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THE PLACE OF ACHIMOTA IN WEST AFRICAN EDUCATION

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THE Prince of Wales College at Achimota in the Gold Coast Colony was opened only about twelve years ago, and it is not yet possible to foretell what will ultimately be its place in the general educational plan of the West African colonies, because the College itself is far from having reached the end of its development, and as yet there is no one educational plan covering all the West African colonies. It still remains to be seen whether they will find the way to co-operate as regards the highest ranges of education; but such co-operation will be necessary if work of a University type is to be successfully organized for West Africa as a whole. Nevertheless, something can be said as regards the part which Achimota already plays, and the opportunities which seem to be open to it.

Achimota does not correspond to any one of the various types of educational institution which are to be found in Africa, if only because it covers so wide a field of educational activity and has something in common with most types. Its students range from the infants in the Kindergarten to the young men and women in the highest Forms of the Teacher Training Department and the University Classes; between these fall the Forms of the Primary and Secondary Schools, and the lower Forms of the Training Department. In common with the Middle Boarding Schools (formerly called Trade Schools) at Esiam, Kibi and Mampong, which are among the most successful and promising educational experiments in the Gold Coast, it combines a considerable amount of practical work (particularly in Agriculture) with the ordinary School Studies. It is not a Mission School and most of its income comes from Government; but it has its own Council which is independent of Govern-

ment, and it is a definitely Christian institution, though no compulsion is put upon its students in matters of religion and all denominations are equally welcome and at home.

But wide as is its range, its main importance is as a place of Higher Education, and it was with a view to this, as the records of its foundation make clear, that it was originally instituted. The lower Departments were necessary at first, because the higher required feeders, and it was rightly thought desirable that those who would in time be the older students should have been brought up in the atmosphere of corporate life and have grown into healthy traditions from the first. But these Departments now supply a very much smaller proportion of the members of the higher Forms; many more now enter from outside at a higher point; after twelve years' life, the traditions and atmosphere of Achimota, of the importance of which something must be said later, are well-established and can be readily absorbed; and it is in its Secondary and Training Departments and in its University Classes, as well as in its Art School and its Agricultural work, that its most characteristic contributions to West African Education are made.

The Commission which recently inspected Achimota found, in the course of its visits to many Schools in the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti, frequent evidence of the high estimation in which teachers trained at Achimota were held. Its University Classes are the only ones in the Colony, while Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone trains a few students for the external Examinations of the University of Durham in Arts and Theology, and the Higher College at Yaba in Nigeria conducts work of University standard, especially in Medicine. Achimota prepares students for the Intermediate Degree Examinations of the University of London in Arts and Science and for the Preliminary Examinations in Medicine, and offers a full degree course in Engineering, and those in authority are anxious to extend the University Classes as soon as it may be practicable to do so.

Although only a very small percentage of children in West Africa, or in Tropical Africa as a whole, receive even any

Primary Education, the demand for Secondary and post-Secondary Education is becoming yearly more urgent, and the pressure upon Achimota is perhaps especially strong because owing to its relatively high fees it is particularly accessible to the children of better-off Africans who hope through education to start them upon a career of influence or success. (There is, indeed, a liberal provision of Entrance Scholarships, and the ambitions of the Scholars are probably similar.) At the last Examination for admission there were 477 candidates for 104 vacancies, and it was symptomatic of the rapidly-growing demand for the higher education of girls that the number of girls hoping for entrance was out of all proportion to that of places available.

It is the professed aim of Achimota to combine the imparting of the best European education with the conservation of all that is best in African life. The attempt to carry out this aim raises questions of great difficulty. Up to the present time no responsible person or body seems to have thought out with any clearness an answer to the question what is the best education for Africans who are to live their lives in African surroundings, not only in the towns, where a considerable degree of Europeanization is inevitable, but in the villages in which the vast majority of Africans pass their lives, nor what is to be the attitude of those who control education to the true African life, based on tribe, clan and family, and rooted in religious beliefs which issue in an ethical and social code deserving at many points the highest respect and capable of holding the framework of society together, but which are yet, from the point of view of both Science and Christianity, baseless superstitions. Nor has sufficient care yet been taken to adapt for African use an education, which in the selection and range of its subjects and text-books and the examples used at every point for illustration, is intended for boys and girls living in England and looking forward to a totally different life from that of the African.

