

THE  
BLACK  
MAN'S  
BURDEN

The White Man in Africa  
from the Fifteenth Century  
to World War I

by E. D. Morel



Modern Reader Paperbacks  
New York and London

97EA

First published in 1920 in Great Britain

Reprinted in 1969 by Monthly Review Press  
116 West 14th Street, New York, N. Y. 10011  
33/37 Moreland Street, London, E. C. 4

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 74-81792

Third Printing

Manufactured in the United States of America

FRONT COVER: SPINKMAN OF ABA!

## DEDICATION

To My Friends,  
W.A.C. and E.H.C.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH  
MANY GRATEFUL THOUGHTS.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE STORY OF GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA.

A recently published Blue Book has revived the horrible story of the treatment of the Hereros in Damaraland, which caused such an uproar in Germany fourteen years ago, and such fierce Parliamentary denunciation that it seemed likely at one time to kill the whole "Colonial movement." The story needed recalling and no condemnation of it can be too strong. German rule in South West Africa from 1901 to 1906 was abominable and many of its bad features lingered on until the invasion and conquest of the country by General Botha, despite the altered spirit in German Colonial policy which marked the supersession of General von Trotha, and the presence of Herr Dernburg at the Colonial Office. The evils had bitten too deep, the immunity from wrong-doing enjoyed by the settlers had lasted too long, the demoralisation and destruction had been too general and widespread to permit of rapid change. Substantially, of course, reparation was impossible. It is reputed that from one-third to one-fourth of the Hereros—who, at the time of the German occupation were estimated to number 80,000—perished in, or as the result of, the sanguinary fighting with von Trotha. For the campaign assumed all the character of the struggle between the settlers and the North American Indians, between the settlers and the Australian Aborigines, and at one time between the French and the Kabyles of Algeria—*i.e.*, a war of extermination.

The land of the Hereros was confiscated; their herds were partly seized, partly destroyed; the remnant of the people reduced to pauperism and subjected to the brutalities of forced labour. Nor was there any attempt on the part of those actually governing the country on the spot, or directing affairs from home, still less, of course, on the part of the settlers themselves, to conceal the main purpose which inspired the policy, *viz.*, the substitution of the native owners of the soil by German immigrants and the transformation of free men into a landless proletariat

of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Herr Schlettwein, a Government representative on the Reichstag's Colonial Budget Committee, delivered himself in 1904 of an essay on the principles of Colonial policy, in the course of which he says, after sundry scoffing allusions to "exaggerated humanitarianism, vague idealism, and irrational sentimentality":

The Hereros must be compelled to work, and to work without compensation and in return for their food only. Forced labour for years is only a just punishment, and at the same time it is the best method of training them. The feelings of Christianity and philanthropy with which missionaries work, must for the present be repudiated with all energy.

The Blue Book must, however, be read with a sense of perspective. It is more in the nature of a "War Aims" publication than a sober, historical narrative, and has been compiled for a perfectly obvious purpose. The reader is left in entire ignorance of the fact that, as Sir Harry Johnston wrote in 1913, referring to this and other German Colonial scandals, "Germany wisely did not hush up these affairs, but investigated them in open court and punished the guilty." There is no mention of von Trotha's proclamations—which, by the way, are misquoted—being annulled by the German Government. Von Trotha's recall is only referred to incidentally. The barest reference is made to the massacre of many German settlers and the destruction of homesteads; and nothing at all of the heavy losses of the Germans, amounting to 90 officers and 1,321 men killed by wounds and disease, and 89 officers and 818 men wounded, a very considerable total for an African campaign of this kind, showing that the Hereros were by no means so helpless and defenceless as the reader would be led to believe. Neither is there the slightest reason to doubt the perpetration in German South West Africa of many hideous individual outrages, floggings, murder, rape and all the concomitants of unbridled passion which have disgraced the records of the White invaders of colonisable South Africa. But an impartial judgment will not accept without mental reservation the depositions of witnesses testifying to such acts years after the event, especially when the circumstances under which their testimony was obtained is borne in mind. Without minimising in the slightest degree the action of the Germans in South West Africa, we should do well to have at the back of our minds the sort of

