SOME ASPECTS OF THE BLACK AND WHITE PROBLEM IN KENYA.

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THE aspect of the Kenya problem which I wish to speak about this evening, is that which deals with the methods by which the best interest of both the European and African communities may be served without unfairness to either side, and without the friction and distrust which at present characterises the situation.

Very unfortunately, indeed, there has developed in recent times the tendency for people both in Kenya and in this country to be either "pro-native" or "pro-settler," which all too often means that the people concerned have made up their minds beforehand that one or other side is wholly in the right, and are unwilling to give any consideration to the arguments of those who are merely "pro-justice," irrespective of the skin colour of the people concerned.

In order that you may appreciate the problems I am going to set before you, as well as better understand the implications of the solutions which I shall suggest to you, it is necessary that I should spend a short time outlining to you the changes in local conditions which have come about in Kenya in the last thirty years.

Let us first look at the changes that have taken place, and are still taking place with increasing speed, over the life of the natives.

Thirty years ago most of the tribes were wholly composed of savage natives, clothed in the skins of animals,—wild or domesticated as the case might be,—or sometimes not clothed at all; nourished entirely by the food which they themselves grew in their gardens, or by the products of the herds which they tended, and in the case of hunting tribes the wild animals they slew; housed in the window-less, smoky, rat-ridden, unhygienic huts of their time, with very little furniture and no comforts; unable to read or write, unable to speak any
language but their own, and regarding all white men with fear and suspicion.

To-day those same tribes still contain a large proportion of natives whose conditions are not, to the superficial onlooker, so very different from those I have just outlined. That is to say, there is still in each tribe a large proportion—larger in some tribes than in others, of course—who cannot read or write, who live in dark vermin-ridden houses, who are dressed in animal skins or not at all, and who feed principally on what they grow for themselves. But even over this section of the community a change has come. All of them have seen the white man and take part in discussions about him and his way of living and his attitude to themselves. All of them know that they have to pay a tax to the Government. All of them know that every adult male native must be registered under the native registration ordinance or incur a fine. Most of them have friends and relations who have attended a school of one sort or another. All of them make use of the facilities of trade to buy and use articles and foods other than those they can make for themselves, in fact all of them are contributing in some measure to the trade of the country.

Besides these there is in almost every tribe, but more especially in such tribes as the Kikuyu and Kavirondo, an ever-growing number of natives who live in hygienic, pest-free houses, with windows and decent sanitary arrangements, who dress in normal European clothing, much as the Europeans in the Colony; whose food is partly grown by themselves, but also includes sugar, tea, coffee, bread, and other European commodities; who can read and write their own language and also very often Kiswahili and to some extent English; and whose children start attending school from the ages of six or seven. As these people grow more civilised they study the methods, manners, statements, and political activities of the European settlers with greater keenness and vision than they are usually credited with, and as a result are less and less satisfied with the conditions in the Colony.

Between these two groups to-day there are, of course, very many natives in varying stages of transitional development.

And what of the future—shall we say in thirty year’s time?

Simply because Kenya is a Colony with a widely distributed settled white population, and is therefore unlike West Africa or even Uganda and Tanganyika,—I believe that the progress and change
which will have taken place in the next thirty years on the part of the natives, will be even more remarkable than elsewhere.

The older generation, who are living much as they did thirty years ago, will have died out. The sons and daughters of the progressive natives of to-day, some of whom already at the ages of ten and twelve read and write English, and who are receiving intelligent education, will have grown into the leaders of the Africans, and almost every native will be able to read and write at least his own language, and a growing percentage will be able to read and understand English, even if they cannot speak it,—provided of course that education facilities are continually improved and increased to meet the demand.

Now for a few minutes let us look at the changes that have taken place and are taking place over the settler communities. From a handful of pioneers living in houses with mud walls and thatched roofs, or in bungalows of wood and corrugated iron, concentrating upon the development of their farms, or their trade, the white non-official community has grown into a body of people living a life which in many ways is not very different from that of this country. They have their farms, on many of which they have built beautiful stone dwellings, situated in magnificent gardens; they intend, many of them, to make the country their permanent home; they have their clubs, and their race meetings, their golfing championships, and their political associations, and they are demanding more and more say in the Government of the Colony. There have also developed big commercial communities in the township, with Chambers of Commerce, Mayors and Town Councils, and all the other similar developments which are in adjunct with town life.

The further great change is that nowadays, instead of sending away their children to school to England or to South Africa as a matter of course, they are demanding local education facilities, with the result that both private- and Government-run schools are everywhere being developed to meet the demand.

