THE AFRICAN PRINCE IN LONDON

BY WYLIE SYPER

The "visiting foreigner" was always an attractive person to the eighteenth-century primitivist, and the various American Indians, East Indians, and South-Sea Islanders who journeyed to England have been recognized as "influences" in the history of popular opinion. Throughout the century a number of authentically royal Africans also visited London, chiefly under duress, to be sure, but none the less serving as examples of savage virtue. How largely the prolonged vitality of the Oroonoko legend, especially in the service of anti-slavery sentiment, was due to these regal Negroes is not certain; yet one can say with assurance that they were the substance of things hoped for in noble savagery. Although Miss Burney may have deemed Omai an indifferent bard, no one seems to have qualified his admiration for the African princes. For one thing, they were verily princes, not, like Omai, of "the middling class of people"; and to the levelling eighteenth century, savage virtues always seemed brighter in gentility. If we except Ignatius Sancho, few besides anti-slavery crusaders seem to have paid much attention to the 14,000 Negro servants in England. But your free-born Briton could feel for a prince, particularly a prince in distress.

Had it not been for the villainy of slave-traders, none of these Africans might have caught popular fancy. During the eighteenth century petty chieftains along the Gold and Slave Coasts not infrequently sent their sons to Europe to be educated. On the good will of these coastal chieftains depended the profits of Liverpool, Bristol, or London investors; nevertheless, a British captain running the Middle Passage to the West Indies could rarely overcome the temptation to sell a journeying prince into slavery. Ordinarily the betrayed prince was redeemed through the righteous indignation (or the less-righteous policy) of English merchants, who made their peace by hurrying the ransomed African to England, settling him comfortably, and reassuring his royal sire as to British honor.¹

¹ See H. A. Wyndham, The Atlantic and Slavery, London, 1935, p. 224. "Two sons of Gold Coast Cabocceers were instructed in the Christian faith, in reading, writing, and accounts in England, and returned to Africa in 1755 in H.M.S. Humber, the Governor of Gambia being warned to show them 'all the civillities in his power' on their way through. They drove down to Plymouth in the same coach as the wife of the captain of the ship. Their berths cost the Company of Merchants Trading
Possibly the earliest instance to gain literary recognition was that of "the African" Job Ben Solomon, who was in England fourteen months in 1733–4. This Negro of theocratic rank had both personal charm and a distinguished mind. Job was sent by his father, high priest of Boonda, "to sell two Negroes" to Captain Pike, an English slaver. On his return to Boonda he refreshed himself at the home "of an old Acquaintance," where he hung up his arms, which "were very valuable; consisting of a Gold-hilted Sword, a Gold Knife . . . , and a rich Quiver of Arrows." He was promptly seized by marauders, sold to Captain Pike on February 27, 1730, and taken to Maryland. In his distress he wrote a letter in Arabic to his father; this letter came to the notice of General Oglethorpe, who sent it to Oxford to be translated. Under Oglethorpe's bond, Job sailed for England in March, 1733, and was housed at Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, where he "had the Honour to be sent for by most of the Gentry of that Place, who were mightily pleased with his Company." A subscription of £59/6/11½ having been collected toward his freedom, Job went to London to be introduced to Sir Hans Sloane, for whom he translated Arabic manuscripts and inscriptions on medals. Sir Hans presented him to the Duke of Montague, who

. . . pleased with the Sweetness of Humor, and Mildness of Temper, as well as Genus and Capacity of the Man, introduced him to Court, where he was graciously received by the Royal Family, and most of the Nobility, from whom he received distinguishing Marks of Favour.  

in Africa £50. Other bills for their expenses at Plymouth before the ship sailed, for diet and for 'cheek shirts,' came to £30; but the Company refused to be responsible for two bureaus which the 'two black gentlemen had bespoke,' and which the captain refused to put on board . . . Finally, the Governor of Cape Coast Castle was informed that the cost of educating them, and sending them back to Africa, had amounted to over £600; and he was instructed to 'send us no more black gentlemen except you find it necessary for the benefit of the trade.' About the same time a Mr. Roberts carried away a son of the King of Popo, and a son of a Cabocean of Dixcove . . . and the Company of Merchants becoming alarmed lest it might 'prejudice English interests at Popo,' sent the son back to his father . . . This little affair cost them £100" [in gifts to the King]. (Ibid., pp. 24–25.)

