

NI GERIAN DAYS

BY

A. C. G. HASTINGS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

It is good for people nowadays to read a book such as the present. At once it brings one face to face with the realities of life and lifts the veil that even still conceals how, and in what manner, our present African Empire was built up. Written with great sincerity and with equal modesty, it is the record of eighteen long years spent on the confines of the Empire, a book written without spread-eagleism, devoid of bombast, and without the cheap expression of opinion of the average globe-trotter who in a month is competent to settle the "native" question of a country that he has only seen as in a cinema.

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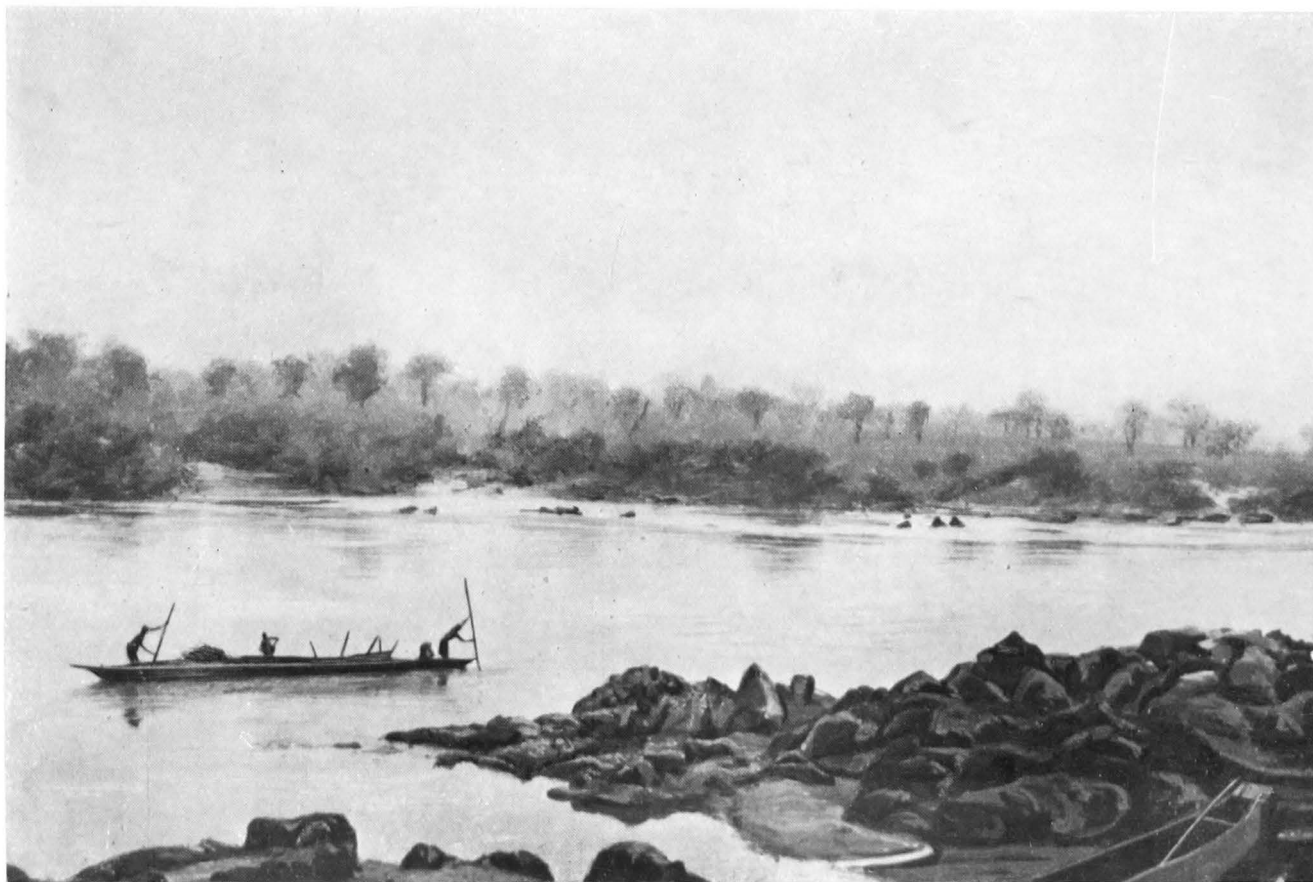
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NIGERIAN DAYS



