

The Traditional Ethiopian Curriculum

Haile Gabriel Dagne

THE great merit of the book¹ lies in its detailed account that it gives of the curricular offering of the traditional schools attached to the Church. Not only what is taught but also how and why it is taught in the various stages is dealt with at considerable length.

In Part I (pp. 17-38) the author describes in detail the learning of the Ge'ez syllabary and the methods developed to help the child master the Ge'ez characters. Space is also given to a discussion of the letters themselves.

In part II the long and tedious course of lessons that culminate in the recitation of all the Psalms and the various prayers is described.

The author devotes a good deal of space in his account to the *Qidasse* and *Zema* lessons, i.e. to the mass and the hymns of the Church (pp. 57-143). Here he describes the learning of the four branches of *Zema*: *Degua*; *Zemare* and *Mewasit*; *Aquaquam*; *Qidasse*.

The favourite teaching of the Church schools, the *qine*, is also described.

The most difficult and most time-consuming subject of the church schools, the study of the commentaries, *metshaf bet*, is given due attention in pp. 212-265. The commentary on the Old and New Testaments, the various patristic works, and the writings on monasticism are described. The teaching of the *Fetha Negest*, *Bahre Hassab* and the *abushaker* calendar reckoning or astrology, topics which are rarely mentioned in other books in Amharic, are dealt with here at length (pp. 237-264).

There is a noteworthy section on the study of calligraphy and painting.

Since this book contains a detailed description of the teaching of the Church schools in their functional setting, i.e. in the service of the Church, it is an important source-book for further critical study of the school system. Students of Ethiopian education will find this a useful book of reference for Church school didactics.

The author appears to be interested, however, only in describing the curriculum as he knows it, whether at first-hand or by report. He is not interested in any critical investigation or analysis of the material he has at his disposal. He does not give his sources, though he mentions the names of a number of people who helped him in his writing. Neither is his approach historical: it is often not clear whether the school practice he is describing belongs to the Ethiopia of the 18th and 19th centuries or to the Ethiopia of to-day. He tends, too, to glorify the Church school system, though its glory has been somewhat eclipsed recently, and he ignores the factors that have contributed to the decline of the system.

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አ. አ. 1955 ፡ 9. ም. 324 ገጽ \$ 5

The secular reader may be disturbed by the legendary and miraculous interpretation of certain historical facts which he finds in this rather uncritical appreciation of the traditional schools.

Education News in Brief

1. In February Haile Sellassie I University celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its foundation with an art exhibition, a poetry reading, a public debate and a musical entertainment. The Alumni Association played a prominent part in the commemoration.

2. The Chancellor's Advisory Committee, consisting of eight distinguished educators from Nigeria, Sweden, U.K., U.S.A., and West Germany, met in Addis Ababa from January 3 to January 9. The Committee was charged by His Imperial Majesty, the Chancellor of HSIU, to offer advice on:

- (a) how best to promote the main objective of advancing knowledge and seeking truth;
- (b) how best to make the University comparable to the leading institutions of higher learning throughout the world;
- (c) how to make the University the exemplar for other Ethiopian universities of the future.
- (d) The Committee was also asked to suggest ways and means for the University's improvement, future growth and development, and to weight its values and provide a frank evaluation as well as recommendations for improvement.

3. Perhaps as early as 1972-73 a new Science Teacher Training Programme will go into operation on the Alemaya campus. Under the proposed scheme it will take the teacher-trainee three calendar years (including a special 12th grade year) to qualify as a teacher of science in senior secondary schools. After three years' teaching he will be eligible to return to the University for a final year in which to take his degree. The main aim of the scheme is to accelerate the production of science teachers, but it is also hoped that the scheme will reduce the drop-out rate by providing more continuous support for students and that it will be possible to increase the relevance of the training offered.

4. The Ministry of Education announced in September 1970 that henceforth textbooks would not be issued free to students. Books might be purchased at the non-commercial prices given in the Ministry's price-list.

The Ministry also announced that, in order to accommodate fast-expanding enrolments in the secondary schools, a shift system had been introduced.

Since July 1970 a new 2% education tax has been levied on all salaries.

It is too early as yet to evaluate the impact of these new measures upon the school system.

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