indictment which would have been drawn up by a successful enemy in occupation of Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, desirous of demonstrating our iniquities to the world in order to make out a case for retaining those territories for himself. The treatment of the Matabele and the Mashonas by the Chartered Company would certainly not have appeared less black if it had been supported by affidavits of individual Matabele and Mashonas eager to curry favour with their new masters. Nor would the so-called Bechuana Rebellion of 1895, some of the incidents which distinguished it, the wholesale confiscation of native lands which followed it, and the fate which overtook the 3,000 odd "rebels" who surrendered, make other than excellent reading for a world audience sitting in judgment upon our sins. Between the decrees of a von Lindequist or a Leutwein, the brayings of a Schlettwein *et hoc genus omne*, and the pompous pronouncements of certain leading South African statesmen there is fundamentally little difference.

After the Bechuanaland Rebellion, Sir Gordon Sprigg, then Premier of Cape Colony, referred in a public despatch to the warning he had addressed to the people of Pondoland: "If they were disobedient and raised their hand in rebellion, they would be swept from the country and other people would be planted upon the land." He went on to say that it was the intention of his Government to introduce a Bill "providing for a disposal of this land (the land of the 'rebels') with a view to settling upon it a European population." Mr. Chamberlain having assented in principle, the Bill was duly introduced, its avowed object being "to appropriate lands contained in certain native reserves, the previous occupants having gone into rebellion." It was, he went on to say, "very valuable land, and probably would be cut up into very small farms, so that there might be a considerable European population established in that part of the country." As regards the Langeberg portion of the disaffected districts, he wrote that, "it would be necessary, of course, before anything could be done, that the rebellion should be crushed, and that the natives now occupying it should be destroyed or driven out of the country." It was the same South African statesman, who declared that "The policy of the Government with regard to disloyal, rebellious natives

is, and has always been, to deprive them of their land, and so teach them that the course of wisdom lies in obeying the laws of the country." A contemporary issue of the *Cape Times* put the case in a nutshell:

We Whites want the Black man's land just as we did when we first came to Africa. But we have the decency in these conscience-ridden days, not to take it without excuse. A native rising, especially when there are inaccessible caves for the rebels to retire to, is a very tiresome and expensive affair; but it has its compensations, for it provides just the excuse wanted.

The distinction, and it is an important one, between ourselves and Continental nations in these matters is that, owing to the past labours of Burke and of the leaders of the *ante* Slave trade crusade, there is a public opinion in the homeland—worthily represented by the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, of which Mr. John H. Harris is the able Secretary—which can be appealed to, which genuinely resents the ill-treatment of native races, and which can sometimes intervene to prevent or to mitigate it.

German intervention in the western portion of the colonisable southern part of the Continent, between the Kunene and Orange rivers, known as Ovamboland, Damaraland and Great Namaqualand with an estimated area of 322,450 square miles, began in 1883 and attained its fullest territorial limits in 1890. The presence of Germans in South Africa is not an event of yesterday. German missionaries were working in Great Namaqualand as far back as the early 'forties of last century, and ever since the British Government settled in Cape Colony the 2,000 Germans of the Foreign Legion, which it had raised for the Crimean War, South Africa has seen a steady trickle of German immigration. This missionary *cum* commercial enterprise was the origin of German political control in the western portion of South Africa [with the exception of Walfisch Bay, the only accessible port on the Western Coast, which Britain annexed]. From time to time the missionaries had complained of ill-treatment from the natives, and the German Government had on various occasions endeavoured to obtain from our Foreign Office a clear statement as to its attitude in regard to the protection of the lives and property of Europeans in the country. This, neither the Disraeli nor Gladstone

Administrations would vouchsafe. Bismarck, who was at first opposed to German oversea adventures, but who had to face a growing popular opinion favourable to them, eventually caused the German flag to be hoisted [in 1883] in the Bay of Angra-Pequena, some 300 miles south of Walfisch Bay. Here a German merchant had bought land with a ten-mile sea frontage from a Hottentot Chief. A full account of the correspondence between the British and German Governments on the subject is given in Lord Fitzmaurice's *Life of Lord Granville*.