THE GREAT NIGER

NIGERIAN DAYS
BY A. C. G. HASTINGS
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM
WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

First Published in 1925

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., EDINBURGH

TO
SIR HUGH CLIFFORD, G.C.M.G.
AS A TRIBUTE TO HIS WIDE
EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

FOR EMPIRE BUILDERS AND OTHERS

IT is good for people nowadays to read a book such as the present. At once it brings one face to face with the realities of life, and lifts the veil that even still conceals how, and in what manner, our present African Empire was built up. In Central Africa, and in especial in Nigeria, there were no juggling speculators with a foot in Africa, another in the Stock Exchange, and both hands working industriously in the public's trouser pockets. There were no Press-boomed Empire Builders; no manipulators of the money market; no gimcrack raids, with the raiders "returned empty" by the men whom they had fallen upon in time of peace. There was no flag-wagging, no cant about the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race, and not a single word about the White Man's Burden, whatever that may mean, for it has never been explained since first Pizarro and Cortes, Valdivia and the rest of the Conquistadores, imposed themselves upon the Indians of Peru and Mexico. Perhaps in Central Africa alone of all our colonies the phrase had a real meaning, for all the conquest was carried out without a massacre, and no one made a fortune by it.

So far from dispossessing or from filching, under one protest or another, the people's lands from them, the young administrators set out to put down slavery, extinguish cannibalism, and introduce what they believed would prove a better life. Luckily, Nature had

not cursed the land with mines. At least there were no gold mines, so that the negroes were not burdened with the scum of all the world falling upon them like an army of white ants, devouring everything. Usually the burden is the white man himself, who generally rides on the black man's shoulders; but in Nigeria it really seems that if the white man did not bear the black upon his back, at least he took him by the hand.

When globe-trotters all write their books after a month or two in Timbuctoo, Wadai, in Patagonia or New Guinea, telling the world how mosquitoes and fleas devoured them; about their dinner with the Governor, or interview with the chief of some tribe or other to whom they talk quite fluently, having apparently the gift of tongues, for no one thinks that they are filled with new (palm) wine, it is refreshing to read *Nigerian Days*.

Written with great sincerity and with equal modesty, it is the record of eighteen long years spent on the confines of the Empire, in heat, in solitude; for in the multitude of negroes a solitary white man is just as much alone as on a desert island, exposed to frequent fevers in a climate hostile to North Europeans, and with no single ray of limelight turned upon any one throughout the colony. Who knows the name of the first resident at Kano, or who first conquered it, the area or population of the colony, or in which provinces they speak Nupe or Fulani, without a reference to an encyclopædia? Yet in South Africa, where the speculative pioneers of Empire ranted and raved and, by their quarrels for supremacy with the Boers, came within an ace of raising the whole world against us, Schweinderby and Mosesville are household words.

Thus a book written without spread-eagleism, devoid of bombast, and without the cheap expression of opinion of the average globe-trotter, who in a month is competent to settle the "native" question of a country that he has only seen as in a cinema, becomes a valuable addition to our knowledge of Nigeria.

Little, indeed, of any value has been written except dry books full of statistics, and the aforesaid globe-trotters' lucubrations about the country, since *El Tarikh es Sudan*, and that is not a work of yesterday.

Therefore, if anybody wants to know, and there must be such people, how different the life of an administrator of a district in Nigeria is to that led by pioneers upon the Rand or in the town of Kimberley, he will find all about it in this book. He will find in it something that an Englishman can well be proud of, and rise from reading it without a bad taste in the mouth or nausea in the soul, such as one experiences after a perusal of the doings of the Jew and Christian magnates in South Africa; for in the whole book there is no notice of a fortune being made, and not a word of any native tribe blown up by dynamite, as happened, so folks say, in the same hills where now a pioneer has found a resting-place from all the toils of Empire building.

