

## SLAVE, SERF, CITIZEN—AND THE WAY BACK

**M**R. G. K. CHESTERTON, in what is really a brilliant essay on the part played by the Church in the history of England,\* has an illuminating illustration of the influence of Christianity on slavery. He points out that the Church did not agitate for abolition by legislation, but created an atmosphere in which slavery simply could not exist. As for the slave, an interesting process resulted. He had been the stick of his master, to be used for any purpose and broken at will, but under this influence he was first rooted in the ground and became a serf, and then threw out branches upward and roots downward and became a citizen.

That atmosphere has taken some time to dissipate. When, in the sixteenth century, the spiritual concept of one Empire under the tutelage of one Church broke down, there emerged from the resulting confusion National States which have increasingly tended to repudiate all direct concern for religion. In the new political entities, the spiritual functions of the Church were first strictly limited but officially recognized; they have increasingly come to be regarded, however, as in no wise within the sphere of politics. The Catholic Church has long since predicted the result. In our own day we are beginning to see it.

Despite all the talk at Versailles and elsewhere of Right and Freedom, these words are empty phrases on the lips of politicians who have no longer any standard as to the one or the other. Political expediency they know; entirely cynical disregard of political obligations they fear as a double-edged

\* *A Short History of England*. By G. K. Chesterton. (Chatto and Windus, pp. 90, 91).

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weapon. But intrigue and trickery, that very so-called Jesuitism of which her enemies falsely accused the Church, and to some extent an honest desire to do the best for the majority on the part of men who no longer have any guide to that best, have finally dispersed this atmosphere of Christianity in which kings and ministers once almost unconsciously moved towards the Kingdom of God on earth. Nor is that all. There is now an atmosphere in which, still in a measure unconsciously, the trend of those in authority is in exactly the opposite direction.

That very thing which Mr. Chesterton selects to indicate the one process, is precisely our illustration of the other. Before the Reformation, the State slowly abolished slavery; since the Reformation, despite occasional spasmodic efforts on the part of individuals, the State has slowly tended to re-establish it in some form or another. Economics, divorced from religion, has few scruples. Capitalism, forgetting Christ, has none. In England, men of goodwill have had continually to fight against these insidious influences, striving to loosen the bonds of virtual slavery from the necks of the poor and the workers. The fight is not won at home, but maybe there are hopes. Meantime, abroad, the chains are being riveted on the necks of those who have few to plead their cause.

The case of East Africa happens to be the one more immediately before our notice, and a just consideration finds it almost incredible, all but beyond words. We have just emerged from a war for Freedom. We are living under a Government whose Premier once climbed to power in a party that won an election over Chinese Slavery. We have but just listened to the enunciation of principles of political self-determination and of mandatory rather than sovereign rights over the less advanced portions of the human race. And it is now that Lord Milner, in the name of the

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Empire, allots to East Africans that very thing against which our invective was turned when the country was German. In a *Despatch to the Governor of the East Africa Protectorate relating to Native Labour*, a copy of which is obtainable at any booksellers, Forced Labour is riveted on their necks.

Before considering the legislation in any detail, it is instructive to take one definite illustration of the methods of our Government in East Africa. The historian knows well the value of an occasional detail in judging the trend of political action, and for my own part I consider that what I shall now give, slight as it is, has almost more value than statistics and quotations. For when General Smuts was said to have conquered German East Africa, the Anglican Bishop of Zanzibar, Dr. Weston, aware of the treatment afforded to Government porters on the campaign and not unnaturally anxious to assure to his and other Africans the fair promises made to them by the Imperial Government, published an Open Letter to General Smuts which he entitled *Great Britain's Scrap of Paper : Will she Honour It?* He referred in this Letter to the German methods of government and to Forced Labour. The Imperial Government of our Empire took that Letter, cut out inconvenient passages, and published it under the title *The Black Slaves of Prussia*. That same Government now legislates in East Africa for that very system of Forced Labour at which our indignation, when it was German, was directed. It is hard to find language for such a thing. The very method of propaganda is so despicable that, sooner than condescend to it, it would have been better to have lost the war. As to Africans it is already a matter of indifference whether they live under the Prussian Eagle or the Union Jack. As a matter of fact, so far as this labour is concerned, it is only a question of twenty days difference in the year whether

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they live under the Union Jack or the scarlet flag of the Slave State of Zanzibar of the old *régime*.

