

A NOTE ABOUT THE TITLE

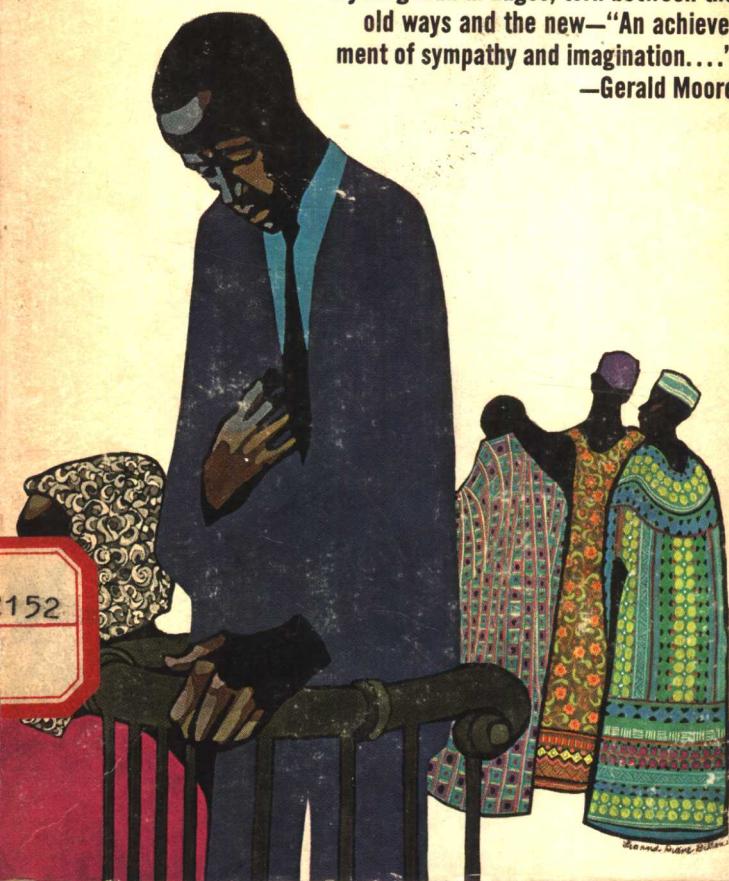
The title for Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is taken from William Butler Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming," and the title for his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, from T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi." As Judith Gleason points out in *This Africa*, the choice of titles reflects the author's awareness of a debilitation that Okonkwo foresees in *Things Fall Apart*: "For *Things Fall Apart* comes from the world of Yeats' cataclysmic vision, and how the Irish poet would have appreciated the wild old Nigerian! *No Longer at Ease* comes from the anticlimactic world to which Eliot's magi return. The career of the grandson Okonkwo [the hero of *No Longer at Ease*, grandson of the hero of *Things Fall Apart*] ends not with a matchet's swing but with a gavel's tap."

3.52

NO LONGER AT EASE BY CHINUA ACHEBE

The outstanding African novel about
a young man in Lagos, torn between the
old ways and the new—"An achieve-
ment of sympathy and imagination..."

—Gerald Moore



"I think that Chinua Achebe is, quite simply, one of the best novelists now alive." —Harvey Swados

"The painful realism of a book like Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is only possible because the author is taking a hard look at Lagos society as it is, without indulging in any comforting generalizations about the virtues of 'the African personality.' "

—Gerald Moore

"Chinua Achebe introduced the novel of serious social and psychological analysis into Nigerian literature. He deserves critical attention at a very high level.... In *No Longer at Ease* he describes with his usual characteristic poise and sanity the tragic predicament of the young African idealist whose foreign education has converted him to modern standards of moral judgment without alleviating the inner and outer pressure of traditional mores: the catastrophe derives from the hero's inability to make his choice; it is the tragedy of a bungled destiny in a bewildering, changing world."

