Some Observations on Jomo Kenyatta in Britain. 1929-1930
Madame Ann Beck
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Jomo Kenyatta's visit to London from February 1929 to September 1930 was hardly noticed by the general public. The London Times brought Kenyatta's presence in the city to the attention of its readers on only two occasions.2 A few authors gave brief accounts of his visit in recent publications and a British Government Report referred to it in 1960.3 But little information can be gathered from these sources.

A brief attempt is made in this paper to describe the impression which Kenyatta made on members of the Church of Scotland who were in touch with him during his London stay. Their observations recorded by A. R. Barlow, a member of the Scottish Church in Kikuyu who met Kenyatta in London in 1930, shed an interesting light on Kenyatta's first direct contact with officials in Britain. The major theme of the talks between the Church members and Kenyatta during their meeting in Edinburgh concerned the conflict over the issue of female circumcision which had led to a deterioration of relations between Kikuyu Christians and the church of Scotland. Although

1. This article is based on material found in the Archives of the Foreign Mission Department of the Church of Scotland. For the interpretation of the development of the Kikuyu Central Association between 1922 and 1929 some use has been made of documentary material in the Library of Central Government Archives, Nairobi, Kenya. The author wishes to acknowledge research grants from the American Philosophical Society and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare which enabled her to travel to Edinburgh and Nairobi.


Barlow’s report to Dr. Arthur, the director of the Scottish Mission at Kikuyu, is primarily focussed on the causes of the conflict, one gathers valuable information on other issues, too. Since Kenyatta went to London as Secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association which represented the political and social aspirations of the younger Kikuyu in Kenya, discussions of Kikuyu political and social grievances enter into the report as side issues. Though limited in the selection of its sources, this paper may contribute some information not previously published.

I. THE BACKGROUND: KENYATTA AND THE GROWTH OF THE KIKUYU CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

When Kenyatta travelled to England in 1929 he had been General Secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association for one year. As an official of this organization he had learned to deal with British administrators in Kenya. His position had given him an opportunity to acquaint himself with some of the grievances of the younger Kikuyu who had been looking forward to better land and better jobs. Their expectations had been raised after the doctrine of “native paramountcy” had been declared by the British Government in 1923.1

This was also the time when Nairobi was undergoing a noticeable transformation from a small provincial railroad center to a modern city which attracted new settlers and businessmen. The Hilton Young Commission of 1928 had published its report in 1929. The Report stated that “the chief need today is that there should be applied throughout the territories as a whole, continuously and without vacillation, a ‘native policy’ which, while adapted to the varying conditions of different tribes and different localities, is consistent in its main principles.”2 It also referred to the great changes which were bound to come when the spread of native education would enable the African to absorb modern ideas through books.3

But conditions were not quite as hopeful as these statements might suggest. Kenyatta left behind him when he went to London an unresolved controversy between the Church of Scotland Mission

1. The doctrine was stated in the Kenya White Paper of 1923. It contained the famous statement that “Primarily Kenya is an African territory, and His Majesty’s Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if, and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail.” See “Indians in Kenya,” Parliamentary Papers (1923), xviii.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
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at Kikuyu and a large number of the natives. Dr. Arthur, head of the Mission, had carried on a campaign against the native custom of female circumcision for many years and in 1929 this fight was approaching a crisis.¹ In this fight the Kikuyu Central Association played an important role. It had been set up in 1925 and had succeeded the Kikuyu Association which dated back to 1920. At that time young Africans just back from service in the British Army were disappointed to find upon their return only limited opportunities in their native reserves. In the Army they had acquired new skills and had proved their loyalty. Back home they were not willing to resume life as it had been before the war. Their restlessness led to the formation of the first Kikuyu political movement which seems to have had official approval in its beginning stage. In 1921 Harry Thuku became Secretary of the Association which changed its name to Young Kikuyu Association. Its character changed, too. Members were now required to take an oath not to sell their land to strangers and a growing hostility developed in the relations between Africans and Europeans.² Differences of attitude among the natives developed, too. Elders, government headmen, and chiefs disagreed with the younger group of Kikuyu primarily living in the city, on their relationship with Europeans and officials. An open rift occurred when Harry Thuku denounced the Kikuyu Association, introduced central controls for his movement, increased the recruitment from among the younger men of his tribe and demanded complete freedom for Africans.³ A new organization was born. It was called Kikuyu Central Association.⁴

Not until 1928 does Kenyatta’s name appear in the memoranda concerned with the activities of the Kikuyu Central Association. Association reports for the period from 1925 to 1928 deal mostly with

¹ Between 1898 and 1906 the Church of Scotland Mission progressed slowly due to diseases and frequent changes of leaders. With the arrival of Dr. Arthur in 1906 medical work was organized, a rudimentary system of education was introduced and gradual improvement set in. Hunter Memorial Hospital was founded in 1914. In 1919 the Mission received a Government subsidy to expand its medical activities. It continued its growth during the post-war years. Kikuyu: 1898-1923 (Semi-Jubilee Book of the Church of Scotland Mission, Edinburgh, 1923), p. 62.

² Corfield Report, p. 39. Corfield attributed the growing hostility between the Kikuyu and the white population to the introduction of Kipande (registration for purposes of labor registration), poll tax, the fall in agricultural prices and the fall of world prices.

³ Author not given, “Causes and History of the 1929-1930 Crisis” (no date), Memorandum, Church of Scotland Mission Files (Edinburgh). Hereafter called CSM Files.

⁴ Kenyatta described the Kikuyu Central Association as a new political movement whose purpose it was “to challenge the illegal actions of officials and settlers, and to carry individual cases to the law courts and to send protests and appeals direct to the Colonial Office in London.” Jomo KENYATTA, Kenya, Land of Opportunity (London, 1945), p. 10. But during the early years of its existence the Association had a much more modest program.
requests to remedy minor grievances. The leaders petitioned for the appointment of a “paramount learned chief.”1 They asked for “decent burials” for Africans, for sanitary inspection of their huts, the setting up of at least one hospital in each district and participation as inspectors of high schools and girls’ schools.2 The requests were not granted immediately3 and Kikuyu leaders interpreted the slow response by officials as unwillingness to implement promises made in British official reports.

