

THE CLAIMS OF UNCIVILISED RACES.

*A Paper Submitted to the International Congress on Colonial
Sociology, held in Paris in August, 1900.*

BY

H. R. FOX BOURNE,

Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society.



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“ We are in contact with uncivilised nations in so many parts of the globe that it has become of deep importance to ascertain the results of our relations with them, and to fix the rules of our conduct towards them. We are apt to class them under the sweeping term of savages, and perhaps in so doing to consider ourselves exempted from the obligations due to them as our fellow-men. This assumption does not, however, it is obvious, alter our responsibility; and the question appears momentous when we consider that the policy of Great Britain in this particular, as it has already affected the interests, and, we fear we may add, sacrificed the lives of many thousands, may yet, in all probability, influence the character and the destiny of millions of the human race.”

**British Opinion
in 1837.** Those were the opening sentences of a memorable report, issued in 1837, by a Select Committee of the House of Commons which had been appointed three years before to ascertain “ what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made, and to the neighbouring tribes, in order to secure to them the due observance of justice and the protection of their rights, to promote the spread of civilisation among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian religion.”

The appointment of this Parliamentary Committee was a sequel to the abolition of slavery throughout the British dominions, which had been resolved upon in 1834. The publication of its report in 1837 was immediately followed by the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Society, the founders of which had been the instigators of the Parliamentary inquiry, and the intention of which was to watch and influence as far as it could the action of the authorities in accordance with the Committee's recommendations.

These recommendations were based on the principles laid down in the report of the Committee and on the evidence adduced by it.

The principles were thus summed up, in continuation of the sentences already quoted:—“ As an enlightened and Christian people, we are at least bound to do to the inhabitants of other lands, whether enlightened or not, as we should, in similar circumstances, desire to be done by. But, beyond the obligations of common honesty, we are bound by two considerations with regard to the uncivilised; first, that of the ability which we possess to confer upon them the most important

benefits; secondly, that of their inability to resist any encroachments, however unjust, however mischievous, which we may be disposed to make. The disparity of the parties, the strength of the one and the incapacity of the other to enforce the observance of their rights, constitutes a new and irresistible appeal to our compassionate protection."

The evidence showed how futile, for the most part, had hitherto been the "irresistible appeal" to compassion or justice. "It is not too much to say," the Parliamentary Committee reported, "that the intercourse of Europeans in general, without any exception in favour of the subjects of Great Britain, has been, unless when attended by missionary exertions, a source of many calamities to uncivilised nations. Too often their territory has been usurped, their property seized, their numbers diminished, their character debased, the spread of civilisation impeded. European vices and diseases have been introduced amongst them, and they have been familiarised with our most potent instruments for the subtle or violent destruction of human life, namely, brandy and gunpowder. Europeans have entered their borders uninvited, and, when there, have not only acted as if they were undoubted lords of the soil, but have punished the natives as aggressors if they have evinced a disposition to live in their own country. If they have been found on their own property they have been treated as thieves and robbers. They are driven back into the interior, as if they were dogs or kangaroos."

The condition of affairs has been greatly altered, but scarcely improved, since those principles were laid down, and those impeachments were made, more than sixty years ago.

The number of uncivilised people brought into contact with nations calling themselves civilised has been enormously increased. Most of the natives of India and some other Asiatic races are outside the scope of the present inquiry, seeing that they have their own forms and developments of civilisation, however different, and perhaps inferior, they may be to those of modern Europe. But the same cannot be said of more than a few of the natives of North and South America, upon whom encroachments began four centuries ago, and who since then have suffered heavily from the results of many generations of ill-treatment. Far more extensive and deplorable has been the ruin of the aborigines of Australia, New Zealand, and nearly all the smaller islands in the Southern Seas, with whom European intercourse has extended over barely more than a hundred years. The expansions of European control in Africa, however, for good or for evil, with honour and gain, or with loss and discredit, have in recent years been very much greater and more notable than in any other part of the world.

The Position at Present.

From the situation in Africa may be drawn nearly all the illustration that is needed in the present survey of the relations between civilised and uncivilised races, and of the obligations thus incurred.