Is it true that, over a certain range, science and history must be the same for everyone everywhere. Nothing can alter the events of the past, and (as Mill remarked in one of those

moments of illumination which distinguish his *Logic*), "that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points we do not doubt to be true, even in the region of the fixed stars". But this does not take us far. It should be a commonplace that "history" and kindred subjects for the African should imply first of all a study not of the Roman Republic or the Wars of the Roses, but of the history, political structure, social and economic conditions and geography of his own country; that his botany and zoology, even if the elementary principles are the same for all the world, should take for its typical examples the plants and animals of his own region of Africa. What do we find? In some sets of papers which it was proposed to set in examinations for scholarships, there was scarcely anything that bore on African life even remotely, but questions on the geography mainly of America and India, on the ridge-and-furrow system of cultivation, on the groundsel and the bog-bean, and on the papering of walls. It is true that the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, to whose School Certificate almost all the Secondary Education of West Africa is intended to lead, has been most generous and intelligent in the provision of special papers and questions for African candidates. But even this, admirable as it is, only gives a limited degree of adaptation, because almost the only text-books available are still European, and when it was suggested that for the groundsel and the bog-bean should be substituted certain plants which the candidates might have seen, it was objected at once that, familiar as these plants were, they were not "in the book", and so their description or anatomy could not be "learned up".

Now the habit of "learning up" what is "in the book" is the radical vice of African secondary education, and is fatal to intelligent study or education in any real sense, and the extraordinary facility in memorizing which the African has makes the practice even more disastrous. But so long as the matter of the instruction available is fundamentally European and therefore half unintelligible to the African, it is difficult to see what cure is possible. It is found by experience that by such a method the examinations can be passed which are the candidates sole pass-

port to many careers; the whole of education is aimed, if not by the teacher (who often struggles hard to effect something better), at any rate by the candidate, at passing examinations; and when the examination is passed, all that he has learned, having no root in his intelligence and little contact with his future life, drops away and is lost.

There are serious obstacles in the way of anyone who would combat these unfortunate conditions. The European teachers, who in practice control and organize the education in the Schools, themselves usually know little of African life and psychology, and still less of African economics and biology, and such elementary books of African history (or history for Africans) as there are have only a limited usefulness. But what is worse is that the African himself believes that the road to success is through European education, and regards with the greatest suspicion any deviation from the exact curriculum prescribed for English boys and girls. In one large and successful School—not Achimota—the attempt to introduce English “prepared books” less dependent than e.g., *The Cloister and the Hearth*, upon a range of ideas and of historical knowledge entirely outside the young African’s reach, met with the strongest opposition, as an attempt to keep the African down or to treat him as in some way inferior to the English boy.

It is the high distinction of Achimota, that although it cannot overcome the evils of the present conditions, it does much to mitigate them, and with considerable success. Its teachers include specialists in African history and in African zoology and botany; every encouragement is given to teachers to make themselves familiar with the home life of Africans, and if a suggestion made by the recent Commission is carried out, it may be possible to send suitable masters for periods of service as assistants to Government officials in different parts of the Colony, where they will have more opportunities of extending their knowledge. The Achimota press does something to provide text-books appropriate for use in an African school, and hopes to do much more. In addition, in three departments of its

