

Notes and News

Human Beings

It was refreshing to read an editorial article bearing this title in that very excellent Nigerian journal, *Farm and Forest*. It was a call to consider things that we are all prone to forget. Our minds are preoccupied with plans for a New Africa: are we not in danger of forgetting the Africans? The human material seems to be taken insufficiently into account. 'The people? Why, they've got to be made to develop!' They may seem almost rather a nuisance, for they are so unlikely to be as enthralled with our plans as we ourselves are. 'It is almost forgotten that if there were no people, there would be no need for any plans or any development, there would be no accelerated erosion to be prevented, no shifting cultivation to be converted to stabilized farming, no insanitary villages to be re-made.' In the end it is the individual African who matters; it is he who has to be considered above all else. How much does planning mean to him? How much will it mean to him in the future? Will he be a happier, better man, a finer personality in the widest sense, as a result of the expenditure of millions of money and the efforts put forth by battalions of expert and devoted men and women? These are pertinent questions. Our present-day outlook is too predominantly materialistic. An improved economic system there must be; but it is still true that man does not live by bread alone. 'Will the whole Finance Ministers and Upholsterers and Confectioners of modern Europe undertake in joint-stock company to make one Shoeblick happy?' asked Thomas Carlyle. 'They cannot accomplish it, above an hour or two; for the Shoeblick also has a soul quite other than his stomach.' 'Pigs', writes the editor of *Farm and Forest*, 'so far as we know, are perfectly happy if well fed and housed, likewise cows. . . . Is the end of our planning to be the production of large numbers of docile cows or pigs or flourishing cabbages, or communities of happy men and women living full and adventure-some lives? . . . The curing of disease, the improvement of water-supply, the stabilization of agriculture and the education of masses, are not ends in themselves but steps towards bringing people to a stage where they are capable of working out their own destiny. The framework of development plans is a mere skeleton lacking body and soul, and if we think it is the whole we shall surely fail, for we are here only as guides and advisers.'

Are we to think of ourselves as dictators, aiming at developing people in spite of themselves, making them conform to our preconceived ideas, forcing them into a standardized mould, stretching them upon our procrustean bed? The suzerain may believe in compulsion; may believe that the African if he cannot be induced must be compelled to do things for his own ultimate good; but will the subject continue in the good way once the pressure is removed; and if not, wherein is he bettered? Apathy, rather than opposition, is the reformer's greatest bugbear, in Africa as elsewhere. Men and women must needs be persuaded that immediate benefit will accrue to them by making a change in their habits—be convinced that reforms are practicable and profitable. Our planners are looking ten years ahead; let them remember that it took twenty years to persuade the British public and Parliament to abolish the slave-trade. The essential problem is that of incentive. Why should an African woman learn to read and write? Why should a farmer bury rubbish in his field, when his fathers never did it before him?

'What practical bearing has this on land planning and rural development?' asks the Editor; and answers: 'Simply this, that development must begin with the recognition of the supreme importance of the individual.' And we beg leave to make our own the conclusion of his article. 'There is therefore, as never before in the history of West Africa'—

let us say, Africa—‘ a great need for Europeans who have a genuine interest and faith in Africans, and who are sufficiently free from routine tasks to be able to devote time and attention to that most important of all tasks—the building up of human relationships, for he who seeks to guide human destiny is like the man at the helm of a great ship, both requiring infinite understanding, patience and wisdom. . . . Those concerned must have an intense interest in those for whom they are working, they must have an altruistic outlook and high ideals, and they must be men and women with open minds ready to receive new ideas and perceive the course of development and direct it wisely. They may not create great wealth, they may not produce huge quantities of mass-manufactured goods, they may not build large cities, but they will do something infinitely more worth while—help in the development and growth of happy communities of human beings, happy because each is living with a sense of service to his fellows and with a sense of purpose in life.’

Dr. J. H. Oldham

DR. J. H. OLDHAM—whose resignation from the Executive Council was briefly announced in our last issue—would disclaim being the father of the Institute. The idea, he would say, was born in the minds of Dr. A. L. Warnshuis and Hanns Vischer; but Dr. Oldham quickly adopted it and nursed it into maturity. From the beginning his long experience in guiding international organizations proved invaluable. It was his influence that gained the support of the Institute’s Chairman, Lord Lugard. He was also instrumental in securing the adhesion of the Protestant missionary societies as Father Dubois secured that of the Roman Catholic congregations. At the inaugural meeting in June 1926 he was chairman of the committee which drew up the constitution; and it was he who secured the grant from the Laura Spelman Fund which made possible the foundation of the Institute. When in 1929 the Executive Council sought to enlarge the Institute’s activities by embarking upon a definite course of research it was (as Lord Lugard said) due to Dr. Oldham’s tact and the confidence placed in him by members of the Rockefeller Foundation that the necessary funds were obtained. In the course of the delicate negotiations which he conducted it was made clear that the Foundation would expect that some man ‘ with gifts of creative statesmanship and administrative ability ’ should be appointed to administer the funds. Dr. Oldham was obviously the man, and at the Council’s earnest request, he consented to divide his time between the Institute and the International Missionary Council of which he was still one of two secretaries. It should be said that as Administrative Director he received no salary, though the Institute reimbursed the I.M.C. to the extent of £100 a year for the partial loss of his services. So the Institute launched upon the Five Year Plan directed towards a better understanding of those aspects of African society making for social cohesion, the economics of communal life, the ways in which African society is being disrupted by the invasion of western ideas and economic influences, and the resulting changes in African institutions and behaviour. This involved the selection of men and women to be given research Fellowships and Studentships. In this part of his work Dr. Oldham, who laid no claim to technical competence in anthropology, relied largely upon the advice of Professor Malinowski; but all appointments were made by the Executive Council. Only those who were closely associated with Dr. Oldham can appreciate the vast amount of care he gave to the administration of this research. From 1937, when the bulk of the work was accomplished, he was able to relax from his efforts; but he continued to give the Institute the benefit of his counsel as member of the Executive Council and of the small group who carried on, as best they could, its functions during the darkest days of the war. All members of the Institute, and especially members of the Executive Council, will join with us in thanking Dr. Oldham and in wishing him to enjoy yet many years of fruitful endeavour.