

# DISCOVERY OF TAHITI

VOYAGE TO THE AMOROUS ISLANDS, by Newton A. Rowe; Andre Deutsch, English price 21/-.

(Reviewed by Nancy M. Taylor)

HERE is a refreshing change from the usual popular treatment of historical subjects. Instead of calling on imagination to bring his book to life, Mr. Rowe relies on thorough knowledge of a worthwhile subject, plus ability to write. He deals with the discovery of Tahiti from both sides of the beach, as it were, for he knows Tahiti, its history, customs and people, no less than he knows the records of the Dolphin, or maybe even better.

Samuel Wallis, sent out in the frigate Dolphin to find a continent west of Chile, having unaccountably forsaken his subordinate Cateret in the wretched little Swallow when just through Magellan Straits, instead found Tahiti on June 18, 1767. A few months later the Frenchman Bougainville visited this island, and in the next year came Cook's Endeavour, on the voyage that revealed New Zealand. In Europe where the cult of the noble savage was in full swing—some among these voyagers were themselves possessed by it—Tahiti

was shown forth as the dream realised, where Nature reigned free and bountiful. Here was happiness, declared the romantics, in these amorous southern islands where the soil was generous, climate and government were mild, the people amiable and beautiful, worshipping no god but love. Wars, human sacrifice and the like, they ignored. The title *Voyage to the Amorous Islands* nods to this legend.

Mr. Rowe, bent on introducing no fiction while providing a reasonably colourful running manuscript, has been favoured by very comprehensive records, mostly in narrative. These, plus background authorities, present the Dolphin and life on her very roundly, from the ship's build and brilliant paintwork, her stores, her cooking, messing and hygienic arrangements, to the gossip in the galley, the smouldering quarrel between the master Robertson and the first lieutenant Clarke, and the "old trade" in Tahiti for which the seamen drew out the nails of their hammocks and lay down contentedly on the deck.

In a slim book (214 pages of actual text, which must have a deal of painful selection and rejection behind them) close adherence to all these journals sometimes juxtaposes seemingly unrelated items, but this is soon accepted

without notice. It is more unhappy that a page or two was not spared to introduce the main actors. Wallis, his lieutenants and some of the petty officers, warrant more than a scattered line or two of description. The author, soaked in his records, must have formed opinions of these characters which would have been helpful to the reader without trespassing into fiction. Five of them—Gore, Furneaux, Molyneux, Wilkinson and Pickersgill—were to sail with Cook, and perhaps New Zealanders may especially regret that they are not more distinctly set forth.

At Tahiti, Mr. Rowe is dealing with things he knows at first hand as well as through books, ranging from missionary records to bulletins of the Bishop Museum and the journal of James Morrison, Bounty mutineer. He can describe the Tahitians who met the Dolphin—their houses, canoes, clothing, food; their legends, their religion and their grim *marai*; their dances; the famous queen Parea and the other ruling families; their wars, and the remarkable *aroi* society. He can penetrate the misunderstandings that infuriated the Tahitians into attacking the ship, explain their apparent wantonness, and illumine many small incidents that bewildered both parties at the time.

Writing of Tahiti Mr. Rowe lets himself go—who, after all, can resist bursting into strong colour when they deal with that island? Perhaps because he saw it all so clearly in his own mind he could not realise that other people

might need a map to follow the Dolphin's coasting, or to locate the districts described. But it is an astonishing and sad omission.

This is not a large book and it has scars that suggest much cutting down. There are occasional statements so shortened that they are no longer quite true, and others not explained enough. For instance, sadism on board the Endeavour is not so well known that instances spring to mind at the mere mention of it; nor does the interpretation of the *aroi* society as an attempt to end war seem sufficiently developed. But it is still a book that goes a long way into new ground in its combination of lively narrative with scholarly resources.

## AFRICAN LEADER

KWAME NKRUMAH, by Bankole Timothy; Allen and Unwin, English price 16/-.

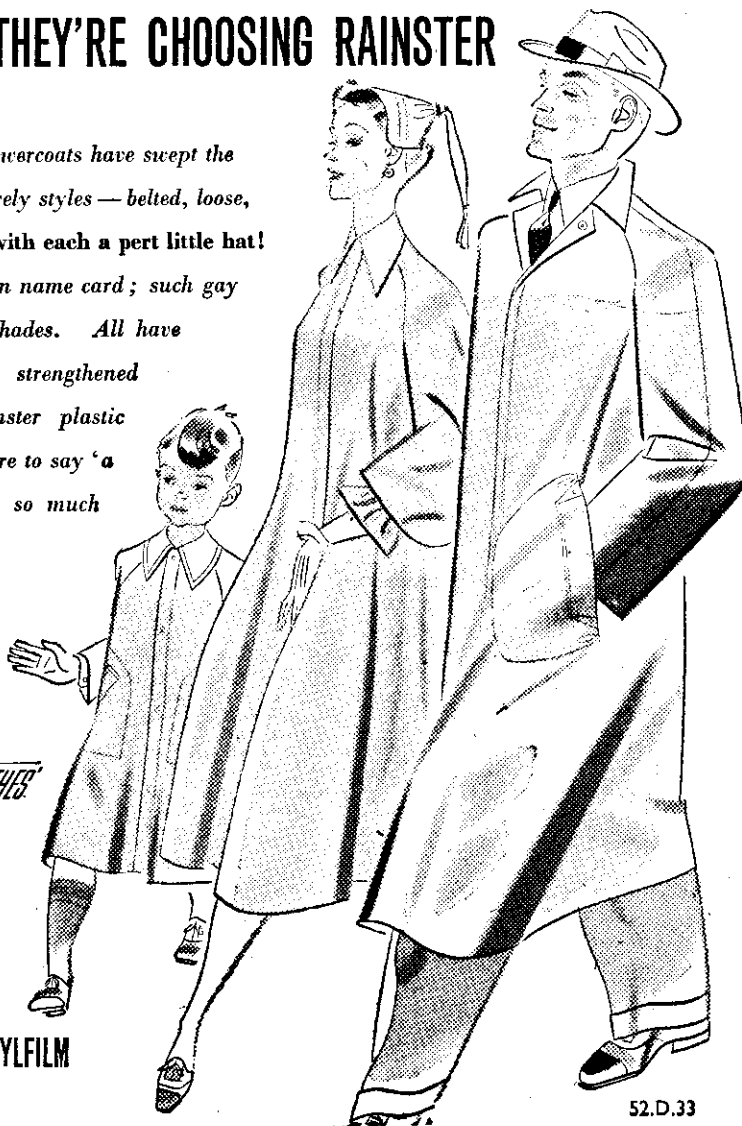
NKRUMAH is one of the key figures of modern Africa, maybe of the modern world. He studied theology in America, Marx in London and the art of politics everywhere. He returned to the Gold Coast as a professional agitator and soon outgrew his employers, created his own party and armed it with all the weapons of demagoguery—songs, martyrs, scurrilous journalism and the leadership principle. The fire of idealism ran through—the love of the Gold Coast, the demand for liberty, self-government and relief from "exploitation." In the end Nkrumah emerged from gaol to become the first Prime

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