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The Nigerian Field

The International Field Studies Journal of West Africa

Volume 47 parts 1-3

August 1982



In this issue:

THE PALMWINE DRINKERDS' CLUB

Price to non-members: Nigeria N30.00; U.K. £5.00



THE NIGERIAN FIELD

THE INTERNATIONAL FIELD STUDIES JOURNAL OF WEST AFRICA

VOLUME 47 PARTS 1-3

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A House Divided

“A House Divided against itself—Shall Stand: Unity in Diversity.”

This is one of the more profound aphorisms of the Palmwine Drinkers' Club to which this volume, the last under the present editorship, is dedicated, with humility, sincerity and everlasting affection. The Nigerian Field Society comprises three elements that are indeed divided: there is the Old Guard of the founding fathers, in particular the redoubtable and legendary triumvirate of Frank Bridges, Don Rosevear and the marathon Editor for nearly half a century Edwin Haig; they devoted their lives to Nigeria and their love of Nigeria and its people is perhaps the most remarkable and enduring memory this Editor carries away with him as he forsakes the editorial chair. The second is the expatriate community, individually generally of an ephemeral nature, that maintains a general amateur interest in the natural history and culture of Nigeria. It is this segment that runs the Society and that fulfils an important recreational role for expatriates temporarily resident in Nigeria. They are concerned with the business of the Society, its meetings, excursions and drafting new constitutions. The third arm is *The Nigerian Field*, which has in the past six years become the major publishing vehicle for African scholars to communicate their work in the area of field studies, in both natural history and culture. The deeply held desire of the founding fathers has been realised. There are now many Nigerians concerned about the natural history and culture of their own land.

The future of the journal will, I hope, continue to be geared to publishing the serious works of Nigerian scholars on the natural history and culture of West Africa.

The aim of my Editorship has been to provide a bridge between *The Nigerian Field* as it was from 1931 to 1976 and a truly Nigerian Field Studies Journal, the only one indeed in West Africa, which primarily serves Nigerian scholarship.

L. B. Halstead

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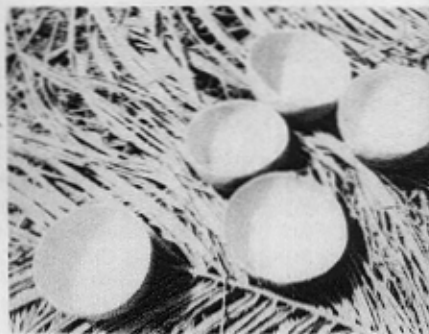
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The Palmwine Drinkers' Club

by Chief Araba Oladokun

(World Headquarters, Uppermost Shrine, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, Nigeria)

The Palmwine Drinkers' Club was founded by just seven students of the then Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, who gathered themselves together to rejoice with palmwine upon hearing that the next morning their college would become a University. Some students, uptill today, hold that the Club is old as the moon, hence the timelessness or agelessness of the Club.

The Motto of the University of Ife is "For Learning and Culture". While the 'Learning' is being done in the lecture-room, the 'Culture' is being taken care of during the programmes of the Club. In essence, the Palmwine Drinkers' Club is the second leg of the University.

The Club's motto runs thus: "The Basis of African Unity is Palmwine".

The aims and objectives of the Club are to promote unity amongst students, academic and administrative and junior workers and officers of the University, the people of Nigeria, Africa in particular, and the world in general; to restore the lost glory of palmwine—an African *Wine*. No one who has ever travelled to the different parts of our country would deny the fact that palm trees from which palmwine is got are available in all our towns and villages—as a matter of fact, the "quantity" and "quality" depend on the type of soil and the amount of rainfall that the particular area has. Henceforth, for convenience sake, I shall call the 'palmwine' the 'holy-water'. In some households, the holy-water is kept overnight and is served to the adult members of the family early in the morning before they begin the day's work. The holy-water is also served during any major ceremonies such as a birth, wedding, burial. Before the "drinking" of the holy-water is begun, the pourer first of all pours some quantity on the ground. This is not a wastage. The sole aim behind it is to appease the forefathers. And, before serving anybody in a gathering, he takes some after which he comments on the taste of the holy-water.

