

Notes and News

Our New Volume

THANKS to a partial relaxation of war-time control on the use of paper this first number of volume XVI contains 72 pages instead of 64. We hope that the time is not far distant when the Journal will recover its pristine spaciousness. Readers will notice that the shorter name of the Institute, authorized by the Executive Council in 1939, now appears on the title-page.

We are introducing a new feature for the benefit of members who wish to keep abreast with developments in African studies but are hindered by the fact that these are chronicled in periodicals which to them are inaccessible. We intend to print in each number abstracts of articles which have appeared in journals devoted to the social sciences—anthropology and sociology, demography, economics, law, colonial administration, education, psychology, and linguistics. We shall not eschew history and archaeology. Such abstracts must needs be very concise but they will at least inform readers of the main facts. Some topics will be reserved for comment in Notes and News. The abstracts in this number are presented tentatively and we anticipate that with the help of experts improvements will be made as time goes on.

The Voice of Africa

EARLY volumes contained, under the rubric 'The Voice of Africa', specimens of poetry, proverbs, legends, and folk-tales in the vernacular with a translation in English or French. We invite the co-operation of readers to reintroduce this feature which, we are confident, would be widely welcomed.

A good example of what we desire is seen in the series of poems which Father Hulstaert has had the good fortune to obtain for a recent number of *Aequatoria* from Abbé Alexis Kagame, the first native of Ruanda to be admitted to the Roman Catholic priesthood, and editor of the periodical *Kinyamateka*. With the active support of King Mutara III a Comité de l'art indigène has been organized in Ruanda and one of its objects is to make a collection of the traditional lore. (The king has established a fund for the publication of books, the first of which, *A History of Ruanda*, appeared in 1943.) These poems form part of the collection. The King, the Warrior, and the Cow are the spinal cord of the Hamitic hierarchy of Ruanda and the poems have the king for their subject. One of them was composed by a dynastic poet named Semidogoro more than 150 years ago. It is entitled *Umwami si umuntu*, 'the King is not a human being'. We quote a few of the eighty-nine verses:

Le Roi, c'est lui le Dieu qui s'occupe des humains.
 Ce n'est vraiment pas un homme, c'est un Roi.
 Le Roi que voici, personne n'oserait se comparer à lui,
 Sous prétexte que leurs demeures sont contigües . . .
 Je trouve que le Roi est Dieu rendu accessible à nos prières;
 Le Dieu suprême, c'est le Roi qui le connaît;
 Quant à nous, nous ne voyons que notre souverain. . . .
 Le souverain que voici boit le lait trait par Dieu
 Et nous buvons le lait qu'à son tour il trait pour nous.
 Le Roi est le seul grand responsable,
 Lui qui se charge de tout un pays et le rassasie.

Apart from their literary quality, which we cannot fully judge in the absence of the vernacular originals, the poems are of high anthropological value because of the light they throw upon the ideas of royalty. The divine right of kings was never more explicitly stated than by these Ruanda poets. The king's power is something infused by God at the moment of conception. As every Hamite enthrones an official bull in his herd to be the symbol of its master (the Abbé comments), so God enthrones the king to be His symbol. The king is the Bull that fecundates his realm. 'En vue de multiplier les vaches, Dieu a commencé par créer les Rois!' One poem of 162 verses, entitled *Nta washobora igihugu nk'umwami*, 'Personne ne saurait être la providence du pays comme le roi', multiplies metaphors in extolling his powers over nature: he gathers the clouds, causes rain to fall, the lightning to flash, the thunder to roll, but does all this by the grace of God who made him king.

C'est maintenant l'ondée du sein de Dieu qui nous est donnée:
Le Roi munificent, descendant de Cyilima,
Obtient de Dieu l'envoi de la pluie.

The Spiritual Ownership of Land

THE term is used to indicate that rights in land exist which are not based upon physical occupancy. An invading people may occupy the land and yet recognize that without the help of the tutelary deities of the conquered they cannot hope effectively to cultivate it and they therefore resort to the priests of the conquered people for prayers to be offered on their behalf. The old deities, or their earthly representatives, are the spiritual owners of the land. A Chief in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast said to Captain Rattray: 'The people belong to me, the land belongs to the *tendana*', i.e. to the 'priest king' of the old inhabitants. There the Chief (representing the conquering people) and the *tendana* (representing the deities of the conquered) functioned side by side, each in his own sphere. In Ashanti the two functions, the political and the religious, became merged in one person.

The Bemba invaded and conquered the north-eastern corner of the territory now known to us as Northern Rhodesia. All rights in the soil became vested in the *Chitimukulu*, their Paramount Chief. As Dr. Audrey Richards tells us in her *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* and in *African Political Systems*, the Bemba believe that the productive capacity of the soil depends entirely on the beneficence of the tutelary deities associated with it, and that the goodwill of these supernatural beings can only be secured by the prayers of the chief and his observance of a particular way of life. Moreover, after his installation he is believed in his own person to affect the fortunes of his land. His ill health or death, his pleasure or displeasure, his blessings or curses, can affect the prosperity of his people; his sexual power gives vigour and 'warmth' to the land. In this respect he is comparable with the divine kings of Ruanda. In the second of the *Communications* of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Mr. W. V. Brelsford confirms and emphasizes this mystical connexion between the Chief and the soil. If, he says, a Chief of the royal clan were allowed to die a natural death the streams would dry up, crops would fail, and game would disappear; he was throttled when his vigour diminished and death was imminent, lest he should take with him 'the spirit of the land'. (We should like to know the Bemba word here rendered 'spirit'; is it *umupashi*, 'ghost'?) It would seem that the Paramount Chief shared to some extent his spiritual prerogative with others: with district chiefs, who were members of the royal clan, and even with village headmen who performed subsidiary rites to local deities. Moreover, while the powers of the old deities appear to have faded out from the territory actually occupied by the Bemba—or to have been transferred to the Bemba ancestral spirits—some of the Bemba still resort to priests of the conquered Bisa and Lala peoples who continue to live within the Bemba domain. In these instances spiritual ownership is separate from