

# INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

*It was typical of the hospitable and friendly character of the Nigerian people that they wished to share with their friends their happiness in the political independence of their country. The Federal and Regional Governments invited a number of guests from overseas to visit Nigeria and enjoy with them the historic events of October 1st, 1960. Most of them had lived and worked in Nigeria; others represented orga-*

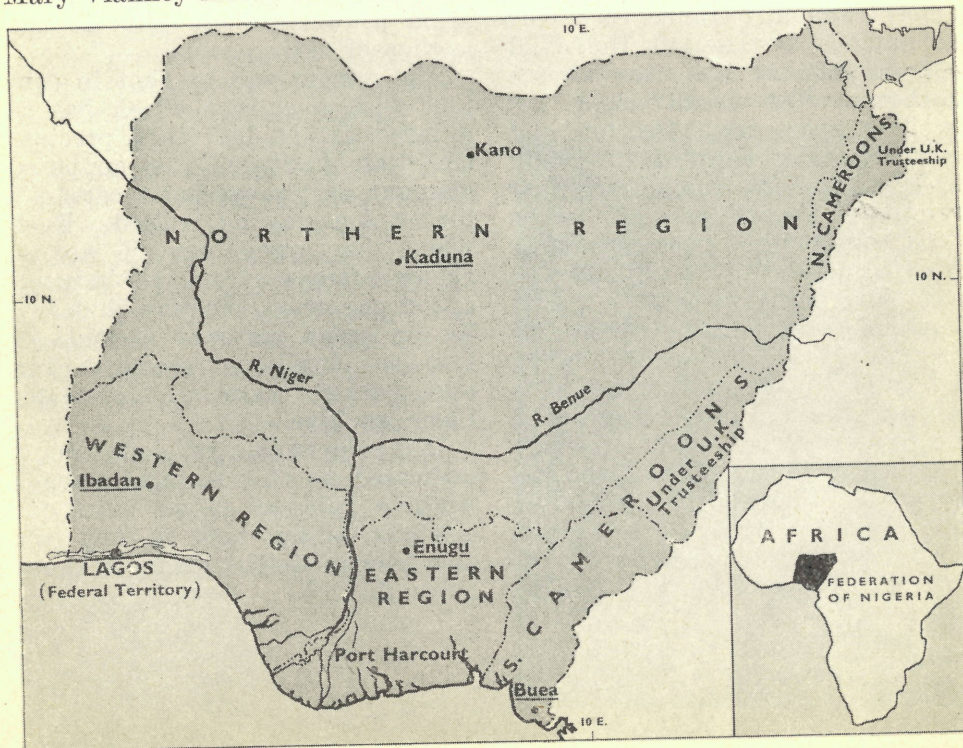
*nizations connected with the development of the country. Amongst those who received invitations there were many missionaries including Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother Mary Osmund. The former unfortunately could not be present in person as she had already made arrangements to sail for America at the beginning of October, but she sent Reverend Mother Mary Frideswide from Rome to represent her.*

## LAGOS, Seat of the Federal Government.

By Mother Mary Frideswide.

From the moment the plane touched down at 7.30 a.m. on Sunday September 25th at Lagos Airport one realized the trouble that had been taken to give the guests a most hospitable welcome. Rev. Mother Vicar and Rev. Mother Mary Vianney met me and told me

of the beautiful car, complete with chauffeur, which had been put at the disposal of each of the visitors. There were no Customs formalities; one sat peacefully, in a comfortable chair, while willing hands retrieved the baggage. Then we drove away in the green "Independence car",





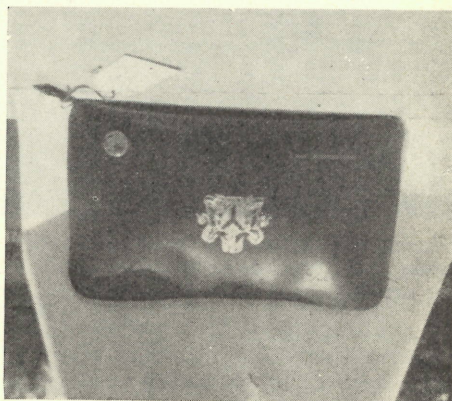


The 'Independence Umbrella' goes up!