activity, Achimota keeps in close contact with African life—in the study of the Vernaculars, in the teaching of Agriculture, and in the practice of Arts and Crafts. There is a systematic study throughout the School of the four Vernaculars mainly spoken by the students, though above a certain point all instruction has to be in English. Even for Certificate Examinations the offering of a Vernacular language is strongly encouraged, and in the Examination a high standard is exacted—so high, indeed, that the number of credits gained in Latin (in which the success achieved is extraordinary) is larger than that of credits in a Vernacular. This is a matter of the first importance. If education is to lead the African to express himself naturally in speech and in writing, and if education is to spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, its medium must in the end be his own language; and it is very difficult to resist the conclusion that, desirable and necessary as it is at present that he should be proficient in English, the gradual transference of secondary as well as primary education onto a Vernacular basis is the aim to be kept in view. Of course, for years to come only the main languages of any region can be taken into account; others are not sufficiently systematized and very many not even reduced to writing; but the old idea that these languages are not adequate for the expressions of economic and scientific ideas, or of abstract conceptions, appears to be out of date. The number of books for general reading (not for religious purposes only) in many dialects; the increasing output of the Achimota, the Lovedale and other Presses; the success with which, e.g. in the Cambridge Local Examinations, relatively difficult passages of English are rendered into African languages, all support this view, which is strongly maintained by distinguished African teachers (such as Mr. Akrophi of Akropong) who are working in this direction; and the apparent success of the great experiment which is being made at the Usmania University is encouraging. Of course, technical terms will be borrowed from European languages, as English has borrowed them from Arabic, Greek and Latin; the substitution for scientific purposes of native languages for English will naturally be a longer

and more difficult process than the substitution, from the seventeenth-century onwards, of English for that Latin which was until then almost the sole language of Science; but it seems certain that it can be done. (Passages in the writings of Dr. Westermann appear to support this belief). In this work, Achimota has an important part to play, and it has begun to play it.

In the teaching of Agriculture, Achimota has made many experiments, and the recent Commission has suggested some modifications in the present curriculum, which is, none the less, producing good results already. The two-fold aim is first, to teach scientific Agriculture in such a way that it can be applied by actual African cultivators and will not be so scientific as to be "over their heads", and therefore rejected, and secondly, to give those who will not themselves be cultivators such a knowledge and appreciation of Agriculture and of its paramount importance in the Economy of Africa, that it will not be treated (as the educated or ambitious African tends to treat it) with neglect or contempt, as compared with the pursuits of town life. If the scheme for the development on the College Estate at Bunsu of a training school for teachers of Agriculture, linked with an Institute of Agricultural research, comes to fulfilment, a great step will have been taken. The technique of Agricultural Education has, it appears, so far been very imperfectly worked out, and it may well be worked out here.

Its School of Arts and Crafts is one of the most striking elements in the education of Achimota. The present Supervisor has brought there a number of the finest African artists and craftsmen, and (to quote the Commissioners' Report): "The intention is to show the pupils how to select what is valuable in African arts and crafts and how to adapt it to the needs of a changing African society, and to introduce them to the best of European art. African arts and crafts are taught at Achimota, not to keep alive the last remains of a dying culture in a native society fast becoming Europeanized, but as a necessary part of its economic and social life." That life is being fast degraded by the invasion of cheap and bad European goods, which have dis-

placed fine native work to such an extent that a cynic might think that the characteristic features of African life were corrugated iron and kerosene tins. Space will not allow any account of the methods with which the Supervisor and his assistant pursue their task, inspiring the young African with a love and understanding of his own heritage; but if it is true, as Dr. Westermann says (*African Christianity*, p. 16) that "the African has begun to run away from his own past and wants to get out of sight of it as soon as possible", Achimota is at least doing something to counteract so disastrous a tendency. In many respects, it is inevitable and beneficial that the advantages of European civilization should spread through Africa, but it by no means follows that all that is fine in native art and production should be lost.

In other ways also Achimota keeps in touch with real African life. In the courses in Domestic Science and practical house-craft, the young women are prepared for life as they will have to live it in African houses, though they will be able to live it in a hygienic and intelligent manner. African music is encouraged side by side with European, though the latter is taught and performed with results which are really marvellous—witness the choruses of Bach and Brahms which were given with an amazing degree of perfection and with obvious delight at the last College Speech Day. Tribal dancing also is regularly practised; the dances with their intensely dramatic movement and the emotional excitement which they involve may seem, to an English onlooker, to belong to another world from that of the reverent and orderly young people whom he has seen in classroom and chapel, and he may well wonder which is the real boy or girl; but they are obviously the natural expression of African feeling, and when purged, as they have been at Achimota, of the sensual elements which were originally in some of them, they do not seem to be in any way unwholesome. Of course it is impossible to say how in the course of his life the young African will adjust the European and the African elements in his educated personality, but if the young man who goes to the towns without such training and experience as Achimota affords is

tempted to blend the worst features of both civilizations, he at least has here the chance of combining the best of both.