The great changes of the past thirty years in the European communities have not so much been due to the change and growth of those who were there thirty years ago, as to the influx of others from overseas, and the general development of transport and other facilities by the Government.

And what of the unofficial European thirty years hence? I doubt
very much if the changes which will have taken place in their life will be in any way comparable with those which will have come over the natives in the same period. Changes and developments there certainly will have been, either in the direction of closer settlement and small holdings, or more likely in the direction of big company-owned estates. But the changes will not be so significant, I think, as those that will have come over the native peoples.

But I must pass on to the more important part of my lecture, namely the causes of the friction and misunderstandings between the two groups, and the possible remedies which might be applied. If one speaks to-day of the injustices done to the natives of Kenya by the white communities, there is a great danger of being misunderstood. Isolated cases of gross and deliberate injustices to the natives by Europeans, and to Europeans by natives, there have been in the past, and are always liable to occur, but I am not concerned with them tonight. They have not been confined to any one section of the community, nor are similar happenings confined to Kenya.

The vast majority of Europeans in Kenya, Government officials, missionaries and settlers are honestly endeavouring to be fair and just to the natives, and they deserve every possible praise for their good intentions, and I feel sure they will not resent it if I, who in many ways am more African than English, attempt to point out to them how they are failing in their endeavours and how they may improve matters. I say without hesitation that at present practically every European in Kenya is regarded by the natives as unjust and unfair in some way or other, even though they may be doing their utmost to be fair and just.

This state of affairs is due to several factors, all of which may be summed up in the word, "Misunderstanding."

Let me point out to you some of the chief sources of misunderstanding. For years the awful fallacy has been allowed to live, that Kiswahili is understood all over East Africa, and it is responsible for a very large percentage of the troubles. Kiswahili is the language of the coastal regions of East Africa, a language derived from many sources, comprising, among others, Arab, Persian, and Portuguese, fitted into a background composed of a heterogeneous complex of inland Bantu dialects. In its coastal form it is a comparatively rich language, adapted to local needs, local conditions and local traditions, and local coastal
native and Arab law and custom. Because most of the inland trade came by way of the coast, first in the hands of Arabs and later with the Europeans, Kiswahili became the language of trade and of the trade routes, but the further it went from its coastal home the more bastardised and tense-less it became.

That a bastard form of Trade-Kiswahili will carry the white man anywhere in East Africa is of course true, but the important thing to bear in mind is that in its trade form, or as it is commonly called these days; "Ki-settler" form, it is useless for anything more than the most commonplace commands and demands which may be necessary between two people who do not know each other's language.

Next, it is of the utmost importance to remember that even good grammatical coast Kiswahili such as some settlers and all administration officers learn is really of only a very limited use away from the coastal areas. This is because of two things.

In the first place, although there are perhaps more up-country natives who know good Kiswahili than there are Europeans up to the same standard, their number is but a minute portion of the three million odd natives of the Colony, and all but these few natives who do know it properly will be unable to understand the real meaning of what is said to them in it, even though they may in politeness, or to avoid trouble, say, "Ndio, Ndio" (yes, yes), to anything said to them in it, or to the query "do you understand"?

Secondly, and even more important perhaps, because it is even less realised, is the fact that even good coastal Kiswahili properly spoken is incapable of translating many of the intricate and specialised words relating to native law and custom in up-country tribes.

Despite these facts, partly because they are not widely known, and partly because even when informed of them many refuse to believe them, the official language of the Colony for dealing with the natives of all tribes is Kiswahili.

All administration officers must pass a series of examinations in Kiswahili, and it is their official language for administration of justice. Few of them are born linguists (very few English people of any class are, I fear) and they have much other routine work to deal with besides learning Kiswahili for their examinations, so that the chances of their ever having time to start learning another native language or ever mastering one more than superficially, are very, very small.
Thus, armed with a language which the majority of the people for whom they have to administer justice do not really understand (unless they are in a coastal district of course), a language, moreover, which is incapable of really translating intricate details of native law and customs, their efforts to be just and fair more often than not fall very short, because even where they have used an interpreter or assessors these people have had to communicate with the officer in Kiswahili. Nor do the settlers come off any better, but rather in many cases worse. I have known many cases of settlers who were honestly fond of their natives, kind to them, and desirous of helping them in every way, yet who acted most unjustly through the use of this appalling Kiswahili.

By far the majority of settlers are content to learn only the up-country "Ki-settler" Swahili, which serves very well indeed for all the ordinary work and ordinary communications between themselves and their native employees on their farms. But every now and then circumstances arise where something more complicated has to be explained by the settler to his employees, or by his employees to the settler, and then the trouble begins.

