

overcome this basic two-fold contradiction : denying freedom by constraint in order to encourage freedom, but endangering the existing society by encouraging freedom through education.

The school is the indispensable medium for ensuring the link between the old and new generations, the absolute condition on which any nation survives. For the individual, on the other hand, it constitutes a zone, as it were, of secondary growth (the first being specific virtualities) thanks to which he effectively develops, attains his full stature in autonomy, and keeps up the onward movement of society. The school therefore lies at the centre of any revolution. That is why all reformers are preoccupied with education, from Lycurgus and Solon to the Marxists and including Rabelais, Montaigne, Luther, Rousseau and many others.

Early Education and Commerce in the Bamenda Grasslands

By Sankie MAIMO

At some moment in its history, no doubt, every country genuinely attains some measure of real prosperity, and may also enjoy a fair measure of high reputation. The Bamenda Grasslands, however, are no exception. For lack of records, it is rather difficult to recapture that glorious past. Yet people do vividly recall the times when elephant tusks played a leading role in their commerce, and wild rubber was of some commercial importance. Now they have received a severe blow from modern trade competition and, as a result, these Grasslands have paled considerably into insignificance. But during the early part of the 19th century, commercial travellers (even before the Heoussa trader came into the show) were irresistibly drawn to these Grasslands. What attracted such an appreciable number of traders was the same that promoted and stimulated internal and external trade - their wealth, for then there was ivory, and fascinating industries and crafts that flourished all over the area.

These Grasslands are situated on a great plateau that is broken up by undulating hills. In some places, the plateau reaches a height of 10,000 ft. The country is dotted, here and there, with homes and farm-houses, which present picturesque villages on the slopes and valleys. These villages did not only command the respect and admiration of travellers but their crafts and industries (like the carvings and metal-works of Babanki and Oku, not to mention the attractive Kom cloth with its intricate designs) gave them something to think about ; considering their large reserves of ivory, they meant wealth and wealth in abundance.

The Bamenda Grasslands are inhabited by big chief-doms like Bansa, Bafut, Bikom, etc. as well as by petty ones that can be reduced to the level of big villages like Babesi and Baba. To the East are the Bamums - very keen and shrewd traders. As a result, they helped to encourage and stimulate trade with the coast through Douala. The Bamileke tribes flank them to the South and the Widikums and the Bayangs to the South-West. Through Mamfe they find another outlet for their trade to the coast with the port at Calabar. The Benue and Adamawa Provinces are to the North. These were already on the known trade routes and their nearness helped to promote and stimulate the desire for external trade. Fortunately, these Grasslands were then considered a source of huge profits and quick returns.

The various tribes were chiefly pre-occupied with commerce and were all committed to defend their trade. Land disputes led to much tribal feuds and, for that reason, some of them came to look on war as an industry. This view does not prevail till this day ; and it would be unnecessary to discuss any tribal wars here. We should go straight-way into their two chief pre-occupations - education and Trade.

a) Education

No parent could afford to be indifferent to the training of his children. The child was made to avail himself of every opportunity and to equip himself with the best that could be provided in the particular district. There was no formal education as such. Nevertheless, great emphases were laid on the child's training. At the age of eight, a boy became a member of a local youth movement (ngwa). The youngsters met at least once a week. For their refreshment, they were served corn beer, a non-intoxicating local drink brewed from corn or millet. Only men drank palm wine in their "manjong" house. The youth movement under- took to arrange hunting expeditions. Not only was it fun to

wander in the grass in search of grasshoppers, it was a great thrill to chase the ground squirrel, rabbit or porcupine armed with a cutlass or spear. This was something exciting and new; it was education. It provided not only entertainment but gave them the rudiments of their military training. The youth movement through these exercises made the young men familiar with the jungle from their early days.

Next the parent and relations saw to it that the boy was either apprenticed to a trade of their choice or he was encouraged to undertake trade. First he attended the local market with a few bags, kola-nuts or ropes for sale. In this way, he found his way out in the barter trade and when he showed talent for it, he was made to go farther afield and could deal in more expensive articles. With his travels he picked up the neighbouring dialects or languages.

The girl learnt house-hold work from her mother and accompanied her to the farm. She was made to realise that the family depended entirely on the soil. It was only during the harvest season that the men and boys came to help in the farm. At other times, the work was left entirely in the hands of the women. With the introduction of coffee as a cash-crop, the man has superseded the woman on the farm, but this is only of recent. The fate of coffee is doubtful and there may be a slump in the market, like the one now crippling the production of banana in the south. This area can turn easily to the cultivation of beans and potatoes. Because of its attitude, tea can do excellently well. In Agriculture, they have very bright prospects.

b) Internal Trade

Indeed, the Bamenda Grasslands had been fairly self-sufficient from very early times. Their internal trade was not chaotic in any way. Surprisingly, it was well-regulated. On market days, the fon's announcer gave a detailed exchange of rates. We can, therefore, say that local trade grew up with the people conscious of some form of price-control. It is not without significance that the market days do not fall on the same day. One could travel from South to North following the markets which were on the route in each locality; the market day, was a day of rest and one had to take a holiday from work on the farm. This arrangement was not only convenient, it greatly encouraged trade.