Most of the coastwise region of German South-West Africa is a desert of sand and scrub, but inland the country rises, is fertile and healthy. The northern and central part is inhabited by branches of the Great Bantu family—Ovambos and Hereros—to which the Matabele, Mashonas, Zulus, Basutos, etc., belong; interspersed with communities of Damaras (whose origin is doubtful), Hottentots, Bastards (half-breeds with a strong admixture of Boer blood) and primitive Bushmen. The southern region is mainly peopled by Hottentots.

For a number of years after the hoisting of the German flag at Angra-Pequena the German Government took very little direct action in the country, contenting itself with a desultory support of various trading companies which had started local businesses. "My aim," said Bismarck in 1885, "is the governing merchant and not the governing bureaucrat in those regions." He persisted in that view until events forced his hand. The representative of one of these companies, assisted by the missionaries, concluded a number of the usual treaties of amity and "protection" with the native tribes, amongst others with Kamaherero, the chief of one of the principal Herero clans. These the German Government subsequently evoked as political instruments, although it is very doubtful whether the original negotiator had any direct official authority. The Dependency's affairs were, in short, very much in the hands of a few merchants, settlers and missionaries, whose numbers, however, grew with the years. Nor did the German Government show any disposition at first to help them when in difficulties. Thus, in 1888, replying to one such appeal, the German Chancellor remarked that:

it could not be the function of the Empire, and that it lay outside the adopted programme of German Colonial policy, to intervene for the purpose of restoring, on behalf of the State,

organisations (order?) among uncivilised people; and, by the use of military power to fight the opposition of native Chiefs towards the not yet established business undertakings of German subjects in overseas countries. He could therefore give no promise on behalf of the Empire that the peaceful pursuit of mining and such like undertakings in South West Africa must be insured by the military forces of the Empire.

In taking up this position the German Government undoubtedly intensified the difficulties its representatives were afterwards to be confronted with and which led to such dire results. An active and overbearing interference succeeded years of complete apathy and indifference, and was entrusted to civilians and military men who were utterly inexperienced in the handling of problems of native administration which were, indeed, wholly new to Germany. The upshot was inevitable. To assume political responsibility for African territory without exercising authority over the acts of local settlers, and providing machinery for the redress of native grievances is always a grave error. In this particular case it was particularly disastrous owing to the unsettled conditions prevailing within the territory.

The German settlers had two chief obstacles to contend with. One was the state of endemic warfare between the Hereros and the Hottentots—the latter of whom, although much fewer in numbers, were better armed and better shot. The struggle between these two races had continued ever since the southern Bantu movement came into contact with the drive northwards of the Hottentots, impelled thereto by white pressure from the South. Between 1864 and 1870 it went on uninterrupted. It was renewed from time to time between 1870 and 1890, when it broke out again with renewed violence. The other obstacle lay in the fierce competition between the German newcomers and British and Boer colonial traders from the Cape. Probably these men were neither better nor worse than their German competitors; but they admittedly, and with the support of prominent Cape politicians, did everything possible to oppose the Germans both in matters of trade and in matters political. There was a strong party at the Cape which wanted Damaraland and Great Namaqualand annexed to Cape Colony and which bitterly resented the action of the Home Government in not preventing the establishment of German political control over those regions. The natural conse-

quence of this rivalry was that the natives were used by both parties to attain their several ends, and that a peaceful establishment of German political control was afterwards made more difficult than it would otherwise have been, and the temptation to precipitate and high-handed action was stronger. In the 1864-1870 wars between Hereros and Hottentots, the former were led by English traders. In 1883, the date of the hoisting of the German flag at Angra-Pequena, a party of Transvaal Boers and Cape colonists trekked into Ovamboland and founded the "Republic of Upingtonia," which broke up after the murder of its founder by the natives. In 1888 an English trader and prospector named Lewis, induced Kamaherero to expel the German settlers from his territory. This event was a land-mark in the history of the Dependency, for it destroyed what little authority Bismarck's so-called "Merchant Administration" possessed, and was the propelling cause of German official intervention, and of the creation of the "German South-West Africa." Chartered Company to which large concessions of land and minerals were granted without any regard to pre-existing native rights. No sooner did the company secure its privileges than it demanded Government action, to "assist the spirit of German enterprise by securing peace there" and the establishment of an organised administration, and announced its intention of preparing for the future settlement of the country by German farmers and agriculturists "on a large scale."

