

KENYA COLONY

The Native Lands Trust

By E. M. G.

The arrogance of the little coterie of Kenya land-owners, who have usurped the functions of Government of the Colony, has by this time become so intolerable that their activities will surely be curbed by the next British Government. It is because they realize the imminence of this danger to their dictatorship that they are now engaged in entrenching their position with the active co-operation of the present Governor and the support of the Colonial Secretary. The White Conscription Bill passed by their Legislative Council, dominated by Ulster traditions, is designed to this end.

The transparently dishonest Native Lands Trust Ordinance, which provides machinery for dispossessing the native tribes of their remaining foothold on the Kenya Highlands, in the guise of a trusteeship, and the proposal to evict the Samburu Tribe from the Laikipia Highlands, are but the latest evidences of a consistent policy of ruthlessness.

The *Manchester Guardian* of 9th August has an outspoken leading article on this Ordinance, which has emerged with some alterations in detail from the Committee stage of the Kenya Legislative Council. On more than one occasion the British Government has endorsed the principle laid down in the League Covenant that the well-being of the simple African is "a sacred trust of civilization." Even the simple African himself, the *Manchester Guardian* says, is not so simple that he cannot understand the true nature of this Bill; and the paper publishes a remarkable letter from the Association of the Kikuyu to the Governor of Kenya, pleading, we fear in vain, for some understanding and consideration of the position of a tribe who have already suffered from the worst effects of expropriation by white settlers. We fear, say the tribesmen, that the rights of our lands will be lost and liberty of our living-place will be rejected, and after this we will come into bondage of working in settlers' farms for our living-place. To appreciate their fear we must remember at the outset that in Kenya no native tribes or individuals have legal ownership of any land in their own country. . . . It is to be hoped that Mr Amery, who has agreed to the principles of this Ordinance but not yet sanctioned its enactment, may yet listen to the voice of reason and humanity and not confirm the exceeding fear of the Kikuyu tribesmen that when the British talk of a perpetual trust they really mean the regularization of spoliation.

From Parliamentary Debates as well as from Press reports one would judge that the European element in the Colony consisted almost exclusively of settlers, of men with their families, on the outpost of Empire, engaged, with the assistance of natives, in winning a livelihood in hard contest with nature—and that readjustments involving native hardship were called for in the interests of such people. Let us see if it be so.

The 1921 census gives the number of Europeans in the Colony as 9,651—the native population is estimated at about 2½ millions, the Indian at about 125,000. Of this minute European population 5,963 consisted of women and children. 3,019 of the white population (which would doubtless include some of the women) were returned as being engaged in the following groups: civil service, professional, clergy and commercial. Only 1,893 Europeans were returned as being connected with land and these included the large landowners, their clerks and agents, as well as managers and assistant managers of plantation companies. It also included the survivors of the 1,000 soldier-settlers who some

years previously had been settled in a remote part of the Colony. It included the handful of Boer farmers who had trekked up from the Vaal in the early days, or their successors. Deduct these other categories, who between them own or occupy in their own right but an insignificant part of the Kenya Highlands, and there remains the mere handful of privileged persons who by wire-pulling in Nairobi or in Whitehall have contrived to possess themselves of thousands of square miles of the pick of the Kenya Highlands free of obligation or merely for peppercorn considerations.

These persons have, meantime, grown passing rich at the expense of the British taxpayer and of forced native labour on public works. For serious business they have the overlooking of the management of this vast domain which in individual cases runs to upwards of 600 square miles, and what is to them of even more importance, the jerrymandering of the Government of the Colony for their own further enrichment.

Notwithstanding that only some 10 per cent of the land already alienated to Europeans (some 9,000 to 10,000 square miles) can be regarded as being in beneficial occupation, it is now proposed that the process of pushing the native tribes off the Highlands shall be resumed. Lord Lovat, in the House of Lords, has designated the arid northern desert as a suitable habitat for them, and the Kenya Government have purchased water boring equipment in order to test its possibilities.

Through all this chicanery the real motive stands out clear enough. If the tribes can be harried sufficiently, if only their poor economic sufficiency can be further weakened or destroyed, then it is certain that the adult males, possibly the womenfolk and children, too, will be driven by economic necessity to offer their labour at the pittance which the white men by mutual agreement are prepared to pay.

Until that day arrives the wide, fertile lands of the Kenya Highlands may stand for the most part fallow, with their dormant values inherent in the expenditure of public money and the forced labour of the natives on public works. Forced native labour enacted by law for private gain is not to be thought of. At least, that is the tale considered good enough for the public ear. When the "development" measures now contemplated or in progress in the Colony have had time to produce their dire results, who can doubt that native labour will not be both cheap and abundant? When that day arrives the publicly created potential values can be cashed in substantial rents and selling prices for the benefit of the few who hold the post of privilege in Nairobi. But long before then we hope to see a democratic Home Government that will assert and establish the equal rights of the whole population, insisting that the public revenues of the colony shall be entirely raised by a tax upon the unimproved value of land, and that land in respect of which no tax is paid shall revert to the State, for redisposal to landowners—whether native or other.

TANGANYIKA

M. J. S. writes:—

Attention has been drawn from time to time in *Land & Liberty* to the very excellent land laws in this mandated territory, formerly German East Africa. The basic law is Ordinance No. 3 of 1923, which provides for complete retention by the State of all site values of native land and complete freedom from taxation of improvements on native holdings of land occupancy. A necessary improvement has been lately made by Ordinance No. 7 of 1928 (27th January, 1928). Provision that all natives have to prove their customary use of land by 1928 is repealed, as unduly swift for so