2 His story was told at least twice: in Thomas Bluett's Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda . . . , London, 1734; and in Francis Moore's Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa . . . with a particular Account of Job Ben Solomon, a Pholey . . . , London, 1738. Both accounts were used by the editor of "The Remarkable Captivity and Deliverance of Job Ben Solomon, a Mohammedan Priest of Bunda, near the Gambia, in the Year 1732," A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels . . . , [London], 1745, II, pp. 234–240.

3 Moore, p. 203.
When in July, 1734, under patronage of the Royal African Company, he set out for Boonda, he had accumulated gifts worth over £500, including a watch from the Royal Family, and "noble presents" from the Duke of Cumberland, the Duke of Montague, the Earl of Pembroke, "several Ladies of Quality," a Mr. Holden, and the Royal African Company. Of Job's person and talents Bluett says:

... His Countenance was exceeding pleasant, yet grave and composed; his Hair long, black, and curled, being very different from that of the Negroes commonly brought from Africa... On all Occasions he discovered a solid Judgment, a ready Memory, and a clear Head... In his Reasonings there appeared... strong Sense, joined with an innocent Simplicity, a strict Regard to Truth, and a hearty Desire to find it...

His Memory was extraordinary; for when he was fifteen Years old he could say the whole Alcoran by Heart...

The Abbé Grégoire numbered him among the illustrious Negroes of the age.4

Distinguished as Job may have been, he did not attain the literary celebrity of the African who was known through two poems by the Rev. William Dodd as the lover of Zara, and who is almost certainly the same prince about whom was written a novel called The Royal African: or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe. If this prince is the original of the lover of Zara, it is possible to trace his career through this novel and through the Gentleman's Magazine.5

4 Henri Grégoire, De la littérature des nègres, Paris, 1808, pp. 182–183. There were many other widely known Negroes—Phillis Wheatley, Francis Williams, Otobah Cugoano, et al.—but evidently not of royal standing and therefore not considered here.

5 Is it possible to prove that the prince of this novel is the prince of Dodd's poems? The anonymous author of The Royal African assures us that "there is not a Syllable inserted which I do not firmly believe to be true." He is probably truthful.

The British Museum dates first and second editions (one of 53, the other of 55, pages, and both printed by "W. Reeve, etc., London") at 1720. The second edition (alone available to me) was printed for "W. Reeve, at Shakespear's Head, Fleet-street; G. Woodfall, and J. Barnes, at Charing Cross; and at the Court of Requests." Plomer's Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers lists W. Reeves as a bookseller and publisher at Shakespeare's Head in Fleet Street c. 1753–1759; John Barnes as a bookseller and publisher (of O'Connor's Considerations Upon the Trade to Africa, 1753, inter alia) who moved in 1753 from Charing Cross to Haymarket and the Court of Requests; and George Woodfall as a bookseller and dealer in pamphlets at Charing Cross c. 1748. Internal evidence also dates the novel as being after 1720. The author (second ed., p. 53) mentions the capture of Captain Lamb by the King of Dahomey. Bulfinch Lamb wrote his letter to Governor Tinker while he was in cap-
Though the book ran to at least two editions, there is the flavor of literature only on the title page, which bears the following verses:

_Othello_ shews the Muse's utmost Power,
A brave, an honest, yet a hapless Moor.
In _Oroonoko_ shines the Hero's Mind,
With native Lustre by no Art refin'd.
Sweet _Juba_ strikes us but with milder Charms,
At once renown'd for Virtue, Love, and Arms.
Yet hence might rise a still more moving Tale,
But _Shakespears, Addisons_, and _Southerns_ fail!

