



Dame Margery Perham, first President (1963-1964) of the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, and thereafter one of its select group of Honorary Members, died on February 19th this year, aged 86. For fifty years she had dominated the scene of the academic-cum-applied study of Africa, seeing the art of African Studies grow from a sort of one-man band in the 1930s (more accurately, until the entrance of Lord Hailey, a two or three-women band, largely anthropologists) through an expanding company of artists in the 1950s to, from the 1960s, a fullscale orchestra of Africanist virtuosi displaying their skill on every kind of score. In her later years she modestly moved from the role of performer to that of patron, yet even in her retirement from the public platform her interest, encouragement and downright prodding remained a matter of affectionate pride to her colleagues and one of inspiration to many a younger player.

The details of her life have been too well rehearsed in the general obituaries to need anything more here than the selection of certain highlights which reflect her contacts and concern with what after World War II earned academic recognition as African Studies. Margery Perham's earlier achievements are perhaps less well-known than the numerous accolades of her later life. Exactly fifty years ago, it was a convalescence necessitated by the strain of teaching ex-servicemen of patchy quality at Sheffield University (a First in Modern History from Oxford in 1917 had secured her an immediate appointment there) and spent, believe it or not, in British Somaliland, where her sister Ethel was married to a District Commissioner, Major H Rayne (himself author of Sun, Sand and Somalis), which was to mark the beginning of a lifetime devoted to Africa. Recuperation to Margery was not likely to mean the same thing as relaxation, so she promptly settled down to describe the colonial administrative scene as she saw it. Her chosen vehicle was the novel; and Major Dane's Garden, long more or less suppressed in her putative cv, is still a neglected, rewarding source for colonial historians. Her travels associated with the tenure of a coveted Rhodes Travelling Fellowship in 1929 were, more than forty years later, attractively related in two autobiographical volumes, African Apprenticeship and East African Journey, but it was her research visit to Nigeria which was to confirm her as an authority on colonial Africa. The resultant Native Administration in Nigeria, published in 1937, remains a classic of its genre, and ranks with her six volumes and 30,000 words devoted to her monumental study of the life and work of Lord Lugard and with her influential Reith lectures (published in 1961 as The Colonial Encounter) as the supreme testimony to her meticulous scholarship and her international reputation as an eminent historian of colonial Africa. Nor, as her Government of Ethiopia demonstrates among other of writings, were her scene and skills exclusively colonial ones.

One could, of course, extend Margery Perham's roll-call of Africanist achievement and honour almost without pausing for breath. There are, for instance, her insights into Kenya (eg. her correspondence with Elspeth Huxley in their Race and Politics in Kenya), the Sudan (her introduction to K D D Henderson's Life of Sir Douglas Newbold) and Southern Africa (her co-authorship of a book on the High Commission Protectorates with Lionel Curtis); her editing of the Series on Colonial Legislatures and of another on The Economics of a Tropical Dependency; her valued introductions to the works of other scholars; and the remarkable collage of her broadcasts, articles, editorials and letters to the press on colonial policy, covering forty years of unremitting advocacy

of a cause, subsequently put together in the two volume Colonial Sequence, itself one of the most influential indices to her own influence on British colonial policy. Another indication of her stature is to be found in the citations accompanying her public recognition: medals and membership and high office in learned societies, countless Councils and Commissions, honours in the order of the British Empire and of St Michael and St George, forty years' teaching at Oxford culminating in the University's signal acknowledgement by the creation of a Readership in Colonial Administration for her and later the Directorship of its Institute of Colonial Studies, and honorary degrees in profusion. This last-named is a source which, profitably if sadly, can now be supplemented by numerous obituaries and by the intimate memorial service addresses by Professor Roland Oliver and Sir Normal Chester. Now, too, her vast collection of personal and private papers have been transported to Rhodes House Library, where in due course - sooner rather than later, if the new Librarian has his enthusiastic way - scholars will have a heyday in researching the life and work of one who, not only during her lifetime had a PhD written about her work, but whom, in a memorable sentence, the Orator in the Senate House at Cambridge perceptively praised as one who never allowed her awesome knowledge and reputation to warp "the sense of intellectual integrity which controlled all her pronouncements", attributing to this virtue the reason why she was able to exercise such extensive influence aut apud principes Africanos aut apud nostros magistratus, both with African leaders and with high officials in this country.

There remains an aspect of Margery Perham's life which is properly neither within the concern of this journal nor within the competence of this writer, yet which is something that few who met her can but have thought about. This is Margery as a persona, a woman operating in the essentially male ethos of colonial administration and in the still predominantly male world of university teaching; and Margery as a human being, as mentor, colleague, friend or relative. In the twenty years since the writer first came to know Margery Perham at Oxford, firm in her faith, warm and inspiring, always challenging, sometimes demanding and seldom one to suffer minor foibles gladly, she never failed to observe the precept she put forward in her address as the inaugural President of our African Studies Association: "the privilege of age to be reminiscent while resisting the vice of age to be merely garrulous".

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