

THE AMALGAMATION OF NIGERIA

A Documentary Record

Being a reprint of the

Report by Sir F. D. Lugard

On The Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria And Administration, 1912 – 1919

Together with supplementary unpublished Amalgamation reports, and other relevant documents

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DOCUMENT VI

THE NIGERIAN PRESS AND AMALGAMATION, 1919

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THE RETIREMENT OF SIR FREDERICK LUGARD

The news of the retirement of Sir Frederick Lugard from the Governor-Generalship of Nigeria, which was flashed down by Reuters during the latter part of January, has been received with great joy and gladness by the loyal natives of Nigeria. So overwhelming is the people's emotion that almost in every nook and corner but chiefly in the inmost recesses of their hearts they have offered and continue to offer day by day some silent prayer to the God of the Negro that his tender mercies in delivering his dusky children from the baneful effects of an inglorious administration which constitutes not only a standing disgrace to the cherished traditions of British colonial policy in West Africa but is also a positive libel upon the accepted principles of British culture.

Sir Frederick has earned the notorious distinction of being the originator of a system of government – the product of his exuberant imagination – entitled the *Nigerian System*. That system has in the pregnant words of ex-Judge Stocker been described as “a set back to a condition of things resembling the barbarous ages”.

To the natives of Nigeria in particular and of West Africa in general the ‘Nigerian System’ is the most infernal system that has ever been devised since the days of the Spanish Inquisition for the express purpose of humiliating and depressing the units of any loyal and progressive community. Its nefarious laws and ordinances read like the weird contents of some musty-fusty documents unearthed in far off Cathay.

Its 25 lashes, its public floggings of general offenders stripped naked in the public markets, its maintenance of so called ‘white prestige’ at all costs, its subjection of the Judiciary to the Executive, and its obnoxious Criminal Code bespeak an administrative system which is the exact prototype of German Kultur in Africa and is in diametrical opposition to the traditionary principles of British justice and fairplay.

Its abhorrence of legal practitioners and denial to natives of the principles and procedure of British Courts of Justice; its judicial folly in investing District Commissioners – whose innocence of English law and practice has been officially and naively admitted in an apologetic memorandum by the retired Chief Justice of Nigeria – with powers of life and death in the provinces over natives of whatever standing without any trial by jury or the right of retaining counsel – powers that are denied even to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria; its detestation of educated natives as the *bete noire* that haunts its political and autocratic dreams *per diem et per noctem* and their shabby treatment as the

convenient scapegoats of official blunders and misrule, and its manifestly provocative and harsh rules and regulations breathe undeniably the spirit and atmosphere of the barrack rooms.

There can be no question that as the conquering hero of punitive expeditions, the widener of imperial outposts by means of the sword and as the High Commissioner of newly conquered territories subject to military control, Sir Frederick has had a distinguished career and has been amply decorated by the Imperial Government. But on the other hand as the administrator of progressive African communities, we regret we cannot help but write Sir Frederick down as a Huge Failure. Judged by the light of the modern conscience in its treatment of subject races, Sir Frederick is a hopeless anachronism; so hopeless indeed that as the product of a bygone age, cast upon a time that would not understand him, yet he persisted in his fitful attempts to force the new wine of the law of social expansion for subject races – the inspiring ideals of twentieth century civilization – into the old bottles of military subjugation, domination and terrorism, with the result that the old bottles have invariably been burst and riots and massacres have become rampant. Thus it is that Hong Kong in China and Lagos in Nigeria – centres of light and leading amongst their respective native communities – have proved, one after the other, the effective graves of his autocratic and militarist ambitions.

