

REPORTS AND ENQUIRIES

Native Progress in the British Empire

In the Spring of 1930 the British Secretary of State for the Colonies addressed despatches to the administrations in Africa, Fiji, and the Western Pacific, asking for information on the general health of the Native populations. He stated that it had been recently represented to him "that the numbers of the native population are in many parts of the Empire stationary, if not actually on the decrease, and that the general level of their physique is very considerably below the standard which is demanded by consideration both of their welfare and of their economic prosperity."

The general nature of the enquiry thus initiated, the results of which have recently been published¹, was, however, in effect limited by the Secretary of State's lengthy mention of female circumcision as a possible cause of low health standards and his statement that it had been represented to him "that the status of native women is in some places scarcely distinguishable from that of slavery". The replies received, therefore, while giving valuable information on the demographic situation, on medical and sanitary organisation, and on the position of women in Native society, do not as a rule examine the general factors in the progress or decline of the populations, which, as the Nyasaland Superintendent of Census stated in 1926, are inextricably bound up with the question of the general development of the country. In particular, it may be regretted that the effect of the absence of the men for long periods in distant employment, often alleged to be a cause of depopulation, did not figure as a subject of the enquiry.

Nevertheless, at a time when the scientific but rapid development of Africa is being considered in some circles as a necessary factor in world economic prosperity, an enquiry which throws light on the virility of the African races, on their health progress in recent years of European contact, and on the present limited financial resources of the administrations, is of international significance.

POPULATION FIGURES

Although most administrations found it necessary to insist on the possible inaccuracy of their returns, the general tenor of their replies

¹ GREAT BRITAIN. COLONIAL OFFICE : *Papers relating to the Health and Progress of Native Populations in Certain Parts of the Empire*. London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1931. Colonial No. 65. 191 pp. 3s.

negatives the Colonial Secretary's apprehensions that in many parts of the Empire the population is stationary or slowly decreasing.

In Kenya the African population is estimated to have increased by 92,582 between 1928 and 1929. The Nyasaland 1926 Census showed a total population of 1,290,885, which was estimated to have increased to 1,356,945 by 1929. Estimates are similar in other parts of East Africa, except Zanzibar, where a 1924 total of 217,965 decreased to 216,520 by 1928. The Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, however, considers that as a result of medical work a fairly large decrease in the Zanzibar resident population has now been turned into a slight increase, and it is also pointed out that the population figures are affected by emigration due to the improved conditions and prospects in Tanganyika.

No fears are expressed from West Africa of a decline in population. In Sierra Leone, indeed, there is reported to be much evidence of land hunger resulting from an increase in population.

The position appears to be different in the South African High Commission Territories. The Principal Medical Officer of Bechuanaland reports that in 1926 he "made certain investigations in Basutoland as to this particular subject and was able to prove conclusively that during the last fifteen years the natural increase of that tribe was rapidly declining and approaching almost to a standstill, and the impression of European residents in the Protectorate is that the same state of affairs holds in Bechuanaland." The Principal Medical Officer of Basutoland similarly states that "there is no doubt that the physique of the Mosutho, generally speaking, is not of such a satisfactory nature as, say, thirty years ago. This is probably due to the fact that many more natives during this period of time have left the territory for money-earning purposes, going more especially to the Rand where they do not get the fresh air and freedom that obtains in Basutoland, and this factor has a deteriorating effect on their progeny."

It is of interest to note that the African situation of a general if slow increase in population, modified by stagnation or decline in certain territories, is repeated in the other areas in which the enquiry was made. The Native population of Fiji, it is reported, increased by 6,236 between 1921 and 1929. The Acting Secretary for Native Affairs writes that "unless some unforeseen catastrophe occurs, this increase may, I think, be regarded as evidence that the Fijian race has successfully withstood the dangers incident to the introduction of foreign peoples and of economic development and has sustained sufficient vitality to ensure its future increase and development." The report on the Gilbert and Ellice Islands suggests that the race, having suffered a loss of the will to live following the first impact of civilisation, has now reached a point at which it responds favourably to scientific European influences. Nevertheless, in eleven units of the Gilbert Group there have been decreases in the last fifteen years ranging from an average annual rate of 1.9 per thousand to 19.8 per thousand. In the Solomon Islands a disastrous decline in population followed early European contact, the Island of Vanikoro, where there

were possibly 700 inhabitants a hundred years ago, now containing 17 Natives. At the present moment, however, the Resident Commissioner with some hesitation thinks the indigenous population is probably stationary.

INFANT MORTALITY

Although the generality of the reports justify optimism as regards the present demographic position of the subject races of the Empire, the reading of the reports leaves the impression of a low standard of health, primarily due to Native poverty. This is reflected in the figures, necessarily in many cases incomplete or approximate, of infant mortality supplied by most of the East African administrations.