Briefly, the Prince's story as told by the novel is this: John Corrente, a Fantin Caboceiro, who can muster 25,000 men to arms, once sent his elder (and illegitimate) son to France to be educated; he was there treated so courteously and now speaks so warmly of the French that the British traders encourage John to send his younger

an entry on Nov. 27, 1724; and Archibald Dalzell (History of Dahomey, London, 1793, pp. 10–11) says that Lamb stayed with King Trudo of Dahomey until 1726 (see also Robert Norris, Memoirs of Bossa Ahádee, King of Dahomey, London, 1789, xiv; and William Snelgrave, A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, London, 1734, p. 7 ff.). The novel also refers to Atkins' _Voyage to Guinea_ (p. 23), not printed until 1735. Furthermore, the captain who kidnapped both this African prince and the prince of Dodd's poems died shortly after his treachery (p. 44); and, as in the case of Dodd's hero, the kidnapped prince comes to London with a "sprightly Negroe, who lives with our young Hero as his Companion" (pp. 48–49). The novel mentions the prince as "now here" in England (p. 18), and as "actually here at present" (p. 37). (See also pp. 23, 29 for further hints as to the date of the novel.)

An entry in the Gentleman's Magazine (XXI (1751), p. 331) continues the story of the prince: "... the Kings of Anisham and Faetu, two great trading nations in the south of Africa, are preparing to send their eldest sons to England, to be educated in the same manner as the prince Annamabo, who arrived safe there in December last, to the joy of his royal father." Dr. William Van Lennep has kindly provided me with the last word on this prince: "This day [July 31, 1751] was read before the board of admiralty, a letter sent by captain Jasper, from the prince of Annamaboe, in which he expresses his gratitude for the civilities shewn his son while he was at our court, and offers the assistance of 20,000 men to build a fort on the coast of Africa in case of obstructions from the French" (John Charnock, Biographia Navalís, London, 1794–1798, V, p. 395, s.v., "Richard Jasper").

Another entry in the Gentleman's demands a word: "Two Africans; one of them son to the King of Anamaboo, and the other son to the high priest of the sun, were baptized at _St. Sepulchre's_ church, by the rev. Mr. _Moore_" (XXV (1755), p. 184). The explanation probably is that the hero of the novel and Dodd's poems returned to Annamaboe in December, 1750, and that his father sent another son to England. This latter son seems to be one of those mentioned by Wyndham in footnote 1, above.

The date of the novel is evidently c. 1749, and the Prince of Annamaboe is almost certainly Dodd's prince.
son, and heir, to England. The captain to whom the prince is entrusted, however, sells him as a slave in Barbadoes. No one objects to this treachery until the Caboceiro hears of it; he at once prohibits all trade with the British and turns to the French. The British merchants, in consternation, ransom the Prince, protesting

... that his Misfortune ... was entirely disapproved by Englishmen of every Denomination; those even of the lowest Rank expressing a just Dain of such iniquitous Practices; not more incompatible with the Doctrines of Religion, or the Principles of Morality, than with the natural Candour and Generosity of a true English Soul.

When the Prince is taken to London, he attracts the "kind Notice" of "those who have a becoming Concern for natural Equity and Justice, as well as for the Reputation and Honour of the British People." Disregarding the 20,000 or more Negroes carried each year from Africa to the West Indies, the author commends the "universal Applause" of "that wise and well-judged Compassion, which the Case of this noble and unfortunate Stranger so apparently deserved." The Prince himself "has appeared such from the Gracefulness of his Person, the Nobleness of his Sentiments, the Modesty of his Deportment." Here is a striking juxtaposition of humanitarian sympathy with the impulse to truck, barter, and exchange.

