

LECTURE AT THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF WEST AFRICA

By MR. J. CATHCART WASON, M.P.

AN interesting lecture on "The Importance of West Africa" was delivered by Mr. J. Cathcart Wason, M.P., before the Society at the Imperial Institute on Wednesday evening, May 9th. Mr. Frederic Shelford, M.Inst.C.E., B.Sc. (Lond.), presided. The audience, which numbered over 150, included Mrs. Wason, Lady Ommanney, Sir Howland Roberts, Lady Roberts, Lady Shelford, Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Shelford, Mr. and Mrs. William Shelford, Miss A. E. Shelford, Lady Burdett, Mrs. J. R. Green, Colonel Stopford, Mr. J. H. Batty, Mrs. Roy Batty, Mr. R. Casement, Mr. J. H. Holland, the Rev. F. Egyir-Asaam, Mr. C. C. Scott, Mrs. Scott, Mr. C. D. Turton, Mrs. Turton, Miss Turton, Mr. H. E. Miller, Mr. Alex. Whyte, F.Z.S., Miss Burnett, Mr. V. G. Plarr, Mr. T. Brem Wilson, Mrs. N. I. Redmayne, Mr. J. Stocks, Mrs. E. A. Stopford, Mr. C. H. Harley Mosely, Mrs. Harley Mosely, Mr. C. H. Hardy, Mr. J. M. Coutts Stewart (Monrovia), Mrs. Stewart, Mr. A. B. Cann (Gold Coast), Mr. P. E. Sampson, Miss E. E. Pilcher, Mrs. Pilcher, Mr. C. Finney, Miss Edith M. Mowbray, Mr. F. H. Anson, Mr. C. P. Cotton, Mrs. Cotton, Mr. Anderson Stebbing, Mr. C. H. Ommanney, C.M.G., Mrs. Nelson Ommanney, Miss Ommanney, Mr. F. V. Nanka-Bruce, Mr. Sylvester Williams, Mr. R. Geikie, Mr. Dalrymple Hay, Mrs. Harrison Crawford, Mr. E. F. Ofom-Quartey, Mr. G. R. Newbery, Mrs. Newbery, Mr. A. S. Arnett, Mr. E. G. Western, Mr. D. E. Wilkinson, Mr. H. A. Couvelas, Mr. J. A. Deldey, Mr. J. H. Marshall, Mrs. J. H. Marshall, Mr. S. A. Qadir, Mr. B. Ahmad, Mr. A. W. Leslie, Mrs. Leslie, Mr. Francis Stringer.

In introducing the Lecturer, the Chairman said:—

Ladies and Gentlemen,—This is the first Meeting of the African Society at the Imperial Institute, and we are glad

that Mr. Cathcart Wason is able to give us a Lecture on this occasion. The Society has recently moved from its somewhat inconvenient offices in Albemarle Street to this building, where we hope to remain until we can have a home of our own. We may not have long to wait, as the Society is making good progress and the Membership is increasing at a considerable rate.

Mr. Cathcart Wason has chosen for his Lecture the title of "The Importance of West Africa," and I would take this opportunity of saying that the Society does not confine itself to West Africa only, but takes an equal interest in North Africa, South Africa and East Africa. Nor do we confine our interests to British Africa, but are glad of information as to any part of Africa, whether British, French, German, or Portuguese.

Mr. Cathcart Wason requires little introduction. As is well known he is the Member for Orkney and Shetland, and hailing originally from Australasia takes an interest in all the Colonial Dependencies of the Empire. He also takes an interest in West Africa. This is not an arm-chair interest, for Mr. and Mrs. Wason visited West Africa personally some 18 months ago.

Mr. Wason sits on the Government side of the House, and I would remind you that the African Society has no views or politics. We shall be glad to hear Mr. Wason's views on West Africa.

