

AFRICA



Continent Rises to its Feet

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AFRICA, AFRICA!

A Continent Rises to its Feet

by

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I

THE INGRATITUDE OF AFRICA

A YOUTH FROM the old English city of Nottingham joins the police force and goes to Kenya. There he becomes an assistant inspector of police. One may presume that he has been a normal youngster, no better or worse than thousands of others. He is given a uniform, a revolver, and extensive powers of arrest. He is told that he may, if necessary, shoot Africans at sight. And out he goes to hunt his first Kikuyu.

Precisely what goes on in this young man's mind—what he is told, what he believes, what he fears and what he imagines—we do not exactly know. But we do know that by the time he has reached the age of twenty he is killing Africans.

For at that age he writes an article in a Sunday newspaper, *The People*, and he declares that the best thing in his judgement would be to shoot 'every single member of the Mau Mau gangs and the tribe that breeds them'. Then he adds: 'Yes, I mean it. Every one. And they tell me there are more than a million Kikuyu.'

Young Peter Bostock—that is his name—reminisces about his experiences in Kenya:

We had captured six black gangsters in the Nakura area. Two were wounded, one in the chest, the other in the leg. We bundled our captives into the back of a truck for the drive to headquarters. The two wounded men were in agony. Every bounce and roll of the truck made them cry out. I and the other police officers just grinned. . . .

Young Bostock describes the interrogation of an old man of the Kikuyu tribe:

With two other Europeans I was questioning an old man. His answers were unsatisfactory. One of the white men set his dog at the old fellow. The animal clawed him to the ground, ripped open his throat and started mauling his chest and arms. In spite of his screams my companions just grinned.

It was five minutes before the dog was called off. I can still hear that old man's screams. . . .

Bostock says that the Kikuyu are all savages. Yet where is the savagery to be found here?

Another young man—Brian Hayward—joins the Kenya police. When the authorities are hunting the Kikuyu up to and over the borders of Tanganyika, Brian Hayward, aged nineteen, is sent into Tanganyika at the head of a police squad. The aim is to find 'bandits'. Young Hayward makes arrests. He interrogates. He does not get the answers he desires. He orders the captives to be beaten. Men in his unit burn their eardrums with lighted cigarettes.

How does this produce civilization and progress in Africa?

Actions like those of Bostock and Hayward do more than bring misery to Africans. They debase those who commit them. And in so doing they debase and dishonour the people of Britain, in whose name they take place.

A very large share of the crimes committed against the people of Africa in the past 100 years have been committed in our name. Britain has paid for them. Britain has sent the troops. Britain has built the ships that brought the oppressors of Africa in and took her wealth out. Our Parliament has made the laws which sanctioned the robbery and oppression of the African people. Our newspapers have poured whitewash by the bucketful over it all.

It is not the British people who decided these things. But it is the British people alone who could have put an end to them. The people of Britain do not own Africa. But we could have—and we can yet—return Africa to her own people.

Africa has not made the British people rich. It has made our exploiters rich. We are told that without the more intensive exploitation of Africa's immense resources, Western Europe will die. We are told that Africa to-day is a main bastion in the defence of the West. We are told that Britain is bringing civilization and prosperity to the Africans just as rapidly as they themselves will permit Britain to do so. That the old, crude imperialism is dead.

When Africans dare to believe otherwise we send our young men to whip them and burn their ear-drums and set mastiffs on them in the manner made familiar by the Gestapo at Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen. We put troops in, we impose constitutions that the Africans do not want, we herd them into reserves or into shanty towns, we kidnap their Kings and Chiefs, we do these things and tell them it is done for their good.

True, the British people do not do them. But the Parliament elected by the British people takes the decisions within the framework of which such deeds are done. The Parliament that we elect could stop these things. We ourselves could stop them, were the protest angry enough and deep enough. That is why there is no escaping our responsibility. The British labour movement in the past, and to-day, has protested vehemently against the excesses of imperialism in Africa. That is to the movement's eternal credit. But the excesses continue. The task of helping the peoples of Africa to be free remains substantially to be done.

To-day the people of Africa are on the march. The fact that that is so is more important, perhaps, than any other current fact in the world. It is a historic movement of such significance that we do not always grasp it. For here is the oldest and richest stamping ground of imperialism no longer safe, no longer available for easy pickings. Here are millions of people struggling forward at long last to demand a place in their own African sun.