In 1906, when the writer first went out to take up his duties as a junior political officer, the colony was in its infancy.

Whether he took notes or not of his first journey up the Niger I do not know, but I should think that there was no necessity to do so, for his account of it remains as fresh as if he had done it yesterday, not after an interval of eighteen years. The first journey of the

kind always impresses itself upon the brain with a poignancy that experience rubs away.

Reading it, with but the difference of names, I fancied I was reading of a journey up the Magdalena or the Paraguay. The stern-wheel boats, the heat, the dank smell of the Tropics, the thick white mists, the dense threatening lines of vegetation upon the banks that seem as if Nature has reared a barrier against mankind, the shallows and the sandbanks with the basking crocodiles (alligators on the Magdalena or the Paraguay), the stopping to take in wood, with naked figures running up and down the banks looking like demons in the firelight, the insects, dripping atmosphere, the moonlight nights that seem almost theatrical, with all the values altered and the shadows deepened, all was the same. So like it was, that I kept thinking, "Now they are close to Honda," or "They must surely soon reach Corumbá."

Even the fellow sounding, half asleep, though on the Paraguay or Magdalena he would have sounded with a bamboo pole and swung no lead-line, all was identical.

One thing alone seemed as it were unnatural, or at the least unconstitutional. The engineer was not a Scotsman. How this occurred I cannot for the life of me imagine, for it is an axiom on tropic rivers to put your head over the scuttle of the engine-room and roar out "Mac!" Then a compatriot appears, carrying a bottle in his hand.

The halts, of course, were different, for on the Niger there are no flat-roofed, dazzling white towns, with some national ensign or another, generally barred blue and white, and with a sun or moon rising above the mountains in the dexter chief, with an ironic smile.

Upon the Niger the wheezy stern-wheeler, fighting against the self-same coffee-coloured stream as in South America, reached native villages, composed of thatched mud huts,¹ looking like haystacks. No Captain of the Port dressed in white duck came aboard for a drink, dragging his sword across the deck, and there was no Italian "pulperia" keeper retailing caña, grappa, or vermouth through a barred grating, with his revolver ready to his hand. A fever-stricken European storekeeper took his place, who gazed upon the steamer with lack-lustre eyes and watched her disappear, leaving him marooned to buy his ivory and kola-nuts, palm oil or what kind of notions people buy upon the Niger, till the next vessel passed.

Marabouts fished upon the banks, whilst on my rivers cranes and herons sat upon the trees; and though there is no mention of them, I feel pretty sure that flocks of parrots flew shrieking through the trees.

Bauchi was the writer's destination, and after three or four days to Lokoja, twenty-three still remained to do to Amar, and then fourteen on horseback to his district.

These journeys in poling barges seem exactly alike in Africa and the Americas, except that the barge in which the writer left Lokoja was built of steel, whilst on the Orinoco, Paraguay or Amazon, they are made of wood. Upon page 24 there is a photograph of a native barge passing a rapid, so like the barges of the same kind on the Paraguay or Parana, that it appears I knew it in another state of life.

Arrived at Bauchi, after a journey of six weeks, he found his Chief, Oliver Howard, awaiting him. I knew

¹ See photograph, p. 10.

him as a young diplomatist in Tangier. He had now changed into a capable and keen administrator, and it is plain that the young political officer was much impressed with his determination and his energy. Nigeria took toll of him as it has done of many others, and he died young, before he had the time to make a name.

Duty in Bauchi province consisted chiefly of being always on the march, to find out native villages marked roughly on the map, collect the taxes, put down cannibalism, and generally introduce some kind of order in the turbulent Emirate.

In the first ten months he covered three thousand miles on horseback, travelling two hundred and seventy days. To assist him in his work, he had an interpreter, three Government paid messengers and six native police, though on occasion he could draw on the Emir for more soldiers or police.