We, as a Society, only desire the progress and welfare of the British Empire, including the West African possessions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WEST AFRICA

WEST AFRICA is every day looming greater and greater in the eyes of the civilised world. It is in many ways unfortunate that during the last few years affairs in South Africa have been so absorbing that all our energy and attention has been riveted on that portion of Africa, and meantime West Africa has been steadily moving in some cases forward, in some cases backward. The past history of West Africa is a sad blot on the civilised world. Raids of slave traders, the horrors of

the middle passage, the atrocious cruelties that have sullied and disgraced European history, and which were thought to have ceased under the beneficent sway of Christianity and civilisation are, I fear, recrudescing in our time. The Gospel that was fearlessly preached by noble men, who, obeying their great Master's command, went forth without scrip or purse to spread glad tidings, has been and is now forced on the natives by quick-firing guns, sale of intoxicating drink, slavery under circumstances as outrageous and as disgraceful as the worst records of the past. During the past few years there has been a wild scramble among the nations to annex lands and hinterlands, and the absence of any strict guiding line of policy between the great Powers has been fraught with great disaster to the person most concerned, the native, the owner of the soil. I trust that in the near future the great nations will resolve on some fixed policy towards the indigenous population, and will decree that in the event of war arising among themselves, it shall not spread amongst the innocent population of West Africa, and indeed this principle has been thoroughly established by Article 10 of the Act of Berlin. Friends of West Africa must have looked forward to a brighter future when the great West African Conference met at Berlin, 15th November, 1884, under the Presidency of Prince Bismarck, and it is not amiss here to recall his eloquent sentence.

"In convoking the Conference, the Imperial Government was guided by the conviction that all the Governments invited share the wish to bring the Natives of West Africa within the pale of civilisation, by opening up the interior of that Continent to commerce, by giving the inhabitants the means of instructing themselves, by encouraging missions and enterprises calculated to spread useful knowledge, and by preparing the way for the suppression of slavery, and especially of the over-sea traffic in blacks, the gradual abolition of which was proclaimed by the Congress of Vienna of 1815 as the sacred duty of all the Powers."

More than twenty years back the great nations gave legislative effect to the deliberations of the Conference by the Act of Berlin, and it is no more than true to say that it would have been infinitely better for the native race if they had never

been brought into contact with the greed and lust of the white man, but I do not propose for more than a second to mourn over the past. We are in West Africa for good and all, and we must remain there. Germany, France, and Great Britain are an irresistible combination, and by concerted action much might be done to promote the welfare of the indigenous races in West Africa. On the question of importation of fire-arms, gunpowder, strong intoxicating drink, rum or gin, on the question of slavery, our policy should be clear and decided. Trade in fire-arms, drink and slaves, is hateful to us all; Germans, French, and English, individually, would stand aghast if they were accused of conniving at or profiting by such horrors, and yet collectively we are content to wipe our mouths and say, *we have done no harm*.

Not only Christianity and civilisation, but material considerations, plead for a kind and generous treatment of the indigenous races; without a happy and contented, flourishing native population, every interest in West Africa is bound to be ruined within a short time. By every law of God and Man, the country is theirs, and theirs only, and we are but trustees for them, and a policy of forced labour, of depriving them of their lands, is in every sense of the word tantamount to slavery. Another Hague Conference should be summoned with as little delay as possible, to consider how far the Act of Berlin has been carried out, how it can be amended, enforced and extended in the near future.

But although it is true that great measures of Reform can only be carried by means of agreement between the great Powers, yet Great Britain's position in West Africa is our first consideration.