which was even provided with a large green-and-white umbrella for use in inclement weather. The Prime Minister of Eire, Mr. Lemass, and his wife had travelled from Kano on the same 'plane. He was going to Maryland, the Training College for Teachers, run by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles not far from the airport, where His Lordship Bishop Aggey was coming to say Mass. The nuns had kindly said that we also might hear Mass in their chapel. From the steps of the altar Bishop Aggey welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Lemass to Nigeria, thanking the Prime Minister for the great spiritual help given to this country by the Irish missionaries. And this help would be needed for many years to come. "For", added the Bishop, "the harvest is great but the labourers very few".

It was delightful after Mass to drive towards Lagos in the bright morning sun. Along the road people were busy putting up green and white decorations. On the Carter Bridge, which connects Lagos with the mainland, very elaborate coloured lights had been erected. In the city decorations were on a lavish scale, and at night the illuminations rivalled any in the world; those along the water front were par-

ticularly effective. But in the morning these glories were as yet unknown; more striking were the green and white bunting of the Convent and School and the traditional Holy Child welcome from the Community and boarders, the latter wearing new and very pretty green and white week-end uniforms. At the Convent was the elegant leather portfolio presented by the Federal Government to each of its guests and containing invitations to all the functions, together with some beautifully produced literature about the history and people of Nigeria. It was stamped in gold with the words INDEPENDENCE 1960 and the Federal Coat-of-Arms: two horses rampant holding a shield surmounted by an eagle. The shield



is divided into three sections, symbolizing the Niger and the Benue joining together and flowing to the sea. The pallium-like effect is enhanced by the motto at the base of the Coat-of-Arms: UNITY AND FAITH.

On Monday October 3rd, H.R.H. Princess Alexandra of Kent arrived to inaugurate a week of ceremonies and events. At the Airport one saw Nigerians from all parts of the Federation in their varied and





Princess Alexandra of Kent receives a welcome from the Oba of Lagos, Adeniji Adele II (left) and the Minister of Lagos Affairs, Alhadji Ribadu (right) on her arrival. Sir James Robertson, Governor-General of Nigeria, walks behind the Princess

colourful national costumes, come to greet the Princess who, as one said, "is bringing us our independence". The Governor General, the Prime Minister, Ministers and prominent members of the Opposition all greeted her on the tarmac before she drove away to Lagos in an open car.

The Federal Government in a seven-page brochure *Programme of Events Independence 1960* listed the various public and semi-public functions and entertainments arranged for the memorable days, September

25th—October 4th. Every evening the city was illuminated for the large, happy and courteous crowds which thronged the streets. The students of the Holy Child School produced a very spirited play, arranged by Mother Mary Thomasine, called *This is Nigeria*. The daughter of the house returns home after some years at school abroad, and her parents arrange a party for her, which the Chief (acted by the daughter of the Oba of Lagos) and various friends attend. Ibo, Efik and Benin dances are performed



by different groups; some beautiful spirituals are sung by another group and by a soloist (Maria Tabio, once a member of the School Staff and now with the Nigerian Broadcasting Company). Light relief is provided by the younger sister who does not want to go to school on the day of her Sister's return, by the various trades men who arrive with provisions, luggage and newspapers, and by an irrepressible streetcleaner who plies his trade outside the house. Finally the daughter, who has greatly enjoyed her party, asks everybody to sing with her one thing more, the *Nigerian National Anthem*.