"Shakespears, Addisons, and Southerns" may have failed; but the Rev. William Dodd composed two album pieces on this prince. How largely the fame of these two poems is due to the notoriety of Dodd may be questioned. Howbeit, the history of Zara's princely lover is sketched in the Gentleman's Magazine, which explains that Captain ———, "trafficking on the coast of Africa went up the country, where he was introduce'd to a Moorish king, who had 40,000 men under his command." This king was persuaded to send his son, "about 18 years of age, with another sprightly youth," to England for education "in the European manner." With traditional perfidy, the captain sold the prince and his companion, and then died. The ship's officers having told the story in England, the government ransomed the youths and brought them to London "under the care of the right hon. the earl

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of Hallifax, first commissioner of trade and plantations." They were presented at court, "richly dressed, in the European manner." But their appearance at the Covent Garden on February 1, 1749, when Oroonoko was played, was sensational:

... They were received with a loud clap of applause, which they acknowledged with a very genteel bow, and took their seats in a box. The seeing persons of their own colour on the stage, apparently in the same distress from which they had been so lately delivered, the tender interview between Imoinda and Oroonoko, who was betrayed by the treachery of a captain, his account of his sufferings, and the repeated abuse of his placability and confidence, strongly affected them, with that generous grief which pure nature always feels, and which art had not yet taught them to suppress; the young prince was so far overcome, that he was obliged to retire at the end of the fourth act. His companion remained, but wept the whole time; a circumstance which affected the audience yet more than the play, and doubled the tears which were shed for Oroonoko and Imoinda."

The Gentleman's likewise records that in November, 1749, these "two young Africans, who have been in England some time, were baptized by the Rev. Mr. Terrett, reader of the Temple, who has undertaken to instruct them in the Christian faith."

The prince had seen Oroonoko in February, 1749. In the Gentleman's for July appeared the first of the two poems by Dodd, "The African prince, now in England, to Zara, at his father's court"; in August the same magazine printed the companion poem, "Zara, at the court of Annamabboe, to the African Prince, now in England." Both are in the pseudo-African manner of the day: the prince easily eclipses Omai, even though he may not rival Oroonoko; and Zara, like Imoinda, is "female to the noble male."

The prince speaks of his position at Annamaboe:

Nurtur'd in ease, a thousand servants round,
My wants prevented, and my wishes crown'd,
No painful labours stretch'd the tedious day,
On downy feet my moments danc'd away.
Where'er I look'd, officious courtiers bow'd,
Where'er I pass'd, a shouting people crowd.

His love for Zara is Platonism heated by savage ardor:

Together sinking in the trance divine,
I caught thy fleeting soul, and gave thee mine!

The prince feels deeply the injustice of slavery—for himself; he recalls the hours of his duress:

7 Gentleman's Mag., XIX (1749), pp. 89–90.
At night I mingled with a wretched crew,
Who by long use with woe familiar grew;
Of manners brutish, merciless and rude,
They mock'd my suff'ring's, and my pangs renew'd.

One thinks not only of Oroonoko with his refined contempt for his fellow Negroes, but of Itanoko, Zimza, Luco, and Zimao, and the whole procession of royal slaves sweeping through anti-slavery prose and verse. Dodd, like the author of The Royal African, discerns that by the release of one royal slave, justice has been done:

No more Britannia's cheek, the blush of shame,
Burns for my wrongs, her king restores her fame; . . .
Whate'er is great and gay around me shine,
And all the splendor of a court is mine.

Perhaps inspired by the account in the Gentleman's Magazine, Dodd fancies what the prince must have felt when he beheld Oroonoko at the Covent Garden:

O! Zara, here, a story like my own,
With mimic skill, in borrow'd names, was shown;
An Indian [sic] chief, like me, by fraud betray'd,
And partner in his woes an Indian [sic] maid.
I can't recall the scenes, 'tis pain too great,
And, if recall'd, should shudder to relate.

Zara responds with an epistle that deepens the great gulf fixed between her prince and his fellow Negroes:

Hold, Hold! Barbarians of the fiercest kind!
Fear heav'n's red light'n-ing—'tis a Prince ye bind;
A prince, whom no indignities could hide,
They knew, presumptuous! and the Gods defy'd.