The Palmwine Drinkers' Club has the reputation of being strongly cultural. For example, we drink from the local 'calabash' which we call the 'emblem' while we drink. We take the holy-water to be superior to any other alcoholic drink such as Star Beer, Guinness Stout, Kantamanto and so on, not necessarily because the holy-water is the cheapest.

When during one Christmas and the New Year celebrations there was a national outbreak of the shortage of beer, the holy-water was never reported unavailable. Probably this was due to the fact that many more Nigerians prefer beer to the holy-water. Our major task in the Club is to see that the

1. The Pourer Danjo Eguche pours the holy water at the initiation of General Yakubu Gowon and President Leopold Senghor (photo: *Daily Times*). 2. Chief Araba Oladokun (wearing beret) with the World Philosopher Efe Guobadia on his right. 3. Senior Fellows Gowon and Senghor in uniform and bearing emblems aloft. 4. Newly initiated Senior Fellows Gowon and Senghor discussing the World Club with its Patron Chief Obafemi Awolowo. 5. The Senior Accountant, Mrs. T. A. Folorunso. 6. Senior Accountant, Life Senior Fellow and Fellow Jenny. 7. Joining Ceremony of Fellow Simeon Malaka and Thelma with Senior Accountant and Chief Joseph Jeroh on his right. (Photos 3-7 courtesy Bisi Photos, Ile-Ife)

holy-water dominates all other drinks in the nearest future, and as much as possible to see it being bottled at a local brewery, and to conserve it in the form of 'tablets' which can easily dissolve in ordinary water to quench thirst.

The way in which the Club is being run is not very much different from the ways that some other clubs in the University are being run, but some interesting and comic scenes and creative ideas by which the Club is known, perhaps, will not be found in some of these clubs. We have many programmes during which members are given the opportunity to express themselves, especially when it is observed that the holy-ghost has descended upon a member! When the holy-ghost has descended upon us, we don't talk in different languages; the official language which we use is English; but we sing in different languages and tones.

Membership is open to everybody, both black and white, male and female, whether rich or poor. During any of our programmes, students and cooks and lecturers drink together using the common calabash or "emblem". A lecturer who is initiated into the Club automatically becomes a "Fellow". But that is not the end of everything. A lecturer, who becomes a "Fellow" upon initiation, which is normally performed by the "chief", can be promoted to the ranks of 'Senior Fellow' or even 'Life Senior Fellow'.

In order to be a member, one has to make up his or her mind to be an active member. The initiation which then follows is an ordeal which a comrado must undergo before he or she becomes a full comrad. Once a comrad, forever you are a comrad. A comrad is essentially a member of the "Supreme comradium" of which the "chief" is the head. Only the chief has the authority to initiate someone to become either a "comrad" or a "Fellow".

It is apparent that during any of our general meetings the amount of the holy-water that a member is able to get is quite insufficient to make him become drunk; instead of this, it is just enough to make his brain become 'sharper'. Comrads do not struggle for the holy-water during a meeting; they sit down quietly as the chief pourer goes round to pour for them. The pourer can pour both "fullness" and "emptiness".

Perhaps I should mention that the Club's system of functioning is based on certain philosophical principles, which we all want to retain, although there may be occasional differences of opinion in certain cases. For example, one of our unwritten laws is as follows: "A comrad must not drive, but he must leave no hole undug". Another duty of a comrad is to try to contribute, in his own measure, to the unity of our country. We sincerely struggle to *promote the preservation and enhancement of our Nigerian heritage*. No man can escape from the time and place of his birth.

If you ask for the definition of "General Education" from a student in the faculty of Education (fortunately I was one), you are likely to be told something similar to this: 'General Education is designed to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills that should be the common possession of educated persons as individuals and as citizens in a changing society'. The opportunities for general education are not confined to classroom activities. This is where the aims and objectives of the club comes in. We sincerely believe that experiences in less formal "extra-class" activities, such as is

available in the Club, have their contribution to make, and should be available in other phases of students' college life, because some kinds of learning take place better in the direct experiences of human beings than in reading about them or discussing them in the classroom.

