

BOOK REVIEWS

Erica Powell, *Private Secretary (Female)/Gold Coast*. London: C. Hurst and Company, 1984. 228 pp. \$8.95.

In the years following the overthrow of President Nkrumah, many books were written from different ideological perspectives in an attempt to explain Nkrumah's personality and his policies. There were books such as Fitch and Oppenheimer's *Ghana: End of an Illusion*, Geoffrey Bing's *Reap the Whirlwind*, Peter Onari's *Kwame Nkrumah: the Anatomy of an African Dictatorship*, C.L.R. James' *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* and Basil Davidson's *Black Star*.

In recent years, however, and with the passage of time, Nkrumah's place in the history and politics of Ghana is being reassessed more and more objectively, and some of his former colleagues and associates have come out with memoirs and reminiscences of their association with Dr. Nkrumah. Such is Tawiah Adamafio's *By Nkrumah's Side*, Genevieve Warais' *Kwame Nkrumah as I knew Him* and Erica Powell's volume presently under review.

Erica Powell worked as Dr. Nkrumah's Private Secretary from 1955 to 1966, having previously served as the Governor's Secretary. In that latter capacity, she came to know Dr. Nkrumah and established a friendship with him which was to culminate in her appointment as his secretary and confidant. Powell's book gives us an insight into the workings of colonial government and society and the racism and prejudices of colonial officials. She presents a highly readable account of the heady days leading to independence and behind-the-scenes incidents. Her easy conversational style moves the reader along rapidly.

Powell's portrait of Nkrumah is realistic and sympathetic and we see him as the ordinary man with his doubts and fears, the friend, the political leader and the statesman. In her description of Dr. Nkrumah's style of work, one is reminded of Dei-Anang's account in his book *The Administration of Ghana's*

Foreign Relations, 1957-65, of the very exacting way in which Nkrumah drove himself and those around him. Nkrumah's tremendous capacity for work, his complete disregard of official hours for himself and his staff inspired them to carry on beyond their endurance. His seeming indifference to the needs of his staff is vindicated by touching accounts such as his personal intervention to restore domestic harmony in the home of his Principal Secretary following conflict over his hours of work. Indeed Ms. Powell gives other accounts of Nkrumah's humaneness and accessibility and of the way many Ghanaians travelled to see him to resolve their personal problems, material or otherwise.

The book recaptures the ebullience and charisma of Dr. Nkrumah around his many state visits abroad. Powell describes the turbulence of the 1960s on the African continent and Dr. Nkrumah's role in it, essentially in the Congo Crisis. She intimates the beginnings of the economic crisis in Ghana, the political intrigues and assassination attempts which created a state of insecurity and suspicion and led to growing arbitrariness and the denial of democratic rights for political opponents which were to culminate in the coup d'état.

Powell's highly personalised recollections are vivid and reflect both her understanding of her years in Ghana and her personal convictions. She had arrived in the Gold Coast with no political convictions, and without encountering Dr. Nkrumah, would have, in all likelihood, returned to Britain without any real contact with or knowledge of the people and the country. Through Dr. Nkrumah, she became intimately connected with the fortunes of the young Ghanaian state and from her position, helped to organise the President's private life and household and sought to influence his tastes and opinions. As a secretary, she was highly efficient and hard-working and as Dr. Nkrumah said, she reminded him of the loyal breed of British secretaries who had worked

for him during his impoverished days in London. And British she remained. As she herself put it, "I have been loyal, almost at times to the point of fanaticism, to the President personally and to Ghana ... at no time have I been, or will I ever be, disloyal to my country, Britain. The occasion has never ... arisen when I have had to face divided loyalties between Ghana and Britain.

If such an occasion does arise, I will not lack the courage and honesty to inform ... the President of my difficulty and ask to resign my position as his private secretary".

The book is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the life and work of Dr. Nkrumah, and its insights into his character and personality from one of the individuals who perhaps was closest to him, should improve our understanding of Kwame Nkrumah the man and the statesman. Ms. Powell's book is much more comprehensive than Genoveva Marais', and her position of vantage as his secretary allows for a portrait which is fuller and many-faceted.

Takyiwaa Manuh.

Meyer Fortes, *Religion, Morality and the Person (Essays on Tallensi Religion)*. Edited and with an introduction by Jack Goody. Cambridge Paperback Library, C.U.P. 1967, p. xiii, 347. Photographs, Notes, References and Index.

The author of this book, Meyer Fortes, died in January 1963 at Cambridge where he was formerly William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology. He is perhaps best known in Ghana for his researches in Ashanti and among the Tallensi of the Upper East Region of Ghana. He is the author of the *Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* and *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, two anthropological classics, as well as numerous other publications.

