

Africa's White Race

by P.G.B. Bown

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THOSE, who have lived in or traveled in Africa, and those who have not, but who have read the romances of the late Sir Rider Haggard, will be familiar with stories, more or less circumstantial, of a white race which is supposed to exist in some unknown and inaccessible region in the heart of the continent. Though such regions still exist in Africa, despite the fact that it has been crossed and recrossed by automobile and airplane, there are few persons nowadays who look for the discovery of a 'Kor' or a 'Zu-Vendis' in those parts which lie 'beyond the ranges'. And yet there *is* a living race of white Africans existing, not in any unknown equatorial region, but in that corner of the continent most nearly adjacent to Europe.

These white Africans are the Berbers of North Africa. Their chief habitat lies in the middle regions of the Atlas Mountains, though considerable numbers are found in the Algerian Highlands, where they are known as Khabyles. Their number are few and appear to be steadily diminishing; probably not more than 100,000 of pure blood now survive. Of this number, perhaps 50,000 exist in the Atlas country, 20,000 in Algeria, 10,000 to 15,000 spread over the whole Saharan region, while the remainder are scattered in small isolated communities over the length and breadth of Africa.

Extraordinarily little seems to be known of the Berbers, their mode of life, beliefs, history and traditions. The latter are particularly interesting and significant to students of the less obvious aspects of life. It is rare, however, for a European to gain the confidence of those who preserve this knowledge — namely, the priests and teachers — and the few who have succeeded in doing so have left no record of what they learned.

According to their tradition, the Berbers are the remnant of a once great race which in past ages occupied the valley now filled by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. In those days a mountainous isthmus barred out the waters of the Atlantic where the Straits of Gibraltar now lie. The lower levels of the valley held two large freshwater lakes, separated by another isthmus connecting what is now Italy with Africa. The present North African region was then much less elevated than it now is, while beyond it, to the south, was an extensive shallow sea connected on the West with the Atlantic. The destruction of the Mediterranean civilization is said to have been due to a terrible earthquake which caused the isthmus at Gibraltar to break in two and allow the waters of the Atlantic to pour in, flooding out the low valley. Simultaneously with this cataclysm a large island to the Southwest, in the Atlantic, sank, and the Atlas Mountains and other North African ranges were raised to their present elevation. This was followed by the gradual drying up of the sea to the south, leaving a vast desert country which we now know as the

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Sahara.

This calamity split the nation into several fragments, each one of the which became the parent of new and independent nations. Of these, the tradition as I have had it related to me has little to say. It is concerned only with that section which retreated to the south and established itself in Morocco. From there offshoots spread all over Africa, and, it is claimed, established a hegemony over almost all Black Africa, with the exception of the Equatorial forest region.

How much of this tradition is truth and how much fairy-tale I am not prepared to say more than that my own extensive observation of native African life, and knowledge of native legends and traditions, inclines me to believe that it has a solid foundation of truth. There is the fact that all Nilotic and Bantu tribes, from the northwest to the extreme southeast of the continent, cherish a legend to the effect that their ancient rulers and great ancestors were *white men from the North*; and the other fact, already mentioned, that stories concerning a mysterious white African people are prevalent among all tribes even to the fringes of the Hottentot and Bushman countries of the extreme south. The latter may be accounted for by the presence among the Black tribes of small communities of Berbers living their own life; but the former must, in my opinion, have some foundation since it is prevalent among tribes which until very recent times had no contact with Europeans.

How I came into possession of the information which I am giving here is a story which would need a good-sized volume to record in full detail, but a brief outline of certain portions of it may interest present readers.

More than a quarter of a century of my life was spent in Africa, in Government service of a kind which kept me constantly moving about among the natives, frequently in localities far removed from European influence. A peculiar aptitude for native languages, and the fact that, for some reason never quite clear to me, I found it easy to win the confidence of the real rulers of all tribes, namely, the people miscalled 'witch-doctors', led me into this work.