Kenyatta’s presence at these earlier meetings cannot be ascertained from the documents since he was not listed as one of the officers. British reaction to KCA throughout this period can be described as mixed. British officials were afraid of the potentially dangerous character of the Association. But they tried to maintain proper liaison and went to meetings when invited. Real cooperation cannot be detected. The Association served as a sounding board for Kikuyu complaints and as an outlet for steam. Dissatisfaction, however, was latent since the members felt that they did not achieve their goals. As time went on, the meetings became more substantial and the topics presented by the Kikuyu covered a wider range. At a meeting in March 1928, for instance, at which the Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner as well as a “representative gathering of the Kikuyu Central Association” attended, Secretary Joseph Kangethe proposed that government orders be announced “in open baraza” to achieve better cooperation between the Government and the Association. Was this desire for better information on administrative matters an attempt to pave the way for participation in the Legislative Council? The Kikuyu also asked for advice by the Government on how to break the Indian monopoly on trade. Kenyatta asked at this meeting to be shown anything that was spoiling the work of the

1. Central Government Archives (Nairobi), Committee of Kikuyu Central Association to Governor Grigg, December 31, 1925, PC/CP 8/5/2. The District Commissioner commented on this request saying that he did not know what was meant by it. He suspected that the translation was faulty. Ibid., District Commissioner to Senior Commissioner, January 2, 1926. It seems that the request makes sense. They wanted a modern chief who would be prepared to take action and was not only a figurehead.

2. Ibid., Kikuyu Central Association to Grigg, December 31, 1925.

3. British officials considered it as their duty to educate the leaders of the Kikuyu Central Association in the elementary rules of procedure. They wanted them to learn how to approach authorities through proper channels. They told them that matters of general policy must be submitted to the Senior Commissioner. Personal or private grievances must go to the District Commissioner. The Chief Native Commissioner wrote that “no notice can be taken of any communication from the K.C.A. that does not comply with these instructions.” Ibid., Chief Native Commissioner to Senior Commissioner, May 31, 1926. — One is inclined to speculate whether a little less administrative formalism and a little more understanding of the growing impatience of the Kikuyu leaders would have contributed to better relations with the K.C.A. in the 1930’s.
Association. He would do his best to remedy the faults and hoped that misrepresentation of the objects of KCA would thereby be avoided.¹

Many years later Kenyatta wrote about the Kikuyu Central Association that

"it worked hard to build up its organization and to strengthen the bond between its acknowledged members and the mass of the people... The Kikuyu Central Association became, and remained for the whole period between the two World Wars, the leading political movement of the young East Africans."²

Regarding the controversy over female circumcision which strained relations between the Scottish Church and KCA for many years, a few explanations are in order here to illustrate the importance which Kenyatta attached to the problem when he went to London. Dr. Arthur of the Church of Scotland at Kikuyu had opposed the custom as early as 1906.³ By 1915 several missionary groups began to contemplate a united stand against the practice. By 1919 the Scottish Church recommended the abolition of female circumcision and suggested disciplinary action against those who continued it.⁴ This decision came at a time when European interference with native customs was resented as a threat to the preservation of the Kikuyu tribal heritage. The new spirit of Kikuyu nationalism manifested itself in the 1920's in two different trends. It strove for the economic and social advancement of the Kikuyu and contributed thereby to the promotion of Western customs. But it also led Kikuyu leaders to stress more vigorously the value of the ancient tribal customs. It is understandable, therefore, that Dr. Arthur's attitude toward circumcision led to the tense relations which prevailed between KCA and CSM in 1929. Joint declarations by Africans and Scottish members of the Church in 1919, 1921 and 1923 denouncing circumcision as contrary to the principles of Christianity were as ineffective as the medical objections to the custom. Kenyatta stated in Facing Mount Kenya that:

"the real argument lies not in the defence of the surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Kikuyu—namely, that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications, quite apart from the operation itself."⁵

¹ Central Government Archives (Nairobi), Minutes of Meeting held at Kahuhia on March 16, 1928, PC/CP 8/5/3. Kenyatta's name appeared as Johnson Kinyata.
² KENYATTA, Kenya, Land of Opportunity, p. 15.
³ CSM Files, Author not given, "History of Teaching in regard to Circumcision" (date not given, but possibly 1930), p. 8.
⁴ Ibid.
But circumcision was only one among several issues which Kenyatta wanted to discuss in London. Foremost on his mind was a Petition which he planned to present to the Colonial Office in the name of KCA. The fact that the Association made an attempt to establish direct contact with the Secretary for the Colonies in London instead of going through regular administrative channels in Nairobi implied a lack of confidence in the Kenya Legislative Council. One may conclude that the relations between the Kikuyu Central Association and the European settlers were not too friendly. Between 1925 and 1928 KCA had tried repeatedly to establish direct contact with the Governor of Kenya. The attempts had failed and it was now Kenyatta's task to draw the attention of the British Government and of the British public to the grievances of the Kikuyu.

II. THE PETITION

The Petition which Kenyatta carried with him contained issues which had been frequently discussed at KCA meetings and in communications between the Association and British officials. It is of historical interest, however, because it presented in condensed form the grievances which had been uppermost in the minds of many Kikuyu. They thought that the time was ripe for a direct approach to the British officials and to the members of Parliament. There is a striking difference between the timid addresses to local officials in Kenya in the early 1920's and the decisive and clear language of the Petition of 1929.