By and large, it is also part of the aims and aspirations of the founders of the Club to help each member to become adjusted to the broad areas of living. We teach our members directly or indirectly how to maintain their response when under great stress. For example, members are encouraged to go and sleep or die temporarily in their rooms when they are fully possessed by the holy-ghost. We encourage our members to be up and doing in their studies, if only to fulfil one of our doctrines which stipulates that "members don't fail examinations, except the lecturers make a mistake".

The rules, regulations and laws of the Club are unwritten but understandable, infinite but expressible. Slogans or aphorisms are many and capable of extension. Here are some of them: 'A house that is divided against itself shall stand—unity in diversity'; 'Few are called but many are chosen'; 'By their fingers you shall know them'; 'A comrad is never late, he may only come behind the time'; 'He doesn't eat, he feeds'; 'He doesn't drink, he evaporates'; 'A comrad never forgets although he may fail to remember'; 'A comrad can never fall, he may only obey the law of gravity'.

So as we go through the University, the University is also going through us.

To make an attempt to count the achievements of the Club is as difficult as to attempt to count the sand grains at the Lagos beach. To mention a few of them, however, will not be out of place here.

The Club regarded it a great achievement to have initiated their Excellencies General Yakubu Gowon and Leopold Senghor, who is also the "father of Negritude", during the best convocation of Ife varsity.

We count it as an achievement to have succeeded where some non-members had thought that we would fail.

Two soldiers, one from the Rebels' side (formerly Biafra) and the other from the Federal side, became friends, dropped their rifles and embraced each other at the battlefield during the Nigerian Civil War. Why? Because they were able to recognise themselves as old members of the Club.

The Year of Efe Guobadia

by Beverly Halstead, L.S.F.

Nearly a decade has passed since the events I wish to describe took place but they represent a fragment of the history of the Palmwine Drinkerds' Club that will be lost forever unless it is put on record. It may be wondered why I should wish to dedicate this volume of the journal to what is apparently merely a student society. But this is a society with a difference; there must be few student societies anywhere in the world that publicly initiate Heads of State, that destroy protocol with such thorough effectiveness. Speaking

personally I owe whatever understanding I may have of Nigeria exclusively to the comrades of the Supreme Comradium of the Palmwine Drinkers' Club at the World Headquarters, Uppermost Shrine, Ife. I measure my own education by the yardstick of the Club. This was the only community I came across where the activities, always traditionally associated with a university, actually could be experienced—an intellectual oasis in the midst of an academic wilderness. If this sounds too harsh, let it be remembered that education in Nigeria, certainly at university, consists to a large extent of either learning by rote, a tradition bequeathed by the missionaries teaching the locals to recite chunks of the Bible, or at the very least expecting the notions of the teacher to be regurgitated. Originality, novelty, was seen as a threat, and students in the classrooms were often poor dull things.

Let me begin at the beginning. On my first evening in Nigeria, as a visiting lecturer, at the University of Ife, in the late 1960's, I was put up at the Staff Club. I went into the bar to find about four expatriates sitting round drinking beer and complaining about everything Nigerian. This did not seem to be a particularly auspicious inviting environment for a newcomer. Later that same evening one of the cooks asked me if I'd like to visit the town; I was delighted. I duly visited his family home, tasted what was not the most palatable of foods, and was introduced to palmwine for the first time in my life. It was then explained that the best palmwine on the campus was in a small clearing in the bush known then as Factory One. I was taken to this where the palmwine seller, Mama Karimu, Mrs. Folorunso, the Senior Accountant, provided the most exquisite beverage it has ever been my pleasure to imbibe, and thereafter I went every day where I chatted and joked with the students and thus began my education; I began to learn of things Nigerian. At the end of my stay I was invited to join the Palmwine Drinkers' Club, which I considered a signal honour. At this first meeting I was overwhelmed by the brilliant language of the students and also realised that for the previous months I had been carefully scrutinised, my every action and every phrase had been minutely monitored.