The victim of exaggerated personality, induced by the power conferred upon him through the indiscretion of a Lewis Harcourt – the highest constitutional power ever wielded in the British Empire by a single Executive Officer, denied almost to the King Emperor and unparalleled since the days of the Sullanian constitution – Sir Frederick lived in a world by himself. So high was he in the clouds that he saw very little of the people he was called upon to govern; and divorced as he was from their local sympathies and liberal aspirations, Sir Frederick, as far as the people were concerned, might as well have been in Kamchatka or the South Pole save that his undesirable presence in Nigeria was invariably heralded by those harsh and repressive laws whereby he sought to misgovern the people and wherein they were able to discern the peculiar workings of his mind. Even to the Civil Staff – both European and Native – that rendered yeoman service during the critical period of the Empire's existence, Sir Frederick endeavoured to invest himself with the sanctity and aloofness of a *Mahatma*. Opinionated, unswerving from a purpose if even it be irrational when it was once formed, and brooking no interference with his imperial will – for, like a true autocrat, his will was his law – Sir Frederick flagrantly disregarded the sage advice of those who were in sympathetic touch with the natives and paid the greatest courtesy to those satellites who to gain their own insidious ends, flattered his reactionary schemes and wild ambitions, with the result that he found himself enmeshed in a series of blunders and violent misrule which constitute the indelible stains of his inglorious administration; and yet it is this loyal band of officials who have prevented the framework of his administration from tumbling down like a pack of cards; who by their sympathetic treatment of the natives have reflected the best traditions of British imperial rule and have remained a pillar of hope and tower of strength to the natives, encouraging them in their unswerving devotion to the King-Emperor and to the Empire in general; and who by their personality and exemplary sacrifice – which seemed to have met with scant reward from Sir Frederick – have prevented the red flag of rebellion from being waved throughout the length and breadth of Nigeria as a protest against the barbarous rule of the Nigerian system, and have witnessed with meek submission the constructive work of previous administrations dashed to the ground by the infatuation and impetuosity of the Head of the Executive. Need there be any wonder, if Dame Rumour be true, that the Nigerian Civil Service has been and is at present the most dissatisfied of the West African Services? To that silent band of officials who in the inmost recesses of their hearts and in the secluded

atmosphere of their offices have conscientiously discharged their imperial duties in consonance with the traditional principles of British justice and fairplay we tender our congratulations and best wishes for the advent of a more liberal administrator who would be able to utilise to the full their undoubted abilities and manifold experience.

Obsessed by two manias – the segregation fad and the *furor faciendi leges* – Sir Frederick, by means of the one, consciously or unconsciously endeavoured to intensify in the Colony and Southern Provinces racial antipathies between Blacks and Whites which had never been suspected nor dreamt of during the palmy days of the old Colony of Lagos and subsequently of the Colony of Southern Nigeria, especially as both sections of the community had formerly lived and traded together under the best terms of friendship and mutual comradeship; whilst by means of the other, a multiplicity of laws which may be classified as bad and indifferent and are distinguished more for their repressiveness and brutality rather than for their juridical lore and enlightened statesmanship and the absurdity of which has earned the derision and contempt of enlightened humanity. Sir Frederick has also won for Nigeria the unenviable distinction of being the greatest Ordinance-ridden Colony within the British Empire. So bewildering and amazing are the laws that it is almost impossible for even the law officers to know at any particular moment the exact law on any particular point; for at that very moment the Head of the Executive may be passing an amending Order in Council of that particular law in sweet forgetfulness of the Legislative Council. The constant tinkering with and almost daily amendments of the Nigerian laws prove the inherent defect of the system. Judged by its hapless record in the Colony and Provinces, the Nigerian System may be described as a perfect crime of clumsiness reflecting a pitiful aspect of woe.

The three basic principles necessary for the successful working of the Nigerian System are ignorance, Fear and Military terrorism; that is to say, the perpetuation of the natives in a state of idolized ignorance, the impregnation of their minds with an instinctive dread of the White man and reverential awe for the fetish of *white prestige* and the paralysation of their wills by the spectacle of Military terrorism hanging over their heads like a sword of Damocles. The crass ignorance prevailing in the Northern Provinces; the farcical show and studied mockery of the much-vaunted Nassarawa Schools which constitute a libel upon and a shocking disgrace to any decent educational or technical system; the ghostly respect paid to the ordinary *bature* (whiteman) – much more to talk of the *baban bature* – and exacted by *zarkiings** and compulsory salutations; the summary jurisdiction of the Provincial Courts even in capital offences without the right of defence by counsel and trial by Jury – all these eloquently bespeak the methods of German Kultur in Africa and of the barrack-room. Living in constant dread of a *jihad*, or holy war, Sir Frederick in order to restrain the cupidity of the Emirs, and curb their restless spirit or love of adventure from breaking forth into rapine and plunder, practically charmed them into submission with the sop of princely salaries and with the allocation of 50% of the native treasury funds – derived chiefly from direct taxation – in such a manner as to create a distinction without a difference between their private and public funds; whilst he humoured their vanity and love of display by the plausible fiction of Indirect Rule since the real authority lay in the hands of the British Residents. The gaiety and external splendour of the regal courts of the Emirs, though superimposed upon a stratum of abject woe and misery among the masses, fired Sir Frederick's oriental imagination, exalted as he was to the position of a demi-god by the *zarkiings* of the Emirs to him in public. But Sir Frederick forgot that

