

HERITAGE SCHOOLS, NIGERIA – AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

Oyinkan Ade-Ajayi, 2019

Phoenix Visions World Ltd.

Pp. 280

“Christian education takes in the whole aggregate of human life, physical and spiritual, intellectual and moral, individual and social, in order to elevate, regulate and perfect it in accordance with the example and teaching of Christ-in other words, to produce the true and finished man of character.”

St. Gregory’s College,
Estab. 1928.

This elegant volume, with its forest green cover and discreet Nigerian flag, printed in China on gloss paper throughout and copiously illustrated with colour and black and white photographs of uniformly high quality, provides a history of secondary education in Nigeria from 1859 (CMS Grammar School) to 1945 (Holy Child College). Each chapter gives the history of an individual school, starting with the school crest and finishing with the school anthem. The text includes the history of the school's foundation, the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the organization of the school day. There are also reminiscences by old students and a list of past principals. The pictures show people and places, staff and students at work and play and the buildings in which these activities took place.

Many of the schools in this volume came into being as a result of Christian missionary initiative e.g CMS Grammar School, 1859; CMS Girls Seminary, 1869, which moved to Ibadan and became St. Anne's in 1950; Methodist Boys' High School, 1878, Methodist Girls' High School, 1879; Hope Waddell Training Institute, 1895; Baptist Boys' High School, 1923; Dennis Memorial Grammar School, 1925; St. Gregory's College, 1928; Igbobi College, 1932, Christ the King College, 1933; Holy Child College, 1945. However, whether funded by Christian or secular sources, all the schools aimed at developing the physical, intellectual, ethical and

cultural aspects of their students. This they achieved through the efforts of dedicated teachers and principals who regarded teaching as an honourable profession, not a stop-gap or job of last resort.

Once an aspiring student passed the competitive entrance exam, s/he was not debarred on the grounds of religious affiliation: mission schools pursued an all-inclusive admission policy, Nor was there any effort to convert students, although certain religious practices were part of the school routine e.g. reciting of the Hail Mary at the beginning and end of each lesson at St. Gregory's (estab. 1928); Sunday morning service and Evensong in the school Chapel at St. Anne's (estab. 1928).

Most Heritage Schools were boarding schools where the students lived in dormitories on the school compound. The dormitories were divided into "Houses", sometimes named after former Principals of the School. These "Houses" acted like teams which competed against one another in sports and other activities such as debating. Boarding house life was structured with definite times allocated to definite activities: cleaning and tidying the dormitory; maintaining the environment; bathing; eating; attending classes; resting; prep; sports and co-curricular activities. Dormitories were supervised by teachers with the help of prefects.

Schools established by the colonial government were few and far between. Expatriate teachers in secondary schools, referred to as "colleges" were graduates, many from Oxford and Cambridge. They brought with them their individual talents which they used for the benefit of the students and Nigeria as a whole. Kenneth C. Murray taught art at Umuahia where he started an art gallery. He was instrumental in establishing museums in Nigeria, becoming the first Surveyor of the Antiquities Service which later became NCMM (National Commission for Museums and Monuments).

Messrs. R.H. Stone and A.B. Cozens Government College, (Umuahia) wrote a textbook "Biology for Tropical Schools", used throughout West Africa.

Mr. E.H. Duckworth (Umuahia) introduced scientific fieldwork, emphasizing the importance of critical observation. He was also the Editor of "Nigeria Magazine", a respected publication whose profusely illustrated articles provide a priceless record of Nigerian life and culture.

The distinguished Nigerian academic and university administrator, Saburi Biobaku, started off as a teacher in Umuahia.

W.B. Benton-Evans of Government College, Ibadan, was an Oxford Blue in football. V.B.V Powell (G.C.I.) was a Cambridge Blue in athletics. D.J. Bullock's love of theatre resulted in school productions of an impressive standard.

The badges of most of the Heritage Schools are like a modified shield, echoing old English grammar schools. The palm tree, source of Nigerian's first oil wealth, features as a motif on many, an open book being another favourite. The burning torch of learning features on two badges. There are also religious symbols: the cross, the dove, the keys of St. Peter. One badge

differs radically from all the rest. It was commissioned from the College of Heralds in London for King's College during the regnum of Mr. J.R. Bunting, 1949-54 and features a seductive mermaid rising from the sea. An elephant and palm tree seem to have been added as an after-thought! However, the elephant has triumphed over the mermaid: there is no sign of her on the badges on the boys' shirts now.

Many of the school mottoes are in Latin, another old English grammar school tradition. School and God are closely linked. “Nisi dominus frustra”: Without God we labour in vain: CMS. Grammar School. Deo duce With God as leader: Baptist Academy. Service Is also emphasized. “Non sibi sed aliis”: Not for ourselves but for others: Methodist Boys' High School. Similar sentiments were also expressed in English. “In love serve one another”: Methodist Girl's High School. “Learning to serve”: Government College, Ibadan.

Two of the Heritage Schools stand out for their nationalist orientation. The motto of Abeokuta Grammar School is in Yoruba. “Iberu oluwa ni ipinle ogbon”: (fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom) encircling a stylized Abeokuta landscape featuring Olumo Rock and the Ogun river, a student with open book seated on its bank, illuminated by a bright sun. The school song is the Egba national anthem. A.G.S was a community school, an initiative of the Abeokuta District Church Council supported by the Egba people and the Alake, Oba Gbadebo. Nevertheless, the first four Principals up to 1967 were all ordained ministers of the church.

Barewa College, Zaria, (estab 1921) which has a logo of a leaping deer has a motto written in Arabic: “Man jadaa, wajada”. He who strives shall succeed. The Native Authority gave a generous grant for the buildings, augmented with funds from Alfred Jones Bequest of Britain. The first 12 Principals up to 1963 were British. The school song is in English and summarizes the history of the college and the national leaders it has produced. There is a large mosque on the college compound.

Professor Emeritus Ayo Banjo, an Old Boy of Igbobi College (estab 1932) and House Master at Government College Ibadan (estab 1929) in the introduction mourns the declining standards in Nigerian education which he links to the quality of teachers who have poor pay and conditions of service. But there may yet be light at the end of the tunnel. On World Teachers' Day, 2020, President Mohammadu Buhari announced measures to attract the “best brains” into teaching. These include:

- Bursaries for Education students.
- Automatic employment for education graduates.
- Raising of retirement age to 65.
- Provision of low-cost housing for teachers in rural areas.
- Annual refresher courses for teachers.
- Awards for excellence.

We shall wait and see!

Oyinkan Ade-Ajayi is to be congratulated for perpetuating the legacy of her father-in-law, Professor Emeritus J. Ade-Ajayi, whose Ph.D. focused on early Christian missions in Nigeria. She has created a book whose carefully researched content is presented with lucidity and enriched with high quality illustrations. It will provoke many a nostalgic sigh from the Old Boys and Old Girls as they turn the pages and remember the days of their youth.

DR. PATRICIA OYELOLA

Ibadan, Nigeria

E-mail: nooyelola@yahoo.co.uk