—Albert Gérard

NO LONGER AT EASE

BY CHINUA ACHEBE

A FAWCETT PREMIER BOOK

Fawcett Books, Greenwich, Connecticut

NO LONGER AT EASE

**THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE COMPLETE TEXT
OF THE ORIGINAL EDITION.**

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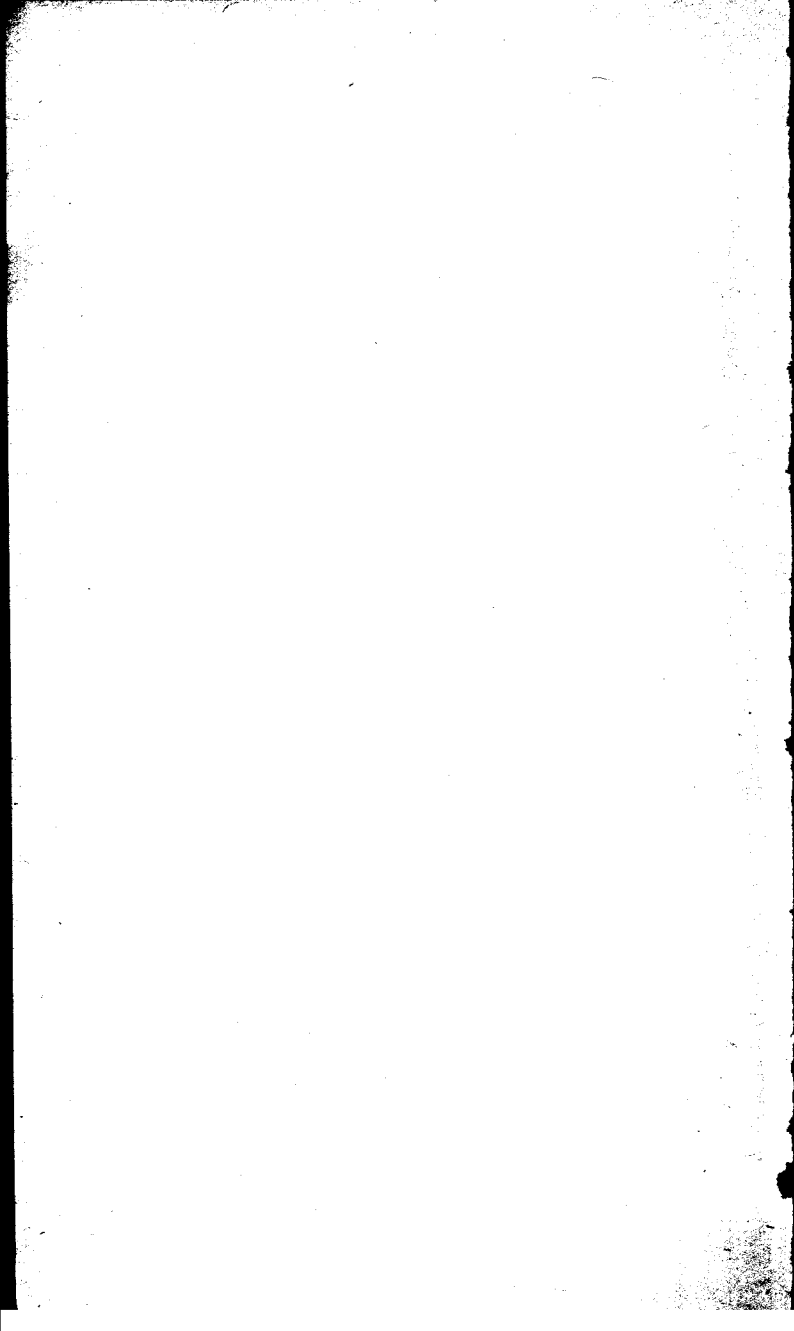
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For Christie

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

T. S. ELIOT, "The Journey of the Magi"

NO LONGER AT EASE



CHAPTER ONE

FOR THREE OR FOUR WEEKS OBI OKONKWO HAD BEEN steeling himself against this moment. And when he walked into the dock that morning he thought he was fully prepared. He wore a smart palm-beach suit and appeared unruffled and indifferent. The proceeding seemed to be of little interest to him. Except for one brief moment at the very beginning when one of the counsel had got into trouble with the judge.

"This court begins at nine o'clock. Why are you late?"

Whenever Mr. Justice William Galloway, Judge of the High Court of Lagos and the Southern Cameroons, looked at a victim he fixed him with his gaze as a collector fixes his insect with formalin. He lowered his head like a charging ram and looked over his gold-rimmed spectacles at the lawyer.

"I am sorry, Your Honor," the man stammered. "My car broke down on the way."

The judge continued to look at him for a long time. Then he said very abruptly:

"All right, Mr. Adeyemi. I accept your excuse. But I must say I'm getting sick and tired of these constant excuses about the problem of locomotion."

There was suppressed laughter at the bar. Obi Okonkwo smiled a wan and ashy smile and lost interest again.

Every available space in the courtroom was taken up.

There were almost as many people standing as sitting. The case had been the talk of Lagos for a number of weeks and on this last day anyone who could possibly leave his job was there to hear the judgment. Some civil servants paid as much as ten shillings and sixpence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day.