1. On the question of land which concerned the Kikuyu very much the Church of Scotland had supported the Kikuyu. It had also registered its objection to compulsory labor together with the Bishops of Mombasa and Uganda in the "Bishops' Memorandum" of 1920. See Parliamentary Papers (1920), XXXIII, pp. 9 and 10.
2. See below, pp. 322-323.
3. Reference is made to the files in the Nairobi Archives of Central Government entitled "Native Affairs," and "Kikuyu Central Association" for the years 1925 to 1928. Kenyatta reported in Kenyatta, Land of Opportunity, how in 1924 the younger men better acquainted with European ways formed the Kikuyu Central Association and drew up a statement for the Ormsby Gore Commission.
4. The text of Kenyatta's Petition is taken from a Church of Scotland document entitled Report of Interview of Mr. Johnston Kenyatta. This is a precis of the meeting between Kenyatta and members of the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee held at the CSM building on May 30, 1930. The minutes of the meeting were incomplete and did not lend themselves to verbatim reporting. Reverend C. W. G. Taylor, Joint Convener and Chairman of the meeting, wrote the precis some time after the meeting. A. R. Barlow, Kikuyu expert of the CSM in Kikuyu and visiting in London in 1930, was also present at the meeting. He described the text of the Petition as rendered in Taylor's Precis as "fairly accurate" although he criticized the remainder of the Precis which will be discussed later. For the text of the Petition, see Appendix.
In 1926, for instance, when KCA addressed the Senior Commissioner in Nyeri, they were apologetic. They said that if they would not speak for themselves their country would be finished by encroachment.

"We are," they said, "acting as all countries are doing or speaking for their country and we believe it was begun in England and every part of European countries . . . There is no any one [sic] can represent our grievances as there is no faithful person who can speak on our behalf . . . ."

In 1929 the Petition begins with the smooth opening statement:

"The humble Petition of the Kikuyu Central Association, Kenya Colony. Sheweth, we the undersigned, representing thousands of members of the Kikuyu tribes beg to lay before you through our representative, Mr. Johnston Kenyatta, Hon. Secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association, whom we have deputed to visit England, the following grievances to which we earnestly hope you will give us your kind and sympathetic consideration."

The first item of the Petition concerned the land question which was taken over literally from an earlier statement by the Kikuyu presented to the East Africa Commission in 1924. In his book *Kenya, Land of Opportunity* Kenyatta mentioned how the "younger men" drew up a most careful statement of their grievances in 1924 and "showed it to the chiefs and elders, translated and discussed it point by point, and after much negotiation secured their complete approval and agreement." This statement, prepared in such a careful and deliberate way, was apparently held to apply to 1929 as it had to 1924 and was therefore incorporated without a change. The request for amendment of the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 had been repeatedly urged by the Kikuyu. Its repeal was considered essential to give security to Kikuyu settlers. They felt that they could not achieve economic betterment and the improvement of native agricultural holdings unless they were assured that their land could not be alienated by order of the Government.

Other items of the Petition concerned native representation in the legislative and municipal councils, education, the labor question, Kikuyu native administration and minor points of a miscellaneous

1. Central Government Archives (Nairobi), Kikuyu Central Association to Senior Commissioner, Nyeri, July 10, 1926, PC/CP 8/5/2.
3. See *Kenyatta, Kenya, Land of Opportunity*, pp. 12-13. The same demands were also presented to the Hilton Young Commission in 1928. A memorandum formulating the grievances of the Kikuyu was given to the District Commissioner with the request that the Chief Native Commissioner arrange a meeting with the Hilton Young Commission. This memorandum reiterated the points made in 1924 regarding the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 and added that the chairman of the Commission (Ormsby-Gore) had promised a reply after his return to England which had not come forth. Therefore the requests must be repeated. Central Government Archives, Memorandum by Kikuyu Association, Southern District of Kikuyu, for Hilton Young Commission, 1928 (no date, but passed on on January 9, 1926), PC/CP 8/5/1.
nature. All except the statements on native administration and the items under "miscellani" had been formulated in 1924 for the East Africa Commission.¹

The Hilton Young Report of 1928 had taken notice of all the points made for the East Africa Commission at the hearings held in Kenya. But the Hilton Young Report experienced difficulties. If, as they said, the development of native life was the first charge of the British administration, then it was imperative that the essential native interests must be defined before any policy could be formulated. Secondly, the conditions under which native development could take place must be examined. And, thirdly, conditions must be created which would prevent any interference with the newly created situation.² The Report was specific in laying down rules for the setting aside of adequate land for the natives. It recommended the modernization of the system of taxation and expressed its concern with the questions of labor, native education and economic development.

The promising statements of the Hilton Young Report did not satisfy the young and impatient Kikuyu in 1929. They did not discover in the Report any definite procedure to guarantee action in the immediate future. Kenyatta described the African reaction to the steady stream of Royal Commissions beginning in 1922 in these words:

"Since 1922 Kenya could be described as a land of Royal Commissions. Each of them came out with high intentions and issued a report expressing lofty sentiments, and yet after each one, more African land has been annexed and the rights of Africans have been further curtailed."³

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Kikuyu Central Association sent its Secretary to London in spite of the good intentions expressed in the Hilton Young Report. He was charged with the task of communicating the feeling of anxiety and urgency felt by his countrymen.

III. KENYATTA IN LONDON:
BARLOW'S REPORT

It seems as though Kenyatta's arrival in London did not attract much attention at the time. A correspondent of the London Times mentioned Kenyatta's departure from Kenya in an article of Februa-

¹. KENYATTA, Kenya, Land of Opportunity, pp. 13-14. Kenyatta said that the statement was only reproduced in part in his book. It may therefore be that the points on native administration and miscellani had been presented in 1924. If they were, Kenyatta did not consider them sufficiently important to repeat them in his book.
³. KENYATTA, Kenya, Land of Opportunity, p. 15.
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January 20, 1929. His major report concerned public reaction to the Report on Closer Union just issued by the Hilton Young Commission and Kenyatta’s trip to London was discussed in only one brief paragraph at the end of the article. The correspondent wrote that “an interesting development since the publication of the Hilton Young Report [was] the departure of Johnston Kenyatta for England in order to interview the Secretary of State on problems affecting the Kikuyu tribe, particularly land.” Kenyatta, the correspondent wrote, was himself a member of the tribe, spoke English and was secretary of the political body known as the Kikuyu Central Association. This writer may have attributed political significance to Kenyatta’s trip to London. But there is no evidence to show that his arrival in London was considered newsworthy by the people in the city.