In 1890, the German Government, yielding to domestic pressure, resigned itself reluctantly to political action. Its early steps were half-hearted and inefficient. It sent out a single officer, Captain von François, with an escort of 21 soldiers and with instructions to put what order he could into the existing chaos, "to take no sides, but to remain strictly on the defensive." Contemporaneously with his arrival in the country, the Hereros and Hottentots had taken to the field once more, the former under Kamaherero, the latter under Hendrik Witbooi. Von François' first step was to get Kamaherero to renew the "protection" treaty he had repudiated at Lewis' instigation; his next to induce Witbooi to come to terms with his antagonist. In this he was unsuccessful. Witbooi insisted upon prosecuting the war. He had, moreover, attacked and defeated the chief of the Red "Bastards,"

with whom a similar "protection" treaty had been negotiated, removed a German flag he had found there and taken it to his capital of Hoornkranz. The war dragged on until August, 1892, when Witbooi and his Herero antagonist patched up their differences. The Hottentot chief persistently declined, however, to treat with the Germans and refused to allow German settlers in his country. The Germans thereupon decided to attack him. He was surprised in his stronghold and many of his followers killed, but he himself succeeded in escaping. Two years later, after a vain attempt to come to terms without further fighting, the Germans again moved against Witbooi. Their case against him was that he would not acknowledge German suzerainty and was perpetually raiding his neighbours. Witbooi inflicted further severe losses on the Germans before finally submitting in 1894. From then onwards, until the General Rebellion in 1905, he fought on the side of the Germans against the Hereros and against other Hottentot communities, which were subdued between 1895 and 1903 with as little or as much justification as is habitual in the majority of these African conflicts. Each side accused the other of atrocities, probably with truth. The fact that the Germans found themselves virtually without native support of any kind and were, indeed, confronted with the active enmity of the Hottentots when the general Herero uprising occurred, although the two races had been engaged in internecine warfare for decades, is the best proof of the detestation in which their rule was held.

A general peace with the Hottentots, was arrived at in 1906. By that time, if the early German estimates of the Hottentot population were approximately accurate, their communities had become greatly reduced. Although the decrease in their numbers may have been partially attributable to their perennial affrays with the Hereros, the prolonged struggle with the Germans must undoubtedly be regarded as the principal contributory cause. Palgrave estimated them in 1877 at 18,350, Governor Leutwein and Captain Schwabe at 20,000 in 1894, while the German official census taken in 1911 gives a total of only 9,781.

The fate of the Hereros has now to be narrated. In 1894 Major Leutwein replaced von François. Owing to the peculiar combination of circumstances narrated above,

the Germans started their attempted administration of the country under unusual difficulties. The situation needed firmness and tact in dealing with the natives, and an iron hand over settlers and speculators guilty of oppression and crime. Leutwein was a well-meaning man—so much even the Blue Book allows—who made himself unpopular in the Dependency by refusing to go as far as the settlers wished him to go, but who lacked efficient home support and the necessary strength of character to grasp with firm hands the nettles of muddle and misrule. His assistants were young and totally inexperienced. Officials and officers trained in the art of Prussian regimentalism, utterly unfitted for the task of administering African peoples, and many of them of indifferent reputation. An impartial account, published in 1908, of the vices of the German colonial system at that time contains the following instructive passages:

Tradition proved too strong even for Prince Bismarck, and gradually the whole system of Prussian bureaucracy was introduced into each of the Colonies. . . . The Germans never went to school in colonial matters. They light-heartedly took upon themselves the governing of vast territories and diverse races in the confident belief that the "cameral sciences," which had for generations proved an efficient preparation for local administration at home, would qualify equally well for Africa. . . . Instead of studying native law and custom systematically, and regulating administration in each colony according to its peculiar traditions and circumstances, all Colonies alike were governed on a sort of *lez Germanica*, consisting of Prussian legal maxims pedantically interpreted in a narrow, bureaucratic spirit by jurists with little experience of law, with less of human nature, and with none at all of native usages. . . . Worse still, the choice of colonial officials has not, in many cases, been a happy one. . . . The Colonies were for a long time looked upon as a happy hunting ground for adventurers who could not settle down to steady work at home, or a sort of early Australia to which family failures might conveniently be sent.