European interference with African affairs dates from Portuguese appropriations of territory early in the fifteenth century, and was fitfully continued by other nations besides France and Great Britain down to the date of the International Conference at Berlin in 1884-5, when the modern "scramble for Africa" may be said to have vigorously begun after some years of preliminary enterprise.

At the Berlin Conference the Powers associated in it declared that they were "concerned as to the means of furthering the moral and material well-being of the native populations [*préoccupées des moyens d'accroître le bien-être moral et matériel des populations indigènes.*]" And it was asserted in the 6th article of its General Act that "all the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native populations and the improvement of their moral and material conditions of life [*toutes les Puissances exerçant des droits de souveraineté ou une influence dans les dits territoires s'engagent à veiller à la conservation des populations indigènes et à l'amélioration de leurs conditions morales et matérielles d'existence.*]"

Moreover, in the General Act of the International Conference which was held at Brussels in 1890-91 to extend and systematise, in certain particulars, the policy agreed upon at Berlin, the associated Powers announced their "firm intention of protecting effectively the aboriginal populations of Africa, and of ensuring for that vast continent the benefits of peace and civilisation [*ferme volonté de protéger efficacement les populations aborigènes de l'Afrique et d'assurer à ce vaste continent les bienfaits de la paix et de la civilisation.*]"

These professions, if vague, are emphatic. They are pledges by all the civilised nations of Europe having control or influence in Africa, and by some others as well, that they will respect the rights of its inhabitants, and that they will fulfil the obligations to those inhabitants which are imposed upon them by their assumption of authority over portions of the continent.

To what extent they have each and all succeeded, in what respects and from what causes they may have failed or fallen short of their duty, and whether intentionally or through inadvertence—these and kindred questions could not here be asked or answered with advantage. But it appears proper, and I shall attempt within narrow compass, to set forth the views which are held by the Aborigines Protection Society as regards the claims of uncivilised communities in Africa and

elsewhere upon those nations or individuals who attempt to bring them under civilised and civilising rule, and as regards the responsibilities devolving on those who undertake the work of civilisation.

The rights of aboriginal races, whatever they may be, have correlatives in the duties towards them of those who intrude upon their primitive arrangements and institutions.

It will be convenient to group these rights of aboriginal races under three heads :—

**The Rights of
Aboriginal
Races.**

(1) A right to the land of which they are the prior occupants and to its use in ways approved by them, or at any rate to so much thereof as may be requisite for their sustenance and prosperity under conditions not less favourable to them than those which they enjoyed while they were its sole owners.

(2) A right to maintenance of the social, religious, political, and other institutions that they have established among themselves, subject only to such changes as they may voluntarily agree to under the guidance of the more civilised visitors and residents whom they have intelligently admitted to partnership or supremacy in the occupation or use of their country.

(3) A right to participation, on equitable terms, in all the beneficial arrangements introduced into their country by those more civilised visitors and residents.

Few, if any, will deny that uncivilised races can and should derive great and manifold advantages from judicious contact with races more advanced than themselves, and from such control by them as is wise and just. But experience proves that, whatever temporary and partial successes may be effected by a contrary policy, no lasting and complete success is attainable, no adequate benefit to either party is to be expected, unless the contact is judicious, in the long run, if not from the start, and unless such control as it is almost certain to result in is just and wise.

The problem of colonial statesmanship in Europe, in so far as it is concerned with the building up of honourable and profitable dominion over such savage communities as still exist in the larger portion of Africa and elsewhere, is how to make that dominion not less, and perhaps even more, advantageous to the inferior than to the superior race.

There is an important difference between the problem as it presents itself, or the conditions under which it has to be solved, in the larger portion of Africa and other torrid regions unsuitable or inconvenient for European colonisation, in the correct sense of the term, and the problem or its conditions in more temperate parts of the world. Where white men, or men of other

**Responsibilities
of Civilised
Races.**

**The Conditions
in Africa.**

colour but endowed with as much physical vigour, can live and thrive, doing for themselves all the bodily labour that is necessary, a stern law of nature appears to render inevitable the ultimate disappearance of the earlier and weaker occupants of the country. That is happening in North America and Australia. But throughout by far the larger part of Africa no intellectual superiority of the white men will enable them to do more than master the black population, which will always abound, and which cannot fail to become more and more numerous, and more and more capable of holding and strengthening its own position, as a result of the white men's influence upon it.

