doubt that it would have found a publisher anywhere but in Germany, or that it would have materialised at all but for the enthusiasm and devotion of the three editors. Two of them were students when the project was undertaken, the third was a university lecturer. All three took on this difficult and ambitious task without any immediate prospect of publication. It is significant, too, that the model for this anthology was one published in Germany shortly after the First World War with the apocalyptic title *Kameraden Der Menschheit: Dichtungen zur Weltrevolution*. Its editor, Ludwig Rubiner, was one of those pacifist revolutionaries who dominated the later phases of the German Expressionist movement. "Every poem in this book," Rubiner had written, "proclaims its author's determination to oppose the old world and to march into humanity's new land of the social revolution."

That was exactly forty years ago, in another age, another climate, as excessively hot as ours is excessively cold; and Rubiner confined himself to French and German poems, whereas the new anthology includes Great Britain. After acknowledging their debt to the earlier work, the present editors go on to say that

they have no such political tendencies. But, after a second terrible war, they have aimed at something similar. They wish to show how war has been understood in modern literature, and what the poets of three great European countries have said about it.

The emphasis now is on knowing, not on doing. True, I have quoted from the English preface; and it is an interesting reflection on such international enterprises that the tone, at times even the wording, of the three prefaces differs quite considerably.

The anthology is published as one of a series of paper-back classics. One may assume that this circumstance introduced a certain element of compromise. The editors imply as much in justifying their decision to include only "poets of the older and middle generations, the younger poets represented being those who are now dead." The justification is that such limits help the anthologist because "they make for detachment;" and "quality was indeed the criterion, in spite of the fact that the specialisation of the theme created certain difficulties, for the editors believe that committedness and quality are not mutually exclusive in literature." (The German and French prefaces mention no such difficulties, and are somewhat less cautious about the relationship between committedness and quality.) It is certainly to the requirements of the series that one must attribute the main shortcoming of the anthology, the very simple one that it contains far too few poems to do adequately what it set out to do. Since every poem appears in three languages, only fifty-one poems could be included. To "show how war has been understood in modern literature," or only in modern poetry, would have called for at least three times the number; to do any kind of justice to the poets included, let alone those who had to be omitted, would have called for even more. Only an activist anthology like Rubiner's, less concerned with literary standards than with the assertion of a single point of view, could have overcome this limitation of space.

One reason is that there is no single criterion by which a war poem can be clearly distinguished from other kinds of poems; especially

* *Ohne Hass und Fahne. No Hatred and No Flag. Sans Haine et Sans Drapeau: War Poems of the 20th Century.* Edited by WOLFGANG G. DEPPE, CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON, and HERBERT SCHÖNHERR. Rowohlt Verlag (Hamburg. DM 1.90).