

THE  
MARTYRDOM OF MAN

by  
WINWOOD READE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY F. LEGGE



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## INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM WINWOOD READE was born at Murrayfield, near Crieff, on the 26th December, 1838,<sup>1</sup> of a family distinguished in the annals of the Civil and Military Services of the Honourable East India Company, and was the eldest son of William Barrington Reade, of Ipsden House, Oxfordshire, a considerable landowner, whose younger brother was Charles Reade, the author of "The Cloister and the Hearth" and of many other famous novels and successful plays. Winwood Reade's mother was Elizabeth, daughter of Captain John Murray, R.N., herself the inheritrix of an estate in Scotland, and she survived him by many years, as did his five brothers. He was educated first at Henley Grammar School and afterwards by Dr. Behr at Hyde House, Winchester, and on the 13th March, 1856, matriculated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, not then known by its revived name of Hertford College. The Hall was then of no great reputation, and Reade did not bring to it the mental discipline that he might have acquired at one of the great public schools, at that time rough but efficient nurseries of manners. If his own novel of "Liberty Hall" be taken as an autobiography of this part of his career, it would

<sup>1</sup> The "Dictionary of National Biography" (*s.h.n.*) says the 30th January, 1838; but this is plainly a mistake. Cf. Burke's "Landed Gentry" (current edition), p. 1408.

seem that he fell at Oxford into a somewhat dissipated set, and acquired there habits which were to stand him in bad stead in after life. On leaving the University without a degree, he at first resolved on a literary career, the success of his uncle, just then risen to fame as a playwright and novelist, doubtless appearing before him as a shining example. In 1859 he published a short sketch called "Charlotte and Myra," narrating the misadventures of a young gentleman who, after proposing to and being accepted by one of the twin daughters of a country squire, afterwards confuses her with her sister, and thereby exposes himself to a breach of promise action which ruins him. The story is wildly improbable, but is told with some spirit, the desire of a very young man—he was then not twenty-one—to show his acquaintance with the world and its dissipations being apparent on every page. This was followed the next year by "Liberty Hall, Oxon," a novel in the then orthodox three volumes, in which Reade sets himself to describe at sufficient length the lives of a group of University men, who can hardly be any other than himself and his companions, as they appeared to his youthful eyes, and as he thought they were likely to end. Here we have the well-known types of the rowing man, the lady-killer, and the undergraduate who has held a commission in the Army for a short time, and is therefore much looked up to by his contemporaries for his superior knowledge of life. There also appear in these pages the drunkard and the gambler, and it is significant of the bent of Reade's mind at this period that none of his characters come to much good, while he indulges in many diatribes against the extravagance of the University life of the time, the facilities it offered to undergraduates for getting into debt with the disabilities that this imposes upon them in after life, and the useless and perfunctory character

of the studies enforced upon them. In the course of this book the author describes his initiation into Freemasonry, and this probably led him to produce, the year after the publication of "Liberty Hall," "The Veil of Isis," a work in which he first shows signs of the anti-clerical tendency which was to give so much colour to the speculations of his maturer years. In form, "The Veil of Isis" is a history of the Druids, to compile which the author raked together, without much exercise of the critical faculty, all the scanty information to be gathered from classical writers such as Cæsar, Tacitus, and Ammianus Marcellinus; but its real purpose is probably shown in the Fourth Book, in which he states his conviction that the leading principles of Druidism have been continued and survive in the ceremonies and ritual of Freemasonry. With this he thought fit to couple much abuse of the High Church party in the Church of England, whom he described in words sounding oddly enough to modern ears, as—"false vipers who, warmed and cherished in the bosom of this gentle Church, use their increasing strength in darting black poison through all her veins. They wish to transmit to our Church those papist emblems and imagery, those ceremonies and customs which are harmless in themselves, but which by nourishing superstition elevate the dangerous power of the priests."