From the first I grew accustomed to hearing from my 'witchdoctor' friends tales of mysterious white men, who were said to be powerful magicians, but such stories I regarded as fairy-tales, because the term used to designate those white men was 'amakosi', and this is the name which the ordinary native applies to his ancestral spirits. It was not very long, however, before I found reason to amend my earlier conclusions, for in the year 1904, in a wild region, the exact position of which I cannot specify, not far from the Limpopo River, I came upon a little community of about a dozen families of people who were undeniably white, though not of any European race. These people, as I learned later from their chief, were pure Berbers, although with the exception of the chief himself and one or two Elders, none had ever been within thousands of miles of the Atlas, nor had their forefathers, for generations. They lived exactly as the natives around them (a Zulu tribe) lived, spoke their language, obeyed their laws and customs, but did not intermarry with them.

The chief, who went by the Zulu name of 'Mandhlalanga' (Spirit of the Sun) proved to be a most extraordinary man. He was an Atlas Berber, but had traveled not only over all Africa, but over most of the world. He spoke English and several European languages perfectly, and exhibited an erudition far

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superior to my own. And yet he was living in this remote spot the life of an ordinary Bantu headman!

I cannot say that I have ever fully solved the mystery surrounding Mandhlalanga, but short of doing that I learned then, and in the years which have elapsed since then, much that was interesting and significant concerning him, and others like him, for he was not unique of his class. My first discovery was that his position was that of a teacher. Little groups of persons attended daily at his hut, "to get knowledge", so one of their number whom I questioned informed me. In these groups of pupils were individuals of many different tribes and races: in one group I was astonished to see two Rajput Indians, and in another an Arab. Arabs and Indians are numerous all along the East coast, but though Arabs travel far inland, Indians rarely venture away from the settled areas.

My interest in what I observed led me to request the chief's permission to sit and listen to the instruction he gave his pupils. He readily consented, but my listening gave me little enlightenment, for the language used, though suggestive of Zulu, was one which I could not follow. I was amazed to note that it was apparently a written language, for both teacher and pupils frequently read from sheets of parchment, made from the entrails of the hippopotamus, and from others which resembled Egyptian papyrus: no native African language known to Philology possesses a written form.

I questioned Mandhlalanga regarding the language he used, asking him if he would teach it to me. His reply was, "Become a learner and I will teach you our secret tongue, and much more which one day you will of profit to you".

I had a year to spend in that locality, and decided without hesitation that I could not the considerable amount of spare time I should have on hand in a more profitable way than by learning whatever this strange man could teach me.

I became one of a group of seven pupils just being formed. Three were Zulus, two were Berbers, one was a wandering European ivory-hunter, while I made the seventh. Three of my fellow-pupils were women, or rather girls. For a beginning we were placed under a vow not to reveal anything taught us without our teacher's permission. Next we were set to work learning the secret language. As I surmised, it had a kinship with Zulu, being, according to Madhlalanga, neither more nor less than the archaic tongue from which all modern Bantu languages have sprung. It was written in two ways: one, by means of symbols, was incalculably ancient; the other, by means of an alphabet, was quite a modern invention. The first, I never mastered. The second, together with the spoken language, I mastered thoroughly in a couple of months.

As for the actual teachings, they were, in one word, THEOSOPHY. Not that I was aware of this fact then: I did not at that time, nor did I for twenty-odd years after, know what the word Theosophy meant, nor that any books existed in a European language dealing with such a subject.

The manner in which Mandhlalanga delivered this teachings was wholly unlike our European methods. His method was to discourse to us in poetic parables and allegories. Then he would dismiss us, telling us to think out the meaning of what we had heard, and bring back to him at our next meeting the 'wisdom'

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we had gained. Alternatively he would read from his parchment and papyrus Mss. [manuscript] or get us ourselves to do so.

The Mss. which we used formed part of a single volume of teachings (so our teacher informed us) called "The Teachings of the Ancient One". In form, these writings were poetry of a high order. The teaching they contained was subtle and paradoxical in the extreme, but, assisted by the significant questions and suggestions of our teacher it, bit by bit, began to set new ideas and conceptions stirring in my mind. The curious thing (I recall remarking it at the time) was that the things I found growing in my mind impressed me as being the truth as regards life, or at least as much of it as I could grasp with my imperfect intelligence.

Of the Mss. we were from time to time allowed to copy small portions to assist us in our private studies. One portion, all were compelled to copy, and were enjoined to study it unceasingly. I append to this article a translation of the copy which I then made. It conveys the essential substance of the original as well as English words can do it, which is but indifferently, but it gives little idea of the poetic beauty of the Bantu version.