This book is a collection of ten essays and a preface and was put together by Jack Goody, Professor of Social Anthropology in Cambridge. The essays were based on a series of distinguished lectures Fortes gave

at various times to associations of anthropologists and other audiences. The earliest of these essays appeared in *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (1962, ed. M. Gluckman) and the most recent is Fortes' preface to *Sacrifice* (1980, eds. C. Bourdillon and M. Fortes).

The title of the volume aptly summarises its content. 'Religion, morality and the person' is a set of interrelated themes pervading the whole of Fortes' work. The specific issues dealt with in the volume include the ancestors, divination, sacrifice, prayer, the concept of person, rituals and office, the first born, destiny, totem and taboo, custom and conscience and festivals. In all of these, the ancestors emerge in Fortes' view as the linch-pin. In Chapter 4 the author delves into psychology and psychoanalysis to explain the role Tallensi ancestors assume in the social experience.

'The Dynamics' and 'The Web' both deal with the issues central to this volume but the book is not, for that matter, redundant. The author took the opportunity provided by the interests of the particular audience and the occasion to demonstrate the motivation and appeal of his earlier analyses and to relate anthropology to other human concerns.

Fortes' work follows the trends set by Functionalism although Fortes does not always agree with the arch-functionalists. This school of anthropological study has drawn much criticism from Marxists, Transactionists and Structuralists and Fortes has had his share of such criticisms, which have at times been scathing. These essays have provided Fortes with the chance to answer back. They demonstrate his conviction that functionalism is useful. He refers to Structuralism as 'message oriented theory' and argues that it complements but does not replace the 'actor-centred' approach of functionalism. Fortes has always paid attention to empirical evidence, to emic categories whether in the form of Tallensi exegesis or the etymology of Taini words. These essays demonstrate these methods and qualities in his work.

Fortes like many functionalists has been

accused of producing accounts which ignore the issue of time. Although in these essays he does not confront this criticism directly he nevertheless makes reference to social change and compares synchronically at least, if not diachronically, temporal phases of Tallensi society. For many Tallensi the traditional and the modern coexist and individuals have evolved a 'dual sector' attitude which allowed for compromise and symbiosis.

The essays are also interesting from the point of view of style. In earlier publications like 'The Dynamics' the style is very formal and the anthropologist was concerned with explanation of the working of society. Layers of compact diagrams, exotic names and a welter of terms have often combined to make those accounts difficult reading. These essays by contrast are full of asides aimed at taking the reader into confidence, personal details and witty remarks. The essays for example reveal that Fortes was a first born from a large Jewish family, and that he had studied Psychoanalysis and had also once practised clinical psychology in East London. In the essays he now goes beyond his customary reference to individual Tallensi as 'my friend so and so' and actually discusses his personal relationships and the attitudes of Tallensi to him. He jokes for example, about songs Tallensi had composed about him which showed that some Tallensi did not sympathise with his curiosity. He expresses at another point pleasant surprise when some Tallensi credited the arrival of rain on the conclusion of the dry season Goliab rites to his attendance. He is similarly pleased when, in recounting the Mosuor legend as a feature of one of the esoteric rites to which he had gained admittance, the Earthpriest compared Mosuor's arrival in Taleland to the visit of Fortes several centuries later. Fortes tells also of how he had to provide a cow as a fine imposed on him by his 'brethren' of the

Boghar Cult. There are many of such episodes which the author recounts in this Volume but not in his other publications. Apart from the relief provided by such humour such episodes are important in a subject which depends heavily on what the person at the spot, the ethnographer, reports and his interpretation of the evidence.

This volume is a valuable addition to the literature on the Tallensi and it should be of interest to scholars and others concerned with Northern Ghana. The appeal of the book should however transcend the North. Fortes makes references to the Ashanti and other Ghanaian people. In Chapter 8 we find Ashanti being compared to Tallensi in an attempt to explain the prevalence of witchcraft beliefs among the Ashanti and the absence of such beliefs among the Tallensi. Perhaps a more meaningful exercise should explain the absence of such beliefs in Taleland by comparing with the neighbours of the Tallensi who are more similar to the Tallensi yet have beliefs concerning witchcraft not shared by Tallensi.

The essays in this volume deal with the general field of human experience. The angle of comparison is often widened to encompass China, India, Western Europe, or the Middle East. We find references to ancient texts including the Bible, the Koran and Greek Mythology juxtaposed with, and illustrative of, modern experience. His aim has been to illustrate that beyond the superficial differences of custom and ritual there exist basic human proclivities which unite mankind across space and time. Fortes holds the view that Anthropologists should study these underlying similarities. In addition to the 'how' of ethnography, there is also the 'why'. Fortes laments that anthropologists have either ignored psychology or paid only lip service to it.

A.K. Awedoba.