These three works were all very badly received by the Press, the leading literary journals being especially severe upon what they considered the author's insolence of tone, and have long since become extinct; but events were now beginning to take shape which were destined to give a totally different turn to the remainder of Reade's short life. In 1859 Darwin had published his "Origin of Species," and the doctrine contained in it soon began to filter through from the learned to the



general public. Among the many misrepresentations of it then current was the statement unwarrantably put into Darwin's mouth, that man was descended from the anthropoid apes; and, while the excitement produced by this was at its height, Paul Du Chaillu, a Frenchman domiciled in America, exhibited in London three stuffed specimens of the gorilla, which he described as a newly discovered anthropoid ape of great ferocity and intelligence living in the forests bordering on the Gaboon. "Rattening," then as now, was by no means unknown in scientific circles, and the narrative of Du Chaillu, who was not fortified by any academic credentials or by the prestige which in England seems to attach to those engaged in the instruction of youth, was at once assailed as a tissue of impossible lies, Dr. Gray, Assistant Keeper of the Zoological Department of the British Museum, leading off in May, 1861, with letters to the newspapers headed "New Traveller's Tales." Yet Du Chaillu found some defenders, including the late Prof. Owen; and Reade, whose tastes had early led him to the study of natural science, and in whose veins ran the blood of many who had sought fortune overseas, conceived the idea of visiting the Gaboon and deciding the controversy for himself. In pursuance of this, he raised money on his inheritance,<sup>1</sup> and started for Western Africa in December, 1862, on board the s.s. "Armenian," belonging to the African Steamship Company. His first visit was to Fernando Po, where Captain (afterwards Sir) Richard Burton was H.M.'s Consul. The visit must have been an interest-

<sup>1</sup> See obituary notice in *Daily Telegraph*, 27th April, 1875. The notice is said to have been written by Charles Reade. As Reade himself says later ("African Sketch Book," London, 1873, ii, p. 331) that in 1861 money was burning in his pocket, it is probable that it was raised for other purposes.

ing one, and formed the beginning of a lifelong friendship; and it was here that Reade had his first touch of fever. But a fortnight later he sailed down the coast in a trading vessel and landed at Glasstown, where he was rewarded by the sight of a tame gorilla.<sup>1</sup> From thence he went up the Ncomo or Upper Gaboon with only native attendants, and succeeded in penetrating as far as the Rapids, then unknown to Europeans. Then, hearing that Du Chaillu had visited the Fernand Vaz or Camma country, he transferred himself to the latter river, where he remained for some time in a kind of honourable captivity as the guest of Quenqueza, King of the Rembo. He also learned that Du Chaillu's account of the habits of the gorilla, though not inaccurate in the main, was entirely derived from native sources, the French explorer having visited the coast merely as a trader, and having bought the gorilla skins that he exhibited from native hunters, while his alleged personal encounters with the animal were "written up" from his notes by a New York journalist. Returning to the coast, Reade visited the Congo, which he ascended for a hundred and fifty miles, and although here he only followed in the footsteps of Livingstone, he was one of the first of modern writers to describe the Portuguese city of San Paolo de Loanda and the island of San Thomé, which has lately attained notoriety for its export of slave-grown cocoa. Then he ascended the Casemanche River as far as Sedhu, only returning to take passage for Bathurst, whence he visited the Falls of Barraconda, and then went back to the coast and up the Senegal. In these last-named journeys he studied the Slave Trade at close quarters, and even made the voyage to Loanda in a Portuguese slave-ship, which

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. i, p. 19.



was stopped and searched by a British cruiser. At the time he was hardly twenty-four years old, entirely dependent on his own resources, and had no knowledge of any African language or even of Arabic, although he managed to acquire some acquaintance with Portuguese *en route*. In the unexplored countries that he visited, moreover, he went practically unarmed, only having, as he tells us, a large unloaded duck-gun borne behind him "as an emblem of dignity and power." Nor does he seem to have had any previous advice on his equipment or conduct before leaving England except from the surgeon on one of the mail steamers to West Africa whom he met in England in the autumn of 1861, and whose conversation<sup>1</sup> first suggested to him the idea of exploration. In one respect he paid dearly for his inexperience; for, by his own confession,<sup>2</sup> he sometimes gave way to intemperance on this trip, and thus probably laid the foundation of the many fevers and other illnesses which were to prematurely cut short his career. Yet, when all is said, the feat was one worthy to rank with those of much more renowned travellers, and has never received half the credit it deserves.