My pupilship under Mandhlalanga lasted nearly a year. Then duty called me elsewhere. I did not lose touch with him, however, and met him from time to time in different parts of Africa, receiving his constant help and guidance. When I left Africa, and came to England in 1927, he ceased to give me direct instruction, and placed me under the guidance of one of his elder pupils, an Egyptian.

I had been some months in England when, seemingly by pure accident, I came in contact with the Adyar Theosophical Society. A friend and myself taking refuge from a sudden shower turned into an open door labeled "Reading Room, Theosophical Society: Open to All". While waiting I glanced casually over the bookshelves. Idly I picked up a little book entitled *Light on the Path*, and turned over the pages. My astonishment may be imagined when I found myself reading precepts which to all intents and purposes were identical with the "Sayings of The Ancient One. Present readers can judge of the resemblance for themselves. Next I picked up a book entitled *The Key to Theosophy*, and with the permission of the librarian took it home to study. The teachings I found there also were simply those which had grown up in my own mind as a result of Mandhlalanga's teachings.

Since that time I have read many books on Theosophy. In some: the works of H.P.Blavatsky, and a few others, I find the truth as I have come to know it through the thinking to which Mandhlalanga's teachings stimulated me; and I find them leading me to *wider* truths — to *extension* of that which I already possess, but not to anything opposed to it. I have also read other books, a great many of them, which profess to teach Theosophy, but I do not find the truth in them as I have grown to know it. Under the influence of my first enthusiasm I became a member of the Adyar Society, but left it after a couple of months. I am now a member of the Point Loma Theosophical Society, having spent five years as an independent student.

Those who read what I have written will probably ask, Who, and what are Mandhlalanga and his fellows? The following is as much as I can tell. They say that they are members of a great Brotherhood which they call by various names: 'Ubungoma obu fihliweyo' (Brothers of Secret Wisdom) is the term employed by Mandhlalanga. My Egyptian friend, and others whom I have met from the northern half of Africa call their

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association 'Abadala abase Khemu" (Elders of Ethiopia). They have no organization such as is found in a Western society. One becomes a member by virtue of a certain development of mind and in no other way. There are many members, they say, who are unaware that they are such. Members are of every grade of attainment, from pupils such as I was, up to men known vaguely as 'Abangoma' (Those who know); but neither Mandhlalanga, nor any of his fellows whom I have met, claim to know anything of those higher brothers. But above the 'Abangoma' there is said to be 'The Ancient One', but who or what he is I do not know. Apparently he is a man, for I have heard it said that he lives somewhere in North Africa. Mandhlalanga, others like him, are simple Brothers, and they declare themselves to be the pupils of Elder Brothers, and these in turn are pupils of 'Those who know'.

All this is merely what I have pieced together from isolated remarks by those whom I knew. I could of course put forward theories and speculations, but I prefer to leave it to those who read what I have written to do this for themselves.

AMAZWI WO MAMDALA

THE SAYINGS OF THE ANCIENT ONE

Translated by Captain P.G.Bowen [Patrick Gilman Bowen — 1877-1940]

The Ancient One said:

The Path of Life is narrow and steep and perilous. He who would tread it must unto MANHOOD be grown. Its Gate is guarded by a TERRIBLE ONE, to conquer whom the courage of a Warrior is required.

The Learner said:

Tell me, O Ancient One, what are the signs which mark the MAN, and of what nature is the courage of the Warrior?

The Ancient One said:

The marks of the Man and the Warrior are four —

1. His eyes are more keen than those of the Bald Vulture though blind with tears because of Man's cruelty to Man.
2. His ear is more sensitive than that of the Brown Sandhawk though deaf to the World's myriad-voiced roar.

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3. His voice rings in the Council of the Ancients clear as the note of a Golden Trumpet, but it whispers no reply to the war-cry of his foes.

4. He fords the stream of his own Lifeblood and stands on the further shore naked and clean and fearless in the assembled Council of the Ancients.

The Learner said:

Tell me, O Ancient One, may I who am weak and fearful hope ever to attain to MANHOOD?

The Ancient One said:

My Son, you may hope. Do that which feeds your growth and cease to do that which makes you a Child, and Manhood will soon be yours.

