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NATIVE AFRICA IN A NUTSHELL

Descriptive Sociology or Groups of Sociological Facts, Classified and Arranged by Herbert Spencer, Division 1, No. 4, Part 2-A: African Races Compiled and Abstracted upon the Plan organized by Herbert Spencer By E. Torday. A reissue of the Volume originally compiled by Dr. David Duncan. Entirely rewritten, 1930, Williams and Norgate. 105s.

MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw

The New Statesman and Nation, 1931, March 14, 116 and 118 pp.

"Nutshell," since we are speaking of Africa, naturally refers to a cocoanut, and this enormous volume which, unfortunately, is scarcely portable, could hardly be encompassed even by the most gigantic metaphorical cocoanut. Seriously, it is high time that the Herbert Spencer Trustees should reform the conditions of the bequest. The size (1 ½ ft. by 1 ft.) and the weight (12 lbs.) the book readable only on a special desk. Had it been printed as three or four handy volumes and arranged regionally, it would have been a book invaluable for any man going out to Africa. This would have made much bigger sales possible, hence lowered this price, which at its present figure of five guineas make the book inaccessible to most people.

Mr. Torday's *African Races* is indeed so important a compilation that every resident or a camel to transport it. This book indispensable to the anthropologist, but also to those practical men (concerned with the government or the education of the natives, who are rapidly realising the value of anthropology in native affairs.

What has been called Practical Anthropology is rapidly coming to the fore. The Colonial Office until recently seemed to believe in the Imperial Value of Ignorance, but in the great Memorandum *on Native Policy* (Cmd. 8573) it recognises the need of a "continuous study of all the institutions of the native communities," of an "acquaintance

with, and... training in, anthropology" as a "necessary part of the intellectual equipment of officers."

How this words are to be given effect to whine anthropology is allowed twenty hours in the Curriculum of Colonial Cadets, is another matter. Some reform in the training of prospective officials seems necessary. In the country at large there is also a growing interest in that seething volcano of coloured races which represents the human side of the British Colonial Empire. The recent turn of Indian affairs has proved that you cannot afford to ignore the point of view of a subject race, and that knowledge when acquired too late may demand too high a price.

Would it not be better to have and African Round Table Conference before the mischief is done instead of after? For such a conference Torday's *African Races* ought to be used as the text-book. Independently, however, of any political issues, the public is interested in colonial affairs, which means first and foremost on African affairs. Vast schemes are being planned for African research and anthropological exploration both at Oxford and in London. Mr. Torday is, in fact, one of the most distinguished members of the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures, which has its seat in London. This Institute, presided over by a great statesman, Lord Lugard, directed by such eminent African scholars as M. Labouret and Professor Westermann, and inspired by one of the leading missionaries of the world, Mr. Oldham, has been the main agency for the organisation of practical anthropology in Africa.

This book will unquestionably be of great importance in furthering practical interest in the science of man. It allows those who are not acquainted with African cultures at first hand, or are unable to wade through the enormous literature on the subject, to have at home an encyclopaedia of African lore.

A serious drawback, due to the inflexible conditions of the Herbert Spencer Bequest is the right division of the matter in a manner entirely out of date in the light of modern anthropology only with great difficulty to the particular area here treated, that is, to Africa. What, however, seems the greatest burden on the writer is his complete confinement to the compilation of the other people's statements. Mr. Torday, in adding his illuminating comments has definitely rebelled against the strict conditions of the Trust, and he has enhanced the value of the book greatly. Had he been allowed to give a full statement

of his conclusions we would have had an even better book – the book, in fact, which is badly needed. The loss would be irreparable, but it is to be hoped that Mr. Torday can be persuaded to publish a companion volume to this wonderful encyclopaedia of African lore.

It requires a trained anthropologist, a filed-worker, a theoretician and a book-worm of the sometime to appreciate the amount of work, powers of organisation and real scientific creativeness embodied in a compilation like this. Science, this compound of learning, common sense and intelligence, consists in selection, in the sifting of the relevant from the paltry, , and here Mr. Torday's scientific sense can be felt by a student of African matters in every detail as well as in the construction of the whole. Overweighted by a mass of material which is really staggering, cramped by the rigid framework of the bequest, handicapped by the taboo on self-expression, Mr. Torday has yet succeeded in overcoming most of his difficulties.

The summery of his personal views given in the short Introduction is most illuminating. The preliminary tables which he has condensed into a convenient compass are useful, and the details of the selection are well done. The most valuable addition, which has allowed Mr. Torday to circumvent to a certain extent the rigidity of Herbert Spencer's classifications, are the sub-headings.

These, combined with the synoptic table of contents and the frequent cross-references and the critical notes, allow the reader to find almost directly any subject of information both as regards matter and the geographic setting, while for the ethnographic survey of the continent, the map of Africa prepared by Miss Ursula Torday will be an invaluable guide to all scholars.

But while African students will have to use and depend upon Mr Torday's work, many of them will quarrel with some of the statements in his introduction. Mr. Torday declares himself an adherent of the functional method in anthropology, a method not accepted yet by all the specialists.

"To-day the investigator can no longer be satisfied with ascertaining what customs and beliefs exist among certain peoples; their social fabric has to be considered as a whole and research aims at discovering the function of each component element."

The functional method, though not hostile to the older evolutionary and historic explanations, maintains that the real meaning of an element of culture lies not in its antecedents, but in the part which it plays as a living force within a living culture. Functional anthropology thus directly lends itself to practical applications. Functionalism, which has but recently laid down its aims and principles as a separate school and method, will therefore no doubt command the attention of the practical man in Africa and other Colonies. It may require some time, however, to convince the vested interests of anthropology that the functions of custom, idea or institution are neither obvious nor irrelevant, that they must be studied by special methods and that a new type of theory is necessary to guide functional observations in the field and functional research in the study.

Mr. Torday quite rightly notes that the functional method is not new, that it was not so much preached as practised by Dapper in the second half of the seventeenth century. Mr. Torday might have mentioned another anthropologist who, in his work done towards the beginning of the present century, also applied the functional point of view before this had been explicitly formulated. I mean, of course, Mr. Torday himself, whose work among the Bushongo, the Batetela, the Bamsuto and other tribes of the Kasai and Kwango, is one of the most important contributions from the African field. As one who has assisted in the organisation of the new method and who is responsible for the label "functional" now invariably affixed to this school, the present reviewer feels it a pleasant duty to acknowledge Mr. Torday's contributions towards the functional method and his pioneering work in it.

A number of concrete points on African anthropology will no doubt also arouse some opposition among specialists. Thus, some may disagree with Mr. Torday's classification of the Pygmies with the tall primitive forest tribes. Other specialists might resent the author's violent *antihamitism*. If I may be allowed to coin this word, Mr. Torday organises a regular pogrom of the unfortunate Hamites, from one end of the continent to the other, and eventually pushes them on the map into "Mediterranean basin."

Others again will disagree with the insistence on the racial as well as cultural and linguistic identity of the various Bantu tribes. The present reviewer, who is not a regional specialist in Africa, would every time be inclined to follow Mr. Torday in his conclusions, but

whether these be final or not, they certainly will stimulate further research.

It remains to be said that while in the introduction we find the same wit and brilliancy which have delighted English and continental readers of Mr. Torday's *Causeries Congolaises*, the body of the present book reveals him as an austere though not pedantic scholar. His capacity for using some six or seven European languages in the abstraction of evidence, his excellent first-hand knowledge of several types of African vernacular, his keen insight into the inner workings of primitive culture and his wide academic outlook, raise the present work from the level of a mere compilation to that of a scientific masterpiece.