In our pharisaism and self-complacency; in considering and talking of the Black as a barbarian, as a savage, as a heathen, for no other reason than because of his colour in the first place, and in the second simply because his ways are not ours, much evil has been done. As regards colour, if we lived in West Africa for a few generations, we would very soon be black also, and thank God for tempering the wind to the shorn lamb, and as regards the abusive adjectives which in our ignorant sanctimoniousness we heap on our black brothers, they are

disproved by every traveller and missionary. Someone flip-pantly describes the essential difference between a man and a monkey as that the man cooks his food and the monkey doesn't; from that point of view, the black man bears very favourable comparison with the white, and the capacity of the black to prepare succulent, nutritious meals out of very little, with limited appliances, is perfectly marvellous, and the orgies of extravagance and waste daily perpetrated in this great city go far to disprove any reflections we can cast on our black brothers. Nor is their skill in manufacturing or agriculture to be despised. Long before our upheaval from ignorance and superstition, great industries were carried on in West Africa; cotton growing, cotton manufacture, cotton trade were of paramount importance, and this cotton is grown and manufactured in West Africa at the present day, of most excellent quality; not that I mean to compare the industry with that of Manchester, but it is there, and deserves respect and consideration at our hands. At the Annual Dinner of the British Cotton Growing Association at Manchester last December, the Chairman, Sir Alfred Jones, stated that West Africa was going to send Lancashire 10,000 bales this year, and that before long—according to the Governor of Sierra Leone—from that Colony alone we would have one quarter of a million bales annually.

Maize is also being very largely cultivated, and in Egba alone there is an increase in the value of Maize and Provisions from £32,823 in 1904 to £55,925 in 1905.

Mr. E. P. Cotton, Commissioner of Lands, in his report on the Egba Boundary, gives a most interesting and graphic account of the Kingdom of the Alake. I felt a special interest in this country, as Mrs. Wason and I had the honour of being received by the Alake, taking afternoon tea with him and visiting under Mr. Edun's care the public offices of the kingdom, all based upon modern ideas. The Alake enjoys under our Protection great independence and the brief history given by Mr. Cotton shows that the country deserves it; I cannot attempt to give even a brief outline of its history, but I am sure you will all be glad to listen to the unprejudiced testimony of such a witness as Mr. Cotton

when he says, "The Egba farmer stands pre-eminent as a husbandman among the Yoruba Races. He is intelligent, industrious and law abiding; his knowledge of agriculture has often been greatly under-estimated, and his ability to improve himself and his country has not as yet been given a fair opportunity of developing."

My friend, Mr. Bellamy, Director of Public Works, Lagos, read a most interesting paper the other day before the Iron and Steel Institute, describing a smelting furnace in West Africa, and his own language cannot be bettered. "They are simple and unsophisticated, but they practise an art which is unknown to the savage, and which places them high above him in the social scale, while it entitles them to be considered to have reached a higher degree of civilisation than many of the tribes met with in European countries, where the people have been looked upon for many years past as more domesticated than any of the inhabitants of the dark Continent."

Their flocks and herds, their manufacture of Leather, their commercial instincts, all must impress the student with ample appreciation of their qualities.

No one in his senses would compare their operations with the great works of our country, but they get there all the same, and I have in my possession a sword of native manufacture purchased in Coomassie but made in Kano, which I do not think for strength, resiliency and temper, could be matched in London, and if you could only see a woman take a piece of clay, and gradually but simply build a shapely vase of perfect design and shape, and without the aid of the most antiquated potter's wheel, you would wonder at our talk of barbarism.

I have no hesitation in saying that if we struck a balance as regards the barbarism, savagedom, heathendom, of which West Africa has been the stage, the European Nations would have a vast balance against them, and in favour of their black brethren. Portuguese and Spaniards, the French, Dutch, English, all strove with each other to exploit the black man. It is said by Colonel Ellis in his admirable History of the Coast that England was the last to embark in the Slave Trade, and that Queen Elizabeth expressed her dissatisfac-

tion that negroes should have been forcibly taken from their native land.

Now, Sir, the future of this vast region lies with the great European Nations. We can do no more than strive in a spirit of humbleness and hope to do our best for the welfare of the blacks. I trust that you will not think the reflections are made in any idle spirit. They lead up to the object of this paper, the importance of West Africa, and the necessity for pursuit of a settled continuous policy which does not exist, which never has existed, and which ought to exist.

The magnitude of the country is shown by the following table, kindly furnished by the Colonial Office :—

WEST AFRICA.