*A misrendering of *zāki*, 'lion' a popular form of salutation in the Hausa-speaking areas – (Ed. 1968)

by postulating the success of his system upon the demonstration of Force, the instillation of Fear, and the fascination of a mercenary bait, he was practically leaning upon a broken reed; for already the schoolmaster is abroad and the rapidity and subtlety with which liberal influences are absorbed by any given community through contact not only baffle research but also escape detection. For the communication of thought, New York is nearer to Lagos today than Lagos was to Ibadan some 20 years ago; whilst the daily occurrences in such remote places as Japan and Australia are discussed with accuracy and ease the following morning in West Africa, simply because the world is linked together by thought, and distances have been annihilated. When in the fullness of time the natives of the Northern Provinces, in spite of Sir Frederick's preventive policy, shall taste of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and, as the wisdom of the serpent hath represented, they shall be 'as gods knowing good and evil' (*Sicut dii scientes bona et mala*); when the bogey or fetish of white prestige shall with increased knowledge among the masses die a natural death, then shall it be a sorry day for Sir Frederick's repressive policy, and the very evil which he has so long dreaded shall be reduced to a political certainty by those very methods which he had devised for its prevention. Let us hope that in the interim wiser and more liberal policies shall intervene to prevent the occurrence of such a huge catastrophe as the violent eruption of a *Jehad* or holy war in the Northern Provinces.

In the light of the foregoing, it was quite natural that Sir Frederick's policy should meet with such lamentable and disastrous failure in the Colony and Southern Provinces; for through the liberal and sympathetic policy of previous administrations the darkness of ignorance had been dispelled by the erection of secondary schools as centres for the dissemination of knowledge; and their wonderful product – the Educated Native – had been evolved in the normal course of events as the repository of the liberal and national aspirations of the people and the doughty champion of Right, Liberty and Justice. Through his mighty exertions, the Native Press – that struggling institution in West Africa – was called into existence as the vehicle of thought for giving articulate expression to the sentiments of the people and for ventilating their grievances under the Crown Colony system of government.

True to his disposition, Sir Frederick loathed the Educated Native and lived in constant dread of the Native Press, which at every turn foreshadowed his sinister movements, and he seemed to be blinded and confused by the glare of its searchlight criticisms invariably supported by a logic which is equally pitiless and irrefragible. The contests between Sir Frederick, the Educated Native and the Native Press over his manifold administrative schemes were intellectual contests, pure and simple; and in every such encounter the honours remained with the Educated Native and the native Press; for Sir Frederick was hopelessly out of date, and it was quite easy to knock the bottom out of any political or administrative scheme deriving its solitary sanction from the dictum of my will is my law and the autocratic power conferred by the indiscretion of a Secretary of State for the Colonies. Again the bogey of white prestige had been given a decent burial ever since the early days of the old Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and any latent or induced fear of the whiteman was confined only to babes and sucklings. To crown it all, the people had for over sixty years been reared under the traditional principles of British Justice and fairplay, and had been living as respectable members of a decent and well ordered community with all the external indications and paraphernalia of modern progress. The wealth, intelligence and social independence of the educated natives galled Sir Frederick to the very bone. The very atmosphere proved uncongenial to his autocratic bearings and the flights of his oriental imagination. To descend from the intoxicating air of a demi-god in the Northern Provinces to the Level of *the first member in the*


community in the Colony and Southern Provinces was more than enough for Sir Frederick's kidney and he therefore determined upon a drastic change of affairs.

In order to wreak his vengeance upon the educated native, Sir Frederick began to set back the hand of the clock of progress by lowering the standard of education in the colony. King's College which was founded by Sir Walter Egerton with the ambitious intention of preparing its students for complete graduation in London University, degenerated into a secondary school of the old regime. So deplorable was the state of affairs that many capable teachers of the old regime threw up their appointments in the Assisted Schools and started private schools of their own merely for the express purpose of maintaining the efficiency of the old regime. It is a sad commentary upon Sir Frederick's educational system that it has not been able to produce one capable native either in the Civil Service or elsewhere. All the prominent and distinguished natives in the service or elsewhere were products of the old regime.