Mustering all the Kiswahili words he can, and with the aid of an English-Swahili vocabulary and phrase-book, the settler tries to make them understand. They understand as best they can, and act upon what they think they have understood, only to find themselves being soundly cursed or punished, which is their first intimation that they had not in fact understood. I have not time to dwell upon the injustices resulting from this sort of thing. It will be sufficient if I ask you when you get home to use your imagination, and think out the kind of troubles that would arise between you and your employees, how unjust they would consider you to be, day after day, and how foolish and untruthful you would probably consider them, if, shall we say, they were all Armenians and you tried to deal with them, and they with you, in German of which neither you nor they knew more than a limited number of words, and when both of you were relying chiefly upon the infinitive tense as substitutes for every other tense.

Before I discuss the more practical remedies for this source of misunderstanding and injustice, I want to deal with the sources of similar evils. It is one of the first principles of British justice that in dealing with the administration of non-European races we endeavour
to administer justice according to native law and custom in so far as it does not conflict with the laws and ordinances of the country. It is obvious, therefore, that from the point of view of administering justice it is essential that all the intricacies of native law and custom should be studied and known.

It should, I think, also be obvious to any thinking person that, quite apart from the question of administration and justice, it is economically unsound not to have a proper understanding of the customs and habits of a people with whom one is in direct contact in all business.

Now in Kenya the Government departments spend thousands of pounds upon such things as locusts, mealy-bug, ticks, etc., and also upon the habits of certain lady-birds and other insects which can be used to control some of these pests.

Even the Coffee-farmers Association, realising the value of research, is, I believe, seeking to organise further the study of insects and diseases affecting coffee.

Now the money is not spent on these investigations simply for the sake of scientific interest, but because a knowledge of the habits of the insects which are to be controlled, or to be developed—as in the case of certain lady-birds—is essential to the welfare of the country, and therefore the work is placed in the hands of experts. The very important study, however, of the laws and customs of the natives of the country, and more especially of the effects of contact with European civilisation upon the social and economic development of the natives, although it is of double importance because it is not only essential to the administration of justice but also to the whole economic life of the Colony—is not put into the hands of experts but is left to be carried out in such spare time as a few anthropologically-minded missionaries and government officials and others may have.

That is to say, it is left in the category of hobbies. A few of those who make this study their hobby in Kenya have had some training, most of them have not, but none of them have time for the detailed co-ordinated work that is necessary. Is it fair, is it just, is it economically sound, to develop Kenya as it is being developed, to spend the money in it that is being spent upon all the other branches of research, when there is no organised study of the natives, their laws and customs and of their reaction to white civilisation?

Had the laws and customs of the natives been properly studied
long ago by people who really knew and understood the natives, all sorts of friction, misunderstanding and injustices could have been avoided. I am well aware that many who hear me, or who read this statement, will reply that the laws and customs have been studied, and that the case-files at the various Government stations in the country are full of valuable information about native law and custom, which is always available and is much made use of by administrative officers. My reply is that much of the information contained in these case-files consists either of half-truths or of completely misleading statements, entered in good faith as facts, and perhaps better than nothing, but wholly inadequate.

Unfortunately, in this country and in Kenya, people are inclined to think of anthropology as the study of natives' ways and natives' customs and the measuring of their heads, and investigating the term by which a man's brother's wife's sister—for example—calls his daughters' husbands cousin, simply for the sake of having that information.

There is of course a purely scientific side to anthropology just as there is a purely scientific side to the study of butterflies or beetles, but what I am urging is the need for organised applied anthropology, and its practical application to the problems of black and white contact in Kenya of to-day.

I do not mean that a few men with anthropological training should be sent out for a few years to work through interpreters and make a report. That would be of little value; but rather that a body of men who not only have anthropological training but also either know or are prepared to learn, and are capable of learning, a native language really well, should be installed to make a detailed study of various important native groups. If they worked through the natives' own languages without interpreters and really got to know their people they would unquestionably be able to produce invaluable information, not only of scientific value, but also of definite value in improving the relations of the black and white races and helping the administration of justice and prevention of unintentional injustices.

A third very fruitful source of friction between the European communities in Kenya and the natives is the resentment sometimes shown by the former, (1) of the natives' desire for better education facilities, and (2) of the way in which they criticise the Government
and also the actions and statements of the unofficial representatives of the Europeans in the Legislative Council.

I think that the majority of the Europeans in Kenya to-day are in favour of the development of native education, but they wish it to be carried out slowly and gradually, which is wise, but also in certain restricted ways, which is not so wise.