AREA (APPROXIMATE) OF COLONIES AND PROTECTORATES.

Colony or Protectorate.	Area in square miles.	European Areas for comparison. Square miles.	Colonial areas for comparison. Square miles.
<i>Gambia.</i> Col. and Prot. .	3,980	Devon and Cornwall . . . 3,950	Cyprus . . . 3,584
<i>Sierra Leone.</i> Col. and Prot.	28,110	Scotland . . . 30,000	Natal . . . 29,800
<i>Gold Coast.</i> Col. Ashanti and N. Terr.	80,000	England & Scotland 80,868	Transvaal . . 111,700
<i>Lagos.</i> Col. and Prot. .	24,500	Scotland . . . 30,000	Ceylon . . . 25,481
<i>Southern Nigeria.</i> Prot. .	51,500	England without Wales . . . 50,868	Orange River C. 48,400
<i>Northern Nigeria.</i> Prot.	281,000	France and Italy excluding Italian Islands . . 298,495	4th India . . 294,440
Total	469,090		5th British India . 271,812

COLONIES.

Colony.	Population.	Total Trade.	British Trade.	Exports.	Imports.
Gambia	150,000	551,755	155,085	(Ground Nuts, Bees-wax, Rubber, Hides, Rice, Millet, Sweet Potatoes, Cotton . .)	Cotton Goods, Kola Nuts, Rice, Tobacco.
Gold Coast	1,500,000	2,899,649	1,893,117	(Gold, Rubber, Palm Oil, Palm Kernels, Rubber, Cocoa . .)	Cottons, Hardware, Gin and Rum
Sierra Leone	576,655	980,044	519,194	(Palm Kernels, Kola Nuts, Rice)	Cottons, Hardware, Tobacco.
Lagos & South Nigeria	2,000,000	4,769,787	2,880,824	(Palm Oil, Maize Kernels, Rubber, Ivory)	Cottons, Hardware, Gin, Rum, Tobacco
N. Nigeria	30,000,000				
Total	33,226,655	9,199,235	5,448,220		

The indebtedness is as follows :—

Gambia	Nil.
Sierra Leone	£1,250,000
Gold Coast	£2,331,000
Lagos	£2,000,000
Southern Nigeria	Nil.
Northern Nigeria	Nil.

The hope of that portion of West Africa for which we are responsible centres in the unification of the country and the adoption of a settled uniform policy. How it is possible to do that with five separate Governments is impossible to say. No one questions the ability or the integrity of the able statesmen who preside, or who have presided, over the Colonial Office, and the staff of able civil servants at their command, but the Colonial Secretary and his staff are, after all, only human, and cannot have time to either formulate or carry out a distinct policy. The time has arrived when a Governor-General for West Africa should be appointed, who should spend eight months in the Colonies and four months at home, advising and influencing the Policy of the Government, and with Lieutenant-Governors under and responsible to him, we could hope for some improvement. Negotiations with the French and German Governments should be carried on, especially with regard to importation of intoxicating drink, importation of fire-arms and the Duty on Salt. Everything possible should be done to discourage hasty action and to discourage a too forward policy, which have so often led us into costly wars and punitive expeditions, and the policy of direct taxation, by either hut or poll tax, should be abandoned until the Natives could be convinced of its justice and expediency.

More than forty years ago a war was raging in New Zealand between the British troops, a few settlers, and a thoroughly disaffected, suspicious native population. The cost was great, and the then British Government felt the task beyond its strength and resources, withdrew all the troops, and left the settlers to work out their own salvation with the Natives. Since then, with one exception, peace and good-

will have reigned between the Maoris and settlers. The Maoris have their special representatives in both chambers of the Legislature, help to make and unmake Ministries, are listened to with respect and attention. The only restriction the Government imposes upon them is to prevent them rendering themselves homeless and destitute by selling their lands. The Government very wisely vetoes their doing so, and also prohibits, under very severe penalties, the sale of drink in the Native districts. I wish it were the same in West Africa. I know the balance of administrative opinion is in favour of the sale of strong drink to the Natives of West Africa, but to me it is a shocking thing to see such a large revenue derived from the sale of drink.