To turn now to this legislation,\* it is ordained—like an ukase of Czardom from the native point of view—that every healthy native under fifty and not in regular employment, must do eighty-four days' labour in the year. He must do any work that the Labour Board may order and labour anywhere in the Protectorate that it directs. (Needless to say he has no voice on that Board.) If it takes the native a fortnight to reach the scene of his labours, this is no concern of the Government and is not deducted from the eighty-four days. The Labour Board fixes the rate of wages without his having any say at all in the matter. Lord Milner admits that "pressure" must be used to obtain this labour in East Africa, but in addition the labour of women and children is to be "encouraged" on white plantations. Headmen who fail to "encourage" it are to be reported to the Governor, and there is no one who is so ignorant as not to know what that may mean when a white Government is dealing with savage peoples, and when headmen are employed who have breathed none of that Christian atmosphere of which we have already spoken.

Dr. Weston, with his usual outspoken courage, and with his knowledge of Africans, makes quite clear in his pamphlets what evils must be expected to result from this. Apart from the fact that all this legislation is ethically immoral and indefensible, it is politically contrary to the spirit of the pledges of the Peace Treaty even if not (which may be doubted) to the very letter. It can only be imposed by those who are at heart indifferent to the social and moral life of the natives.

\* The most convenient reference for these details is the pamphlet *The Serfs of Great Britain*, by Dr. Weston (Knott, 2d.), in which full references to the actual *Despatch* and other Parliamentary papers are given.

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You cannot summarily break up the habits of child-races without incurring the guilt of their murder in the eyes of God. And such murder does follow. Every traveller in Africa knows well enough that to remove primitive men from their homes for any length of time is to ask for disaster, and there is scarcely such a book of travel written in which the difficulty of persuading natives to leave home, and the trouble of frequent changes of porters, are not emphasized. And why? Because both the men and the women of tropical Africa, in their present state of civilization, are still animal in their instincts and passions. Wives will easily become unfaithful if the husband is long away. The men themselves resort to concubinage and prostitution. Venereal disease is spread broadcast. The birth-rate is lowered. And more, a new type of African is created, that very type of a primitive man not yet civilized, but, thanks to "Civilization," no longer controlled by his own social laws, which is in truth not merely the danger of such white settlements as may be near, but of the whole world.

How little this Forced Labour is necessary for actual government is not disputed and only slightly camouflaged. The clove industry of Zanzibar, for example, of course privately owned, pays 25 per cent to the Government, and this is excuse enough for its use in this industry. The Government also deals directly in cloves, and compulsory labour is quite definitely intended for the Government plantations. Few, moreover, who know Africa well, are under much delusion as to a good many other works of alleged public utility. Roads may even fall under this head. When they are made, the bare-footed African beats himself out another side earth track, and the white man's car enables its owner to develop the country commercially and enjoy touring.

Much capital is made by the average European

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who is indifferent to Christian ethics and ignorant of any law of Divine morality, of the laziness of Africans and the necessity of their being made to work for the good of the community. In practice this means little more than that the standard of the life of the black is wholly different from that of the white, and the white man fails to understand this other standard, or, if he does, to care about it. By way of illustration, I was involved in an argument the other day in Basutoland with sundry Europeans, some of whom had been twenty years in the country, as to the work which a male Mosuto performs. I enumerated his occupation in a native village; and when I said that no woman ever milked a cow or touched the kraal while the beasts were in it or had anything to do with the cattle, I was laughed to scorn. The oldest resident was, however, impressed, and made enquiries. He came to me a week later and apologized. "It is extraordinary," he said, "that I should have been twenty years in this country and never have realized that all the dairy and cattle-work falls to the men." Incidentally Prof. Frazer points out this interesting fact as a case of the survival of sympathetic magic.\*

The average African is not lazy. In the words of Bishop Weston, who has had twenty-two years intimate experience of him, he "has a hard task to get food for himself and his family." What right have we to insist on his changing his economic standard of life, buying at a store, and earning the money with which to do it by working for the white man—for to this it comes. It is bad enough to tempt him to do so; it is wicked to apply force.

