

Institut Français d'Afrique Noire

IN January 1948 IFAN celebrated the tenth anniversary of its foundation, and a special number of *Notes Africaines*, the organ of the Institut, includes tributes to the work of the Institut from numerous scholars and scientists, and an account by Professor Th. Monod, the Director, of progress and development during the past ten years. 'Le 14 juillet, quand je débarquais à Dakar pour y appeler à la vie un organisme encore théorique, de quoi disposais-je? D'un collaborateur africain, H. Adandé, de quelques pièces vides dans un immeuble . . . et d'un arrêté administratif créant, sur le papier, l'Institut.' During this short time, thanks to the energy and devotion of its Director and in spite of innumerable difficulties, the Institut has progressed steadily, has established itself as a centre of research in many different fields, and has, moreover, given birth to a number of *centres locaux* in French West Africa, Cameroun, Togo, and French Somaliland. IFAN also initiated the 'Conférence Internationale des Africanistes de l'Ouest' and organized the first meeting held at Dakar in 1945. The list of researches which the Institut has carried out and participated in, is an impressive one, and the account of its publications is no less so. Professor Monod, in his editorial, expresses his thanks to numerous collaborators and friends and especially to M. Albert Charton, the real founder of the Institut, 'qui n'a cessé de conserver à l'IFAN une sollicitude sans doute naturelle de la part d'un père, mais qui nous demeure précieuse'.

Islam in Dahomey

DAHOMÉY has hitherto been one of the West African countries least affected by Islam. To-day there are signs of a small but growing movement towards the religion of the Prophet. Not the least interesting feature of this movement is the effort of justification and propaganda, conducted by some of the younger literate members of the community. Their attempted adaptation of Islam to modern needs is a noteworthy instance of culture-contact.

In April 1945 there appeared, in French, the first number of a quarterly bulletin entitled *Islam-Dahomey*, with the explanatory sub-title of *Bulletin trimestriel de liaison et de documentation de l'Association culturelle et d'entre-aide dite 'Jeunesse Musulmane Franco-Dahoméenne'*. This was published under the patronage of the Imam of Porto Novo, and edited and printed by a well-known Muhammadan printer of Brazilian origin, Da Silva. The Association which it represents was founded in the same year, and had as first president M. Serpos Tidjani, an employé of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire in Dahomey.

The Bulletin is addressed to all Muslims, male and female, and to any others interested in Islam. It is emphasized that the Association represents no party; it is not an extremist group or a coterie. Nor is it a political club: 'We shall remain in the middle of the road marked out by French legality.' The Governor of the colony having approved the statutes of the Association, the members are exhorted to 'make *no public demonstration* without having previously informed the local Administration'.

The programme of the Association is fellowship on Sundays, prayer at the great mosque on Fridays, mutual help in the event of marriages, baptisms, and bereavements; recreations such as the theatre (European and native), music, a travelling library in French and Arabic, sports, scouting. There are exhortations to pious works, support of the Muhammadan school in the capital by providing bursaries and a boarding establishment. The necessity for self-help is stressed: 'We must not wait for everything from the Government: private initiative has realized fine things among our Christian brothers.'

The most striking side of *Islam-Dahomey* is the manifest attempt to conciliate Christian and educated opinion, and even to copy Christian method and spirit. This new propaganda of Islam has nothing of the old fanaticism, which is explicitly renounced. It is Islam aware

of the necessity of justifying its faith and practice, and conscious of the impact of Christianity upon its faith and morals.

In the second *Bulletin* there is an article headed 'Free Opinions', by Serpos Tidjani, the President of the Association, though it is stated that this article is the sole responsibility of the writer. The sub-title is 'Glances at the Christians', and the text a verse from the Koran: 'In truth, those who believe [the Muslims], and those who are Jews, and the Sabæans, and the Christians, and whoever believes in God, at the last day, if they have done good, there will be no fear for them and they will not be afflicted.' The writer forestalls those who might be surprised to read about Christians in a Muhammadan review, by saying that in every missionary review one may find objective studies of paganism and Islam, and that even Islamic reviews in north Africa are edited by priests. He then describes Christian social services: schools, hospitals, leprosy institutions. These are to be found all over Africa, and 'I do not separate in my homage Catholics from Protestants'. This is 'Christian charity' and 'preaching by example', the 'association of religion with science'. He therefore exhorts his readers to 'salute, when you see them, these Priests, Sisters, Ministers, from distant lands, who have left families and lucrative situations, denying themselves, using up their strength in their tasks, demanding no salary save from God'.

Another letter is even more explicit on the mutual toleration of Islam and Christianity. 'No *religious proselytism*: our action must be social. No *fanaticism*: remember that all Africa has been idolatrous and that it is not for us to make distinctions between elect and non-elect. The ways of God are mysterious. Remember that the Koran teaches us that Sidna Issa [Jesus] is a Prophet, sent from God. Do not forget that other religions teach faith in God. As far as possible give no occasion for criticism; act with humility of heart.'

Even more interesting is it to find a contribution to the *Bulletin* from 'A Christian Dahomean'. This is entitled 'El Açr . . . a poem in prose chanting prayer'. It is a short story of a caravan in the desert. At sunset the weary travellers get down from their camels to pray. After the ritual gestures of ablution, these prophets, escaped from ancient Judaea, stand up facing the east, and their lips move in prayer. With sighs and prostrations their faith rises to Allah. Then as they go on their way through the night, they are filled with hope and confidence in the Merciful, and follow the path traced out by the divine Prescience.

The religious tolerance, even syncretism, of Muslim and Christian makes itself felt also in the doctrinal sphere. The liberalism, which is not unwonted among the lax Tidjanist sect to which many West African Muslims belong, appears in sermons on Faith, and a 'Credo' attributed to a Sheik Abdel-Kadir Guilani of the eleventh century of the Christian era. Most important is the question of the traditional Holy War. The problem is tackled early, and a loose sheet from the pen of M. Tidjani reinforces it in a later number. 'Let us speak of it a little [the Holy War]. This word frightens, because it always calls up pictures of banners raised above piles of bodies, ravaged towns, desolation, all the baser instincts liberated. . . . There is, nevertheless, a holy war, the most beautiful and the purest, which must be fought to the last breath. Of what value is mass conversion, if the price is lack of the qualities that make a good Muslim? How shall I seek to guide another, when I cannot see the precipice under my own feet? "Love your neighbour as yourself." . . . We shall set out, then, on a war against all moral slackness, that will be our holy war; following in this the command of the Prophet who, returning from a war [djiha] said: "We have returned from the little djiha [holy war] to undertake the great djiha against ourselves."'

Communicated by G. PARRINDER

Mass Education Experiment in Nyasaland

REFERENCE has been made in this JOURNAL (xviii. 3, p. 208) to a pilot project in education to be organized by U.N.E.S.C.O. in Nyasaland. In the April number of *Oversea Education*,