She rests confident, too, in the steadfastness of his primitive love:

. . . in Britain's happy courts to shine,
Amidst a thousand blooming maids, is thine—
But thou, a thousand blooming maids among,
Art still thyself, incapable of wrong;
No outward charm can captivate thy mind,
Thy love is friendship heighten'd and refin'd;
'Tis what my soul, and not my form inspires,
And burns with spotless and immortal fires.
Thy joys, like mine, from conscious truth arise,
And, known these joys, what others canst thou prize?

Manifestly an Oroonoko redivivus! It is easy to believe that such literary figments as Day's Dying Negro and Mrs. Mackenzie's
Prince Adolphe of Tonouwah are patterned not only after Oroonoko and noble savages in general, but more precisely after visiting African princes.

Even the West Indian could feel for injured royalty. John Singleton, inspired by the muse of "tuneful Grainger, nurs’d in fancy’s arms," who "So elegantly sung" *The Sugar Cane*, printed in Barbadoes in 1767 *A General Description of the West-Indian Islands, "Attempting in Blank Verse,"* he modestly adds. The poem (reissued, with changes, in London ten years later) digresses from the picturesque tropical landscape to remark upon the wretch

... who once betray’d

A sacred trust, which hospitality
And honor bound him to perform, and sold,
Like a base villain, for a little trash,
That pledge of friendship, which his royal host
(A king he was in Afric’s sable realms)
Deliver’d to him with a parting sigh;—
His only son ...

The Caboceiro who is willing with 20,000 men to establish British fortunes on the Guinea coast seems to Singleton a "fond father" rearing his son

... to arms

And virtue—virtue such as Nature’s sons
Are taught to practise, unallay’d with art.
Happy! thrice happy! had not Europe’s fame
Induc’d the credulous old man to trust
With this false friend the darling of his age.

And Dr. Johnson, though contemptuous of savages, was reverential enough toward royalty. "In our own time," he says in his argument on the Knight case which he dictated to a demurring Boswell on September 23, 1777, "Princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were entrusted, that they might have an European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would avail either their dignity or their wrongs." The lover of Zara is a not-inconsequential person in the eighteenth century.

In 1759 another royal Negro, like the prince of Annamaboe, for an instant holds the spotlight in the London theatre, this time the Drury Lane. On Wednesday, May 9,
... a young African prince appeared publickly at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. This youth was committed some time since to the care of an English captain to be brought over for education, but the captain, instead of performing his promise, sold him to a gentleman in London. The father of the prince being lately dead, and the captain being upon the coast, was at that time desired by his subjects to bring the young prince home; but he giving them no satisfactory account, was seized, imprisoned, and ironed, and then confessed the truth; upon which an order was sent to a merchant in that trade to procure the prince’s enlargement, which was done by purchasing him of the gentleman who bought him; and he is soon to return to his native country.  

This African prince kindles no British muse, and at once passes from the Drury Lane into oblivion.

The Negro Gustavus Vassa, however, enjoyed no mere crowded hour of glory; indeed, his figure stretches Munchausen-like across the closing decade of the century. The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself, appeared first in two volumes in 1789. In 1794 there was an eighth edition, enlarged, printed at Norwich, and I have seen an edition printed in Leeds as late as 1814. The preface of this 1814 edition explains that the first edition “was graced with the names of a greater number of worthy characters than had before adorned the pages of any small book published in this country”—a claim that may or may not be informative: Ignatius Sancho’s Letters had appeared (in 1782) with something over a thousand names, many of “quality”; but it was not a small book—nor was Vassa’s. His adventures, true or not, were too exciting and continual even to summarize. He was, in any case, the son of a chief in Benin, and in 1765, together with his sister, was kidnapped by slavers, who sold him in Barbadoes to an officer in the British navy. After extraordinary wanderings to Turkey, then northwest to seek an arctic passage to the East, then back to the West Indies, Vassa settled in England and helped manage the first colonization of Sierra Leone; for some reason the Bishop of London was unwilling to sanction his going to Africa as a missionary. His marriage to Miss Cullen of Ely is announced in the Gentleman’s Magazine for April, 1792.