But the whole problem of the relation of black to white is involved in this question, and whereas it seemed that we might hope, after the Peace Treaty,

\* *Folklore in the Old Testament*. By Sir J. G. Frazer. (Macmillan, Vol. III, p. 133 and note 2.)

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that something was really to be done to protect the weaker from exploitation, it appears that now the whole battle is to be fought again. The African missionary is the man who knows how the lists are set. He knows that the more or less open opposition to Missions on the part of the average white man is due to the fact that Missions do make for the creation of that very atmosphere of the early and middle Christian Ages in which Roman slavery died its natural death. Religion is said to make the native "conceited" and "cheeky." It may be admitted that in a very true sense it does. But an African may be forgiven for being a little proud when he realizes for the first time that Almighty God is interested in him, and if it is "cheek" on his part to think of his natural and spiritual rights, then the encouragement of such "cheek" is the definite object of religion. The fact is that a Christian native begins to have aspirations for himself and his race; he begins to feel himself a man; he begins to understand that there are rights and wrongs in the world. He ceases to be content to be for all time, without a voice on any particular connected with himself, a manual labourer to a foreigner. He tends to become increasingly educated, that is he tends to become increasingly resentful of a servitude to which he begins to see there is no end.

The trend of modern unchristian thought about all these things is admirably illustrated in the case of Basutoland, where at present no political action has as yet followed. Basutoland is the one native territory left in South Africa in which the native is honestly, on the whole, his own master. In the War the Basuto raised the equivalent of £55,000 voluntarily for War funds. They sent 2000 boys to France. In 1899, 1914, and 1917 they turned a deaf ear to Boer, Rebel, and German intrigue. Their country

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pays its own way, and finds, voluntarily, a large percentage of the labour on the Johannesburg gold mines. Yet an officer in France with the South African Native Labour Contingent, in an applauding mess, declared to me that it was the "Plague spot of South Africa." I have heard it deliberately said that the Basuto are growing too well educated and too numerous and ought to be "thinned out." There is a very definite undercurrent in the Union for the absorption of the country that it may be exploited by Europeans. The present Imperial Government has in a sense renewed our pledges of Basuto protection, but in such language that even the native paper *Mochochonono* (or *The Comet*), written and edited by Basuto, saw the worth of its diplomatic avowals. The territory is wholly surrounded by the Union, and it would be hard indeed for the British Government to refuse what would be claimed as a question of internal colonial administration.\*

On the other hand, the trend of this thought in political action is well shown by recent events in Rhodesia. To sum up the story briefly, first, deliberate war was forced on the Matebele in 1893 by Dr. Starr Jameson, who promised to each of the six hundred filibusters who rode against the natives, 6000 acres of native land conditionally redeemable at £9000.† Secondly, in 1896, the Mashona, oppressed and subject to Forced Labour, heard of the collapse of the Jameson

\* These, and other facts dealing with the labour and life of boys in the S.A.N.L.C. in France, were related by me in a book entitled *The First Black Ten Thousand*, welcomed very heartily and prepared for the Press by the S.P.C.K., and censored out of existence by the Imperial Government in 1918.

† These and the following facts can be verified by reference to Charters, Histories and Colonial Office Memoranda, but a complete statement with references will be found in *An Appeal to The Parliament and People*, issued by the A. and A.P.S. and obtainable from Denison House; or at length in *The Chartered Millions*, by Mr. John H. Harris. (Swarthmore Press, 1918.)



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raid and rose against their oppressors. As a result both tribes lost their land, and 800,000 natives were allowed to live in their own country (1) on those lands now taken by whites, by paying £1 per head to the owner and £1 to the Chartered Company; (2) on those lands which nobody had taken and nobody wanted, by paying £2 to the Company; and (3) on the lands set apart as Reserves, by paying £1 head tax. The first sort are known as Alienated Lands, approximately 20,000,000 acres; lands (2) and (3) as Unalienated, approximately 70,000,000 acres. In 1914 the expropriation of the whole of this Unalienated Land was effected by means of a deliberate plot combined with misrepresentations made to the High Commission of South Africa, now known and admitted to have been such, with the result that no single native of the Mashona, Matebele, and kindred tribes was to own, either personally or through membership of his tribe, a foot of land, a spring of water, a sacred graveyard, a patch of garden, or even the plot on which his hut was built.