Next, Sir Frederick introduced his revolutionary changes in the Judicial System which has been bitterly criticised on all sides, and with the Provincial Courts Ordinance, the Criminal Code and the Newspaper Ordinance, he attempted to break the backs of the educated natives and muzzle up the Native Press. But the educated natives, fighting for their very existence in defence of their sacred rights and privileges and in defence of their country and people, cheerfully entered the lists against Sir Frederick. Being adepts in organised publicity, they brought home to the conscience of the British Nation the dangers that would arise out of the successful prosecution of Sir Frederick's policy, since it would entail not only the social and economic enslavement of the natives but also the legal swindling and confiscation of their inherent and inalienable rights to their ancestral lands. Such gross injustice and un-British principles could have but one natural result and that is the gradual weaning away of the hearts and affections of the natives from the folds of the British Empire. The conscience of the British Nation, always alive to its vital interests, caught up the plaintive cry of the educated natives and looked with great disfavour upon Sir Frederick's reactionary schemes who, unable to cope with the trenchant arguments of the educated natives, merely poured the vials of his wrath upon their heads and represented them as the scapegoats of official blunders and misrule. They, on the other hand, took up the gauntlet and directly challenged Sir Frederick to substantiate an iota of the charges levelled against them but Sir Frederick failed to satisfy even this one request; just as the insistent demands of the educated natives for the publication of the Report of the Commissioners over the Ijemo and Itori massacres have also remained unsatisfied. Sir Frederick in order to complete his nefarious schemes whittled down the area of the Colony to its most insignificant limits so that with the consequential widening of the area of the Protectorate he might be able to legislate solely and singly without the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and administrate without the paraphernalia of British Courts of Justice so that in the end the militaristic principles of the Provincial system may enjoy undisputed sway. Sir Frederick has indeed performed a miraculous achievement; for within the short space of 4 years he has transformed the proverbial loyalty of a liberty-loving people into a hot-bed of disaffection and has been responsible for more massacres and riots than those of previous administrations.

Our distinguished contemporary, West Africa, discussing the retirement of Sir Frederick, ominously observed in its issue of January 18, that as regards 'a communique issued by the Colonial Office to the London Press, various comments were made. That none are worth reproducing, because none has the least justice either to the man or the country'. This naive admission testifies to the efficacy of the propaganda of the organised forces of publicity in West African Affairs and proves conclusively that the

conscience of the British Nation – the greatest asset of the subject races of the Empire – has been roused to its keen sense of justice and to the assertion of those principles of political righteousness by which the Empire has attained to its present limits. But the organised forces of publicity in West African affairs are not going to rest merely at this point but intend to impart a world-wide character to their propaganda in order that it may serve as a warning-note to the custodians of the arcanum of British imperial policy.

Today on the chessboard of imperial politics the question of questions with all the loyal natives is whether Great Britain is definitely pledged to the maintenance of her former humanitarian and sympathetic policy in West Africa, or whether her future policy is to derive its sanction from the Nigerian System. If the former, she can, to her heart's content, count upon the well-tryed loyalty of her African subjects but if the latter, then the natives will be compelled to claim the right of self-determination before the League of Nations. We for our own part know for certain that the British public will not tolerate for a second the muddled state of affairs in Nigeria as soon as 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth' is placed before them. 

Lastly, as far as the natives of Nigeria are concerned and the Mercantile community whose hostility Sir Frederick has unduly and most unwisely excited; yea moreover, as far as even the Civil Service – both Europeans and Natives – is concerned, Sir Frederick departs from the stage of West African activities 'unwept, unhonoured and unsung'. Let us hope he will be the last of military governors to disgrace the annals of British Colonial history in West Africa. His name will undoubtedly be handed down to posterity not with such cheerfulness as the memory of a John Glover, Gilbert Carter, William Macgregor, or Hugh Clifford, to mention a few random names, but with the bitterness of a Samuel Rowe, Frederick Cardew, Macullum, Hodgson, or Sir Merryweather; and bitterer than any of these as the man who came within an ace of weaning the affections of the natives away from the folds of the British Empire; for had Armageddon been postponed for another five years and Sir Frederick's scheme given full and unrestricted play it would have been difficult to predict the same degree of loyalty manifested by the natives during the most critical period of the Empire's existence.

In conclusion, let us hope that with the departure of Sir Frederick, the *Nigerian System* – the product of his exuberant imagination – will be consigned to the limbo of oblivion where embedded in the historical strata of British imperial colonisation it will exist as the fossilated remains of an administrative experimental failure. *Dii nostras preces secudent!* 

Prepared from the original by Ndidi Uwechue on this day, Sunday 10th October 2021 in grateful thanks to the Lower Niger Congress, particularly to Mr Tony Nnadi for his determination, dedication and fortitude in the untiring work to bring about the historic Constitutional Force Majeure declared by the NINAS Movement on 16th December 2021 in Lagos, Nigeria.