The play was given on three successive nights, on the second of which two Archbishops were present: His Grace Archbishop Heerey of Onitsha and His Grace Archbishop Porter, late of Cape Coast, both of whom were visiting Lagos for the Independence Celebrations. At the end Archbishop Heery congratulated the actors and spoke of the responsibilities all must face in the new era of "our country". For the last performance Reverend Mother Mary Osmund arrived just in time, her plane from the East having been delayed by the furious storm which had swept over Lagos two hours earlier. At the end of the play Mr. Esua, the Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, congratulated the school on the success of *This is Nigeria* and warmly welcomed Reverend Mother Mary Osmund, saying how much pleasure her return to Nigeria had given to her many friends.

With the storm the elements seemed to have done their worst and the following day dawned bright and clear for the National Pageant which took place on the Racecourse. Of this the Speaker of the House of Representatives in

the Foreword to the Programme had said: "The idea behind this Pageant is to show Her Royal Highness, Princess Alexandra of Kent, foreign delegations and visitors, and Nigerians generally some of the things the ordinary people of Nigeria do in their daily rounds. The emphasis of the Pageant is on youth, education and the community....."

In preparing this National Pageant the Committee has borne in mind, at all times, the motto of the



new Nigerian Crest - Unity and Faith".

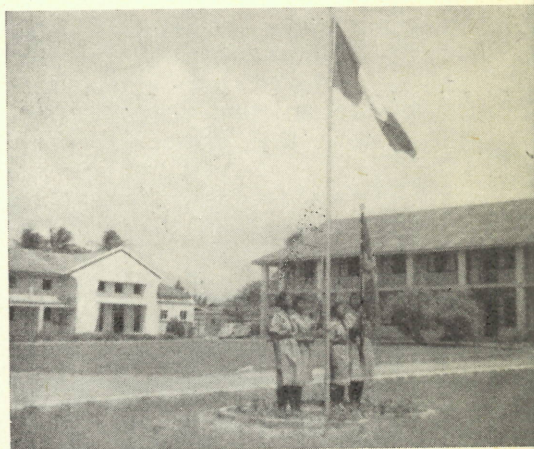
The Pageant consisted of a march past of children from all the Primary Schools of Lagos, very gay in their different coloured uniforms. This was followed by a procession of thirty-six floats illustrating "Youth, Education, and the Community". The first four floats, marked EDUCATION, contained seats occupied by notable figures - clerical and lay, male and female, African and European, who had been connected at some time with Nigerian education. Many of those whose names appeared on the Programme had long since gone to their reward: Bishop Shanahan, Mary Slessor, Archdeacon Dennis; others could not be present in person but were represented by



deputies. Reverend Mother Mary Osmund had a place in float 3 and Mr. Esaa in float 4. Miss Plummer, H. M. I., who had been such a good friend to our missionaries, had a place reserved for her in float 3 but she had not been able to accept her invitation to return to Nigeria. The other floats illustrated many facets of Nigerian life: Youth Movements, Health, Physical Education, Fishing, Trade and Social Activities. We took a proprietary interest in Float 7, which depicted a Guide Camp with Guides cooking their dinner. The float had spent the previous day in the Holy Child Compound and been arranged by Miss Rose Anne Durkin, the School's zealous Guide Captain, and members of her Company who now demonstrated their culinary dexterity before Princess Alexandra and the great ones of Lagos.

After the floats there were displays of P.T. and community good works arranged by the Boy Scouts, Y.W.C.A., Brownies, and students from the Man O'War Bay Training Centre. The last taught us such useful arts as how to construct a market at short notice, cross a river and get over the top of a wall (and a very high one!) without any aids; what is more, they got a patient on a stretcher over the wall too. During these edifying demonstrations acrobats danced and leaped and tumbled round the edges of the arena for the delectation of the more frivolously minded. The area demonstrations ended, Princess Alexandra got into an open jeep and drove round the racecourse to visit the thousands of school-children massed to receive her with fluttering green flags, while the bands of the Nigerian Police and the Royal Nigerian Military Forces played marches and incidental music with splendid rhythm. At one

point strains of *The Minstrel Boy* floated on the air. When the Princess returned to the Royal Box there appeared the first formation of the R.A.F. staging a short and thrilling Fly Past. The last plane went out of sight; we rose to our feet; the bands played the opening bars of *Nigeria, we hail thee*. The Nigerian National Anthem was sung publicly for the first time in history.