What they tend to overlook is that they themselves and their manner of living, their attitude to government, and everything else, are in many ways a far bigger factor in the education of the natives than anything taught in schools, whether they would wish it so or not.

Imitation, both conscious and unconscious, is bound to exist the moment you have a race with a higher form of civilisation alongside of one less developed. Very many settlers who are in favour of some education for the native are strongly opposed to his being taught English, and I think the same may be said of most Government officials, and I also believe that both the settlers and the Government officials really mean it when they say they have the best interests of the natives at heart.

Personally I am convinced that in the interests of justice it is every whit as important to encourage and organise the teaching of good English to the natives as it is to insist that Government officials instead of learning Kiswahili should learn one of the native languages from the outset. My chief reason is this. The laws and ordinances of the Colony, even those which intimately affect the natives, such as native registration ordinance, the Squatters' ordinance, and the natives' Land Trust Bill, are naturally written and issued in English.

The debates which take place in Legislative and Executive Councils upon matters dealing with native affairs also naturally take place in English and are reported in English.

It is only just and fair that the educated natives should know what is said and what the laws and ordinances mean, and if they did so there would be far less distrust of the white man.

Another reason is that the very fact of the contact of a settled white community with the native population is going to result in many of them learning English of a sort, whether they are taught it or not, and to me it seems infinitely preferable that they should learn good English properly taught, than that we should discover in Kenya one day that there had developed among the natives either the awful
"pigeon English" of the west coast or a form of the "Babu" English of the Indian in East Africa, which is the result, I believe, of English taught to Indians by other Indians.

At an earlier stage in the lecture I suggested to you that so long as Kiswahili was the official language of the country, real justice in Kenya for the natives would be difficult. I would like to indicate to you how this state of affairs could, I think, be remedied.

At the present moment it is a very rare thing indeed for a junior administrative officer, after he has been home on leave, to go back to a station where the same language is spoken as that which was spoken at the station where he was before his leave. Officers are moved about from province to province and tribe to tribe for various reasons, the chief of which are probably:

1. That since Kiswahili is the official language anyhow, and can be used on any station in any province because there are interpreters, it does not really matter if they are moved about.

2. That some of the stations in the country are definitely more unhealthy than others and it is felt that by continually changing about, each officer gets his fair share of good and bad stations.

3. That the whole question of "leaves" makes continual shifting necessary.

As a further argument in the favour of the use of Kiswahili as an official language, it is urged that since there are so many different native languages in the country it would be quite unpracticable to keep an officer for the whole of his service in the area where a single language is spoken.

My reply to all of these arguments is this. There are to my mind five principal language groups in Kenya. An officer who had once learnt one of the languages in one of these groups properly, would be able to learn any of the other languages of the same group very easily in a few months, so that an officer once stationed to a given language group and having learnt one of the languages of that group could be moved as necessity required to any of the stations in the area comprising that language group without causing undue hardship to him, or necessitating his learning an entirely new language, and at the same time he would thus be far more able to administer justice properly than is at present possible. I said at the outset of this lecture that misunderstandings of various kinds were the source of
nearly all the problems in Kenya, and I have already shown you how various misunderstandings arise. I want, in conclusion, to discuss a further aspect of misunderstandings.

In recent years very many families of natives have gone out from their Reserves and become “Squatters” upon European farms in districts such as Naivasha, Nakuru, Gilgil, Njoro, etc. This migration from the Reserves has at times caused the local Government not a little surprise and it has misled the European settlers into believing that the natives prefer the life as Squatters to life in the Reserves. This is so utterly untrue, and shows such tremendous misunderstanding of the whole position both by the settlers and many of the officials, that I ask your patience while I try to explain the true position. First of all let me quote you two extracts from a letter written recently by an East African settler and published in the journal, East Africa, on April 23rd, 1931, in order to show you that what I say of the settler and Government attitude is not merely my view of their attitude.

“Now Canon Leakey must know of the thousands of Kikuyu who have of their own accord left the Reserves for good and have gone on to European farms with their wives, cattle, sheep, and all their little household goods. In Naivasha, Nakuru, Gilgil, Lumbwa, and Nandi, they have settled in their thousands. I have them on my farm on the Aberdare mountains 9500 feet above sea level, where it is bitter cold; they have made their home there, have established their own native councils, their dances, and all their religious ceremonies and will never go back to the Reserves. I have ten families settled on my farm in Kikuyu for the last four years, and they will remain there for all time; I could have had fifty more if I had wanted them. Why have they left the Reserves and settled on my farm? Their answer is always that they got a square deal and were not harassed and bled as they would be in the Reserve by the Kiana (Native Council).” . . . And “this exodus from the Reserves has for many years caused the Government a certain amount of anxiety and they have tried to stop it, with no results.”

