

Kumasi Kumbungu and John English

KUMASI KUMBUNGU slipped his hand into mine. He was a small black scrap of West African humanity, just five years old, and this was part of a daily routine of many months' standing. I was on my way to the school in the Government Education area in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast in which I then lived. The European bungalows I had just left were about three-quarters of a mile away from the school. During the dry season when fires had reduced last season's crop of elephant grass and the new season's blades were only an inch or two above ground, my coming could be seen for most part of the way. Each morning as I neared the children's houses, Kumasi, one of the youngest pupils, came out to meet me. He took my handbag from me, held my hand with his and silently toddled to school beside me. Silent companionship it had to be for quite a long time because neither of us knew more than a word or two of the other's language, but the act was a friendly one and we were happy. How like an English child I often thought, perhaps like a child anywhere in the world! There was only one difference. Kumasi transported my bag on top of his head. It was customary for him to carry packages this way.

The infant section, which Kumasi attended, was a long building divided up into three classrooms, an office and a veranda. Each classroom was open on two sides and large enough for thirty-six children. Covering all was a thatched grass roof which was vaulted and high. The end room was furnished with small tables and chairs which the little ones used and, as requirements demanded, moved to verandas or shady trees. Kumasi belonged to this class. He was always an attractive child, even in his moments of rascality. Sometimes I've wondered if he knew subconsciously that I joined in his fun. He certainly would not have gleaned it from my manner, for only from the tail of my eye did I ever dare to observe him. In lessons which from his viewpoint were boring, I believe I was a welcome sight. Life brightened at my coming for, as he saw me approaching, he examined the situation of the moment. If there was evidence of great activity of answering questions around him, then up went his hand with the others and his voice also whispered "Teacher! Teacher!" with, I'm sure, a fervent hope that the same teacher would be understanding enough to overlook such unusual demonstrations. If, however, the other pupils were observant and still, then a great and disquieting stillness pervaded Kumasi and an expression of super-earnestness filled his eye. In craftwork and dramatisation it was a different matter. I could have claimed little appreciation then. The joy of rolling wet sword grass on his little thigh, in preparation for plaiting salt bags, was entirely absorbing, and the complete abandon with which he impersonated goats

and other folk-tale animals rendered my presence quite unnoticed. How often I wished I could bring a living picture of that small boy and his companions to children at home! I was sure they had the password to all British kindergartens; indeed I felt no doubts regarding their reception anywhere.

Just recently I felt very strongly about this. I have just seen a film of the everyday life of an English working-class family projected, with running commentary in a Gold Coast vernacular, for African teachers in Accra. The film, I was told, had been made by the Ministry of Information's Colonial Film Unit specially for the purpose of bringing an English family to West Africa. It showed a day in the life of an ordinary English family, typical of a big percentage of the people of Britain. While the father, named in the film Mr. English, a carpenter by trade, made doors and window frames for a local housing scheme, his wife occupied herself with housekeeping and the care of her children, two of whom attended the elementary school near by. Points such as Mr. English's interest in his early morning paper, Mrs. English's marketing activities in the main street of the town, the care of the sitting room kept for holidays and visitors, and the detailed arrangements and preparation of family meals, were all made in turn, but the main theme centred round the children; it was a picture of sturdy childhood, rightly encouraged to fend for itself in the happy atmosphere of parental care. Remarks spontaneously expressed at the end of the show by the African teachers who had seen this glimpse of typical English family life, were illuminating.

"Do many English women have to work as hard as that?" asked one teacher.

"Do they not have servants?" asked another. These questions were not really surprising, because Gold Coast Africans see white people only in their own hot country where the climate is damp and enervating and the employment of native labour, including that of the domestic servants, is essential to all foreigners. They do not know them in their own European environment.

As we were leaving the hall a head master stopped me: "Could this film be shown to our school children, do you think?" he asked. Presumably he thought my support would strengthen his request.

"I'm sure it would be good for our geography," he added. While he was making his point I thought with some distaste of many lessons in my own schooldays, and of how I had rebelled against the memorisation of numerous useless geographical facts; how also I had looked somewhat patronisingly at pictures of life in countries far away, and misunderstood rather than understood, as I listened to the national teaching pattern:—

"They have peculiar customs"; "They wear strange costumes"; "They eat queer dishes," and many more such contrasts.

"We are the salt," I had meditated. "How different are you!"

It is an innocent enough reaction for a nation's youth, but it will not serve its age. Maturity should bring with it some knowledge of samenesses—a feeling of human kinship, to promote the growth of international co-operation essential to economic and cultural development. Kumasi and his family are friendly people, and they and their country are often very like ourselves and our country. "Mr. English" has travelled to West Africa. When, I wonder, will Kumasi Kumbungu be taken to England?

Work in Progress

RURAL SCHOOL

The object of this film is to explain the working of a small English school in a rural locality and to show what can be done with a small but enthusiastic staff, by a wise arrangement of the syllabus. There is little extravagant equipment but there is much improvised apparatus for individual work. This film should teach many lessons in skilful group working.

Shooting started early in May.

AFRICANS STUDY SOCIAL WORK IN BRITAIN

About thirty African men and women from many of the African colonies are in Britain studying various branches of social science. After a lengthy course, they will return to work among their own people. A short film has been made showing their various activities and will shortly be ready for general distribution.

AN AFRICAN IN ENGLAND

The first film in this series was shown with success in all parts of Africa. Agreement has been reached on the script of a second film. It will show an African paying a visit to an English village and seeing the many activities normal to village life in this country. Shooting will commence when work on "Rural School" is finished.

COLONIAL CINEMAGAZINE

As already announced, no further issues of *The British Empire at War* are being made. In place of the newsreel there will be a periodic issue of the new *Colonial Cinemazine*. This will contain stories which are likely to be of particular interest to people in Africa. Several Magazines have been planned for this year.

JONATHAN BUILDS A DAM

This film in 16-mm. Kodachrome was taken by the photographic section of the Kenya Information Office. We hope permission may be given to distribute this film in colour. It may be necessary to reduce the length to make this possible.

The photography is of a high standard throughout, and the slow tempo makes the story easy to follow.