

# The dual mandate in British tropical Africa

by Baron Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, 1858-1945

Publication date: 1922

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AFRICAN. 69

In character and temperament the typical African of this race-type is a happy, thriftless, excitable person, lacking in self-control, discipline, and foresight, naturally courageous, and naturally courteous and polite, full of personal vanity, with little sense of veracity, fond of music, and "loving weapons as an oriental loves jewelry." His thoughts are concentrated on the events and feelings of the moment, and he suffers little from apprehension for the future, or grief for the past." His mind," says Sir C. Eliot, "is far nearer to the animal world than that of the European or Asiatic, and exhibits something of the animal's placidity and want of desire to rise beyond the state he has reached," — in proof of which he cites the lack of decency in the disposal of the dead, the state of complete nudity common to one or other, or to both sexes among so many tribes, the general (though not universal) absence of any feeling for art (other than music), and the nomadic habits of so large a section of the race.

Through the ages the African has evolved no organised religious creed, and though some tribes appear to believe in a deity, the religious sense seldom rises above pantheistic animism, and seems more often to take the form of a vague dread of the supernatural. It is curious that whereas in East Africa Sir C. Eliot observes that prayers are always addressed to a benevolent deity, in the West the prevalent idea seems to be the propitiation of a malevolent spirit. Belief in the power of the witch and wizard, and of the Juju-priest and witch-doctor, in charms and fetish, and in the ability of individuals to assume at will the form of wild beasts, are also common among many tribes. To these superstitions the Hamite is less prone.

The African negro is not naturally cruel, though his own insensibility to pain, and his disregard for life — whether his own or another's — cause him to appear callous to suffering. He sacrifices life freely under the influence of superstition, or in the lust and excitement of battle, or for ceremonial display. The wholesale executions of Mtesa of Uganda, or Behanzin of Dahomey, would seem to have been dictated rather by a desire for the ostentatious display of power, or even by a blood-lust, than by a love of witnessing pain. If mutilation and other inhuman punishments are inflicted, it is because nothing less would be deterrent.

He lacks power of organisation, and is conspicuously deficient in the management and control alike of men or of business. He loves the display of power, but fails to realise its responsibility. His most universal natural ability lies in eloquence and oratory. He is by no means lacking in industry, and will work hard with a less incentive than most races. He has the courage of the fighting animal — an instinct rather than a moral virtue. He is very prone to imitate anything new in dress or custom, whether it be the turban and flowing gown of the Moslem, or the straw hat and trousers of the European, however unsuited to his environment and conditions of life. He is an apt pupil, and a faithful and devoted friend.

In brief, the virtues and "the defects of this race-type are those of attractive children, whose confidence when once it has been won is given ungrudgingly as to an older and wiser superior, without question and without envy. " Valiant, clever, and lovable, they bear no malice and nurse no grievance." ^

Perhaps the two traits which have impressed me as those most characteristic of the African native are his lack of apprehension and inability to visualise the future, and the stead-fastness of his loyalty and affection.

' Sir F. Fuller (of the Ashantie), 'A Vanished Dynasty.'

" His description of the African is, I think, the best I have read. — Loc. cit., chap. iv.