While Kenyatta came to London in February 1929, another traveller from the Kikuyu country arrived in London in the spring of 1930. He was A. R. Barlow, a member of the Scottish Mission at Kikuyu. Barlow described his impressions of Kenyatta in a long report which he sent to Dr. Arthur, head of the Scottish Mission at Kikuyu. Though primarily interested in Kenyatta’s attitude toward the Scottish Church, Barlow also tried to understand Kenyatta’s political mission in London and his European experience.

What does Barlow’s report reveal about the man, his plans and his activities? His first impressions of Kenyatta were highly favorable. He happened to run into Kenyatta in Southampton after his arrival in England. He was pleased with the courteous reception he was given and expressed his surprise that Kenyatta was relaxed and at ease “as though he had been born and bred in England.” Barlow admired his enterprise and courage in undertaking his London mission. He acknowledged Kenyatta’s ability “to mix on equal terms with Europeans and to hold his end up in spite of his handicaps, educationally and socially.”

Barlow tested his first impressions of Kenyatta in discussions with friends who had met him frequently in London before Barlow’s arrival. One of them was McGregor Ross who had “done a lot for him [Kenyatta] in various ways” but had not taken Kenyatta simply at his words. McGregor Ross’ conclusions were favorable and he assured

2. In his report to Dr. Arthur Barlow did not give the date of his own arrival. He mentioned only that he saw Kenyatta briefly in Southampton and again in May. Barlow’s report is detailed although several months passed after his first meeting with Kenyatta. From here on Barlow’s Report will be quoted as Report, Barlow. See CSM Archives, A. R. Barlow to The Rev. J. W. Arthur, O.B.E., M.D., August 4, 1930.
4. Ibid., p. 11. See Also note 2, p. 327.
Barlow that Kenyatta “had been living a decent life taking into account the great temptations to which he may have been exposed.”\(^1\) Barlow himself found evidence for the modest way in which Kenyatta conducted himself in London where he spent money carefully and managed to get along on £3 per week. His mastery of English, his pleasant manners and his unassuming attitude impressed Barlow.\(^2\) Barlow was particularly surprised that Kenyatta was so flexible and could adjust so quickly to the modern urban environment without any outward appearance of strain or uneasiness. Even his speech was smooth, “almost entirely lacking in African accent.”\(^3\)

Barlow acknowledged that Kenyatta had not wasted his time but that he had been pretty busy in England. “A great deal of his time,” wrote Barlow, “has been spent in Lobbies of the House of Commons and he has been called before various Committees, such as the one on Compulsory Native Labour.”\(^4\) He was received by Dr. Shiels, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. Although Shiels did not see fit to act on his proposals, Kenyatta seems to have been satisfied that he fulfilled his assignment of presenting Kikuyu grievances to London officials.\(^5\) Kenyatta also met Lord Ollivier who got him a seat in the House of Lords at the state opening of Parliament which impressed him very much. He described it as the most wonderful thing he had seen in England.\(^6\)

Among his acquaintances on the other side of the fence were persons who were not greatly appreciated by British officials. There was Isher Dass, for instance, an Indian elected member of the Legislative Council who had accompanied Kenyatta to London. The Government considered Dass as tainted by “Communist affiliations.”\(^7\) Kenyatta had also established contact with members of the League against Imperialism, especially with Reginald Bridgeman. Another of his friends was the above mentioned McGregor Ross,\(^8\) former director of Public Works in Kenya who had retired to London after a bitter fight with Lord Delamere and the European settlers.\(^9\)

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2. Ibid., p. 6.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. From the official Corfield Report one does not have the impression that Kenyatta could have been satisfied with his visit to the Colonial Office. According to the Report Dr. Drummond Shiels and others agreed that Kenyatta’s coming to London over the head of the Kenya Government had created a dangerous precedent and that his early return would be urged. Corfield Report, p. 42.
8. See above, p. 316.
9. Barlow was aware that McGregor Ross was inclined to be sympathetic toward Kenyatta. Ross himself had gotten a rough deal in Kenya. Barlow
Barlow’s description of Kenyatta’s trip to the continent during 1929 is interesting though his account is incomplete. He relied on Kenyatta’s statements to him about the trip and did not “cross-examine” Kenyatta since he did not regard himself as a “detective agent.” He found that Kenyatta was not a bit reluctant to tell him all he might want to know. He did not get details of the trip because of his own reluctance to request details. Kenyatta told Barlow that “an American Negro” befriended him on the tour. This Negro seems to have been “a sort of commercial traveller or agent, either on his own behalf or for some American business firm.” He seems to have been very well off and invited Kenyatta to travel as his guest. Kenyatta made a preliminary trip to the Continent to make arrangements for his extended trip “half round Europe.” Barlow thought they travelled to Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa, Sebastopol, Yalta, Constantinople, and back via Berlin. McGregor Ross had told Barlow that Kenyatta had not refused the invitation by the American Negro since it was an opportunity not to be missed of seeing more of Europe. Ross thought that “he had not been ‘squared’ by the Bolshevists nor come under their influence.” Kenyatta told Barlow that he had not asked to be supplied with literature from Russia but he feared that upon his return to Kenya, he might receive communications from there. Ross, therefore, advised Kenyatta to get in touch with officials after his return to Kenya and offer to have his mail from Russia opened or confiscated to avoid further complications. He also advised him:

“to write direct to Sir E. Grigg stating frankly the reasons for his Moscow trip . . . and asking for fair treatment. He also put the matter before Lord Passfield and . . . received a letter from the Colonial Office giving instructions that he [was] not to be penalized so long as he [conducted] himself as a law-abiding citizen.”

It seems that Barlow, Ross and Kenyatta were well aware of the stigma that attached to his Moscow trip.