Obi's listlessness did not show any signs of decreasing even when the judge began to sum up. It was only when he said: "I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this" that a sudden and marked change occurred. Treacherous tears came into Obi's eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. But he did it as people do when they wipe sweat. He even tried to smile and belie the tears. A smile would have been quite logical. All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal had not taken him unawares. He had expected it and rehearsed this very scene a hundred times until it had become as familiar as a friend.

In fact, some weeks ago when the trial first began, Mr. Green, his boss, who was one of the Crown witnesses, had also said something about a young man of great promise. And Obi had remained completely unmoved. Mercifully he had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely on each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man, able to look words like *education* and *promise* squarely in the face. But now when the supreme moment came he was betrayed by treacherous tears.

Mr. Green had been playing tennis since five o'clock. It was most unusual. As a rule his work took up so much of his time that he rarely played. His normal exercise was a short walk in the evenings. But today he had played with a friend who worked for the British Council. After the game they retired to the club bar. Mr. Green had a light-yellow sweater over his white shirt, and a white

towel hung from his neck. There were many other Europeans in the bar, some half-sitting on the high stools and some standing in groups of twos and threes drinking cold beer, orange squash or gin and tonic.

"I cannot understand why he did it," said the British Council man thoughtfully. He was drawing lines of water with his finger on the back of his mist-covered glass of ice-cold beer.

"I can," said Mr. Green simply. "What I can't understand is why people like you refuse to face facts." Mr. Green was famous for speaking his mind. He wiped his red face with the white towel on his neck. "The African is corrupt through and through." The British Council man looked about him furtively, more from instinct than necessity, for although the club was now open to them technically, few Africans went to it. On this particular occasion there was none, except of course the stewards who served unobtrusively. It was quite possible to go in, drink, sign a check, talk to friends and leave again without noticing these stewards in their white uniforms. If everything went right you did not see them.

"They are all corrupt," repeated Mr. Green. "I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won't alter facts."

"What facts?" asked the British Council man, who was relatively new to the country. There was a lull in the general conversation, as many people were now listening to Mr. Green without appearing to do so.

"The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him? He is . . ." He was interrupted by the arrival of another friend.

"Hello, Peter. Hello, Bill."

"Hello."

"Hello."

"May I join you?"

"Certainly."

"Most certainly. What are you drinking? Beer? Right. Steward. One beer for this master."

"What kind, sir?"

"Heineken."

"Yes, sir."

"We were talking about this young man who took a bribe."

"Oh, yes."

Somewhere on the Lagos mainland the Umuofia Progressive Union was holding an emergency meeting. Umuofia is an Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria and the home town of Obi Okonkwo. It is not a particularly big village, but its inhabitants call it a town. They are very proud of its past when it was the terror of their neighbors, before the white man came and leveled everybody down. Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners. They return to Umuofia every two years or so to spend their leave. When they have saved up enough money they ask their relations at home to find them a wife, or they build a "zinc" house on their family land. No matter where they are in Nigeria, they start a local branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union.

In recent weeks the Union had met several times over Obi Okonkwo's case. At the first meeting, a handful of people had expressed the view that there was no reason why the Union should worry itself over the troubles of a prodigal son who had shown great disrespect to it only a little while ago.

"We paid eight hundred pounds to train him in England," said one of them. "But instead of being grateful he insults us because of a useless girl. And now we are being called together again to find more money for him. What

does he do with his big salary? My own opinion is that we have already done too much for him."

This view, although accepted as largely true, was not taken very seriously. For, as the President pointed out, a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone. And so the Union decided to pay for the services of a lawyer from their funds.

But this morning the case was lost. That was why another emergency meeting had been convened. Many people had already arrived at the house of the President on Moloney Street, and were talking excitedly about the judgment.

"I knew it was a bad case," said the man who had opposed the Union's intervention from the start. "We are just throwing money away. What do our people say? He that fights for a ne'er-do-well has nothing to show for it except a head covered in earth and grime."

But this man had no following. The men of Umuofia were prepared to fight to the last. They had no illusions about Obi. He was, without doubt, a very foolish and self-willed young man. But this was not the time to go into that. The fox must be chased away first; after that the hen might be warned against wandering into the bush.

When the time for warning came the men of Umuofia could be trusted to give it in full measure, pressed down and flowing over. The President said it was a thing of shame for a man in the senior service to go to prison for twenty pounds. He repeated twenty pounds, spitting it out. "I am against people reaping where they have not sown. But we have a saying that if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one."