Consider the wealth. In the past sixty years alone antimony, asbestos, coal, cobalt, copper, chrome, diamonds, gold, iron, lead, manganese, platinum, tin, uranium, vanadium and zinc to a value of £4,300 millions have been torn out of the African earth. Torn out by African labour at a few pence a day, for the further enrichment of rich men in London, Paris, Brussels and New York. And on top of that is the coffee, the sisal, the palm oil, the cocoa, the tobacco. . . .

Africa has one-fifth of the world's copper and tin, nearly a quarter of the manganese, over half the gold, 80 per cent of the cobalt and 98 per cent of the industrial diamonds. The bid of her peoples for freedom coincides with the discovery on her

territory of vast deposits of the uranium needed by Africa's oppressors for their atomic bombs. Their bid for freedom comes at a moment when vast new projects for drawing riches and strategic material out of Africa are under way: when African output of such vital metals as chrome, copper and zinc is being frantically increased for the stock-piles: when the inter-imperialist rivalries of the nineteenth century have been replaced in Africa by the newer rivalries between the old imperial Powers and the new Power across the Atlantic.

Thus, the peoples of Africa fight for their freedom under particularly difficult historical circumstances. They are not struggling in some half-forgotten backwater, where the stakes are not high and an imperial loss would worry no one over-much. They are struggling in the very heart of Empire—in its last great stronghold.

All the world's eyes are on Africa. No one is neutral. For Empire and profit, or for freedom and progress. And dressing Empire in seductive colours and calling it Commonwealth cannot alter the facts.

What we now have in Africa is a continent-wide movement against imperialism and all its works. A protest that was bound to come sooner or later and has come now. It is a movement against what Lord Erskine called the united efforts of civil and military powers 'to support an authority which Heaven never gave, by means which it can never sanction'. Against a foreign occupation based upon the proposition that the amenities of civilization should be built by black labour for white use. Against the simpler things like endless poverty, hunger and disease.

It is a familiar irony of history that the movement of the oppressed against their oppressors is always of the oppressors' own making. Africa is no exception. Skilled labour was needed to mine the ores, build the railways, work the modern plantations. You cannot have skilled labour without education. And so some limited education was brought to Africa.

But a man who can read the servicing instructions for a pneumatic drill can also read newspapers. He can read those

things in the Bible that tell him he is as good as any man of any colour. He may, perhaps, read the Communist Manifesto.

A man who can write his name on a work contract can also communicate with his fellow-workers. He can form a trade union, run a political party. And so a leadership emerges for the young national movement in Africa.

But there is far more than this. For educated or not, an African working class is coming rapidly into being from the splintering and collapsing fabric of tribal and feudal society. It is the class which stands to gain most from complete freedom; the class destined by history to be the great motive power in the struggle for independence and democracy; the class which is emerging as the leadership of the struggle, with by its side its allies among the peasantry and those many traders and intellectuals whose interests are served by freedom from foreign rule.

The great trusts came to Africa to exploit her. But for their exploitation they had to create this African proletariat and they had to bring some beginnings of education with them. In different parts of Africa the situation differs. But only in degree. Everywhere it adds up to a contradiction from which the exploiters can have no escape. And now they see these forces that it has been their blind purpose to create, ranged against them in overwhelming strength. No wonder they tremble and devise Constitutions here, Emergencies there, banishments, regulations and decrees.

In Africa one of the most important battles of our time is being fought out. It is a complicated battle because there are not two but three contestants. There are the peoples of Africa, determined to be free. There is the group of Colonial Powers, led by Britain, defending as best they can what they hold. And there is the United States, preparing to seize the prize herself.

That is to put it baldly. The picture varies, as Africa in her vastness varies endlessly. But if one can generalize at all about Africa, that is the picture.

The purpose of the chapters that follow is to fill the picture in. We need to know more about a continent where, within the

space of a few months terror has reigned in one territory, a King has been officially kidnapped and deposed in another, strikes are smashed in a third, and in all these and in almost all others there is a deep, restless angry ferment against colonialism and all that it means.