There was a flourishing local trade in palm-oil. It is common knowledge that excellent oil was produced in commercial quantities in Meta and environs and in Wum area. The Metas alone

supplied almost all the Southern Districts with the oil they needed. Consequently, Menemo became a great oil market and enjoyed a local reputation for its high grade oil. Wum followed up with Bafut as oil-producers. There can be no doubt that, if the Metas had only gone on undisturbed, the Meta-Oil would have attracted greater attention and an influx of traders into the area. As a whole, plenty of palm oil was consumed locally, as there was a great demand for it. Apart from the small importation from the Bayangs of Mamfe because of their high quality oil, the need for great importation never arose.

Pottery was a very lucrative and highly developed industry; it flourished in Meta and Babesi areas. In those days, only earthen-ware pots were used all over the Grasslands. The Babesi found an attractive market for their pots in Kumbo; Menomo and Bali became the chief markets for the Meta-pots. At the moment, the industry no longer pays as enamel pots are much superior and durable.

The same fate has befallen the basket and mat industries. Baskets were much in vogue then. The people of Kaka designed baskets of various sizes for different occasions. They were the best containers. They were as attractive as they were serviceable. The mats too have received a serious blow. These mats, with elaborate designs on them counted for much then. They were put to various uses, depending on the make - used for the bed, the ceiling or for partitioning apartments. Now there are better substitutes and one looks on them as relics of the past, especially with the introduction of rugs, linoleum, and asbestos from over-seas.

The Bali and Wum people were noted for their farm produce. They traded in corn and groundnuts. When the crops failed in other parts, the affected tribes turned towards Wum and Bali for supplies as they had rich granaries. There was much trade in grain between the Bamum and the Nsaw. This was so until recently, with the opening of Mamfe - Enugu road, when there was a big swing towards Onitsha and Enugu Markets.

Tobacco was also cultivated in places like Vekovi and Tatum in Nsaw as well as in Ndu and Upper Ngemba. This was on a modest scale and was consumed locally. There were excellent prospects for increased production, but the production waited patiently on demand.

Some, however, give the impression that there was a lot of slave trade carried on. Reports in this respect, do not seem to have been greatly exaggerated. But, it must be accepted that slave-dealing was then virtually an institution and was carried on

by all the tribes. Even a petty chief-dom like Baba was an active slave dealer. But the more notorious dealers were the Nsaw and the Bali-Nyongas.

The dangers encountered by traders made them recruit boys to carry their wares for them. Slaves did this very efficiently and the Balis cleverly put them to that use. The man who failed to pay his debt was in danger of losing his liberty. If he could not discharge his debts, he was enslaved. The plateau demands hard charge his debts, the strain was enough to require extra labour work on the farm. On a modest scale, was carried on. Such slave- and slave-labour, on the boarders and the only slave markets on record are Kumbo and Bali. Even as late as the First World War, there was some illegal slave-dealing going on in some quarters.

From the nature of the country (inhabited by such wild game like lions and hyenas) trade on a large scale with countries far apart bordered on a great venture. The trader carried all his merchandise with him and spent his nights under the stars or in huts in the jungle, as his lot fell out. With the wares either on his head or back, he hawked them from place to place. Again the trade routes were comparatively new and dangerous. But the profits that awaited his efforts more than counter-balanced his troubles.

c) External Trade

The chief interest of traders lay in the excellent kola-nut or ivory to be found or the grain, palm-oil and a certain species of strong tobacco that was produced. It is significant that the peoples of these Grasslands are not great kola consumers. The great kola eaters and enthusiasts in the North (Hausas etc.) unfortunately grow no kola themselves, so they had to turn to the south for supplies. Long before the advent of Europeans there had been considerable trade carried on towards the North into Adamawa and Benue. Consequently Ibi and Yola became commercial centres and chief kola markets.

Even to the South-East, as early as 1848, there was a strong demand for "Bali kola" especially in Bandem and Ngambe, as the Bali species was regarded vastly superior to all others; consumers found it tastier and more wholesome. It was sheer good luck, therefore, that the Bamenda Grasslands were rich in just the two types or species of kola greatly coveted and relished in Bornu and Adamawa. Bafut virtually became a great kola entrepôt. The Nsaw were the leading producers of kola and they had their warehouse in Nkor. Some of it passed out of Bansa through Bum and Ntem into the North. Other kola collecting centres were Kom, Ndu and Oku. Elsewhere Bali-Nyonga enjoyed the highest repu-

ation as the producer of high quality kola. It must, however, be borne in mind that this much talked-of "Bali-kola" (*) must have come from Baforchu. The Baforchu kola is unsurpassed, but the people have never engaged in much trading. Hence the Balis found a place to cash in, and win for themselves a name.

