

## **LIFE AT GOVERNMENT COLLEGE IBADAN, *Omo N'Oba N'Edo Erediauwa.***

I arrived in the College in January, 1940 (It was all boarding, no day students); escorted from home by a palace messenger.

After my box had been brought out from the vehicle, near the European Housemaster's Office, the messenger had started carrying it towards the dormitory when the Housemaster bellowed from the office, "*let him carry it himself*". The messenger quickly dropped the box and I had to carry it myself, saying bye-bye to the palace messenger who rained abuses on the *ebo* (European).

That was the sign of things to come: no royalty in Government College, Ibadan. Leaving home for the first time in life, letters were pouring in to me at school by post, and all mails first went to the Housemaster's office where they were sorted. All my letters were addressed "*Prince .....*" One day, the Housemaster called me with a letter in his hands and asked me what I thought was an unnecessary question, or just his curiosity: "*How do you say 'prince' in your language?*" And without giving any thought to it, I answered, "*Okoro, Sir.*" And he said, "*then tell all your friends who write to address you like that, not Prince*" and he walked into the office.

When I mentioned this in the dormitory, some of my seniors simply abused him and said to me, "*Don't mind him. Because they use prince for their royal family, they don't see why a black man can also be called a Prince*". Nonetheless, I still mentioned it to my relations and friends, but many of them continued writing "*Prince*", and I think the Housemaster simply resigned himself to it.

There were students from all the then Southern provinces hence there were Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Itsekiri and Urhobo. But we did not relate on ethnic basis. There was no ethnic affiliation, though on individual basis, we knew one another's tribe. Speaking Vernacular was strictly forbidden by the School Authorities. I was happy to be with the students from my home (Benin), but I made friends with all the rest, and I thank God they all liked me.

Discipline was extremely high, and several strokes of the cane or cutting of the grass followed any breach. Speaking of Vernacular, stealing, lying were forbidden. You owned up to any wrong doing; maintained cleanliness of body and clothing. Attendance at dining hall, studies, dormitory, at manual work and of course in the classroom was compulsory.

Father sent me to Government College Ibadan, rather than his own Old School (King's College, Lagos) because he did not want me to be brought up like an European and unable to do manual work, as in King's College, Lagos.

Looking back now with hindsight, I realized that even before I finished from Ibadan, I already had a feeling of happiness within myself that I schooled in Ibadan and not Lagos; and I was grateful to father. Before I left home for the first time to go to Ibadan, being a Prince, and the eldest at that, I never did any manner of rough or manual work; there were servants around to be called upon. Had I gone to King's College, I might have grown up to be quite lazy and to abhor any form of manual work, or "using my hand" as father had put it.

My Set entered for the two prestigious senior examinations in 1945: the Cambridge School Certificate and the entrance examination into the highest local post-secondary institution known as Higher College, in Yaba. We all passed the two examinations. For the Higher College, any pupil (it was a mixed college) who passed at a certain high percentage level gained automatic scholarship from the then Colonial Government. All in my class gained scholarship.

Prince Solomon Akenzua continued his tertiary education at King's College, Cambridge University where he studied Law and obtained a Degree – a specialization most appropriate for his future career. Here also, his capacity for being sociable was demonstrated through his membership of the Kings' College, Cambridge Football Team where he was the only Coloured student in the team.

He ascended the throne of his ancestors on 23 March 1979 as Omo N'Oba N'Edo Erediauwa, and has guided the ancient Benin Kingdom with the wisdom of the Biblical King Solomon. Thereafter, he was appointed by the Federal Government as Chancellor of the University of Ibadan where he has given speeches that touch on very important progressive and sometimes, sensitive issues relating to the progress of the country. In 1982 before a distinguished academic community, the Omo N'Oba N'Edo delivered his famous lecture titled "*Tradition in the Service of Modern Society in the Nigerian Society*" at the Centre for Social, Cultural and Environmental Research, University of Benin. As an apostle of technological development based on the knowledge of local traditions, Oba Erediauwa does not believe that technology can be effectively transferred without modifications to accommodate local traditions.

Government College Ibadan is proud to have in its fold, an astute and naturally diplomatic traditional ruler, patriotic sound scholar, a free thinker and a great philosopher who is ready at all times to offer his services wherever it is needed.

Omo N'Oba N'Edo Erediauwa is a patron of Government College Ibadan Old Boys Association (GCIoba).

... *Excerpt and Adaptation from "I Remain, Sir, Your Obedient Servant"*.