The Learner said:

Tell me quickly, O my Father, what I must do and what I must leave undone, for Childhood is a weary burden and I long to be a Man.

The Ancient One said:

Hearken then to my words and forget them not, for in the way of which I shall tell and in no other will you find the Path to Manhood.

1. Labor for ever like one who toils for a Royal Reward; but seek not to end your labor, for your Reward dwells in the task and not in its completion.

2. Love Life, for Life is your Great Teacher: but love Death also, for he is Life's other self, and without the one the other can teach you nothing.

3. Rejoice if your lot be pleasant, but if it be miserable rejoice also: Joy and Sadness are your twin slaves joined from birth and neither can serve you apart from his brother.

Thus you will take the first steps on the Path to Manhood.

The Learner said:

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O Ancient One, I long to grow, but my Heart bids me turn from the Path towards which you point and flee to the ends of the earth.

The Ancient One said:

The Heart of Man is the wellspring of a fountain whose waters poison growth, which blinds the eyes to the Straight Way and turns the feet into the waste places of life. It brims up in the Patient Learner's heart as well as in the heart of the Heedless Child: while it flows it bars the way to the State of Manhood. If you would attain to that State, O Learner, you must drain this poison from your heart: you must see the heart wither, and your life becomes less than a handful of sand blown by the desert wind. This torment all must endure who would tread the Path to Manhood: therefore brace your courage to meet and overcome it.

The Learner said:

O my Father, when may I look to meet this fearful trial? If it be near me will it not destroy me in my weakness? If it be distant will not its shadow darken my days with terror and fill my nights with evil dreams?

The Ancient One said:

None can tell when the Trial may come. It may meet you at your first step, or it may lie in wait for you on the very Threshold of Manhood. Watch, therefore, and be ever prepared, fixing your whole mind upon strengthening your courage, but giving no thought at all to the Battle in which your own courage alone can bring you victory.

The Learner said:

I understand indeed that Growth is attained through Suffering, but is Suffering never to have an end?

The Ancient One Said:

Suffering is a road which has extension behind you and also before you, but has no length at all at the spot whereon you stand. The Past lies behind you and the Future stretches before you: blot out the first and look not forward upon the second and Suffering exists no more for you.

The Learner said:

That is a fearful saying, for without Past to remember and Future to look forward to it seems that my life must cease to be.

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The Ancient One said:

Most true, O Learner: by blotting out the Past, and by shutting out the vision of the Future you lose the Life of the World of Men; but when the Life of the World fades away the Light of Eternity will dawn upon your eyes. O my Son, Now *is the* ETERNAL. Fear an Suffering exist not in that State, nor can the miasma of the Fount of Poison pollute the air of Eternal Thought.

The Learner said:

Wondrous is your wisdom, my Father; let it continue to enlighten me I pray you.

The Ancient One said:

1. Look out upon the World of Men: in everything that exists you see as in a mirror some aspect of your own self known or unknown, yet more your kin than any brother of the flesh; therefore you can never be alone. But also look inward upon *yourself* and know that in it and not outside it exist all things that are mirrored outwardly; therefore you are forever alone, without friend or foe, helper or teacher in all the worlds. Look upon Life and live it in those two ways and your feet will be upon the Path of Growth.

2. Consider the lessons placed before you by eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth and hands, but learn from the falsehoods which you find in them to despise and distrust those teachers.

3. Rejoice that you are the Seed from which the Man will grow, but think not at all of the Tree which the Seed may become. Consider the seed which gives birth to the sky-towering palm: it does not, before it is yet a lusty plant, struggle to the surface of the ground where the desert sun will scorch it and the desert wind suck out its life-sap. It does not seek the upper air before its roots are bedded deep and firm. It hastens not and struggles not, but awaits the call of the circling seasons to grow, or to rest from growing in accordance with the Law of Nature. Learn from the Palm and be glad to grow. Think not at all concerning the measure of your stature. Fix no limits to your growth. It has no limits except those within which you confine it by your own willing and thinking; therefore think ever of growing, but never of being full grown.

The Learner said:

Longing seems to be part of my life, O my Father. If I put it aside will I not in so doing put aside my life also, or is there no one thing for which I may long and so preserve my life?