When I returned in the early 1970's as Professor and Head of Zoology, my entire social life was spent in the Uppermost Shrine; I had no other. I have never ceased to be amazed at the astounding dichotomy between students in the classrooms and those same students in the Uppermost Shrine; suddenly they were articulate with sharp and incisive minds. One learnt of the history of all parts of Nigeria from the stories told by their families. Most remarkable of all was the quiet authority and confidence that the 'elders' of the Club possessed. Once in the Uppermost Shrine all status that one carried in the world outside was disregarded. All were equal in the eyes of the God of Wine, the Professor and the Messenger, the Security Officer and the local hunter, illegally poaching, were of equal standing in the Club.

I had joined the Club and had become part of its life and indeed identified myself wholeheartedly with its aims, as I could observe that they made seriousness out of unseriousness. Palmwine is the traditional drink of West Africa. Libations are poured for every ceremony, every event of note in the life of man from naming, to joining ceremonies, and in the rites of passage of death. Palmwine is an integral part of the life of man, it is a potent potable

symbol of an entire culture. It is, moreover, the drink of the common people. It is a drink despised by the newly-educated elite, quaffing their 'Star' and 'Stout' and whiskies and other hot drinks. For them palmwine is a symbol of the primitive past from which they have only recently emerged. Association with palmwine was taken as a token of the lower orders in society. Students that were taking to the habit of disappearing into the bush to partake of palmwine from native sellers were seen as some kind of antisocial delinquents. After my first term at Ife as Professor, it was made forcibly clear to me that my frequenting of the palmwine bar every day was being interpreted by both the expatriate community as well as the Nigerian academics as a gratuitous insult on my part towards Nigeria and Nigerians. When my pattern was observed to be unchanging then it was concluded that I was not a serious person. The reality was of course the exact reverse. The Nigerian Middle Class were so eager to embrace an alien culture even to its beverages, that they were intent on turning their backs on their own. It was against all this that the Palmwine Drinkers' Club made its stand. Palmwine was the symbol of their culture, its virtues to be extolled, the traditional values to be maintained. Unlike many of my fellow countrymen I am exceedingly proud of my cultural heritage and our history and will never deny my own. By the same token, I am equally enthusiastic towards any group with a similar outlook towards their own culture. In the Supreme Comradium everything was straightforward, there was neither point nor need for anything else. This was a truly refreshing experience. The enduring happy memories I retain of Nigeria are linked to palmwine. It is, however, to be stressed that a comrad is never overwell; we are drinkers, not drunkards. For a comrad to overindulge in the Holy Water is a sacrilege which is not to be tolerated; only comradus drink like baskets. The year the University came to celebrate its first decade, the Supreme Comradium invaded the official lizard-tail parties and dispensed the Holy Water—and were carried marathonly.

When the then Head of State General Yakubu Gowon and President Leopold Senghor of Senegal were to visit Ife, the Palmwine Drinkers' Club proposed to initiate them. Professor Protocol was horrified at the idea. The very notion of giving such visitors palmwine to drink was just too much; the even more outlandish idea of putting a uniform on them was similarly out of the question. A discrete well distanced event with Heads of State as well separated audience, that might just be possible. Needless to say, came the day, protocol was annihilated, Gowon and Senghor were duly initiated. They drank the Holy Water with evident appreciation and enjoyment and insisted on donning the uniforms.

This climactic, such astounding success, such recognition of the fundamental principles for which the club stood, brought the Supreme Comradium into national prominence. Suddenly everyone was eager to join and proud to belong. The advantage of being in a position of being looked down on, there is no place to advance in people's eyes but up; by the same token being at the pinnacle means not only are others jealous and eager to topple you, the only direction in which further movement is possible is downwards.

The years of denigration, insult and struggle had tempered the core of the

Supreme Comradium and when it came to the test, which was not long in coming, the Club's aphorism "Things fall apart—the centre shall hold" described the situation accurately.