The Guides at Holy Child School, Lagos, practise for the formal raising of the new Nigerian flag.

On the night of September 30th we listened to the very dignified ceremony of the raising of the Nigerian Flag. Prayers asking the blessing of God upon the new nation were said by the Anglican Bishop of Lagos, by His Grace Archbishop Taylor and by the Chief Imam of Lagos, the Head of the Lagos Moslems. It was a solemn moment when the Archbishop's familiar voice came strong and clear over the air. One who was present at the Flag Raising said that he looked very imposing, his *cappa magna* fluttering in the night breeze. Then we went to see our



own Flag Raising in the middle of our compound and to sing the National Anthem. From the Community Room we watched the magnificent display of fire-works which must have been visible for many miles around the city.

On Sunday, October 2nd, Holy Cross Cathedral was filled for the Solemn High Mass of thanksgiving celebrated by the Holy Father's representative, His Excellency Archbishop Maury, Apostolic Delegate at Dakar. In the Sanctuary were Archbishop Taylor, Archbishop Gantin of Cotonou and Bishop Aggey, who preached a very vigorous sermon expressing his joy at the political independence of his country but stressing vehemently the need for great endeavour especially on the part of Catholic Nigerians: more earnest prayer, harder work, greater interest in social problems, above all, greater respect for womanhood. Crowds came to the altar rails to receive Holy Communion from the Holy Father's representative and at the end of Mass we all received the Apostolic Benediction.

Two days later we were delighted to have an informal visit from His

Grace, Archbishop Maury. This charming and urbane French prelate had tea in the Convent, went to the Chapel and School, talked with the Community and boarders (it was afternoon and the rest of the School had gone home), and gave us his blessing. This, he said, was his first contact with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, but it would not be his last. He expects to visit the Convents in Ghana when he goes there. "Holy Child", he remarked "is a beautiful and appropriate name for those who teach children".

I have said nothing here of the great public ceremonies that have taken place, since these are already matters of history and have been described in the press and on the air all over the world; nor yet of the many beautiful and interesting things to be seen in Lagos in the Museum and in the Nigeria Exhibition; for this we would need a special edition of *The Pylon*. What has stood out very strikingly during the whole of Independence Week is the dignity and restraint with which all these ceremonies have been carried out and the great

**His Excellency Archbishop Maury, the Holy Father's representative, pays an informal visit to the Holy Child compound.**





courtesy and kindness displayed by all ranks of Nigerians. In this city, teeming with visitors, from home and abroad, the man-in-the-street has gone out of his way to be friendly and helpful. In these days of racial, political and social bitterness one feels that Nigeria, if she can maintain this spirit at home and abroad, will play a useful and salutary part in world affairs. Politically, Nigeria is a Federation, within which, like the

Kingdom of Heaven, there are many mansions. She has chosen as her motto UNITY AND FAITH. Perhaps at present the strongest motive for unity amongst her many tribes is their common faith in the great future of their Nation. This natural faith we pray may be enriched and illuminated by the supernatural so that in God's good time all her "nations and tribes and peoples" may come to the Unity of the Faith in the Bond of Peace.



Mr. Ben Enwonwu, the Nigerian sculptor and painter (right) is shown with his portrait statue of H. M. Queen Elizabeth II which now stands in front of the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos. Admiring the statue are Mr. Matthew Mbu, Assistant Federal Commissioner of Nigeria, and the famous British sculptor, Sir William Reid Dick (centre). As a boy, Mr. Enwonwu was encouraged in his art career by Reverend Mother Mary Osmund and is a loyal and devoted friend.