We need to know more because so much of what we are commonly told is untrue. This is the day of the hypocrite, when terror masquerades as police action, exploitation as development, racial intolerance as racial partnership and Empire as Commonwealth. Things are not called by their names. It is no longer possible in the capitalist world to hold up what is done for all to see and to judge. And so, if any text suits our purpose here, it is this, of Frederick Engels:

The more civilization advances, the more it is compelled to cover the evils it necessarily creates with the cloak of love and charity, to palliate them or to deny them—in short, to introduce a conventional hypocrisy which was unknown to earlier forms of society and even to the first stages of civilization, and which culminates in the pronouncement: The exploitation of the oppressed class is carried on by the exploiting class simply and solely in the interests of the exploited class itself; and if the exploited class cannot see it and even grows rebellious, that is the basest ingratitude to its benefactors, the exploiters.

We will attempt to lift for a moment this cloak of love and charity, and look at the rebellion and the ingratitude of the Africans for the splendid things that they are.

II

RED RUBBER AND SLAVERY

A crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast; they go on shore to rob and plunder; they see a harmless

people, are entertained with kindness; they give the country a new name; they take formal possession of it for their king; they set up a rotten plank or a stone for a memorial; they murder two or three dozen of the natives; bring away a couple more by force for a sample; return home and get their pardon. Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed; their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free licence given to all acts of inhumanity and lust, the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants; and this execrable crew of butchers, employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony, sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people.

SWIFT'S GULLIVER, describing the British system of colonization.

It was Lord Salisbury who once remarked that nothing is more deplorable than an inheritance of triumphant wrong. He might have added that nothing is more difficult to expose for what it really is. The passage of time dulls the edge of the most intolerable crimes, transforms aggression into adventure, murder into warfare, and loot into treasure. In Africa it has been like that. For the continent's history reveals a saga of barbarity, greed, fraud and betrayal, venality and utter ruthlessness that is unequalled, taken all in all, in any other part of the globe. If the truth is to be told at all, it has to be said that Britain has had a lion's share in it all. And if some Britons are prepared to overlook what their forefathers did and what many of their contemporaries do still, the African may be pardoned for being less ready to forgive and forget.

Not only Britain has outraged Africa and the Africans. The French, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spaniards, the Belgians and the Germans, have all squabbled and plotted with each other through the centuries for the rich pickings. Turn and turn about they have tricked the Africans, robbed the Africans and killed the Africans. Into Africa they have marched, with their pockets full of fake treaties ready for signature. And where no treaty would serve, they have returned with bullets.

Here we are concerned mainly with the fourteen territories of

Africa controlled by Britain. They extend over four million square miles, contain some 56 million people, stretch down both flanks of the great continent and across its belly. Colonies, Protectorates, Trust Territories—whatever the title, the British writ runs and has run here for a substantial time, and if there is to be a reckoning that reckoning must be with Britain. Most of these territories have little enough in common, save the fact that they are part of Africa and are dominated by the same alien power. Seven hundred languages are spoken on the continent, and scores of cultures flower there. It is very nearly as far from the Gold Coast to Tanganyika as it is from New York to Southampton. Inside Nigeria alone there are over a dozen different peoples who have no language in common. There is variety unlimited in the scenery and climate, the customs and creeds. Under alien rule these peoples have become aware of their common lot as Africans. Beyond that, what they hold in common is their grinding poverty and burning determination to be free.

* * *

To talk of Africa without talking of slavery is impossible. For 250 years it was the dominant fact of Africa. Scores of millions of people were seized, bound, and sold into slavery by white men. Never, anywhere, before or since, has a crime of this magnitude been committed. Never have any peoples been subjected to such a sustained bloodletting, such an endless outrage.

Probably it was Prince Henry 'The Navigator' of Portugal who started it in 1442. On a trip to the West African coast in that year he acquired some gold dust and 'ten blacks'. Having sold the gold and the men, he returned for more, and soon Portuguese forts and settlements sprang up along the Guinea coast.

The Portuguese made a good thing out of the trade—their Bishops standing by to baptize each man, woman and child to be driven in chains to the ships so that their souls might find salvation in the very probable event of their death on the high

seas. The Church did well out of the transaction, charging 300-rei baptism tax per head—suckling infants excepted.

