

Makerere Historical Journal

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Godfrey

12/00

The study and teaching of history like that of other academic disciplines, have undergone refreshing changes. A hundred years ago, few historians doubted Lord Acton's belief that "Knowledge of the past is eminently practical." This assumption was given force by J. B. Bury, Lord Acton's successor at Cambridge as Regius Professor. Bury proclaimed that "a complete assemblage of the smallest facts could tell in the end." Today, these assumptions have come under increasing criticism and according to Professor Barraclough such confidence as expressed by Acton, Bury and others at the turn of the last century, "proved to be the great illusions of a whole generation."

These criticisms have come partly as a result of the revolutionary changes which have taken place since World War I. Critics have decried the ever increasing burden of intractable material. Others have denounced specialization and what they call the "arid professionalism which regards history as made for the historian only." Yet in Africa where the writing of the continent's history is just beginning, the belief that "knowledge of the past is practical" and also the belief that "a complete assemblage of the smallest facts will tell in the end", is still very relevant. The degree of practicability or what the assembled facts can tell may be limited. Nevertheless, the relevancy of Africa's past to the present cannot be doubted.

This journal, therefore, is launched not to increase the number of journals in African history, but as a useful forum for historical research. We are aware that history must maintain a living connexion with the present, we are also convinced that the present generation has demanded a shift in historical perspectives by providing clues to the understanding of the world in which we live. We have, therefore, included on our editorial committee and among our correspondents scholars from related disciplines such as sociology, political science, religion etc.

Scholars are, therefore, invited to contribute to this journal and keep it afloat not only by their original researches but also by new interpretations. Our belief in the latter must be stressed because we know that the impact which has been made by some of the great historians of the past was not due to what they added to knowledge by meticulous research but to what they contributed to understanding.

This issue was originally planned to concentrate on the study of African Institutions. This, however, proved impossible

in the end and we decided to include articles on other subjects. We wish to extend our gratitude to Drs. Kasozi and Mutibwa and Mr. Nyeko who were originally concerned with the collection of articles. Dr. Kasozi, in particular, worked tirelessly and proved to be the cornerstone of the editorial committee. We are further grateful to our publishers, the East African Literature Bureau, for their support of the efforts of scholars in general and of accepting to publish *The Makerere Historical Journal*. Particular thanks go to Mr. Sabiti, the Bureau's Uganda Senior Book Production Officer. Finally we thank all our contributors and we hope their contributions in this issue will not be the last.