In Kenya a 1922 investigation in Kavirondo showed an infant mortality rate of over 400 per 1,000. In Uganda the rate per 1,000 has been reduced from 276.27 in 1926 to 232.75 in 1929 (223.65 in 1930). In certain districts, however, rates of 322, 338, and 382 are recorded. The Governor of Nyasaland reports that "figures obtained by test examinations in certain districts, though they may not be quite exact, demonstrate that no fewer than 35 per cent. of the children die before reaching the age of puberty." The Principal Medical Officer of Northern Rhodesia states that the infant mortality rate is 38 per cent. In 579 villages in 1929, 2,974 children were born, 624 died under one year of age, and 482 between one and two years.

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

There is general agreement among the administrations that female circumcision has slight or no effect on fertility or the health of the mother and child. Only a few tribes practise a serious form of mutilation. The chief interest of this part of the reports, however, is the insistence on the necessity of considering any one Native custom in relation with the whole life of the community. The following extract from a Sierra Leone report dealing with a particular situation reflects general opinion on the general problem :

"Excision, though doubtless the chief physical incident in the Bundu ceremonies, is only a small part of the total initiation ceremonies which are educational and consist of instruction in the duties of wifehood and motherhood, in dancing, household duties, etc. The natives of Sierra Leone are not yet to any extent detribalised and the hold of the Bundu Society, which is regarded everywhere with the greatest respect, is very strong. I think that Government interference with it, as it at present exists in Sierra Leone, is greatly to be deprecated. No abuses are known to exist in connexion with it, and though excision may serve no useful purpose there are in my opinion many matters requiring Government intervention and assistance with claims much stronger than those of the Bundu Society. Interference by legislation, which would be unenforceable, is of course not to be considered."

This argument may be said to be continued by the Tanganyika Secretary for Native Affairs, who writes :

"The tribal system is a working system which does actually fulfil the functions required of it, and which contains in itself little that is objectionable on grounds either of morality or humanity. Of what is objectionable the greater part is due to superstition which the missionary and the schoolmaster are rapidly enabling the natives to overcome. . . . From time immemorial the tribal system has met the needs of the people, and in their new and alarming contacts with western civilisation it can still meet these needs and serve as a stabilising influence in all the perplexities which surround the African of to-day. . . . I am far from being a blind admirer of the tribal system and from supposing that it will be preserved indefinitely. . . . But time and great patience are needed, and a realisation that attempts at coercion and isolated prohibitions will inevitably cause a revulsion against our culture and our religion and a disposition to reject our help."

While, however, caution in positive action is insisted on, throughout the reports can be traced a line of policy for the gradual abolition of harmful Native customs. In the first place, it is generally emphasised that the administration must at no time do anything to suggest that it supports such customs, that it would, for example, be impolitic to attempt to mitigate the evils of female circumcision by training Native women to perform the operation more skilfully. The administrations also appear to be willing to protect any individuals who wish to escape from such customs. Secondly, tactful efforts are apparently being made in some areas to suggest that certain rites are unnecessary or even ridiculous. The result which appears to be eventuating is that the social inferiority in which are placed women who have not been fully initiated gives way to a contrary public opinion which looks down on those who have submitted to "savage" customs. At the same time, a process of substitution is often being encouraged, by which either through the missions or through the tribal authorities the symbolism of the rites is retained. In this way it appears possible gradually to approve measures of positive prohibition, which, supported by public opinion, will prove really effective.

The last stage appears to have been reached in the Gold Coast, where the anthropologist, Captain Rattray, has reported to the administration that the tribes generally would welcome a pronouncement that the practice of female circumcision must cease. In the case of another initiation practice in Tanganyika Territory an even more interesting result has been obtained. From one tribe a number of girls approached the Provincial Commissioner with a protest against their tribal custom by which they were shut in a darkened hut for a year. The report continues :

"Discreet enquiries showed that the enlightened chief of the tribe and the elders and prominent men agreed with the girls in disliking this incarceration, which was supported, like most objectionable customs, only by the old women. In these circumstances, it was possible for the authorities of the tribe with the support of the Provincial Commissioner to give an order, as it was given, that the custom of shutting the girls up must cease, and there is no doubt,

that in a few years it will have completely disappeared from the initiation ceremonies, being replaced by some purely symbolical representation of it."

STATUS OF WOMEN

The administrations' comments on female circumcision make it clear that the operation is not a rite imposed on women by men, but a part of social customs carried out and supported by the women themselves. All the African administrations concur in refuting the suggestion that the status of Native women is scarcely distinguishable from that of slavery. Many of the reports consider that this belief has been due to a misunderstanding of the two questions of bride-price and the inheritance of wives. Several definitions of the bride-price (or dower) are given, typical of which is the Nyasaland Governor's statement "that the payment of dower, far from representing the purchase of a woman, is in the nature of a deposit or security for good behaviour which will be forfeited if the woman obtains the permission of her sponsors to leave her husband on account of unsatisfactory treatment." As regards inheritance, the Tanganyika Secretary for Native Affairs says that "it is at least as often a responsibility as an advantage", and that as a result of it there are "no destitute widows or children in Bantu society". The Secretary for Native Affairs of Northern Rhodesia admits that in the past widows often had to marry heirs they did not like or even loathed, but adds that "these matters are adjusting themselves, and to-day few women would agree to become the wife of a man they do not desire."

