

# The Missionary Racket in Africa

By George Padmore

*From Paris Mr. Padmore Sends the Readers of The Crisis Another of His Articles on Africa*

“THE Cross now stands at the frontiers of Abyssinia, and soon it will march ahead of our gallant troops, the torchbearers of fascist civilization. Let no one seek to block our path.” This is how Mussolini’s official mouthpiece, “Giornale d’Italia,” is trying to arouse the sympathies of the christian world for his imperialistic venture against the last independent black state in Africa. This, however, is not the first time that whites have cloaked their predatory designs against colonial peoples by exploiting religion. The British and the French are the past-masters of this art. While proclaiming that they were carrying the blessings of christianity and civilization to the blacks, they stole their lands. Not without reason, neither the Pope nor the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leading representatives of Christ on earth—for they are the heads of Catholicism and Anglicanism respectively, have raised their voices in protest against Mussolini, for they too have used the name of Christ in the services of capitalism.

The story of the conquest and annexation of Uganda, which lies to the southwestern frontiers of Abyssinia affords us a typical example of the role of missionaries in the service of imperialism. For this reason, we think it is opportune to tell it.

## Socio-Economic Situation

But before doing so, let us say a few words about the socio-economic situation in Uganda, by way of introducing this far off African country to our readers. Uganda is one of the richest and most developed parts of Africa. Cotton is the principal crop; it is grown entirely by natives and exported to India and Japan. The country covers an area of 94,204 square miles of fertile upland agricultural and pastoral country, with many beautiful rivers and lakes, especially the famous Lake Victoria, one of the wonders of the world. The population numbers 3,497,650 Africans; 14,000 Asiatics, mostly East Indians, Arabs and Japanese; and 1,973 Europeans.

The social status of the various ethnic groups is determined not only on the basis of wealth and culture, but of race. Race is the most important factor. The government administers the country along racial lines. For example, although Indians are allowed to own land, a privilege denied them in many other parts of Africa, they are nevertheless not permitted to ride in the same rail-

way carriages and sections of the ships that travel up and down Lake Victoria as white people. The same applies to the Africans. On the other hand, the Japanese who are Asiatics like the Indians, have the right of way. The white officials tried to also segregate the yellow men, but their Consul protested, and as Japan is a powerful world power, the British decided to respect her nationals in Africa. This is something for blacks to think about; for they have no rights even in their own lands. So much for general interracial relationship. Now let us get on with the main story.

## Coming of the Missionaries

The British explorers, J. A. Grant and John Speke, members of Richard Barton’s expedition of 1862, followed by H. M. Stanley in 1895, were the first white men to penetrate into Uganda. They were surprised to discover the high degree of cultural development in the country, especially in the states of Buganda, Bunyaro and Toro, the principal states which formed the empire of Uganda. These states are inhabited by a Bantu-Hamitic people of such remarkable intelligence, that John Roscoe, the famous British anthropologist, refers to them in his authoritative work on Uganda as “the Japanese of Africa.”

Two years after the visit of Stanley to the court of Mutesa, the then king of Uganda, Protestant missionaries from England began to arrive in the country. They were soon followed by Catholics from France, known as the White Fathers, an order organized by Cardinal Lavigeric, and from then on, some of the most scandalous episodes in the history of foreign missionary activities in Africa began.

## Protestants vs. Catholics

The Protestants who were bent upon winning over Mutesa to their brand of christianity in order to pave the way for the British imperialists who had sent them out to steal the country, organized themselves into a party called *Wa Ingleza* (the Englishmen). The Catholics were also determined to turn the old king into a good child of Rome and a better puppet of French imperialism, so they called their party *Wa Fransa* (the Frenchmen). A religious

war was declared between these two sets of christians for the soul and body, but more important still, country of the king. But while they were intriguing against one another, Arabs appeared on the scene and joined in the squabble. As Mohammedans, they wanted Mutesa to become a believer in Allah. The old man was in a fix. On one hand, he was being offered a choice between two varieties of christianity, and on the other, Islam. What was he to do? As a man of tremendous common sense, he rejected them all, and died in 1884, proclaiming the ancestral faith. The death of Mutesa marked the first round in the struggle of the aliens for the favor of the Royal Court of Uganda.

## War Breaks Out

Mutesa was succeeded by his son, Mwanga, who was just the opposite of his father—weak and stupid. He, however, had one strong trait, and that was a distrust for the whites, whom he instinctively realized were in Uganda for one purpose, namely, to steal his country. This distrust was strengthened by the fact that General Gordon, the famous Gordon of Khartum, was then over-running the Soudan, and had his eyes southwards towards Uganda. Apprehensive of invasion, Mwanga closed the eastern frontier of his kingdom and gave orders to his soldiers not to allow any whites to cross the border. Although this instruction was well known to the missionaries, Bishop Hannington, the head of the Protestants, attempted to cross the frontier and was killed. This was a Godsend for the whites who utilized this unfortunate incident to foment trouble. The missionaries of both denominations made a united front, and organized all their native converts to launch an attack against the king. Mwanga retaliated and ordered his soldiers to slaughter all christians. The Mohammedans supported Mwanga, and in this way won his favor. The christians defeated, retired from Baganda into Ankole where they reorganized their forces and prepared a counter-attack against Mwanga.

The christian army was well supplied with arms by the British East Africa Company, especially an Irish gun-runner by the name of Charles Stokes, who was later caught and hanged by the Belgians in the Congo for supplying arms to the Arabs and natives to drive out the Europeans. Thanks to their superiority in arms, the missionaries and their black followers

(Continued on page 214)

## Missionaries

(Continued from page 198)

captured Mengo, the King's capital. The territory was then divided between the Protestants and the Catholics. This marked the second stage in the subjugation of Uganda.