The choosing of the Chief is accomplished in a manner of African tradition. The 'Elders', the experienced members of the Club, the Centre constitute an informal electoral college, the comrades are closely observed and their personalities weighed, and from this an individual emerges, and when the new session begins at the first meeting the name of the new chief is proposed and is carried by acclamation. In this way the best candidate is put forward. The qualities that are sought are those which will command respect and which must include a high level of self-discipline and responsibility. There came the year when the calling fell to Efe Guobadia. He was the choice of the king-makers. Now it was well known that a fairly prominent member of the Club was exceedingly keen to become the Chief and had been actively canvassing support. This activity ran completely counter to the constitution of the Club, which although unwritten was known by all. It was accepted that this person, having drummed up what was by all accounts ethnic support, again the very antithesis of the fundamental principles of the Club, as well as being again unconstitutional, was entirely unsuitable for such a post. Furthermore there had been rather too many occasions on which he had been overwell, which was in itself sufficient grounds to debar him from the chieftaincy.

Came the new session and the traditional nomination. It was dark and some 20 comrades crowded into the Shrine; many faces were not known to us. Efe Guobadia's name was proclaimed, acclaimed and by tradition at that moment became the new chief. But that was not the end of the matter: this was immediately challenged and the name of the self-campaigner was proposed and an overwhelming majority voted for him, thus defeating the traditional nominee, to wild jubilation.

The Supreme Comradium had never been faced by such a situation and was not equipped to deal with it. The Supreme Comradium entered its most serious crisis. All the senior members, all the ex-chiefs were aghast at this contravention of all the principles for which the Club had always stood; it was out of the question for someone to promote their own candidature. It was inconceivable that the Club's traditions should be so flouted, so peremptorily overturned. As far as the Old Guard was concerned, there was only one legitimate chief and that was Efe Guobadia, formerly the Philosopher. The usurper could not in any sense be accepted as the legitimate chief. A World Meeting was due, the Kegites from Ibadan, the Palmates from the Ibadan Polytechnic, branches from Akure and elsewhere were due to converge for a marathon prayer meeting at Ife: a meeting at which the new chief traditionally presided. This could not be and the XY Chief Banwo presided over the proceedings.

The situation resolved itself into a clear issue: the self-proclaimed chief demanded that his election be ratified by the Supreme Comradium otherwise he would take his own supporters and set up a rival Palmwine Drinkers' Club. In any event the membership, now bitterly divided, would soon be seen publicly to be divided and this would have disastrous consequences. There

ensued much heart-searching and it was felt that the prime consideration, the first priority, must be to the future of the Club in the longer term. The key issue was that the new chief must be subjected to the traditional procedures, that the chieftaincy could only be legitimate and subsequently confirmed only if the due process was that of the Club's tradition. For the sake of maintaining the ongoing integrity of the united Supreme Comradium the self-appointed chief was made the legitimate Chief and Efe Guobadia agreed to act as his 'Chief of Staff' and all the senior members of the inner core closed ranks around this arrangement. The traditional system, albeit bruised, was restored and no longer was the appointment of a new chief left to the automatic assumption of power by automatic acclamation at the first informal meeting of the Supreme Comradium.

What is the purpose of bringing out this historical scandal of the Club? There are two reasons: first in the list of Chiefs in the history of the Club the name Efe Guobadia does not rank, yet he played one of the most important roles in the entire history of the Club. It is important that following generations should know of this and that he should be rightly honoured. Efe abdicated his legitimate position as Chief in order that the Club should survive intact. He recognised that the place of the Palmwine Drinkers Club in Nigeria, in Africa, in the world was more important than personally serving as an individual chief for 12 months. He put the welfare of the Club before all other considerations and his action should serve as an inspiration to all comrades.

The year that I would call the Year of Efe Guobadia was one of success. Efe Guobadia, by remaining at the right hand of the legitimized chief, ensured that the disillusioned members similarly retained their loyalty to the Club and, albeit at first reluctantly, to the new chief. Efe Guobadia with his diplomatic skills kept the Club intact and as Chief of Staff his enhanced authority inspired the Supreme Comradium. The acknowledged Chief made every effort to live up to his responsibility and indeed grew in stature to fill the post. It was an uneasy year but it was, as it had always been intended, the year of Efe Guobadia.