The official report about Kenyatta’s activities in Europe differs considerably from this version. Corfield stated that Kenyatta went to Russia with the help of the Communists in August 1929 and returned to England in October. He allegedly joined the Communist Party and attended “the Communist inspired International Negro Workers Congress in Hamburg.” Whereas Barlow accepted Kenyatta’s expla-
described Ross, at a meeting which he had with Kenyatta and Ross, as displaying “a good deal more heat on various points.” Nevertheless, Barlow found Ross’ statements on Kenyatta were helpful.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 5.
5. Ibid.
nation that his trip to Russia was inspired by non-political motives, Corfield saw it as the result of Kenyatta's failure to obtain commitment by the Colonial Office after he presented his Petition. Barlow had heard from Ross that Kenyatta's travels between August and October 1929 had cost him the support of some of his English supporters. Barlow quoted Cannon Handley Hooper as saying that Kenyatta "had been leading a decent life since last October (due possibly to the interest and influence of the McG. Rosses)." This statement leaves the period of his trip to the Continent unaccounted for. Barlow did not support the rumors about Kenyatta's possible Communist connections and tried to avoid the issue in his letter to Dr. Arthur. He was satisfied that Kenyatta carried out his assignment to act as a representative of the Kikuyu Central Association and that he made as many contacts as possible in London to present the problems of the Kikuyu to officials and non-officials. Barlow made an effort to be impartial in reporting his impressions of Kenyatta. He did not accept any rumors for which he did not have evidence. This is remarkable in view of the tensions between the Church of Scotland in Kikuyu and the Kikuyu Central Association.

IV. Kenyatta's Meeting with Members of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh

When Barlow met Johnston Kenyatta on May 14, 1930 in McGregor Ross' house in London, they discussed Kenyatta's futile attempts to arrange a meeting with the Foreign Mission Council of the Church of Scotland. Back home in Kikuyu Dr. opposition to female circumcision had led to the boycott of SCM schools and churches by the Kikuyu Central Association. Kenyatta attached great import-

2. I do not think that Barlow was "naive" and blindly trusted everything Kenyatta told him.
3. Dr. Arthur had been opposed to female circumcision as early as 1906 when he became the doctor of the Kikuyu Mission Station. Between 1906 and 1915 it seemed that education and preaching would induce the younger Kikuyu to abandon the custom. By 1915 several missionary Churches began to contemplate a united stand against the practice of circumcision. By 1919 the Church of Scotland recommended the abolition of the practice and urged disciplinary action against Kikuyu Christians who continued female circumcision. In 1922 resolution was passed that missionaries should use all their influence against female circumcision. In 1923 a Committee was appointed by the Church to deal with the issue. In 1929 the open rift occurred. Christians who were members of the Kikuyu Central Association left the Kikuyu Church and Kikuyu schools of the Scottish Mission. See "Causes and History of the 1929-1930 Crisis." Memorandum, CSM Files, Edinburgh.
ance to an interview in order to discuss the reasons for the disagree-
ment between the Kikuyu Central Association and the Scottish Church
in Kenya.

After several delays the meeting took finally place on May 30. Barlow's description of the background story explains the tensions
which prevailed at the beginning of the interview. According to his
story Kenyatta had first been given a date for an interview in Edin-
burgh by the Moderator of the Church. Unfortunately, after the date
had been set, the Under-Secretary of State granted Kenyatta an
interview on the day which had been reserved for the Church meeting.
Kenyatta was forced to cancel his visit to Edinburgh. When he asked
for a new appointment, a Mr. McLachlin from the Council corresponded
with him about a new date and wrote "that he could still have a
meeting if he wished, but he must understand that all discussion of
political matters would be barred, and in view of that did he think it
worth his while to travel to Scotland?" Ross was "furious" and
considered this reply as indication of "shabby treatment" of Kenyatta.
Barlow commented that "M'G. Ross and J. K. seem to have looked
upon this as a breach of faith... and J. K. took it practically as a
refusal of any interview."

Ross and Kenyatta then asked Barlow whether he thought it was
wise on the part of the Foreign Mission Committee to refuse discussion
of political matters with the representative of a large body of Kikuyu
native opinion. They argued that if the Foreign Mission Committee
were genuinely interested in native welfare and if it permitted Dr. Ar-
thur, their representative in Kikuyu, to sit on the Legislative and
Executive Councils of Kenya, and if missionaries were anxious to
uphold the rights of the Kikuyu, then Kenyatta ought to be permitt-
ed to discuss political issues with Committee members in Edinburgh.
Barlow replied that it was a matter of credentials since "the K.C.A.
was a suspect body and had become discredited in the eyes both of
Government and of Missions." Kenyatta did not accept this inter-
pretation. He said that "there had been no breach between the
K.C.A. and the C.M.S. and that since he came home [sic] he had
received much kindly interest and assistance from the C.M.S. at home."

1. Barlow to Arthur, Report, p. 3.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 4.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. Notice the typographical error. Instead of C.M.S. it should read
C.S.M. — C.M.S. stands for Church Missionary Society whereas Kenyatta referred
to the Church of Scotland Mission.

Note also the term "home" used by Kenyatta. Barlow spoke of coming
"home" to England and Kenyatta adopted this expression. One wonders
Barlow promised to help bring about the desired interview and a date was arranged for May 30.¹

Twelve members of the Church of Scotland were present to attend the meeting with Kenyatta in Edinburgh. Kenyatta was invited to speak and asked for permission to have Mr. Barlow read the Petition of the K.C.A. After the reading Kenyatta explained that he had the document read “not only to show why he had come home, but also because he wanted the meeting to sympathize with the K.C.A. in regard to matters with which it dealt.”² He showed good political sense and declared that in agreement with the Foreign Mission Committee he did not press for a discussion of the Petition at this time. The Petition was before the Colonial Office and had received a long reply. Mr. McLachlin then pointed out that the CSM members at this meeting did not represent a Committee of the Church and were therefore not authorized to speak for the Church in an official capacity. Nevertheless, he felt that he was entitled to say that “on certain points put forward in [Kenyatta’s] statement the Church of Scotland would feel themselves to be in sympathy.”³

The meeting then turned to the major issue on the agenda. Kenyatta was asked “what he had to say about the disagreement between KCA and the Church in Kenya.”⁴ Kenyatta said that the Kikuyu Central Association was not against the Church since most of their members were Christians. The misunderstanding, he thought, arose because “perhaps the Church was too keen to abolish the custom of female circumcision at once and [he added], what my Association thinks is that through educating people we can gradually stop that custom which brings disagreement between K.C.A. and Missions.”⁵

Reverend Taylor, chairman of the meeting, distinguished between Christian Kikuyu who continued the practice of female circumcision and the heathen Kikuyu on whom the Church did not intend to impose any prohibitive rules. He wondered whether Kenyatta was aware of this difference. In his answer Kenyatta referred only to Church

whether he accepted the Britisher’s way of thinking of London as home or whether he used the word in order to be polite.