No slaughtering of blacks in the process of their conquest by Europeans can cause a tithe as much waste of life among them as has been going on through centuries in consequence of their perpetual raidings upon one another. No forcing of European rule upon them can prevent, or other than assist, their turning to their own account the opportunities afforded thereby for developing the resources of the country. The spread of what is called civilisation, including much that does not deserve the name, may incline the natives of Africa to be eager disciples and loyal subjects, or it may make of them dangerous enemies. But in either case it will increase and widen their opportunities of, as they choose, rewarding or punishing their white teachers and masters.

Self-interest and considerations of expediency, therefore, if not philanthropy and a sense of justice, should keep in lines that are really civilising the progress of so-called civilisation, and the conduct of those who undertake to extend it.

It may be true not only that enlightened Europeans have a right, but that it is also their duty, to aim at the overthrow of barbarism and at the improvement of regions which have hitherto been insufficiently or improperly used, as well as of people who have hitherto been the victims of their own or others' faults. But the economic, as well as the ethical, principles which our modern civilisation boasts that it has firmly established, in theory at any rate, forbid the perpetration of a crime in order that other and even greater crimes may be averted. Condemning, with St. Paul, the doctrine, "Let us do evil that good may come," those principles support the Christian rule, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." The abominations indulged in by ignorant savages are no excuse for any approach towards imitation of them by people claiming to be civilised and to be engaged in civilising work. "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods," are commandments more binding on educated white men than on benighted blacks.

The Ethical
and Economic
Law.

They should be none the less binding because the penalty for wrong-doing is often long delayed and sometimes altogether evaded. Every European nation that has acquired authority over uncivilised races by vicious methods has suffered in one way or another for so doing; but, as a rule, when honest effort has been made to atone for initial blunders and offences, the result has been easier of achievement and more satisfactory than might have been expected. The readiness of nearly all savages to excuse and forget wrongs done to them and to accept, even after harsh treatment, and even as its direct issue, any benefit accruing to them from European intrusion, is an argument in favour of and not against their being justly treated from the first.

So it is in Africa, perhaps more than in some other parts of the world, although the certainty that, as has already been suggested, its black inhabitants will always form the vast majority of its population renders it incumbent, on grounds of expediency as well as of justice, that the fundamental rights which we claim for them should be recognised and upheld.

The modern European "scramble for Africa" has reached a stage that leaves few portions of the immense continent to be further "scrambled" for as spheres of influence if not as actual possessions by the Powers concerned. But in the way of such "effective occupation" as was contemplated at the Berlin Conference most of the business has yet to be done. Nine-tenths of the continent, it may be, are now marked out on the maps as European property; but barely a tenth, if so much, has hitherto been brought under European rule. According to the prudence or the lack of wisdom shown by those who are eager to extend that rule will be the success or the failure of their enterprise. Heretofore, for the most part, they have been as much concerned in friendly or unfriendly bargaining and competition with one another over their several shares in the appropriation of Africa as in utilising the several properties of which, by agreement among themselves, they have assumed ownership. Henceforward their chief concern, if they persevere in the task they have undertaken, must be in bringing under beneficial control the native occupants of the territories which they have appropriated, but of which good use can only be made with the loyal assistance of those native occupants and through the spread of true civilisation among them.

One of the hardest, albeit the most necessary, of the lessons to be learnt, or at any rate to be put in practice, by individuals or nations that claim to be highly civilised is that the process of civilisation, inevitably slow, is impossible unless it is carried out by elevating and refining methods.

From
"Scramble" to
"Effective
Occupation."

The Civilising
Process.

Cruelty may kill, but it cannot cure. Fraud can do nothing but impoverish and make resentful those on whom it is practised. The so-called civilised man who deals savagely with savages shows that he is himself a savage still. Whatever present and apparent advantages he may gain by his crime, it does positive harm to others.