The trouble with the Hereros began in 1890 upon the death of Kamaherero, the chief of the Okahandja clan of the Herero tribe. With their usual passion for centralisation, the Germans had treated Kamaherero as the paramount chief of all the Hereros, to which position he had no title in native law. When he died the Germans supported the claim of his younger son, Maheroero, to the headship of the clan, as against that of the rightful heir, Nikodemus. Worse still, they persisted in their policy of investing the head of the Okahandjas with the paramount chieftainship, with the idea, apparently, of dis-

integrating the tribal organisation, and making of it a house divided against itself. The upshot was civil war within the tribe, the Germans siding with Maherero.

To this initial impolicy the cattle and land questions added their causes of disturbance. Land and cattle, sometimes one, sometimes the other, sometimes both combined, have been at the bottom of every collision between whites and blacks in South Africa. The Hereros, like the Matabele, were great herdsmen. The Blue Book states that in 1890 they "must have possessed well over" 150,000 head of cattle; that the cattle disease killed off half that number; that "something like 90,000" were left, and that by 1902 the Hereros retained 45,898, while the 1,051 German settlers then in the country possessed 44,487 between them. It is interesting to compare these totals with the Matabele totals given in the last chapter. No authority is cited for the Herero totals but, accurate or not, it is glaringly evident that from 1894, on one pretext and another, the Hereros were systematically despoiled of their herds. The robbery of cattle went hand in hand with successive encroachments upon the land of the tribe. The land syndicate formed in Germany had applied for an area in the Dependency as large as Wales and had sent out a large number of new settlers for which, in point of fact, it had made no provision. Acting under the pressure of these demands and the incessant disputes between settlers and the natives as to boundaries and cattle grazing, the local Authorities drew up in 1894 a quite arbitrary boundary line, which trenchanted severely upon native rights. All Herero cattle found beyond the boundary were to be impounded and sold to settlers, the proceeds to be divided between the Administration and Maherero. This suited Maherero and his clan, but naturally infuriated the other clans. Two years later, several thousand native head of cattle were seized despite the protests and tears of their owners. The act was one of sheer robbery. The whole country was convulsed. The settlers were threatened by the exasperated natives and fled to the coast. War seemed imminent. Maherero's people were, however, placated by receiving half the proceeds in accordance with the terms of the agreement. The other clans, and the Khamas—Hoftentots who were also affected by the seizure, remained angry and resentful. A meeting between Leutwein and many of the chiefs for the purpose of reopening

the boundary question, failed to secure unanimity. It was characteristically opened on the part of the German Governor with a threat of war, which could result "only in the extermination of one party thereto, and that party could only be the Hereros." It was followed by a summons to the dissatisfied Herero Chiefs and the Khamas to deliver up their arms. The summons meeting with a refusal, the Khamas were attacked by the Germans, aided by the Okahandja Hereros, and "practically exterminated." Nikodemus and another prominent Herero chief were seized and executed as "rebels." Large quantities of their peoples' cattle were confiscated.

The ensuing years witnessed a further whittling down of Herero grazing lands by settlers, and many cases of abuse, extortion, and cruelty on the part of individual settlers. There were no courts to which the aggrieved natives could have recourse. All they could do was to make representations to the nearest official who . . . sided with the settlers. Unable to obtain redress in any direction, incessantly harassed and defrauded of their property, it is little wonder that the Hereros were gradually goaded into that condition of desperation, which it was the deliberate object, at any rate of the settlers, the land and mining syndicates and their backers at home, to provoke.