¹There exist two accounts of the Interview. One account was not verbatim since the stenographer present had not been able to “hear a lot of what was said,” and the notes were, therefore, full of blanks and unfinished sentences. *Ibid.,* p. 1.

²In quotations hereafter the incomplete account will be called *Report of Interview* and Barlow’s reconstructed and more complete account will be called *Private Account of Interview*. Both accounts are in the CSM Files, Edinburgh. The accounts were not dated but from Barlow’s letter to Arthur of August 4 it is clear that the accounts were written some time after the Interview.


⁴*Ibid.

⁵*Ibid.,* 2.
members and he repeated his emphasis on the need for education and gradual change as the result of which the custom would soon die out without any trouble.\footnote{1} Reverend Taylor wanted to know whether he was right in thinking that resistance to the Church attitude toward female circumcision had stiffened lately because the Kikuyu Central Association had backed the Christian Kikuyu. Kenyatta said that this was not so.

In spite of this firm statement, however, the questioning returned again and again to the K.C.A.'s responsibility for the recent disagreements between the Kikuyu Christians and the Mission. A letter written on August 29 of the previous year to the \textit{East African Standard} was debated. Kenyatta did not support the views expressed in this letter, especially the statement by the president of KCA that they viewed with much fear the Missionaries' propaganda against circumcision since they felt that this was an attempt on the part of a Church to demolish an ancient Kikuyu custom. Kenyatta stressed the fact that he had written the president of K.C.A. telling him that it was not the business of a political body to take action of any kind in the matter and to leave it to the people.\footnote{2} He was sure that if he had been in Kenya such a statement would not have been made. The discussion on this subject continued and Kenyatta stood his ground firmly. When asked why the Church should do its best to get a bad thing abolished, he replied "I put it this way, to sum it up in a nutshell, their way of looking at it is that the way of gradual conviction is to be preferred to that of direct attack by means of spear and shield."\footnote{3} This was said in Kikuyu and translated by Barlow. The fact that he reverted to Kikuyu although the majority of his audience did not understand it permits the conclusion that he was excited at this point.

It seems that his listeners were not yet satisfied with his comments on the stiffening Kikuyu reaction to the Church. Reverend Taylor wanted to know why Kenyatta could not agree that "it was right to ask Christian people to have 'no part or parcel in this rite'" and Kenyatta agreed.\footnote{4} Dr. Philips who had been stationed in Tumutumu and was the co-author of a pamphlet against circumcision published by the Scottish Church in 1924, came back to a point raised earlier. He insisted that between 1924 and 1928 the educational campaign against circumcision had been successful. The deterioration set in when the Kikuyu Central Association tried to gain votes from "heathen people" for its Kikuyu members who ran for the Local Native Council.

\begin{verbatim}
1. Private Account of Interview, 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
\end{verbatim}
This would clearly indicate that circumcision had become a political issue.

Throughout the discussion Kenyatta insisted that the Kikuyu Central Association was not responsible for the increasing tension manifested since 1928. On two occasions the exchange of opinions became heated. Kenyatta was annoyed when the chairman of the meeting mentioned a letter allegedly written by Kenyatta to a Chief Gideon. The letter had been taken to the Chief District Commissioner because the writer had threatened the Chief with removal from his position. Chief Gideon had told the Commissioner that he wanted the people of Scotland to know "how he as a Christian was being treated by the Secretary of the K.C.A."¹ Barlow's rendering of the incident contains many gaps. Kenyatta was so outraged by this accusation and so outspoken in his answer that one is inclined to accept his statement that the accusation was "absolutely a lie" and that the letter must be a "forgery."² Kenyatta had not used such strong words before. Another controversy that cannot be properly reconstructed because of fragmentary recording concerned the vow taken at the Chogoria Scottish Mission. *Kikuyu News* of December 1929 had reported that at Chogoria a vow was required of Church members which contained the words "... and to have done with the Kikuyu Central Association, because it aims at destroying the Church of God."² Here again, agreement could not be reached on whether the vow was required from paid Church workers only or from Church members in general. Barlow felt that if the intent of the Chogoria oath had been misrepresented, the facts could easily be ascertained in Kenya. Kenyatta insisted that proof could not be obtained since the Church was biased against the native organization and statements made by Kikuyu Christians might be misrepresented.

Apart from these episodes, the talks revealed a remarkable restraint on both sides. Kenyatta showed courage in his determination to face twelve people whose attitude toward him personally and toward his Association was not entirely known to him. His aim was the improvement of the relations between K.C.A. and the Church of Scotland. In his concluding remarks the chairman pleaded for support of the Mission's stand against "the terrible custom" of female circumcision. He hoped that a break with the Kikuyu Central Association could be avoided provided they would not encourage their members to keep up a custom which the Church condemned. He concluded by saying "we feel we understand each other, and we believe that you will be a very important link between the Kikuyu people and the Church... and that you will put all your weight of your influence to

be a real guiding link and a pacifying influence...”¹ Kenyatta replied: “I will try my best—if we cooperate and work together.”²

V. Evaluation of the Meeting

Barlow had shown much understanding for the Kikuyu in general and for Kenyatta in particular. In the letter to Arthur which accompanied his report of the meeting he asked himself in the end what conclusions could be drawn from his own observations and from the discussions at the meeting. He found himself facing a dilemma. Should he trust the impressions he had gained at the meeting in Edinburgh and during his visits with Kenyatta in London, or should he rely on the conflicting reports he had heard from several people in the City? Did the events of the recent past not support the opinion that the Kikuyu Central Association had adopted a belligerent attitude toward the Church? Since Kenyatta was the Secretary of the Association and since he had come to London as their spokesman, Barlow could not disregard the activities of K.C.A. during the last years.