Interesting information is given in most reports on the division of labour between man and woman, which differs in its details among the various tribes, which takes account of the fact that the African woman has fewer household duties than the European, but which on the whole represents a fair balance of duties between the sexes. It is possible that a more valuable review of this question would have resulted if the administrations had been specifically invited to consider the changes in sex relations due to new economic and social circumstances. As was stated in the 1929 Report to the League Council on the British Cameroons, the man "still largely conceives his status in society to be that of the hunter and warrior, even though he has practically forgotten how to fill these rôles." The burdens of everyday life are being transferred from the women to the men. But the process is slow, and it is possible that it may be particularly slow or even reversed where the men go out to distant employment and fail to save enough to contribute appreciably to home support. It is in fact significant that the most unfavourable account of the position of women in Africa given in the present reports comes from Bechuanaland, where the Principal Medical Officer states that the women "are still more or less chattels who have to carry out the orders of the husbands or fathers, and . . . not only do they perform all the household duties but they are obliged to do the greater part of the manual work in the fields."

SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT

In spite of the somewhat limited character of the enquiry, most of the reports tend inevitably to the conclusion that a better health situation and the disappearance of harmful customs can only be brought about through general economic and social progress. Sir Edward Grigg, Governor of Kenya, writes that "if the innate conservatism of native women is to be overcome, the attack on the problem must be by means of education concurrently with the improvement in their economic and social condition." Sir Donald Cameron in his Tanganyika report emphasises as a primary consideration the necessity "to improve the material conditions of the people if their standards of health are to be improved. . . . They must have better food and better living conditions generally, the duty of the Government in this respect being to place them in a position to obtain these things by their own efforts." The Governor of Nyasaland quotes the 1926 Census Report: "The destruction of the poor is in their poverty. Until the native villager reaches a higher plane of wealth and prosperity he will not be able to live the full and healthy life which must be aimed at." Moreover, the Governor of Uganda points out that by economic progress not only would the present population be bettered and increased, but the resources of the administration would equally benefit. "Not only is the medical care of the population a liability implicit in the doctrine of 'trusteeship', but also for economic reasons an increase in the population and a better standard of health is essential if progress is to be achieved. Uganda could support a population of ten millions instead of three, and the resources of this Government would be increased accordingly."

This last statement merits consideration in connection with one or two passages in which the complex question of the desirable rate of economic progress is touched upon. A report on Sierra Leone states that "on the whole the development of the Protectorate has followed the lines it was hoped it would, but with the opening up of ways of communication the pace of development is quickening and it will be necessary to prevent this acceleration from getting out of hand." Outside Africa, this is stated in greater detail in the report on Fiji. "It has always been recognised that the economic development of a race possessed of a highly-developed social system, admirably suited to its needs, of land more than sufficient for all its people, and capable of supporting life, according to its own traditions and customs, with a minimum of effort, must be accomplished by gradual stages which were not repugnant to established custom and which could be assimilated by the people." And again in the same report: "The vital factor in the economic development of the Fijians is the preservation of the racial 'will to live'. Without this stimulus the most well-intentioned and comprehensive welfare measures must fail. To keep alive this racial spirit it is essential that development should proceed on lines not too far removed from custom and tradition and that the interests which gave zest to life should either be retained or replaced by others acceptable to the race."

It is possible that the nations of Europe, including Great Britain, will increasingly look to the development of their subject peoples as both a moral duty and the means of their own economic rehabilitation. In such an eventuality it will be necessary in each case to find a practical solution for the logical difficulty of reconciling the two facts that social progress can only be effected through economic advancement and that forced economic advancement may stultify social progress.

Labour in the Mandated Territory of Tanganyika in 1930

The 1930 Report of the Labour Department of the Mandated Territory of Tanganyika¹ is of particular interest as containing a description of the effect of the economic depression on African employment. In addition, its account of a serious outbreak of sickness in one employment area affords evidence of the continued need of close control of African conditions of engagement and employment by a Government authority specialised in Native labour administration.

THE LABOUR MARKET

The outstanding feature of the year was the critical situation created by the disastrous fall in price of all the more important commodities produced by Tanganyika. The European staff on estates was reduced, while those employees who were retained were obliged to accept drastic reductions of salary. Reductions had also to be made in the case of African staffs, and numerous meetings of planters were held at which the possible or justifiable decrease was discussed, it being obvious that any action would have to be carried out with uniformity. Many of these meetings were attended by the Labour Commissioner, with the view not only of offering such information as might be of assistance but also of keeping the Government rate of wages in touch with the general market rate. The reduction adopted throughout the country generally averaged 20 per cent. for the African staff, which was considerably less than the figure for the European staff.

While uniformity of procedure rendered these changes easier, there were nevertheless many factors which presented great difficulties. Conspicuous among these was the position of the contract labourer, who, being engaged for six months at a certain wage, could

¹ TANGANYIKA TERRITORY. LABOUR DEPARTMENT: *Annual Report, 1930*. Dar-es-Salaam, Government Printer, 1931. For summary of the 1929 Report cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXIV, Nos. 2-3, Aug.-Sept. 1931, pp. 266-271.