

Progress And Poverty In Central Africa

DAWN IN NYASALAND. By Guy Clutton-Brock.

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THIS book presents the "test case in Africa"—so it is sub-titled. But the author speaks not only for Africa, not only for Nyasaland. He speaks for all those parts of the world which the statesmen of the "developed" countries so readily classify as under-developed. In fact, we are all under-developed. And indeed, if we have grasped the idea of wealth in its fullness, we may be more impressed by the riches already in evidence in those countries than with their poverty by a narrower definition of wealth,—riches such as the stability of family life, simple wisdom in the management of their own economy, and the degree of democracy in government already enjoyed.

Seeing all these in Nyasaland, and seeing too the pattern of Federal policy—the break-up of family life, loss of liberty, unemployment and impoverishment—what are we to make of the oft-repeated plea for preserving the civilisation in Central Africa? Mr. Clutton-Brock points the choice for us, in familiar words: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." (Luke 17: 33).

He is explicit as to why: "In any society peaceful development depends not so much upon the basic standard of living of the people at any given time as on the balance between the standards of individuals, classes and communities. Where the differences are great or are increasing, the peace is in jeopardy . . . In South Rhodesia are being created . . . dangerous contrasts, and the Federation gives them power to spread."

One who is more impressed by an increasing divergence between the standards of living in a society, than with the soaring standards of the few sees things in the same light in which Henry George saw them. Consequently it is not surprising to find in Mr. Clutton-Brock's book this passage which might have come straight out of the chapter on How Modern Civilisation May Decline in *Progress and Poverty*:—

"In a world in which abundance is on the horizon and a reasonable standard of living becomes a possibility for all, the rich are becoming ever fabulously richer and proportionately fewer, and the poor become poorer, and more. History may well show that in recent years there has not been economic progress but regress for mankind as a whole."

The failure of Western Civilisation so far to formulate its ideal of a just society is at the back of its failure to establish such a society in Africa. Ignorance is the root of it all; and here is where "primitive" society so often has something to teach the one more "advanced". Certainly it seems the Africans have. For them "land is a primary gift which God gave to every man; it is free, like sunlight, air and water." How long lost-sight-of is this simple

view of land in the "advanced" theories of Western political economy! Lost sight of at a price — since it gives to society the golden rule of life. In the evil consequences that follow from the land policy pursued in Southern Rhodesia we see Western Civilisation losing its own soul.

The Land Acts of the governments of the Union and of South Rhodesia are the chief cornerstone of their apartheid policies. Plainly put, the people of Nyasaland do not want Federation "because it means the Land Apportionment Act" which operates in Southern Rhodesia. "A major reason for the opposition to Federation of the people of Nyasaland" is the Southern Rhodesian land policy. This refrain runs through the book. Well it might. For to deprive the African of land practically means that he is sold into slavery. With insufficient farming-land to make a livelihood for the family, fathers, sons and brothers must take the road to the towns, there to live on the white man's terms. A vivid picture of the grim conditions in the native "locations" in Southern Rhodesia is given in the Report of the Plewdon Commission appointed by the government headed by Mr. Garfield Todd. The Report has been "buried without honours" by the present government.

It is important that the British people, who are concerned in what happens in Central Africa, should know something of what Federation means, especially now when the sadly unrepresentative Monckton Commission is about to set out on its preliminary task. Here let me quote Mr. Clutton-Brock's own forceful summing up:—

"Millionaires and professors, big businessmen and Commonwealth politicians visit Salisbury from overseas and tour the Federation in a week. They see Kariba Dam, the Copperbelt, the Group Hospital at Limbe and the Pearl Assurance building in Salisbury. In the Balance Sheet they note the extent of capital investment from overseas. Their photos appear in the press taking cocktails at the sundowner given in their honour. They note the 'well-dressed' African waiter who refills their glasses. Their statements hit the headlines in the press: 'the phenomenal economic advance in the Federation,' 'its brilliant future for investors,' — 'the example to the world of racial partnership'.

"Some miles away from their luxury hotel, along unlit pot-holed dusty roads in serried ranks of little dwellings, or five in a room in a hostel, live the 'partners'. They have surrendered their traditional ways to make possible the 'economic development' and the 'rewards to the investors'. The 'overall picture' of their lives is one of 'extreme poverty'. [This last, a quotation from the Plewdon Commission Report.] Where lies the 'phenomenal economic advance,' and for whose benefit is the 'brilliant future'? It is an old tale, too old to be repeated in modern times in Central Africa."

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