Barlow also asked himself how Kenyatta could resume his previous life in Kenya after having tasted the amenities of European civilization.³ Would his influence on the “intelligentsia” among his own people be to the good or otherwise? Barlow professed that he could not answer the question. He could not draw on a precedent for purposes of comparison. Kenyatta was the first among the Kikuyu to enter the scene of British-European politics outside his own country. His letter expresses some anxiety. He wrote, for instance, “I greatly admire J. K.’s enterprise and courage in undertaking this mission of his, and his apparent diligence and perseverance in carrying it out. Looking at it from the point of view of those who are enthusiast for African progress and political liberty, he has probably accomplished a great deal of good, and we should all concede him the honour due to a courageous man and patriot...”⁴ The dilemma of being attracted by Kenyatta while at the same time being afraid of him is also revealed in another letter to Arthur, probably written at the same time but undated. In it he said, “There is something simple and likeable about him, despite all the suspicion attaching to him.”⁵ Barlow inclined toward the view that Kenyatta “may yet be a very good influence on the Kenya situation, if he keeps his head.” He admitted his

¹. Ibid., 12.
². Ibid., 13.
³. Barlow to Arthur, p. 10.
⁴. Ibid., p. 11.
⁵. CSM Files.
“apparent level-headedness and quiet bearing.”¹ He found that the Kikuyu had gained an able champion who had opened the doors through which many might pass in the future. “He has demonstrated the ability of a Kikuyu to mix on equal terms with the Europeans and to hold his end up in spite of all his handicaps, educationally and socially.”² And he accepted Norman Ley’s opinion that “Johnston Kenyatta will never make a fanatic.”³

A letter written to the Times by Kenyatta and published on March 26, 1930 seems to bear out Barlow’s positive remarks. The purpose of the letter was to protest against further alienation of land from the Kikuyu. He summarized the major Kikuyu objectives under the headings of land, education, women’s hut tax, representation and tribal custom. He concluded that

“evolving from these five points, we hope to remove all lack of understanding between the various peoples who form the population of East Africa, so that we may all march together as loyal subjects of His Britannic Majesty along the road of Empire prosperity. I would like to ask if any fair-minded Briton considers the above outlined policy of the Kikuyu Central Association to savour in any way of sedition? The repression of native views, on subjects of such vital interest to my people, by means of legislative measures, can only be described as a short-sighted tightening of the safety valve of free speech which must inevitably result in dangerous explosion—the one thing all men wish to avoid.”⁴

This letter may have expressed the feelings of many British observers. It shows that Kenyatta possessed political tact and adhered to the British maxim of fair play in politics. It also shows that Kenyatta fought for the right of his people to participate in an organized way in the political life of Kenya.

Conclusions

Do the documents on which this paper is based add to the understanding of Kenyatta during his visit in London in 1929-30? This was a critical year for the Kikuyu Central Association in its relations with the Government and the Scottish Mission at Kikuyu. K.C.A. had attracted sufficient attention in Kenya to require an official reevaluation of the role it played among the Kikuyu. K.C.A.’s stand against C.S.M. policy toward female circumcision had brought its relations with the Kikuyu Mission close to the breaking point. Any

1. Barlow to Arthur, p. 11.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 9.
4. Jomo Kenyatta, Letter to the Editor, Times (London), March 26, 1930.
document, therefore, that can shed more light on Kenyatta during this period must interest the historian.

From Barlow's statements it appears that Kenyatta was serious and persistent in the pursuit of his aims in London. He tried to restore better relations with the Scottish Mission and was determined to pave the way for proper acceptance by the Government of the Kikuyu Central Association as the spokesman for the Kikuyu. He was convinced that both the Government and the Scottish Mission were important factors for the political and economic development of his people.

Although neither the Scottish Church members nor Kenyatta trusted each other fully, they tried to be fair and open-minded. They tried to hold on to straws in the wind which might be useful whenever concessions could be made on either side. Neither side was ready to make concessions which involved the sacrifice of principles. The Church desired to direct the transformation of the Kikuyu tribal life through Christian channels. Kenyatta saw the Church as only one among several factors which should guide the Kikuyu. To him the ultimate goals were more important than the agency with whose help they were achieved. The gaining of political rights, the growth of economic progress and the awakening of a Kikuyu-African self-consciousness mattered most.

The members of the Church in Edinburgh were impressed and, perhaps, also perturbed by the encounter with Kenyatta. He represented to them a new type of young African. Barlow regretted that the Church had been out of touch with K.C.A. from the very beginning. Having had no influence on it, "it fell under the spell of extremists." Was it too late to establish good relations with the Kikuyu political movement through Kenyatta?

Barlow's letter to Arthur also discussed Kenyatta's activities in London. In this respect the letter is not quite as revealing. It is interesting that it contradicts statements on Kenyatta in the Corfield Report but Barlow leaves too much in doubt. He was disturbed by rumors that Kenyatta was a tool of foreign Radicals and that he had been exposed to Communist influence but he dismissed this idea from his mind without trying to explore the basis of the rumors. He relied heavily on McGregor Ross who was not an entirely impartial observer due to his previous quarrels with the European community in Kenya. Barlow's description of Kenyatta's trip to Russia in 1929 leaves it to the reader to interpret the trip either as an innocent excursion or as an attempt to join the Communist Party. Barlow does not set forth a definite opinion.

1. Barlow to Arthur, p. 11.
2. Ibid.
Barlow's illustrations of Kenyatta's adaptability to the London environment are very interesting. He stressed the fact that Kenyatta met modern western civilization in London in 1929-30. In colonial East Africa he could not have a proper picture of Europe. From Nairobi, still a small city in 1929, he made the sudden transition to an industrial metropolis. He lived comfortably on Cambridge Street, a “rather drab, but quite respectable street.” The external advantages of a technological civilization were available to him in the form of bus and subway transportation, and not by way of a sumptuous life, as some observers had said. He enjoyed moving about freely in the big city. Barlow concluded that

“he [Kenyatta] has shown, too, that there is no great gulf between the African and the Legislative Council. If the uneducated Johnston Kenyatta can do these things, are there not potential Aggreys amongst our High School and other pupils?”