Ignorant and barbaric communities, like undisciplined or perverse children, require patient and judicious education to enable them to associate satisfactorily with people more intelligent and capable than themselves. The best education may not place them on an equality with their teachers, but, unless the teaching and control are of the right sort, neither side can really profit by the intercourse.

In Africa, as in every other region tenanted by uncivilised races, there is room for a far larger number of tenants than it has at present, provided the hitherto neglected resources of the soil, its opportunities for scientific cultivation, and the mineral wealth often hidden beneath its surface, are turned to good account. It is the function of civilised new-comers to give such instruction to the earlier occupants as will enable them to make better use of their land and to live more prosperously upon it than their benighted condition allowed. If that function is worthily performed by the new-comers, they are fully entitled to such recompense as they can obtain from occupation of land no longer required for the maintenance of its original inhabitants and from such service as these inhabitants are willing to render.

The mutual aid afforded by this arrangement may, and should, be of unalloyed benefit to both parties. Its immediate advantages to both would be considerable, and no limit can be set to the further advantages that ought to result from it in due course.

Unfortunately, the ideal policy is rarely attempted with seriousness, and yet more rarely persevered in to an adequate extent.

The old assumption that might is the only right, that the aggressor's strength is sufficient warrant for any conquest he is able to make and for any tyranny he is willing to impose, is now more or less discredited in theory; but in practice, and with some change of shape, it continues.

If in our day a pretext is generally found for whatever European aggression may be contemplated on savage communities or despotisms, the pretext is too often hypocritical or treacherous or both. Much of the zeal with which, for instance, expeditions have been sent out ostensibly for the suppression of the slave trade in Central Africa, under sanction of the General Act of the Brussels Conference, are open to the charge of hypocrisy; and of treachery that would be intolerable in the relations of European Powers with one another, there are almost daily examples

**Abuses of
Civilisation.**

**Spurious
Treaties.**

that raise no blush on the perpetrators' cheeks and no protest from outsiders. One-sided treaties, extorted from ignorant and incompetent savages, are manifestly intended to serve as preludes to seizures of territory or assertions of authority which, if allowable in any case, could probably have been brought about with more dignity and less slaughter had some regard been paid when the proceedings began to the elementary principles of humanity and honour.

**Wanton
Warfare.**

It was a French missionary who said, "On ne fait pas la guerre en Afrique; ce qui s'y fait c'est la chasse aux nègres." There may not be many Europeans who are themselves aware, or who will admit to others, that the pleasure with which they engage in "nigger-hunting" owes anything to the fact that is a more exciting sport than the shooting of tame birds and a less perilous sport than the shooting of wild beasts. Yet it is, for most of those who engage in it, and carried on as it is, a sport which cannot fail to be cowardly and contemptible, and which no profession of good intentions or of necessity, and no real or imaginary gains resulting from it, can redeem or justify.

Whether war under any conditions, between foes of equal intelligence, and in attempted settlement of quarrels held to be just, is to be reconciled with the ethical and economic rules that are supposed to be integral parts of the groundwork of civilisation, is a question that does not call for answer here. But those who most approve it as the last resort in disputes between civilised nations, or as a school for training in courage and patriotism which no other outcome or adjunct of civilisation can supply, will scarcely venture to say that there is warrant either in ethics or in economics for employment of the scientific appliances of civilisation in attempted extermination or, at any rate, complete overawing of races that, however great may be their lack of civilisation and their consequent deficiencies and misfortunes, have still, by the dispensation of Providence or in accordance with natural laws, a right to live and a prior claim to the lands they occupy.

**The Duties of
Civilised Races.**

In other parts of the world, including the most advanced European countries, civilisation has enabled a hundred or a thousand families to thrive more or less on ground that once barely sufficed for one. In Africa there is ample room for the presence and the enterprise of white tenants who in benefiting themselves may at the same time benefit the blacks on whom they intrude; and no excuse can be found for a less humane and a less rational policy.

