April, 1969 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the *Sierra Leone Outlook*, published by the Sierra Leone Conference of The United Methodist Church. In the field of conference publications, sixty continuous years under one name and one sponsorship is a remarkable achievement in longevity. A historical review will show that *Outlook*’s sixty years include many other significant achievements as well. In particular, it has served as an instrumental vehicle for the development of African independent thought and criticism on a wide range of religious and social issues.

The maiden number rolled off the new Albert Academy Press under the editorship of John Ressler King. King had been sent by the Home, Frontier and Foreign Missionary Society in cooperation with the Woman’s Missionary Association of the United Brethren in Christ to reorganize and reconstruct the West Africa Conference and Mission after setbacks suffered as a consequence of the serious 1898 Hut Tax War. King guided the development of the new journalistic enterprise until his permanent departure in 1913, and the initial establishment of the journal stands as a permanent monument to his vigor and foresight as a leader and administrator in Sierra Leone.

The first editorial pledged to foster the spirit of the earlier missionary fathers, to advocate a cautious progressiveness, and to keep an eye to practical lines of endeavor. The editor promised to pass on information about men’s doings, not about men’s theories, in religious and evangelistic as well as broader pursuits.

The name, “Outlook,” was chosen to express the purpose and scope of the paper. One who looks out obtains a broad view, a prospect, and the *Outlook* proposed to point out both opportunities and dangers to its readers. Its sponsors wished it also to serve (here mixing metaphors) as a mirror, reflecting back the activities of the world at large on the West Africa Conference and the entire Sierra Leone community. Noble were the purposes of the *Outlook*—to uplift the masses morally and industrially through the printed page.

A letter of great interest was submitted by an intellectual giant of West Africa, E. H. Blyden, and printed in the third issue:

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1 In 1898 the Mende and other tribes erupted in war to rid their lands of obligations connected with the imposition of colonialism. Hundreds of British subjects were destroyed, along with seven United Brethren in Christ missionaries and virtually all mission property. Among the British, the uprising was known as the Hut Tax War, but the Mende called it puugwej (“White Man’s War”).
I am very much obliged to you for a copy each of the first two numbers of the Sierra Leone Outlook. I sincerely hope that all the good its publication contemplates for Africa will be more than realized. A wide, a varied, a necessitous, a difficult field confronts the earnest worker in this country. The situation demands less of Europe and more of Africa: less of the letter and more of the spirit: less of theology and more of religion; less of dogma and more of Christ.

As Blyden so clearly pointed out, the *Outlook* was born at a moment great with change as well as with opportunity. In 1910 national institutions were beginning slowly to crystallize within the structural framework imposed by British colonial rule on the Sierra Leone Protectorate fourteen years earlier. The West Africa Conference itself was well into the recovery phase following the 1898 Hut Tax War, and its stations were spread the 150 miles from Bonthe to Kono country. The Post Office, using the railroad and regular launch services, had modernized communications, and the Conference began to utilize these new facilities for the distribution of its own materials. The *Outlook*, as a national religious medium employing mass production and distribution, was surely in step with the times.

By 1910, the mission schools were just enrolling the boys and girls who would emerge after years of academic and professional training as the new African elite. For the time being, therefore, the larger share of editorial responsibility remained in missionary hands. J. F. Musselman served for sixteen years as editor during his thirty-seven year missionary career in Sierra Leone. E. M. Hursh served for six years as editor before leaving the principalship of Albert Academy (in Freetown) for the Chair of Sociology and Missions at Otterbein University in Ohio. Walter Schutz gave nine years of creative editorial management between 1931 and 1948.