Absolutely alone, without another European at his station and ignorant of Haura at the first, he buckled to the administration of a great territory. I hold that it is well for men in England to understand with what small forces these great territories were administered at first in Central Africa. Reading of what the writer so modestly sets down, one feels impelled to shout now and again, "Good boy!" and to look slyly out of the window to see if there is any Union Jack hoisted upon the nearest police station. The whole book is a record of hard work unostentatiously performed, and one suspects not too well rewarded by a grateful country.

Adventures seem to have been fairly frequent, and, in fact, the whole life of a Nigerian administrator was an adventure in those days. The writer had one close

call, in a fight with the Pagan Tulas, just getting home with his revolver before a warrior had time to wash his spear in blood.

This he tells quietly as part of the day's doings, and passes on to say that the lesson did the fellows good and made them rub their heads.

This summary way of obtaining peace was not approved of at Headquarters, where, of course, they would have preferred that the spearsman should have bagged the District Officer, so that a better feeling might have been superinduced, and, incidentally, that the Tulas should have had white man to eat as an experience.

Next time they sent him to another tribe called Tangale, to try the virtues of moral suasion on them, without resort to force. It seems as if the expedition really called for greater nerve than that against the Tulas, which ended in a fight.

Seated upon the ground, supported by some twenty of the native police, he called a bluff on the whole tribe, whose warriors numbered several hundred, who surrounded him on every side. In a speech through an interpreter (and oratory must suffer at second hand), he told the astonished warriors that in two hours he would blow a whistle, and when they heard it they must deliver up their arms. They did so to his great astonishment, and he refers to the affair as "most colossal cheek."

It was so, and one wonders what the central authorities thought about it. Probably as they had not risked their skins, they wrote him asking if he had had the Tangale baptized.

The book contains a mine of information about

prices of grain, of horses, of provisions and of the working of the native mind.

Horses he loved, and owned some thirty of them, covering six and twenty thousand miles in the course of his eighteen years of service.

One ride in Gombe, of some seventy-five miles by night, makes interesting reading, and when the writer's joints become too stiff for him to ride, will be with him as an abiding memory to his last hour on earth.

The description of the moonlight shadows in the bush, the way the different stars appear, the false dawn in the sky and then the sunrise, makes a fine picture; such a one as none can paint but those who have experienced such rides.¹

In all those countries people have to shoot large animals with quick-firing rifles, sometimes because they spoil the natives' crops; at times in self-defence; again at others, out of the wanton folly that is known as sport.

"I was no slaughterer at any time," he says, to his great honour, and goes on to say he never would shoot a giraffe, an animal that he calls "most inoffensive," and he might have added, beautiful. It seems incredible that any one could do so. The Cockney "sportsman" who has murdered one, paying a licence to commit his crime, might just as well go out and stalk his maiden aunt at Cheltenham, on the Parade, and having put a bullet through her back, hang up her wig as a memento of his prowess in his smoking-room.

During the eighteen years the country gradually developed and became peaceful, or at least more peaceful than it was at first. Ford cars appeared, and natives now and then appeared in European clothes,

¹ Ció sa l' tuo dottore.

wearing pith helmets over their woolly heads, that had been for centuries impervious to sun.

No doubt they called themselves "Native Kalistians." It appears that by the wearing of our clothes, they lost the power of standing heat and cold and of resisting little maladies that formerly they got rid of by the assistance of some Ju-Ju or another, what, in fact, is known to us, the children of the light, as Faith Healing.

This most interesting book closes with the writer's profession of his affection for the people amongst whom he had lived and laboured for so many years. With the regret natural to sensible but artistic minds, he welcomes progress, but looks back upon the days when there was none of it with a half-stifled longing and regret.

Truly the colony has been lucky in its administrators, Sir Henry Hesketh Ball, Sir Frederick Lugard, Sir Percy Girouard, and Sir Hugh Clifford; but luckier still to have possessed men of the stamp of Hastings, who patiently and conscientiously performed arduous and dangerous work in a dark corner of the earth.

The book is notable for many things. It reveals a forceful personality, not altogether in the things he writes, but in the things one feels he could have written had he been minded so to write. Lastly, it shows how a great Empire can be built up almost without injustice and without bloodshed, and what the builders have to face as they lay stone on stone.

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM,

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