The task of Achimota in these respects would be rendered less difficult by the fulfilment of a project strongly recommended by the recent Commission and approved (*The Times*, September 1st, 1939) by the Conference of Governors of West African colonies which met this summer at Lagos—the foundation at Achimota of an Institute of West African culture, consisting of persons entirely engaged in sociological and anthropological study and research, and at the same time available for consultation by teachers and able to give them guidance, both as regards particular problems and also as to the best use of any time which they may have for acquiring knowledge of native life. The Institute would also be in close touch with the School of Arts and Crafts, and there is reason to think that it would be welcomed by Industry, for which an intimate knowledge of the life and tastes of those with whom it has to deal is obviously important; and the value of such an Institute in connection with missionary work needs no proof. The Institute would moreover be doing work of high scientific value, as well as averting many mistakes of policy and saving much misdirected effort.

But when it is admitted that the aims and achievements of Achimota are worthy of all praise, what does it all lead to? The question is an urgent one as regards higher education in West Africa as a whole. No one can spend even a short time in these Colonies without realizing that the educated African feels that he is not getting a fair chance. Trained to a high degree of intellectual proficiency, he naturally has his ambitions; and he sees young Englishmen, whose qualifications he regards as no higher than his own (and as regards intellectual capacity he may be right), put directly into positions in the Civil Service and in Industry to which he himself can only attain, if at all, by beginning at the bottom and working painfully upwards; and if he is politically minded he will remember the not infrequent declarations of responsible authorities in England that the aim of British rule is to fit the African races for self-government. The statement of Mr. Malcolm Macdonald at Oxford on June

27th, 1938 is an instance. "The Dominions are already completely free, each of them equal in status with Great Britain herself, each of them clothed with all the constitutional rights and powers of fully sovereign nations. That same spirit guides our administration of the Colonial Empire. Even amongst the most backward races of Africa our main effort is to teach those peoples to stand always a little more securely on their own feet. In spite of the great variety of conditions and of circumstances we can, I think, say with confidence that the trend is towards the establishment of the various Colonial communities as self-supporting and self-reliant members of a great Commonwealth of free peoples and nations." The eager young African cannot see that such professions are being implemented, or that any serious steps in that direction are being taken; he feels that he does not get his due place either in Government or in Industry; he becomes disaffected, and the growth of a disaffected *intelligentsia* may become a very dangerous thing. Now it is easy to give at least a partial answer to the complaint thus made. The complainant almost certainly lays too much stress on intellectual qualifications and training. These, up to a certain point, are necessary; but the qualities which fit the young Englishman for the posts which the African covets are not primarily intellectual. They are some of the qualities which are generated unconsciously by his upbringing in homes and schools in which high standards in matters not intellectual are assumed and almost unconsciously acquired. It is these which are essential both in Government service and in business, and for various reasons—the want of such traditions, the pressure of his family upon a young African who acquires a position and opportunities, or what not—it has not been possible to assume that the African will usually possess and maintain these qualities; and there have been many breakdowns. Yet it seems short-sighted not to make free use of the great capacities developed in an institution like Achimota, which seems to supply just what has been described above as lacking. For there what is called the "public-school spirit" pervades the life of the College; the qualities which are needed have every chance of becoming in-

grained, and they spring from a soil of genuine Christianity, which is the surest guarantee of their permanence. An extension of education on these lines in West Africa should in time produce a large number—it has already produced not a few—of Africans who are fitted on all grounds for the highest posts of trust. In the meantime, is it impossible that many more than at present should be given a chance? They will need friendly (and unobtrusive) training and shepherding at first; and to give this adds, no doubt, an additional care to English civil servants and business men who, in that climate, have cares enough. But there can be little doubt of the response, though of course there will be some disappointments, and in such action there would be at least a step towards the fulfilment of professions so often made.

This article is already too long, and it is not possible to enter here upon a forecast of the service Achimota will doubtless render to West Africa when the time comes for a West African University, which will embrace all these colonies and will be, not a pale imitation of European Universities, but a genuinely African institution, giving to West Africa not what London or Durham want, but what West Africa needs. When that time comes, no one who has made acquaintance with Achimota can doubt that she will prove equal to the call.