Only recently a powerful Deputation of Liverpool Merchants, introduced by Members of Parliament of both sides, protested to the Colonial Secretary against the constant disturbance of trade caused by the continued punitive expeditions in West Africa. I trust these same Merchants will support the Government in maintaining the Octroi, or Customs Duties, levied in certain districts, notably Egba, which enable local Government and administration to be carried on in a manner which upholds the native dignity, and is a great lesson in Government, viz., that of making both ends meet. At the present moment a Deputation from Cape Coast is here, protesting against an Ordinance to be introduced in certain towns there, and I must say that their objections to a hut or poll tax are extremely well put. No taxation without representation was one of the cries of the Liberal Party at the last Election, protesting against the Education Bill. I think we might well extend our sympathy to the Deputation from Cape Coast. We are quite able to make the native pay a very fair share of the cost of protecting and governing the country without resorting to such an expedient as that. But with five Governors with practically nothing in common, with no opportunity of meeting, with a Colonial Secretary of necessity ignorant of the circumstances, and with a multitude of other details to attend to, what can be expected? The French system is in some respects, I think, superior to ours, and although Mr. Baillaud, in his interesting sketch of our Colonies, gives it as

his opinion that there is not much practical difference between the English and French system of Government, I think there is, and a short sketch of the French Policy in West Africa will emphasize the material difference.

The General Government of French West Africa was established by a Decree of June 16th, 1895. By a subsequent Decree of October 1st, 1902, the Administrative Political and Military Powers of the Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and the Territories of Senegambia-Niger, came under the control of the Governor-General.

The Decree of October 18th, 1904—(a last step in consummation of the original plan)—was the Institution of a General Budget for West Africa, and last week we read in the *Westminster Gazette* of a journey from Paris to Timbuctoo in nineteen days; I believe it was successfully accomplished more than a year ago in that time.

The appointment of a Governor-General is the keystone of the French Policy, and I trust will commend itself to our rulers. It is playing with credit, figures and finance for each of those Colonies to have its own loans. As the Loans stand they are extremely satisfactory and in fact they stand high as first-class securities. The British Government is without doubt responsible for principal and interest, but it would be extremely desirable to have one policy and one Loan for West Africa.

West Africa enjoys a bad reputation as a health resort, and many a home in the Motherland has been rendered desolate by the special diseases and circumstances of the country. Years ago, I remember an old Indian telling me that in his youth young men in India wore cotton, drank brandy and died, and that now they wore flannel, drank tea and lived. On no account should young men under 25 years be allowed to go out; they should be compelled to go through a special course of instruction of say three months at the Liverpool Tropical School of Medicine. They should be made to understand that illness caused by neglect of ordinary precautions would be a bar to promotion and even to full pay when on sick leave. Unless absolutely necessary, sleeping without mosquito curtains, sitting in the evening without mosquito boots, drink-

ing unfiltered water should be declared serious offences. Eight hours' office work should be the absolute maximum and in this respect the governors should be instructed to set the example faithfully and warned of the consequences if they exceeded the limit. Overwork lowers the system, causes a demand for stimulants, and then the end comes.

I have undertaken a serious task in accepting your invitation to read a paper on West Africa, a country of which so little is known, but taking such an interest in our Colonial Dependencies and recognising that the day is not far distant when Canada, Australasia, and South Africa will become more or less complete States, I and others interested demand that every care and attention should be directed to those countries for which we are responsible before God and man, and of those West Africa stands forth prominently.

At the conclusion of Mr. Wason's lecture Mr. Shelford exhibited a series of West African lantern slides; Mr. Wason then proceeded to show some further slides.

On the motion of the Chairman, seconded by Mr. Sylvester Williams, a hearty vote of thanks was given to Mr. Cathcart Wason for his lecture.