"It is all lack of experience," said another man. "He should not have accepted the money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to their houseboy. Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done." He told the proverb of the house rat who went

swimming with his friend the lizard and died from cold, for while the lizard's scales kept him dry the rat's hairy body remained wet.

The President, in due course, looked at his pocket watch and announced that it was time to declare the meeting open. Everybody stood up and he said a short prayer. Then he presented three kola nuts to the meeting. The oldest man present broke one of them, saying another kind of prayer while he did it. "He that brings kola nuts brings life," he said. "We do not seek to hurt any man, but if any man seeks to hurt us may he break his neck." The congregation answered *Amen*. "We are strangers in this land. If good comes to it may we have our share." *Amen*. "But if bad comes let it go to the owners of the land who know what gods should be appeased." *Amen*. "Many towns have four or five or even ten of their sons in European posts in this city. Umuofia has only one. And now our enemies say that even that one is too many for us. But our ancestors will not agree to such a thing." *Amen*. "An only palm fruit does not get lost in the fire." *Amen*.

Obi Okonkwo was indeed an only palm-fruit. His full name was Obiajulu—"the mind at last is at rest"; the mind being his father's of course, who, his wife having borne him four daughters before Obi, was naturally becoming a little anxious. Being a Christian convert—in fact a catechist—he could not marry a second wife. But he was not the kind of man who carried his sorrow on his face. In particular, he would not let the heathen know that he was unhappy. He had called his fourth daughter Nwanyidinma—"a girl is also good." But his voice did not carry conviction.

The old man who broke the kola nuts in Lagos and called Obi Okonkwo an only palm-fruit was not, however, thinking of Okonkwo's family. He was thinking of the ancient and warlike village of Umuofia. Six or seven years ago Umuofians abroad had formed their Union with the

aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England. They taxed themselves mercilessly. The first scholarship under this scheme was awarded to Obi Okonkwo five years ago, almost to the day. Although they called it a scholarship it was to be repaid. In Obi's case it was worth eight hundred pounds, to be repaid within four years of his return. They wanted him to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbors. But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new. The Union was angry but in the end they left him alone. Although he would not be a lawyer, he would get a "European post" in the civil service.

The selection of the first candidate had not presented any difficulty to the Union. Obi was an obvious choice. At the age of twelve or thirteen he had passed his Standard Six examination at the top of the whole province. Then he had won a scholarship to one of the best secondary schools in Eastern Nigeria. At the end of five years he passed the Cambridge School Certificate with distinction in all eight subjects. He was in fact a village celebrity, and his name was regularly invoked at the mission school where he had once been a pupil. (No one mentioned nowadays that he once brought shame to the school by writing a letter to Adolf Hitler during the war. The headmaster at the time had pointed out, almost in tears, that he was a disgrace to the British Empire, and that if he had been older he would surely have been sent to jail for the rest of his miserable life. He was only eleven then, and so got off with six strokes of the cane on his buttocks.)

Obi's going to England caused a big stir in Umuofia. A few days before his departure to Lagos his parents called a prayer meeting at their home. The Reverend Samuel Ikedi of St. Mark's Anglican Church, Umuofia, was chairman. He said the occasion was the fulfillment of the prophecy:

"The people which sat in darkness
Saw a great light,
And to them which sat in the region
and shadow of death
To them did light spring up."

He spoke for over half an hour. Then he asked that someone should lead them in prayer. Mary at once took up the challenge before most people had had time to stand up, let alone shut their eyes. Mary was one of the most zealous Christians in Umuofia and a good friend of Obi's mother, Hannah Okonkwo. Although Mary lived a long way from the church—three miles or more—she never missed the early morning prayer which the pastor conducted at cockcrow. In the heart of the wet season, or the cold harmattan, Mary was sure to be there. Sometimes she came as much as an hour before time. She would blow out her hurricane lamp to save kerosene and go to sleep on the long mud seats.

"Oh, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob," she burst forth, "the Beginning and the End. Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight. We are like little children who only wash their stomach when they bathe, leaving their back dry . . ." She went on and on reeling off proverb after proverb and painting picture after picture. Finally, she got round to the subject of the gathering and dealt with it as fully as it deserved, giving among other things, the life history of her friend's son who was about to go to the place where learning finally came to an end. When she was done, people blinked and rubbed their eyes to get used to the evening light once more.

They sat on long wooden forms which had been borrowed from the school. The chairman had a little table