On his return to England at the end of 1863, Reade published an account of his travels under the title "Savage Africa"; and then, having determined, rightly enough, that a knowledge of medicine was one of the most important aids to an explorer of savage countries, he set himself to acquire this by entering as a student at St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington. Here he remained three years, went through the usual course, and on the outbreak of the cholera

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," pp. i *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> "Savage Africa," pp. 281, 339, 349, 505, etc.

epidemic in the autumn of 1866 volunteered for and received the charge of the cholera hospital established at Southampton. In the meantime he continued to pay attention to literature, a novel called "See-Saw" written by him under the pseudonym of "Francesco Abati" having appeared in 1865. This recounts the adventures of a *prima donna* married first to a middle-aged English man of business, but afterwards returning to her first love in the person of an Italian Count of long descent and much wealth, who is, somewhat incongruously, a virtuoso and composer; and its scene is chiefly laid in Florence. Its object—for Reade, like his uncle, never wrote other than *romans à clef*—seems to have been to contrast the simplicity and earnestness of the Roman Catholic faith, as professed by the lower orders in Latin countries, with the hypocrisy and bitterness current among the more Puritanical English sects. It would therefore seem that Reade at this period passed some time in Italy, and that what he saw there induced him to modify his youthful views with regard to the inbred wickedness of Catholicism.

Perhaps it was some idea of the way in which the public of the period would be likely to regard this palinode which led him to adopt the very thin disguise with which he thought to cover the authorship of the novel. According to his own statements, however, it fell as flat as the others, and created only the most momentary sensation. As he himself says a little later,<sup>1</sup> "my books are literary insects, doomed to a trifling and ephemeral existence, to buzz and hum for a season—and to die."

This failure, as he chose to consider it, seems to have entered like iron into a soul ever greedy for

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 364.

personal distinction, and Reade's mind began to turn again to the pursuit of fame as an explorer. In his own words,<sup>1</sup> he reflected that: "it is a curse to aspire and never to attain. To-morrow I shall be thirty years old. For more than ten years I have been writing and writing, and yet have done nothing, absolutely nothing, and at length am learning the unpalatable truth that my fate is Mediocrity."

In these circumstances, it is no wonder that he "began to hunger after Africa again," and thirsted to leave "a red line of his own upon the map." With this view, he besieged all the business men dealing with the West Coast of Africa with offers of his services as an agent, intending, as he says,<sup>2</sup> "to remain for a time patiently upon the Coast, making natural history collections, studying the native languages and customs, and to wait an opportunity of plunging into the interior." Perhaps it was because Reade had neither business training nor had given any signs of capacity for it—or perhaps the firms to which he applied not unnaturally distrusted a subordinate who did not disguise his intention of using their service as a stepping-stone—but they one and all declined the offer of his services, until the Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society thought of introducing him to Mr. Andrew Swanzy, the head of an important firm then trading with the Gold Coast. Mr. Swanzy was opposed to Reade in politics<sup>3</sup> at a time when politics made a more complete dichotomy of society than at present, but he had for some time meditated doing something for the cause of African exploration, and

<sup>1</sup> "Ibid," ii, pp. 363, 364.      <sup>2</sup> "Ibid," ii, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> He was Liberal candidate for West Kent at the General Election of 1874, while Reade was a member of the Conservative Club.

had even dreamed of making a visit in person to Dahomey and of impressing upon its king the advisability of adopting "a better, fairer, and a more beneficial system of trading and even of governing his people."<sup>1</sup> These schemes for the political reform of the most savage state in Africa were hardly likely to come to fruition, but he recognised in Reade a kindred spirit, and finally offered to bear the expense of a second journey of exploration by Reade to the West Coast, giving him, in his own words, "*carte blanche* to go where I please in this country, to stay as long as I please, and to spend as much money as I please." The expedition was placed under the control of the Royal Geographical Society's Council, and Reade started again on a journey to Africa in the autumn of 1868.