The last straw was the Credit Ordinance of 1903. The settlers and traders had long been in the habit of giving credit to natives for goods sold. The practice is a common one in many parts of Africa, and much is to be said for it where there are Civil Courts to see justice done between debtor and creditor. But in German South-West Africa no court of any kind had been set up, the system had preceded the Administration, and the Administration had done nothing to regulate it. Governor Leutwein had drafted an Ordinance as far back as 1899, providing for their creation. His proposals had been strongly opposed—a sinister incident—by the settlers and by the syndicates in Germany, who had the ear of the incompetent Foreign Office officials who mismanaged the Dependency's affairs. The creditor preferred being a law unto himself. And still he grumbled. Then came the Credit Ordinance. Creditors were given a year within which to collect their outstanding debts: after that period the debts would not be recognised as valid. No measures whatever seem to

have been taken either to prevent them from attempting to recover by personal action, or even to supervise them in the process of doing so, with the inevitable consequence that seizures of land and cattle; spasmodic before, became thenceforth systematised. This iniquitous order was forced upon the Dependency by the vested interests concerned despite the Governor's protest.

It was the final provocation. Profiting by the Governor's absence in the south in connection with one of the perennial Hottentot troubles and believing the report of his death, spread by the settlers by whom he was hated, for their own purposes, the Hereros, led by Maherero, rose in a body and fell upon the officials and settlers, killing as many as they could reach. In a letter to Governor Leutwein, replying to the latter's remonstrance, Maherero wrote:

I and my headmen reply to you as follows: I did not commence the war this year; it has been started by the white people; for as you know how many Hereros have been killed by white people, particularly traders, with rifles and in the prisons. And always when I brought these cases to Windhuk the blood of the people was valued at no more than a few head of small stock, namely, from fifty to fifteen. The traders increased the troubles also in this way, that they voluntarily gave credit to my people. After doing so they robbed us; they went so far as to pay themselves by, for instance, taking away by force two or three head of cattle to cover a debt of one pound sterling. It is these things which have caused war in this land. And in these times the white people said to us you (i.e. Leutwein) who were peacefully disposed and liked us, were no longer here. They said to us, the Governor who loves you has gone to a difficult war; he is dead, and as he is dead you also (the Hereros) must die.

Reinforcements were sent out under General von Trotha, a perfect type of the ruthless Prussian soldier. Until recalled, owing to the indignation aroused by his brutalities, von Trotha carried out for twelve months a war of expulsion and extermination against the Hereros, who, encumbered by their women, children, and cattle, driven from place to place, were killed in great numbers, or perished in the desert regions into which they were mercilessly hunted. Peace could have been made with them after their signal defeat in August, 1904. But von Trotha would not hear of peace. The war degenerated into wholesale, retail, and indiscriminate slaughter of both man and beast.

Thus perished the Hereros—a vigorous, intelligent people, like all the Bantus: to-day a miserable, broken remnant. "The late war, wrote the missionary Schowalter in 1907, has reduced the Herero tribe by more than a quarter. After the battles on the Waterberg the rebels disappeared in the sandy desert, and here the bones of 12,000 to 15,000 men who fell victims to hunger and thirst lie bleaching." Wholesale executions and forced labour on the Coast completed the work of destruction.

The moral of it all—the old, familiar, ghastly story, in all its futility and short-sighted greed, is stated with fluent veracity in the record of a conversation between one of the earlier settlers and some newly arrived German soldiers:

Children, how should it be otherwise? They (the Hereros) were ranchmen and landowners, and we were there to make them landless working-men, and they rose up in revolt. This is their struggle for independence. They discussed, too, what the Germans really wanted here. They thought we ought to make that point clear. The matter stood this way: there were missionaries here who said you are our dear brothers in the Lord, and we want to bring you these benefits—namely, faith, love, and hope: and there were soldiers, farmers, and traders, and they said we want to take your cattle and your land gradually away from you and make you slaves without legal rights. These two things didn't go side by side. It is a ridiculous and crazy project.

"How should it be otherwise?" The question is easily answered. There is room in colonisable Africa for the White man and the Black. There is no necessity for these robberies, these brutalities, these massacres. They are the product of lust, of greed, of cruelty, and of incompetence.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY.

- "The Life of Lord Granville." Fitzmaurice. (Longman & Co.).  
 "The Evolution of Modern Germany." Dawson. (Fisher Unwin).  
 "Germany." Alison Phillips and others. (Encyclopædia Britannica Co.).  
 "The Colonisation of Africa." Sir Harry Johnston. (Cambridge Press).