Who are the natives who are leaving the Reserves and going out as “Squatters,” and why do they go? The answer is that—except for a very few—they are natives who were rendered land-less by the ignorance of those who had the control of the alienation of land to Europeans for farms.
These people seriously but quite erroneously imagined that in native occupied areas all land was communal, and so they took over large areas for European farms and told the natives they could move into the other parts of the native area. What they did not realise was that these natives who were being moved were landowners in the area where they were found, and that when they moved they could only go on to the other native land as tenants-at-will, by the kindness of the landowners there.

At the time this was possible because the land was not carrying anything like its maximum population and the landowners were quite willing to take in tenants-at-will. It was, however, made quite clear to them by native law, that they could only stay for so long a time as there was ample room both for them and their children, as well as for the descendants of the real landowners.

In recent years the population density started to reach a point where there was real congestion and the land was insufficient, so the tenants-at-will received notice to quit, and it is, I think, very significant, that in the area from which nearly all the thousands of Squatters have been drawn, the population density after they had gone was still about 500 to the square mile in some 63 square miles, according to the latest figures.

"Why," says the writer of the letter just quoted, "have they left the Reserve and come and settled on my farm?" And he states that the answer which they gave him was that they got a square deal and were not so harassed as in the Reserve. The harassing which they refer to is the eviction of themselves who were merely tenants-at-will by the real owners because of the congestion which made life impossible economically.

Well, say many settlers, when their Squatters come to them and ask for a rise in wages or some other concession, "if you are not satisfied with my conditions you can go back to your Reserve."

What they do not realise is that this is just exactly what they cannot do.

To-day in that part of the Reserve from which the Squatters came the native not only needs land to grow his food, and extra crops to pay his taxes, but also land to grow trees for fuel, land to grow grass for thatching, and land upon which to graze his flocks, and the figure of 500 to the square mile is even now making this impossible.
Of course the settlers and officials who do not understand native law and custom and religion at all, say glibly, "Ah yes, but he need not go back to that part of the Reserve from which he came. He can go off to some of the less-congested areas and live and settle on them." What they do not know is that every piece of land in what is now the Kikuyu Reserve is owned, and that to go and settle in these relatively thinly populated areas, they would have to get permission from the landowning families, and would even then only become tenants-at-will. Moreover, the land-owning families are not prepared nowadays to take on countless tenants-at-will, for they prefer to keep the available land against their own expected population increase of the near future. True, there are certain areas in the Kikuyu province which at the moment carry as low a population density as only 5 to the square mile, but they are areas which, without the expenditure of large sums of money, and work, could not carry a much bigger permanent population for the following reasons.

The population-carrying capacity of an area is not only determined by its food production possibilities, but far more by the amount of permanent water supply for man and beast.

In these areas, during the rainy seasons, there is of course ample water, but in the dry seasons, there is barely enough for a population of 5 to the square mile plus their flocks.

The mistakes that have been made in the past over questions of native land possibly cannot be altered, but at least let care be taken that these mistakes are not repeated and that every possible effort be made to improve conditions now, and above all things let the settlers be not misled into the idea that the natives come to them as Squatters because they like being Squatters.

Many of the Squatters, where they are well and fairly treated are temporarily quite content, but they know that their position is precarious because at any time they may find that their agreement is not renewed, and they will be forced to leave; or again, the farm on which they are "squating" may change hands and their new landlord treat them so harshly that they will want to leave, and there is nowhere for them to go.

I said at the outset of this lecture that the change which would have come over the Africans in Kenya in thirty years' time would be far greater than the changes of the last thirty years.
Of that I am certain, but I am equally certain that unless drastic steps are taken to safeguard native interest and remedy certain evils, Kenya will find itself saddled among other things with a big homeless, landless, poverty-stricken group of natives, possibly forced to slum-like conditions on the fringes of the townships, and a very fertile bed for the sowing of seeds of sedition by anti-British agitators.

The natives of Kenya need the sympathetic co-operation of Government, settlers, and missionaries to help them. There seems to be an idea in this country, among a certain section, at least, of the community, that the natives of Kenya are being deliberately oppressed by the Europeans. That is not true. But what is true, all too true, is that far more often than not, through ignorance and misunderstanding, the honest desire of the Europeans to help the African results in actions which are unjust and unfair, and which cause great hardships and breed distrust.