This second expedition "in search," as he described it,<sup>2</sup> "of a reputation," all but cost him his life. He went first to Sierra Leone, where he remained for some months, studying the route to be taken, and making trips to the Slave and Gold Coasts. He at one time thought of exploring the Sherboro River, then of penetrating to Coomassie or to Dahomey. He came to the conclusion, however, that the chance of reaching either of these capitals was too slight to be worth the enormous expense involved, while the journey up the Sherboro, where Jules Gerard the lion-hunter was killed, would add little to our geographical knowledge.

Finally, he decided to push through from Freetown to Falaba, the capital of the military kingdom of Sulimania

<sup>1</sup> See his letter to Reade of 12th June, 1871, given in "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 509.

<sup>2</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 349.

discovered by Major Laing in 1825, and thence to make a bid for the sources of the Niger. This plan was much encouraged by Sir Arthur Kennedy, then Governor of West Africa, who visited Freetown during Reade's stay, and was anxious to get the trade route to Falaba reopened; but it is curious to notice that Reade conceived his first idea of the expedition from Major Laing's "Travels," published by Murray in 1825, a copy of which he found in a disused cupboard in the Government interpreter's house at Freetown. Reade tells us that he had studied the geography of West Africa ever since his former visit, and had read nearly every book upon it extant; but that, till then, he knew Laing's work only by name.<sup>1</sup> It is odd that he should thus have missed a book to be found in the British Museum and no doubt in other places of the kind, and of such interest to him that, after its first perusal, he was unable to sleep. It convinced him, as he tells us, that the Niger is "close to Sierra Leone"; and on Major Laing's map its source is actually marked as rising near Mount Loma on the borders of the Kissi and Koranko countries. This was confirmed by some negro headmen or "landlords" who had assembled at Freetown to meet Sir Arthur Kennedy, and determined Reade to reach this source or die in the attempt.

At last all his preparations were complete, and he started from Port Loko, the headquarters of the Timni nation or tribe, with all the prestige that could be conferred by the active support of the Government. He took with him a number of the medals usually given to the native chiefs in alliance with Sierra Leone, and one of his men was dressed in a uniform which gave the expedition the rank of a Government mis-

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 369.

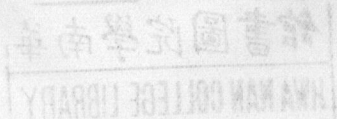
sion. Two interpreters, a guide, a special Timni emissary from Port Loko, and a great train of carriers accompanied the expedition; but it was characteristic of Reade that he took with him no provisions for himself, no medicines but a small quantity of quinine and chlorodyne, and that the only firearms to be found in the convoy were a breechloading carbine and a few cartridges carried by himself. With these, he traversed the Timni country, crossed the Little Scarcies River, and entered the country of the Limbas, where his troubles began. The medals removed some difficulties caused by his Timni escort, who were plainly ill-affected to the expedition; but he discovered that a small subsidy paid to the Limba town of "Big Boumba" (Boumbadi) for the free passage of gold caravans to Sierra Leone had been allowed to lapse, and he was allowed to go forward only on promising to send back from Falaba a Limba messenger for the arrears. On leaving the Limba country, Reade sent back his Timni escort and carriers, who had done little but make trouble,<sup>1</sup> and touched Major Laing's route by crossing a limb of the country of Koranko which here interposes between that of the Limbas and the kingdom of Sulimania. This over, he entered what he calls the *Great Central African Plateau*, a high table-land separated from the coast by the wood-covered hills through which he had just struggled. Before very long he reached the great town of Falaba and was well received by Sewa, king of the Sulimas. In three months he had successfully accomplished the first part of his journey, and had opened, as the

<sup>1</sup> He explains in one place (*op. cit.*, p. 376) that the Timni chiefs were at no time in favour of the expedition, no doubt having reasons of their own for not wishing direct trade with Falaba to be resumed.



Government wished, the direct trade route from Sierra Leone to Falaba.