### Missionaries Quarrel Over Spoils

The missionaries soon began to quarrel over the spoils. Each wanted to boss the other. Finally fighting broke out among them. The Mohammedans and those natives who remained loyal to Mwanga started to attack both sides, which became so threatening that the Protestants appealed to the East Africa Company, which was at that time about 800 miles away along the East African coast grabbing up as much territory as it could, to come to their rescue. The Catholics did not like this, but better could not be done. So in 1889, the directors of the company despatched a military mission to Uganda under the command of Sir Frederick Jackson. He was later joined by Lord Lugard, then a captain in the service of the East Africa Company.

With the coming of military aid, the Protestant missionaries, having played well their part in making the first opening in the country, turned over what they had already annexed and retired in the background.

### Germans on the Scene

The Catholics realizing that the Protestants had out-manuevered them, began to foster anti-British propaganda amongst the blacks. This led them to render objective aid to the German East Africa Company, whose representative, Dr. Karl Peters soon appeared on the scene demanding a part of the loot. Since France could not get Uganda, the Catholics out of sheer revenge, wanted to see the Germans beat the English to it. So bent were they to get even with the Protestants, who were having the laugh on them, that in 1892, they organized all native Catholics and civil-religious war broke out. The Germans, however, did not participate; for the British had already come to a settlement with them by making concessions to them in other parts of the world under the terms of the Treaty of Heligoland in 1890. So the fight was one between the *Wa Ingleza* and the *Wa Fransa*. Thanks to the support which the English party received from the military garrison, they drove their opponents away. Then Lord Lugard with the use of Sudanese native troops carried through the pacification of the country. After peace was restored, he proceeded to England and negotiated with the British Imperial Government to take over the administration from the company. The Government agreed

to this as the company, a joint-stock corporation, was incurring much indebtedness in maintaining its own private army of occupation.

### British Government Takes Over

The final stage in the subjugation and annexation of Uganda took place in 1893, when the British Foreign Office sent out its own representative to take over the administration of Buganda state from the agents of the East Africa Company. In the following year, the British officially declared a protectorate over the country, and from then on gradually extended its authority over the other native states until all Uganda passed into their hands around the beginning of the century.

The conquest of Uganda shows the technique of imperialist penetration into backward areas. First, came the missionaries with the Bible; then, the traders of the Charter Company with liquor; and finally, the soldiers with machine guns. It is this technique which Mussolini is now trying to apply to Abyssinia; but the dictator reckons without the cost.

No one who knows the historic traditions of the Ethiopians, their martial spirit and ardent love for liberty, coupled with the hostile climate and difficult terrain of their country, expects anything else but disaster for this fascist adventure.

### Disaster Faces Italy

The Diplomatic Correspondent of Manchester *Guardian* (May 17) writes: "The Italian expedition is considered to be a personal idea of Signor Mussolini's that is being carried out against the advice of Italian military experts. The chances of its success are considered doubtful unless the Abyssinian tribes can be intimidated by a mere display of force. Military operations on a big scale are thought almost impossible by reason of the climate and the nature of the country.

"At the same time, it is difficult for Italy to abandon the expedition altogether, for confessed failure might react heavily on the already precarious Italian internal situation."

Bullying will not succeed, for the Ethiopians are more determined than ever in their history to defend the 3,000 years' independence of their country, and to drive the whites out of Africa.

### What Is to Be Done?

The peoples of African descent in America, as well as elsewhere, have a great moral duty to perform in this hour of danger. How can this be best done? Personally, we think that the N.A.A.C.P. or some other organization (it does not matter which) representing and enjoying the confidence of Afro-

Americans, should convene a national conference of all Negro organizations,—religious, political, educational, social, labor, fraternal, etc., for the purpose of organizing common action on behalf of the Ethiopian people. Such a coordinated effort can achieve tremendous results, and demonstrate to the peoples of Africa that their descendants in the New World have not forgotten their ties of blood and race with them. For when all is said and done, the struggles of the Abyssinians is fundamentally a part of the struggles of the black race the world over for national freedom, economic, political, social and racial emancipation.

## Gilpin Players

(Continued from page 206)

Gilpin Players contributed a fifteen-hundred-dollar collection of native African art to the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History. These gifts were the first instances where collections of this kind were given to museums by Negroes and attracted much attention in the curatory world. The collections have become the nuclei for later gifts from many interested persons.

Among the important contributions of the Players, that toward racial adjustment, although beyond concrete evaluation, is of undoubted value. In plays dealing with the present-day social problems the Players have served as a means of expressing the thoughts and feelings of the Negro. It is not beyond reason to assume that some members of their audiences have carried away from the Karamu theatre a better understanding of the racial conflict that exists in America. It is to be hoped that they have also carried away a desire to aid in bringing this conflict to an end.

It is a far cry in the professional theatre from the dubious welcome given the first serious venture of the Negro actor into drama in the *Emperor Jones* to the extravagant welcome given his appearance in *The Green Pastures*. Still the future of the Negro in the American theatre is far from secure. In his search for the security of an audience and the freedom to act, the Negro actor will do well to look not only toward the Broadway stage but toward the undeveloped hinterlands as well. The Negro actor will have to fight for recognition and appreciation, and the Little Theatre offers him a puissant weapon. The battle for a future in drama, like the battle for an economic future, will be fought on a thousand fronts. It is to be hoped that the attack of the Gilpin Players will be the signal for a thousand raids by Negro Little Theatre groups on the smug barriers raised against the Negro actor.