This expropriation of the rights of an entire people might well have gone wholly unchallenged but for the watchfulness of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society who brought it before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, April 16 to May 2, 1918. The Legislative Council of Rhodesia proceeded to add insult to injury. In 1914 they voted a sum to defray the costs of the impending action as "The cost of presenting the case of the inhabitants and people of Rhodesia," so that they do not regard the 800,000 natives as either inhabitants or people of Rhodesia in comparison with a few thousand invading foreigners! But these costs were levied upon taxation of which nearly half is actually drawn from these natives, who were thus forced to pay for the case against themselves. The cost of the action for the

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natives was raised in England through the A. & A.P.S., but when the Society sent its secretary to South Africa to collect evidence, the Chartered Company declined to give the required powers. And in 1910, while still waiting for the action, the Company appointed a committee upon which sat no native, no missionary, no unofficial person and no official of the Native Affairs Department, and before which no native was allowed to give evidence, which cut down the Reserves by 6,000,000 acres and gave the natives in exchange 5,000,000 other acres of "granite soil" and "uninhabitable" portions of Southern Rhodesia. J

The story needs no comment. It is, as Mr. Ramsay Macdonald said, "One of the most unpleasant skeletons in our country's cupboard." And although the Privy Council's decision on July 29 was against the Company, holding the legal title of the 70,000,000 acres to be vested in the British Crown on behalf of the natives, the 20,000,000 acres of so-called Alienated Lands remain as before. Natives on these territories are a conquered people, allowed to exist on payment of taxes and in view of the value of their services. What "rights" they have, may be guessed. In South Africa generally, a free tax-paying native cannot move from one farm to another without a pass, and may be put in prison if he strikes like the white man for a higher wage. And yet his wage is based definitely on a very low standard of living, and has been raised quite inadequately as a result of the War. In East Griqualand in May of this year I watched sheep-shearers work from sunrise to sunset for 15s. a month. A blanket at the store cost from 30s. to £4.

Thus there are two policies in respect to the child-races of Africa. The one, while admitting that they are in a sense children, urges that it is fatal to these races to forget their characteristics and customs in legislating for them, feels that they have rights in

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their persons and territories no less than we, and aims at raising them (if they will be raised) to a place no less honourable than our own among the peoples of the world. The other is careless of their customs, refuses to admit that their rights are comparable to our own, and would exploit them in the interests of European commerce and foreign enterprises. The Imperial Government appears to have no positive policy of its own in regard to them other than that of keeping the peace as cheaply as possible. But it is for ever besieged in the interests of this second popular policy and tends increasingly to surrender to it. It should be closely watched in Basutoland, in Rhodesia, in Zululand, and in the native labour markets of South Africa generally. But in East Africa the surrender just now is brutal and complete. Citizen is already Serf and may to-morrow be virtual Slave.

Mr. Henry W. Nevinson, who risked his life to expose Forced Labour in Portuguese West Africa, has some fine sayings in this connexion. He had been visiting the stations of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit in that country (it should be remembered that he is not a Catholic) and he says :\*

“ I have nothing but good to say of the missionaries and their work. The work is marked by the same dignity and quiet devotion as marks the work of all the Orders wherever I have come across their outposts and places of danger through the world. . . . As to the scandals and sneers of traders, officials and gold-prospectors against the missions, let us pass them by. They are only the weary old language of ‘the world.’ . . . They are the tribute of the enemy, the assurance that all is not in vain. It would be unreasonable to expect anything else and dangerous to receive it. . . . As a rule, it is not comfort or gain,

\* *A Modern Slavery*. By Henry W. Nevinson. (Harpers, pp. 138 ff. and p. 79.)

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it is not persuasive eloquence or religious conviction that draws the native. It is the two charms of entire honesty and inward peace. In a country where the natives are habitually regarded as fair game for every kind of swindle and deceit, where bargains with them are not binding, and where penalties are multiplied by every legal and illegal trickery, we cannot overestimate the influence of men who do what they say, who pay what they agree, and who never go back on their word. . . .”

We Britishers have always tried to believe that the British Government stood for these things also. True, those of us who know Africa have found it sometimes hard. But to-day—and these are weighed and serious words—the Imperial Government is not doing what it said it would do, is not paying Africa that wage of liberty which it offered for support in the War, and has gone back on its word.

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