

**AFRICA:  
SLAVE OR FREE?**

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Africa: slave or free? by John H. Harris

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BY

JOHN H. HARRIS

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*Days in Darkest Africa* (Smith, Elder & Co.)  
*Portuguese Slavery: Britain's Dilemma* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.)  
*Germany's Last Colonial Empire* (Simkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd.)

WITH PREFACE BY

SIR SYDNEY OLIVIER

K.C.M.G., C.B. (Assistant Comptroller & Auditor,  
Formerly Governor of Jamaica)

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## PREFACE

BY SIR SYDNEY OLIVIER, *formerly Governor of  
Jamaica*

THE war has augmented the sensible importance of Africa and African peoples in the progress—whether it is to be through conflict or through co-operation—of the complex life of our world, and especially that of the British Empire; since that Empire, according to the figures which Mr. Harris gives on page 20 of this book, controls about one-third of the total population of the continent, and not far from half the total number controlled by all European Powers taken together.

The African peoples—that blended tissue of races, with all its varieties of locally adapted civilizations—in speaking and writing of which we are accustomed to bandy summary generalizations about “The Negro,” “The Black Man,” or more vulgarly “natives” or “niggers”—have both risen several degrees higher above the horizon of our general insular consciousness during the war, and have themselves, considering them and their transplanted blood-relations in America and the West Indies together, learnt a great deal

more than they knew before about the white man, the white man's civilization and his actual as distinguished from his official religion and morals.

Speaking in very broad generalities about this increased confrontation, we may note four important characteristics in the development of mutual relations and attitudes.

First there was, on the part of these African and African-born peoples, a warm and spontaneous manifestation of loyalty, goodwill and affection towards the white States with which they were associated. Naturally courageous and alert to the excitement of fighting, their men eagerly volunteered for enlistment in the Allied armies, and, whether in fighting corps or labour battalions, rendered admirable service and endured their full share of hardships, disablement and loss of life.

And their people who stayed at home sent their modest but not insignificant contributions of work and money.

Though this enthusiasm has met with some disappointments, the experience has, on the whole, I believe, reinforced the goodwill, loyalty and sense of solidarity out of which it sprang.

Secondly—the converse has happened. Many intelligent and sympathetic white men and women have had the opportunity better to realize the qualities and capacities of the African, and there has been much genuine increase of appreciation and respect towards him. Further, an attitude of enhanced goodwill and responsibility towards African races has been officially adopted and proclaimed in the Peace Convention, an attitude

which will be to some extent at least embodied in the mandates to the nations entrusted with new sovereignties in Africa by authority of the Council of the Allies.

So much to the good. Unfortunately there have been correspondingly negative evolutions.

For, thirdly, because the war has thrown many ignorant persons into positions of military or official authority, or has brought narrow-minded or stupid private citizens into contact or competition in various relations with coloured men, and because colour-prejudice is a very common attribute of ignorance or stupidity and a convenient stalking-horse for elementary instincts of self-interest and jealousy, there have been both unjust official discriminations to the prejudice of "coloured" British subjects (some of them I am glad to say, redressed under pressure) and some manifestations and preaching of colour prejudice in industrial centres and in the Press. And in the United States there have been, as was fully to be expected, even more violent manifestations of this noxious social distemper.

And, fourthly, conversely to this, the African has learnt a good deal about the seamy side of the white man. However uprightly and admirably he may have been dealt with by European missionaries, administrators and colonists, and whatever confidence and affection these may have won with him, it has never been possible for him to appraise the value and efficacy of the Christian religion, as the religion of the white man, quite so highly as the missionary and the administrator