The first Englishman to enter the slave trade was Sir John Hawkins, and on his third trip to the Guinea coast in the latter half of the sixteenth century he captured 400 Africans and sold them later in the West Indies for £25 a head.

From these modest beginnings, the slave trade—British, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Arab and Spanish—flourished exceedingly. By 1680 wealthy and respectable merchants of Bristol, Liverpool and London were exporting 15,000 Africans yearly. Later, the total increased. Britain alone seized, transported and sold over two million slaves between 1680 and 1786. At the height of the trade there were 192 British ships engaged, carrying 47,000 Africans between them on each trip. By 1791 there were forty slaving stations, euphemistically called 'factories', on the West Coast alone.

Every effort by humanitarians to have the trade abolished was met by refusal on the part of those many members of the ruling class who were making vast profit from this wholesale murder. 'We cannot allow the Colonies to check or to discourage in any degree a traffic so beneficial to the nation,' said Lord Dartmouth, Colonial Secretary, in 1775.

Perhaps worse than the extent of the trade were its conditions. Figures for the British-run Jamaica trade show slave losses as 12½ per cent in harbour, 4½ per cent before sale, and 33 per cent in 'seasoning'. Thus, for every slave who survived to enjoy a few years of back-breaking toil and inhuman treatment in the plantations, another lost his life.

Later, when Britain turned from slaving to more refined forms of exploitation, and tried to persuade the Spaniards and others to do the same, conditions of transit deteriorated as slave runners crammed their holds full of men and women in risky, and thus highly profitable, trips across the Atlantic. The slaves were packed like fowls in a crate with no amenities of any kind for the duration of the long voyage in storm-tossed seas. They had to lay in spaces of only eighteen inches between decks. They could only turn on their hard boards if all turned together. So

foul did the ships become that they were often burned after a voyage: no one could be found to clean them. For every slave reaching the American continent alive, several died a terrible death on the way. And still it paid!

The slave trade still flourished in parts of Africa in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was not substantially ended until the first years of the twentieth. It speaks volumes for the vitality and vigour of the Africans that they were able to survive it and still people large tracts of their continent.

* * *

Not surprisingly, the slave trade took its toll. Once flourishing civilizations along the West African coast withered and died. 'It was sorrowfully recognized,' says William H. Woodward in *A Short History of the British Empire*, 'that the degradation of the Negro peoples of the nearer African interior was the direct result of European slave dealing.' Civilizations which can be traced back to the eleventh century were almost totally destroyed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There is much evidence to show that the widely accepted conception of the African savage, brought gently along the road to civilization by the White man, is a myth in more ways than one. Frobenius, in his *Civilisation Africaine*, speaks of the astonishment of the traders of the Middle Ages at finding in the Gulf of Guinea 'streets well cared for, bordered for several leagues by two rows of trees . . . magnificent fields . . . a country inhabited by men clad in brilliant costumes, the stuff of which they had woven themselves . . . a swarming crowd dressed in silk and velvet; great States well ordered, powerful sovereigns, rich industries—civilized to the marrow of their bones'.

From the ninth to the thirteenth century the great Kingdom of Ghana flourished in the area of the West Sudan and carried on extensive trade, practised the arts, boasted a centralized administration and powerful, disciplined armies. The splendour of its Court impressed travellers from the Mediterranean area. The Kingdoms of Mali and the Songhai also had power, wealth, and an important degree of civilization.

Leo Africanus, in 1513, saw in West Central Africa 'fifteen kingdoms of the Negroes' where trade flourished and the arts were practised. And in the East, in Ethiopia, there are traces of mighty civilizations dating back to early Egyptian times.

'The scum of England,' said Sir G. Cornwall Lewis in 1837, 'is poured into the colonies; briefless barristers, broken-down merchants, ruined debauchees, the offal of every calling and profession are crammed into colonial places.' This was true of the early nineteenth century. It was only later, with the full flowering of the industrial revolution, that colonial possessions gradually took their place in the structure of modern imperialism and began to attract the talents of officers and gentlemen.