It was here that the expedition nearly terminated in the death of Reade. He had sent back, according to promise, the Limba envoy—one Linsenì—with a request for the arrears of the subsidy immediately upon reaching Falaba, together with all the carriers remaining of those who had accompanied him from Sierra Leone. He had trusted neither of the interpreters who remained with him with the real object of his journey until he reached Falaba, of which town one of them was formerly a citizen. Hence when he told them that he wished to push on to the source of the Joliba or Great River—as the Niger is there called—they advised him that his best course was to say nothing about it to the king of the country for at least a month. When, at last, the revelation was made to Sewa, that worthy answered in true African style that he was then at war with a tribe of revolted Foulas called the Hooboes, but that, when the country was quiet, the white man should go and look at the water of the Great River. The excuse was more than a mere pretext, as was shown by the appearance and execution of Foula prisoners in Falaba; but it soon became plain that Sewa intended to keep Reade in his town as long as possible, and at all events until his goods, which are the money of the country, were exhausted. The disappointment was bitter to Reade, who reflected that so far he had penetrated no further than Major Laing, and doubtless had much to do with the illness which followed. First he was attacked by dysentery, but recovered by returning to a meat diet; then by small-pox, which also prostrated the body-servant whom he had brought with him from the Coast: and during these troubles he discovered that he was really a prisoner, and that Sewa would neither let him go forward to the Joliba nor return



to Sierra Leone, at any rate until his fast-dwindling stores were exhausted. At last, having sent away one of his two interpreters with a letter for Sir Arthur Kennedy, he was again attacked by malarial fever. "I am now confined to my hut," he writes at this period;<sup>1</sup> "all strength is gone from me. I never see my face, for I have no looking-glass; but my hand, as I write, startles me—it looks wasted and old. But my spirit is not subdued. If it is death which is approaching, it will find me prepared. When I came to this country a second time I knew that the chances were even against my return. What does it matter after all? Life at the longest is not so very long." But while he was writing these lines, Linseni, the native whom he had sent to Sierra Leone on his first arrival at Falaba, returned. He had been instructed by the Governor to escort Reade to the Coast; and Sewa, who desired the English trade, luckily interpreted this as an order to himself to release his prisoner. Three days later Reade started for Freetown.

On his sufferings in this return journey there is no occasion to dwell. Unable to walk, he had to be carried in a hammock the greater part of the way, but on arriving at Mabile he managed to obtain a canoe, and travelled through most of the Timnis' country by water. Moreover, the Governor had on his advice paid the arrears of subsidy due to the Limbas, and the fame of this, and perhaps the presence of a nephew of Sewa's who accompanied him, prevented the natives from molesting him on the road. On arriving at Freetown, the Government paid all the expenses of his journey and entered into an arrangement with Sewa's emissary by which the King of Sulimania was to receive a small annual payment so long as the road

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 449.

to Falaba was open. This has since been faithfully observed, and Falaba is now the centre of a flourishing trade. The five months that had elapsed since he first left Freetown had not therefore been ill-spent, and all his friends advised him to remain there and recruit his shattered health; yet in a fortnight's time he was again on the now opened road to Falaba, having decided to return with Sewa's envoy. The fear that another expedition might be dispatched by the Government during his convalescence seems to have been the moving cause of his thus risking his life a second time, and the surgeon in charge of the Colony told the Governor that he would certainly die on the road. But Reade was not to be turned back, and the Governor did what he could for him by stipulating with Sewa that he should be allowed to pass through Falaba to the Niger, an agreement which was rigidly kept. Probably Reade was right in not allowing Sewa sufficient time for his gratitude to evaporate.

This time there were no difficulties, although it was now the rainy season, when the bush is supposed to be impossible for Europeans. Falaba was reached without hindrance, and here Reade was able, for the first time since he left it, as he says, "to put on his boots" and walk. Taking Sewa's envoy with him, he pressed on, and struck the Niger at Farabana where it is but 100 yards wide, and where he narrowly escaped again being detained as a prisoner. He also ascertained<sup>1</sup> that Major Laing's account of the source of

<sup>1</sup> "African Sketch Book," vol. ii, p. 471. This was confirmed ten years later by MM. Zweifel and Moustier, the agents on the Coast of M. Verminck of Marseilles, who undertook to bear the expenses of a voyage of discovery undertaken by them in 1879. They found the fame of Reade still fresh in the country, and that the Niger—there called the Tembi—issued from a hill on which was a great hollow tree, afterwards passing through a small lake ("Bulletin de la Société