The broad rule that should limit and direct all intercourse between civilised and uncivilised individuals or communities, and all

the influence or control exercised by the former in their dealings with the latter, may be thus stated somewhat more in detail:—

(1) No appropriation of natives' lands or their produce which have not been equitably acquired from and intelligently sanctioned by the rightful owners should be allowed. Of all that has not been so acquired and conceded they should be left in undisturbed possession, and it should be the duty of those who have taken on themselves the responsibility of maintaining civilised rule to safeguard them from aggression and fraud.

(2) No labour or other service should be exacted from natives which is not due from them under voluntary contracts fairly entered into. Anything more than that is in the nature of slavery, and not to be justified on the plea that slavery is an institution to which many of them have long been accustomed. The stamping-out of this institution, more than of any other, is put forward as a motive and warrant for European intervention in Africa. But not a few of those who condemn the enslavement of blacks by blacks have no compunction in adopting tyrannical methods differing only in degree from those they deprecate. Compulsory service is none the less servile because there is pretence of paying for it, or because it is regarded as an educational process. It may be irksome to teach savages what is called "the dignity of labour" merely by honest example and wise precept. But these are the only legitimate agencies, and they are only too much aided by the wants—whether for clothing, for tools, or for anything else of European manufacture—which are readily implanted in savages, and for the satisfaction of which they are quite ready to become wage-earners.

(3) In dealing with all other barbaric institutions, as well as with slavery, reasonable persuasion alone should be resorted to for their suppression. The cannibalism practised by many is perhaps the most obnoxious of these institutions, and the one that it is most desirable to put an end to; but there are others more or less connected with it, such as human sacrifices, and the gross superstitions known as witch-doctoring. All these may and should be sufficient grounds for the refusal of civilised men to have dealings with those who practice them, and for interference on behalf of outsiders victimised thereby. But even savages have a right to their own institutions, however degraded, if they are not injurious to outsiders, and the surest and speediest, as well as the only legitimate, plan for turning them from pernicious courses is to enlighten them as to their follies and errors. To tolerate and encourage among savages, moreover, obnoxious habits, for which under other conditions they would be condemned and punished, when it is thought they can be serviceable in hunting

down and persecuting other savages, is wholly reprehensible. Of this vicious and dangerous policy, the most conspicuous illustration is in the employment of cannibal hordes as mercenary or irregular troops in what are wrongly called civilising enterprises in Central Africa.

(4) In all planting and extension of civilised settlements among uncivilised communities, the moral advantage of the latter should be not less aimed at than the material advantage of the former. In some of these settlements, after they have been equitably started and arranged for, there may be no room or use for native residents, and in that case the exclusion of natives from them may be proper. But wherever black men are allowed or invited to associate with white men, the association should be of the sort best adapted to gradually and judiciously raise the blacks as nearly as possible to the level of the whites. The transition from barbarism to civilisation must perforce be slow, and attended by frequent failures, which should serve as lessons for future guidance; and, when the utmost has been done, it must not be expected that the highest civilisation of the blacks will be in all respects equal to, still less identical with, the highest civilisation of the whites; but, whatever the outcome, full opportunity ought to be afforded for natural developments and elevating influences.

White men are, or should be, in the position of guardians, or of elder or more fortunate brothers, to the blacks with whom, by their own choice and primarily for their own benefit, they are in contact. Whenever and wherever such contact is brought about, uncivilised races, by reason of their lack of civilisation, are in need of, and ought to have, the zealous protection and discreet control of those more civilised than they are. They need to be led, not forced, to exchange their barbarism for superior modes of living, and while they are acquiring the virtues that civilisation can develop in them, to be saved from the vices that, too often, mar its work. In a word, they need to be treated with justice—such justice as will make allowance for their defects, and seek to remove them by kindly and reasonable methods; such justice as will prevent their being made victims of the cruelties and treacheries, the tyrannies and meannesses, which are spurious concomitants and corrupt idiosyncracies of civilisation.

The foregoing, in brief outline, are the views held by the Aborigines Protection Society, which it earnestly commends to the notice of all who are concerned in the establishment of civilised rule over uncivilised races.