* * *

The importance of the colonies was reflected to some degree in the methods used to control them. In the period when merchant adventurers were pillaging their way into Africa, the Government body responsible for overseas possessions was the Board of Trade and Plantations. In 1782 the colonies came within the responsibilities of the Home Secretary. In 1801 the link between colonization and warfare was reflected by placing them under a Secretary for War and the Colonies. It was in 1854, as vast areas of Africa were discovered and the value of the African possessions came gradually to be realized, that a Colonial Office was created.

The great era of expansion and consolidation in Africa came in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Britain pushed in from East, West and South. In the seventies the Congo basin was surveyed and found to be heavy with riches. Several European Powers realized the importance of tropical Africa, and rushed to stake claims there. In 1874 General Wolseley had fought the sixth Ashanti war, had sacked Kumasi and imposed an immense indemnity on the Ashanti. Further south, in 1877, Britain annexed the Transvaal, and by 1879 was engaged in carefully provoked war against the Zulus. In the early eighties, British, French, Germans and Portuguese found themselves grabbing at the same territories. In 1884 the Germans declared

their possession of South-West Africa. A conference in Berlin at the end of that year parcelled out the loot in a tolerably dignified manner.

✻The boundaries set up then were nothing but convenient lines drawn by politicians upon maps which did not even show the distribution of differing populations. Borders cut through peoples, even through villages and farms. Thus, the Ewe people, who number one million and live on the West Coast, were first divided between the British Gold Coast and German Togoland. When the squabbles between Germany and other European Powers culminated in the German defeat of 1918, the hapless Ewe found themselves parcelled up and redivided like so many chickens on a farm between Britain and France. This and other such divisions ignored all history, language, tradition and human considerations.

The Berlin agreement of 1884-85 stabilized the situation. But intense rivalry between Britain and France continued.

The British and French had long held small strips of the Guinea coast. The French had been pushing vigorously inland in an attempt to connect up their holdings and encircle the British. Soon they held a vast Empire in which Algeria, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey and the French Congo joined frontiers with the West Sudan. Later, they were aiming at a belt of territory across the continent, but a clash at Fashoda with British forces made them change their minds.

The seizure of the Matabele territories by simple trickery took place in the late eighties, and instead of being prosecuted for fraud, Cecil Rhodes had the stolen territories named after him. A dispute with the Portuguese was settled by treaty in 1891.

What is now the Belgian Congo had been internationalized in Berlin in 1884 and placed under the tutelage of King Leopold of Belgium. By 1890 the Belgians had both annexed the territory and were committing there some of the foulest and most widespread atrocities in the history of man.

African villages which failed to deliver on time the impossibly large quotas of **rubber** from the forests were subjected to

indescribable brutalities. Commonest practice was to slaughter men, women and children, cut off their right hands and deliver these to the local Belgian agent as proof that the punitive expedition had been successful. Joseph Clark, an American Baptist missionary working in the Congo, reported on 5th June, 1895:

There is a matter I want to report to you regarding the Nkake sentries. You remember some time ago they took eleven canoes and shot some Ikoko people. As a proof they went to you with some hands, three of which were the hands of little children. We heard from one of their paddlers that one child was not yet dead when its hand was cut off, but did not believe the story. Three days after, we were told that the child was still alive in the bush. I sent four of my men to see, and they brought back a little girl whose right hand had been cut off, and she left to die of the wound.

Two days later Clark asked: 'How many people have been slain for the sake of rubber I cannot tell, but the number is large.' It was. Whole districts were almost entirely depopulated. Hundreds of villages were razed to the ground, their families first tortured and then butchered. It was a favourite Belgian pastime to castrate the men and display their sexual parts on the village fence.

In 1894 an English traveller, E. J. Glave, reported: 'Twenty-one heads were brought to Stanley Falls and have been used by Captain Rom as a decoration round a flower bed in front of his house.' In 1898 an individual named Lacroix, an agent of the great Anversoise Trust, admitted killing 160 men, women and children, cutting off sixty hands, crucifying women and children and mutilating men. In some cases Africans delivering badly prepared rubber were forced to eat it, and on one occasion a Belgian Court solemnly declared that since the swallowing of rubber could produce no ill effects, the fact that a number of Africans had subsequently been taken ill and died could only indicate that they had something else wrong with them.

The horrors of the Belgian Congo, which were finally to be ended largely as a result of a powerful popular movement