Barlow hoped that Kenyatta would have the strength to rise above his narrow environment and become a political leader. But beneath his hopes one discovers a lingering fear about the future of the Kikuyu Central Association. The man in whom Barlow set his trust did not stay in Kenya very long after his return from London in 1930. He returned to England in 1931 to give evidence before a Parliamentary Committee and remained there until the end of World War II.

APPENDIX

“Nairobi.
Kikuyu Central Association.

A Petition to the Right Hon. H.M. Principal Secretary of State . . .
The humble Petition of the Kikuyu Central Association, Kenya Colony.

Sheweth, we the undersigned, representing thousands of members of the Kikuyu tribes beg to lay before you through our representative, Mr. Johnston Kenyatta, Hon. Secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association, whom we have deputed to visit England, the following grievances to which we earnestly hope you will give us your kind and sympathetic consideration.

Land Question. As regards the land question, we most respectfully and earnestly pray that the Crown Lands Ordinance 1915 (Kenya Colony) should be amended so as to recognise native rights and titles to land which the said

1. Ibid., p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 11. Kenyatta received his more formal education in England during his second stay. Barlow was, therefore, entitled to speak of Kenyatta as “uneducated.”
Ordinance wholly swept away, substituting nothing by way of proper equivalent to that which we formerly possessed, leaving us absolutely without any legal right to our lands and making us mere tenants at will of the Crown. This absence of legal title to our lands has exposed some of our people to loss in favour of non-natives, and it leaves us all without security against further demands at encroachment on our lands. Next, we earnestly pray that the present proposed Native Land Trust Bill, Kenya Colony, should not be allowed to pass into law. On the contrary, we beg to submit

(a) That before anything is done, individual Title Deeds should be given to every Kikuyu land-holder to ensure that no one will take his land away;

(b) That no exchange of land should take place in the Kikuyu Reserves between the Kikuyu and non-natives, to ensure that the Kikuyu should not be dispossessed of their land by this method;

(c) That the land should be left in the hands of the Kikuyu Councils, with power to deal with lands under the Kikuyu customs without any interference from the District Officers;

(d) That the Councils which deal with the land should not be interfered with by the District Officer as Chairman of such Councils;

(e) That no lease should be given to non-natives inside the Kikuyu land, and that where this plan has been done in the past, compensation should now be paid to holders or their descendants;

(f) That the issue of temporary occupation licences to non-natives be stopped in the Kikuyu land as it tends to these lands being taken away from the Kikuyu;

(g) That all Kikuyu lands which have been given as freehold should be redeemed if possible and returned to their original owners or their descendants who shall be paid compensation for the loss they have suffered during the years since the land was taken away;

(h) That the Kikuyu be permitted to plant economic crops like Arabica coffee, &c. on the lands they occupy without any hindrance;

(i) That Kikuyu be taught to be agricultural instructors in order to teach and encourage others to take up this work instead of the Government sending other people, who do very little to help the Kikuyu people.

We respectfully beg to bring to your notice that the Kikuyu have lost faith in the demarcation of the boundaries, as such demarcations have in the past been of no use, since boundaries once demarcated have been encroached on and land in the Kikuyu Reserves been given up in spite of demarcation, and certain examples are given in the margin.

NATIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS.

Taking into consideration the fact of the enormous majority of the native population in Kenya in comparison with the non-native, we earnestly pray

(a) That the native population should be allowed to elect three Africans and two Europeans as an initial step to represent native interests, and that ultimately the number of African representatives in the Legislative Council should predominate.

(b) That three African natives be elected by the natives to represent their interests in the Municipal Council.

EDUCATION. We earnestly pray

(a) That primary and agricultural and domestic education should be made compulsory for native boys and girls;
(b) That a sufficient number of secondary and high schools should be established all over native areas to impart higher education to native boys who have completed their primary education.

(c) That Native District Councils should be encouraged to send deserving boys from districts to England and elsewhere to receive University or Higher Education in Arts, Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, &c.

(d) That several scholarships should be established by the Government for the training of all natives of ability, locally and abroad.

Labour Question. We earnestly pray

(a) For the abolition of the Kipande and Registration Certificates which restrict the freedom of movement of the African native subjects of the King and facilitates efforts to keep them in a state of slavery.

(b) For the removal of all restrictions on natives with regard to the plantation of Arabica coffee and other economic crops in the shambas.

(c) A Guarantee that provided natives pay their taxes and produce crops on their own fields, they will not be compelled to leave their land to go out to work for Europeans;

(d) That women shall be exempt from hut and poll tax.

Kikuyu Native Administration. We earnestly pray

(a) That the Kikuyu Tribe be formed into one compact whole and not divided into separate districts.

(b) That a Native Administration be established for the Kikuyu tribe, to be placed under one educated paramount chief, to be selected by the Kikuyu people, who should rule over them in accordance with their tribal customs.

(c) That a Central Native Council with representatives from various native tribes as members acting as mediums between the Government and the native people, should be established for the discussion of tribal business.

Miscellaneous. We earnestly pray

(a) That accused natives be tried by native juries;

(b) That the practice of the non-natives living openly with the native women without going through the forms of legal and tribal marriage, and thus encouraging immorality among the natives, be stopped by special legislation against it;

(c) That since the natives are not allowed to run Bars for the sale of native beer, the Government should not sanction native beer shops to be run by the municipality, or in the alternative, owing to the degrading effect of liquor traffic and the terrible consequences, the trade should be entirely abolished among the natives and non-natives.

Finally. We assure you, Sir, that in all we have stated above we are actuated by the sole desire to promote the welfare of the millions of Africans whose destinies are in the hands of the British and who look unto them alone as their protectors. We beg to remain your most obedient and humble servants.

For and on behalf of the Kikuyu Central Association."