By 1916, Hursh could report, in an article in *Woman's Evangel*, that the *Outlook* had increased from the original twelve to twenty pages and was the only religious magazine published in Sierra Leone. Its main competition, he said, was from imported magazines and papers, as well as the local press. But, he continued, European literature could not satisfy African readers, for the evolution of African life must be directed and interpreted by leaders of African thought in Africa, and the African could do this best. Africanization was the official policy of the *Outlook* at this early date. And indeed, important contributions in article form were made by African writers from the very first, evaluating political and social trends in Sierra Leone as well as specifically religious issues. The *Outlook* clearly exemplifies the judgment of the anthropologist Paul Bohannan:

The great debt that Africa owes to the missionaries is that in a situation in
which the forces of trade, colonial government, and the missions themselves were creating cultural havoc, it was only the missions that began to rebuild, and gave them a chance to rebuild.2

The circulation was too small to bring in sufficient money from subscriptions to meet expenses, at least for the first fifteen years, and circulation-building was a frequent item of discussion. In 1912 the Annual Conference Outlook Committee recommended that every pastor and agent secure at least four paid subscriptions, and that anyone securing twelve should receive his own copy free. On the fifth anniversary in 1914, an increase of nearly one hundred percent in paid subscriptions was realized as the result of special efforts. A total of nearly 500 was reached. Then subscriptions began to dwindle again. One must greatly credit the persistence of the Conference in that it continued to publish a volume of ten or eleven issues each year despite the annual deficit.

Contents varied from issue to issue, but the general pattern came to include at least the following categories. First, editorials. Second, a column of general news. Third, general church news, reporting major events in sister missions in Sierra Leone. Fourth, Annual and Quarterly Conference news and reports. Fifth, highlights from particular mission stations. Sixth, continuing articles in serial form by boards and committees, such as Youth Fellowship, Education Page, and Vernacular Page. And finally, critical articles on a wide variety of subjects from temperance to religious training, and from anniversaries to athletics.

In 1910 Blyden had demanded "more of Africa, less of Europe." A significant step in that direction was taken as early as 1915, when A. T. Sumner, an African, was appointed Associate Editor with J. F. Musselman. Sumner held the post for five years. Later, T. B. Williams chalked up nine years on the editorial staff, and S. M. Renner, J. K. Fergusson and S. B. Carew, all African churchmen, served several years each.

But the most decisive step was taken in August, 1950, when the Associate Editor, S. B. Caulker, replaced the Editor, L. O. Shirley. Shirley was the last missionary to serve as editor.

In his first remarks as editor, Caulker humbly stated that, "Under New Management" in this case meant only that a different man would be scrambling for copy. "Under New Management," however, certainly carried a great deal more freight in this situation, considering the parallel process of the transfer of administrative positions from expatriates to Africans then occurring in public

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administration and other fields. The context was African control of African communications.

For sixty years the *Outlook* has functioned admirably as a Conference journal. Part of its appeal has been the broad range of ideas and issues it has taken up. Its scope has been wider than most comparable conference papers in the United States. The *Outlook* has functioned effectively as a platform for discussion, a vehicle for evangelism, and a medium of communication and debate on a national scale.

The *Outlook* has continuously served the entire Protestant community in Sierra Leone as a forum open to all for the presentation of religious and ethical views on the burning issues of the day. Furthermore, a significant part of the history of every major religious organization in the country is recorded in the *Outlook*.

Probably the full importance of the *Outlook* will become apparent only in retrospect. Already it has served as a primary source of information for research into Sierra Leone Conference history, and there is every reason to expect that microfilms of the *Outlook* will be sought increasingly by scholars wishing to study the history of the Protectorate, particular chiefdoms, congregations, and many important individuals whose biographies or memoirs have been printed in its pages.

For sons of men, sixty years is just five years short of a pension and ten short of the proverbial three-score-and-ten. For the *Outlook* the first sixty years will hopefully be the foundation for a future of fuller realization of the role of journalism in supporting African Christianity and social reconstruction.

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The Commission on Archives and History, Lake Junaluska, N. C., is presently completing the collation of a series of the *Sierra Leone Outlook* for microfilming. Contact the Commission office if further information of this project is desired.