The Ancient One said:

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One thing there is, and one only, which the Learner may seek with longing. It appears in six different forms, and in a seventh which combines in itself the other six:

The first is that LIGHT which lies hidden in the Caverns of the Mind, which is darkness to the eyes of men, but without which heart could not beat, nor men live, nor the eyes of the Learner behold the Path.

The second is that SELF which is not Self and which is found only when self is slain.

The third is THAT which is buried in Self, which is approached in that Self which is not self, which can never be touched by self, but without which self could not exist.

The fourth is that STRENGTH which slays strength and leaves the Learner a Newborn Babe.

The fifth is that PEACE which is found in the thick of battle, but never in avoidance of strife.

The sixth is that WEALTH which covets nothing great or small in all the worlds. He who possesses it possess all Life and enriches it for he and Life are One.

The seventh which is also the six and the One is —

THE PATH TO MANHOOD

Mark my words and observe them, O Learner, so will you find Wisdom. That which you must seek with longing is not Manhood, but is the WAY which leads towards that State. Search for this WAY within and without. It lies within you, for within yourself dwell all men and all things. It lies without you, for the Life which is YOURSELF dwells in all men and all things. It is in all things, but it is not to be found in any one thing. You will seek it through many things and in many ways, but you will find it only when you have united all things and ways in your own self. Despise not your vain quests, because not until you have learned to know all that is false and imperfect can you come to know that which is true and perfect. Despise not your imperfections and grieve not for your failings. By recognition of their nature you make them steps taking you forward into more perfect states. Yet beware of these: if you rest in them, calling them good, they cease to be steps and becomes snares holding you back. Not until you come to know them as imperfections do they in their turn become steps helping you onward. Learn, my Son, that in your nature nothing is good and nothing is evil, except as it stands beyond you, or you stand beyond it. When you stand neither beyond anything, nor yet behind anything in all your nature, but unite all things in your own self, there will be for you neither good nor evil, happiness nor misery, gain nor loss, nor any one thing which stands opposed to any other, but only PERFECTION. When you have thus united your whole nature in your TRUE SELF you will have found the Way to Manhood; and the Way will be neither within you, nor without you, but will be YOURSELF, FOR YOU AND THE PATH ARE ONE.

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The Learner said:

Is there a sign I may watch for that will assure me my feet are upon the Way of Growth?

The Ancient One said:

Look, O my son, for THE STAR. The Star, O Child who would be a Man, will gleam upon you when the night wanes and midnight's storm sinks into silence in the peace which presages the distant dawn. That STAR neither rises nor sets: it is ever there shining above the storm clouds in the speckless depths of heaven; but not until the thunders are hushed and the cloud wreaths thin and part will its wondrous light break through and illumine the darkness of your night.

This Nature in which you live and move and labour is, as is the air which surrounds the mid-regions of The Mighty Mountains, the Playground and Battleground of The Gods of Storm. Not until you have conquered those Angels of Strife, not until you hold them bound, still and obedient to your will, will the clouds which are their Breath of Fury break apart letting the rays of THE STAR stream through upon the Lower Earth. When you have conquered there will come unto you a PEACE, and in a deep SILENCE will happen that glorious thing which tells that the Way has been found. Ask me not what its nature is, for I cannot tell it. Words cannot describe it, nor mind of man conceive it. It is not seen by the eye, nor heard by the ear, nor felt by the heart, nor yet perceived by the mind: It is KNOWN with a KNOWING which knows not doubt.

The Learner said:

Tell me, O Ancient One, will the shining of The Star bring me peace forever more?

The Ancient One said:

Not so, O my Son. Peace lasts while the STAR shines, but its shining may be but, for a moment of time. Even though it shine through a period of many lives, yet at last its light must fade. Again will your slaves break their bonds. Again will they surround you with the clouds of their Breath of Wrath. Again, and yet again must you fight and conquer them, but while they live The Storm Gods cannot rest. But the memory of THE STAR will go with you into the battles which lie before you, and you will know that it is there ever shining beyond the storm clouds. Strong in this knowledge you face the fight, and no matter how terrible the conflict will doubt your strength no more.

Ngiti kurwe salake kahleke.

(I say unto you be thou at peace)