There were, of course, many Africans being instructed in Christianity by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the

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8 Gentleman's Mag., XXIX (1759), p. 240.
dissenting sects, and the Sierra Leone Company; periodicals from the mid-century on frequently mention Negroes lately baptized in one or another London church. Even in this evangelism an African prince played his part—for Naimbanna seems to have been known to all the godly of 1793. His father, Naimbanna, king of Robanna, Sierra Leone, with a true eighteenth-century enlightenment, dispatched one of his sons to Turkey to be reared as a Mohammedan, one to Portugal to be reared as a Roman Catholic, and a third—Naimbanna—to England, where, as his obituary in the Gentleman's Magazine has it, he "imbibed . . . the strongest attachments to the principles of the Protestant faith." 9 Naimbanna, whose name was John Frederick until he was christened Henry Granville, arrived safely in England on September 22, 1791, under the care of Alexander Falconbridge, who committed him to Granville Sharp, who in turn arranged with Henry Thornton to put him under the Rev. Mr. Gambier in Kent. Naimbanna's father complained to Sharp that there were "three distant relations of mine now in the West Indies, who were carried away by one Captain Cox, captain of a Danish ship." (Thornton later cited this letter in an anti-slavery debate in Parliament.) Sharp replied that he would "make particular inquiries after your three relations"—Corpro, Banna, and Morbour—and that the young Naimbanna exhibited a "good disposition, modesty, behaviour, and great diligence and application to learning." The reports of the Sierra Leone Company for 1794 comment upon the "alteration which . . . took place in his mind." In April, 1793, came word that the King of Robanna had died, and about May 23, Naimbanna sailed for Africa. On July 18, he was dead of a putrid fever. Zachary Macaulay had serious trouble convincing the Negroes that the British had not killed him. Poor Naimbanna's last days were saddened by the oaths of British tars; in his pocketbook was found the following entry, written as he boarded ship: "I shall take care of this company which I now fallen into [sic], for they swears a good deal, and talked all manner of wickedness. Can I be able to resist that temptation, no I cannot, but the Lord will deliver me." Londoners agreed that "he possessed a good understanding, a disposition

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earnest in the pursuit of knowledge, and a great facility in receiv-
ing instruction," as well as an "easy address and suavity of
manners."

One of the Cheap Repository Tracts, inspired by Hannah More,
tells his story, rephrasing the reports of the Sierra Leone Com-
pany. Naimbanna, said to be twenty-three (he was twenty-nine),
is described in *The Black Prince* as

... not handsome, but his manners were extremely pleasing, and his
disposition kind and affectionate; at the same time, his feelings were quick
and jealous, and he was very violent in his temper, as well as proud and dis-
dainful.

Discipline in "Christian principles," however, subdued this im-
petuousness: "before his departure from England, not only his
pride, but also his revengeful spirit had become hateful to him." In fact he turned something of a prig; when he happened upon an
impropriety in what he was reading aloud, "he instantly shut the
book" until a lady left; then

... he dashed the book with a degree of fury which astonished the
gentleman who was present, against the wall of the room, declaring that the
man who wrote the book ought to be punished...

One senses the tone of Bristol boarding schools. Indeed, Christian
principles did not make Naimbanna’s life any simpler:

Among the difficulties which his new view of things laid upon him, one
respected his wives. He had two while in Africa, but he clearly saw the
New Testament allowed only one; his difficulty was to know which of them
it was right for him to keep.

By nice casuistry he cleaved to the second one, who had brought
him a son; all the while protesting his willingness "to make a sac-
rifice of his feelings, should it appear right to keep the first in pref-
erence." Naimbanna signifies to the author that "God has given
to the most rude and savage people minds capable of knowing,
loving, and serving him."

Thus the century that fashioned and exalted the noble Negro
ended with worry about the salvation of souls in Africa, and with
an acceptance of the white man’s burden.

Simmons College