In exchange for kola, they got salt and cloth. Eventually, a local cloth industry sprang up in Wum area. Certain coveted cloths (like the Kom cloth) were actually made locally. Some used certain barks of trees which they treated with certain liquids and had them beaten out and dyed to give the cloth an attractive appearance. There were local looms and their presence encouraged the weaving of divers things; raffia came in very handy and was used extensively.

The ivory that made Adamawa, famous and gave her a place in world markets is reported to have come chiefly from these Grasslands. The main hunting grounds were in the Mbokam thickets of Nsaw, the Nkambe Plateau, and to some minor extent, in the Upper Ndop plain. Elephant tusks could not be kept by the common man. The Fon and nobles had the exclusive right to exchange ivory between themselves. In some cases, they could part with the tusks only to foreigners who paid handsomely for ivory. (Probably there must have been smuggling of some sort. It is reported that even quite recently 1905? as many as eighty elephants were killed in Mbokam during a hunting expedition. The whole bush was burnt in a manner to give the elephants little chance of surviving). They are now virtually extinct in the whole area. The trade in ivory with the outside world was carried on through Bum, Ndu and Ntem. Indisputably Bum became an entrepôt without a rival. But now, Bum is only a name - a name without any significance.

Wild rubber was actually produced then in commercial quantities. Those whose ancestors were big rubber dealers, can, to this day, show the rubber line on the wall. Dealers bought the rubber in rolls or balls which had to bounce from the floor to reach the line on the wall to show that they contained no foreign bodies and that the rubber was genuine.

It is unfortunate that Mrs. Chilver (b) has a contrary view. Traders assert that wild rubber from these Grasslands was actually

a) Mrs Chilver talks about this "Bali Kola" in glowing terms - vide her article in *Afrika and Uberssee*, Band VLV, Heft 4. I am, however, indebted to her for some interesting and very useful information contained in the said article.

b) In *Afrika und Uberssee*, Band XLV, Heft, 4, (June 1922) Mrs Chilver expresses this opinion in an article - "Nineteen century trade in the Bamenda Grassfields".

exported and that some of it did reach Germany. Zintgraff too stated that the wild rubber was in commercial quantities. His shrewd observations were made with a view to encourage Germany to take an interest in colonising the area and therefore ensure that Germany had a market for raw-material. But for the world-wars, something could have probably happened to this wild rubber which looks as if its true habitat is in these Grasslands. But with the present generation, unaware of its commercial value it now stands dejectedly in and around the villages, as if it had never known better days. The future may still hold something in store for it.

Hausa and Benue cloths found a rich market in the big towns. These imported cloths came in through Adamawa. Ntem and Bum became big commercial centres. Subsequently, a local cloth industry flourished in Bikom. It has made its mark and today the people can look on their richly embroidered cloths with pride and satisfaction. Some were very ingeniously wrought with elaborate designs or embroidered with beads. To a minor extent, there was some cloth industry carried on in Bali and Wum. The keen traders from these areas chose to barter their wares for things they really valued. Items that were in great demand were salt, cloth, beads, guns and gun-powder. Through Bum salt was imported in wooden tubes from the coast. Yabassi, as a result, handled a lot of Bamenda trade. Much finer salt came from the Bayangs of the Cross River. When salt was scarce, they passed on a certain fruit for a substitute. (In seasons of scarcity the measure for salt in some places was a groundnut shell). There were seasons, therefore, when trade in salt was a boon.

There must be some deposits of iron-ore as the native smiths were able to make cast-iron cutlasses and spear-heads and knives. These were mainly in Oku, Babingo, the Ndog plain, Tavisa and Shisong in Nsaw and in Bikom. Only Oku and Babibingo still carry on any smithing to this day! The main bulk of fire-arms was imported, for guns were in great demand both for hunting and military activity. The people found traders coming in great numbers to do business.

One of the reasons to account for such flourishing trade was the evolution of a simple custom-duty system. Goods entering a chiefdom were allowed to pass, after the payment of a voluntary fee. The transaction was not much involved and tradition demanded that bit for the "Fon's bag", and no trader grudged him that. An entrepreneur, however, who chose to farm it, bought the "Fon's bag" and went to the borders to collect the custom-duties, hoping to collect enough to pay him also for his pains.

This system after a time lent itself to abuses. Some servants

of the Fon demanded fixed rates of their own making. The extent of the exploitation is not as alarming as some people choose to imagine.

The currency in vogue lent itself to easy transactions. One could use either brass-rods, iron rings, hoes (shovels) or cowries. There was nothing complicated at all.

The prosperity of a people can be measured by their wealth. These Grasslands could boast of kola, ivory, well-prepared palm-oil, live-stock, tobacco, grain, drinks, hoes and shovels and a variety of local ironware, mats, bags, and baskets. Carving in Babanki and pottery in Meta and Babessi had attained such reputation too, that the people of these Grasslands could be justifiably happy with and proud of their lot. They did not desire more than salt, cloth, beads and fire-arms from outside. Such self-sufficiency was unparalleled at the time, and such a variety of articles of trade, local industries, and rich embroidery gave the Grasslands a place worthy of note and honour.



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