

# CALL FOR MORE CHILDREN BOOKS

Publishing in Nigeria dates back to many decades ago when the colonial lords were at the helm of affairs in this country. The whole idea started with missionary societies pioneering the venture. The christian missionaries started with the printing of religious books and pamphlets which were used to impart moral lessons to the christian adherents and the literate public. There was no limit to what could be published as long as it conformed with moral norms and does not conflict with the laws of the land.

The Nigerian public gulped down their throats the contents of these literatures with less regard to the quality of the contents. We were being led by those we then regarded as all round masters in anything thinkable.

Hitherto many books read in this country came from Europe and we relied on the whiteman solely for our education both morally, socially and economically. They published for us books on varying subjects like English, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Religion, Mathematics, Accounting and Secretarial practice. These books were used then and they formed the bed-rock of our education.

Today, the tide has changed considerably. Although alien publishers are still many in the country, yet indigenuous publishers are encouragingly springing up and this gives us a sort of consolation that a brighter tomorrow is in sight for Nigeria. Perhaps it is pertinent to mention that apart from the missionary publishers concerning themselves with religious books, colonial masters established government documents and information pamphlets to project the image and functions of the government.

It is noteworthy that this century has witnessed the appearance on the printing scene of eminent Nigerians who are worthy in character and learning to man our growing economy in the printing and publishing industry. We can now boast of such publishing industries specialising on not only commercial printing but on book publishing.

It is also noteworthy that even in alien publishing houses in Nigeria such

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as Macmillan publishing Company, Nelson Publishing Company, we have Nigerians occupying responsible positions which has placed them in vantage positions to assist in the running of the affairs of the companies, and their skill and expertise have contributed immensely to the economy of Nigeria in the printing and publishing industry..

Having spoken briefly on what publishing had been in the past and what it is presently in Nigeria, it is important to draw attention to one vital aspect of publishing which is almost lacking in this country - that is the publishing of children's literature. It has been said that since Nigeria is not yet generally a reading public it has been suspected in some quarters that it will amount to an economic risk to publish books for children.

It should be noted that most of our children in the hinterland of the country are not exposed to education in good time. Unlike the children in advanced countries who have the advantage of early education, majority of Nigerian children start schooling at the age of six years. It was of late that nursery education was introduced to Nigeria and this facility is exclusive to children of the top brass in the society who could conveniently afford the exorbitant cost of sending their children to nursery schools. This has hindered the publishing of children's books.

It is believed that parents, majority of who are illiterates, could not afford to buy books for their children since

many of these parents are very poor and could not even afford three square meals a day. Perhaps it is in place to mention here some of the reasons why children's books have not enjoyed the patronage of publishers in this country.

Apart from the aforementioned reasons, there are insufficient writers of children's literature in Nigeria. The few, who venture, into such avenue do so on part time basis because as it is, the risk being so much in terms of sales and patronage thus making the venture quite unrewarding.

Also, the publishers lack adequate financial resources, manpower, and equipment to handle such venture. The publication of children's books require very sophisticated equipments like four-colour machines and printing papers because children's books are produced with special papers. The duty on printing machines and papers is so prohibitive that it has escalated above the reach of many publishers and unless children's books are cheap many parents will not be able to afford to buy them for their children.

The above are some of the problems facing the publishing of children's books in Nigeria, and it will be in place to suggest solutions to these problems so that the generation of young ones in this country may have the benefit of reading books meant for their age and thereby enjoy the benefits derivable from such books.

First among the solutions I am suggesting is that Nigerian intellectuals should be encouraged to write books for children now that we are in the era of the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) so that our children may have enough to read. We already have some of them trying to make their mark in the field of children's literature. These include Mabel Segun, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, to mention a few.

The heavy duty on machines and papers meant for printing books for the use of schools should be lifted so that publishers may be encouraged to import these machines without hindrance.

The government, in pursuance of

its policy on education and in order to realise its dreams on the Universal Free Primary Education, should give financial subsidy to indigenious publishers to mass produce qualitative children's literature and also support this with liberal loan facilities through the banks or direct from government through a board that may be set up for that purpose, so that publishers can operate without financial hinderance.

Illustrators and graphic artists in this country (thank God we have many of them) should be encouraged to work in collaboration with writers and publishers of children's books so as to produce good quality children's literature for our children. A well illustrated children's book will no doubt arrest children's attention and aid their perception ability.

Finally the Federal Military Gove-

rnment should consider as a matter of urgency, the establishment of pre-school education facilities in both urban and rural areas of the country so that the young ones may have a taste of education before their full primary education begin.

Teacher training programme should be intensified in order to produce sufficient manpower to handle the education of the young ones at both pre-school and primary school levels.