

# The Massachusetts Review



Edward Dahlberg on Woman, Poetry & Philosophy

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\* Poems; Drawings by Eight Masters \*

SPRING 1964

James W. Fernandez

## The Sound of Bells in a Christian Country—in Quest of the Historical Schweitzer

Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking swelling, a tremor vast, faint: a sound weird appealing suggestive and wild—and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country.

*Heart of Darkness*

ALTHOUGH 1963 MARKED a half century of his labor in the equatorial forest, it was the last decade that belonged to Albert Schweitzer. He was the “logos of the fifties.” But in the sixties we pay him little heed. For one thing decolonization is about complete. A decade or more ago, after the second war, when the spectacle of a barbarous European conflagration had lifted the last scales from native eyes, we were looking for some tutelary being, some personification of all the civilized superiority, the selfless good and kindly endeavor we liked to think colonization was. We were looking for someone to restore to us our lost moral authority in those darker portions of the earth. And Schweitzer did that. He was symbolic. He exemplified a vigorous morality embodied in patriarchal authority. He could save us, the overprivileged, as the cycle of history began inexorably to carry us down from apogee to equality. Unfortunately, the natives remained unimpressed. They pushed on towards independence and, lacking the courage of those convictions we might have regained from Schweitzer, we gave up our civilizing mission. Do we any longer need Schweitzer? Have we come, perhaps through a

Edgar Degas, French, 1834-1917

4. A BALLET DANCER IN POSITION FACING THREE-QUARTERS FRONT, 1872

Black pencil accented with crayon and heightened with white chalk on pink paper; 16 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches  
The Fogg Art Museum; Meta and Paul J. Sachs Collection

Georges Seurat, French, 1859-1891

5. THREE WOMEN, STUDY FOR "THE GRANDE JATTE," 1885-1886

Conté crayon on Ingres paper; 9 1/2 x 12 inches  
Smith College Museum of Art

Adolph Menzel, Germany, 1815-1905

6. STUDIES: OLD MAN WITH A GLASS, HANDS, 1890

Black chalk on white paper; 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches  
Smith College Museum of Art

Pablo Picasso, Spanish, 1881

7. SHEET OF STUDIES WITH THREE ELEPHANTS, about 1903

Pen and ink on tan paper; 9 1/2 x 12 3/4 inches  
Collection of Dr. Lillian Malcove, New York

Piet Mondrian, Dutch, 1872-1944

8. CHRYSANTHEMUM, 1908-1909

Charcoal on grey paper; 23 x 13 inches  
Smith College Museum of Art

The photographs of drawings: 5 by Herbert P. Vose; 6 and 8 by Hyman Edelstein courtesy of the Smith College Museum of Art; 1, 2, 3, 4 by Mr. James West courtesy of The Fogg Art Museum. The reproductions were printed by The Meriden Gravure Company

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failure of nerve, a moral bafflement, to fall back upon our technological and organizational authority? Technologically Schweitzer runs a backward hospital. It is a source of embarrassment.

He is not just backward; Schweitzer forthrightly takes an inconvenient position in respect to the most consuming developments of our technological age. He talks like a pacifist and minimizes exploits in space—altogether an embarrassing voice crying from the wilderness. More reason, therefore, to consign him to history. It has become painfully apparent, as indeed he has long maintained, that he is not in accord with the spirit of his time.

But when my wife and I went off to Gabon in 1958, Schweitzer was still charisma itself, a name to conjure with. Though anthropological research took us first to northern Gabon far from Lambarene, it remained our intention to visit the famous man, hopefully to discover what those who are great to us become when they are at home on the equatorial line. So it took place but not in just the way we had anticipated. We finally were able to make one of the great pilgrimages of the twentieth century—the pilgrimage to Lambarene.

It will be of interest to relate something of our research in Gabon. Although it had, on the face of it, nothing at all to do with the famous doctor and musician-philosopher who had made the equatorial republic well-known, we were surprised to learn that he knew very little about the nativist religious movement with which we were concerned, even though it had once been especially active in the region of Lambarene.<sup>1</sup>

In brief, this movement called Bwiti expressed for a minority of the Gabonese disaffection with missionary endeavor and dissatisfaction with Christian theology and liturgy. The movement had two intentions. It attempted to gain autonomy in respect to matters of church organization and it attempted to achieve fuller meanings in ritual and belief by preserving traditional conceptions of the supernatural and the ritual attentions due it. Bwiti went on to incorporate attractive Christian elements so as to form a new and more satisfying whole. Messianic visions and directives emanating from persons of strong spiritual qualities were

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<sup>1</sup> He was not entirely unaware of these movements though he seemed interested in only their most barbaric form. Returning to the hospital in 1924 he passed a region ravaged by human leopard societies. "Like other secret associations they are signs of an uncanny process of fermentation which is going on in the heart of Africa. Reviving superstition, primitive fanaticism, and very modest bolshevism are today combining in the strangest way in the Dark Continent." *The Forest Hospital at Lambarene* (New York, 1931), p. 23.

often, as is usual in such movements, the means by which the pagan past and the Christian present were knit together. The chief feature of Christianity which such leaders had to confront and reinterpret to their satisfaction was of course the figure of Christ himself. For the European version of Christ does not—at least in this case it did not—make entire sense to those of African culture. Africans, although struck by the final sacrificial act, usually relish a more vigorous life of the Saviour than that given emphasis by Western Christians. Therefore the cult leaders had been obliged to recreate a Christ in their own image.

What surprised us was that here in the very precincts of his labors Schweitzer might have been witness to a continuing equatorial search for a relevant Jesus. He chose rather to write second-hand on Indian religion and philosophy, when he might have done first-hand work in Africa and found in the process something more akin to the life affirmation he proclaimed. Why did he not do so? Why did he not make a concerted study of the Africans around him? His journals and notebooks, of course, give ample evidence of sharp if casual insight into that African behavior that detached itself because of sickness from village life to pass before him in the hospital itself. But of African life in its own setting, most of what he knows is second-hand, usually the experiences of missionaries and administrators related to him in the hospital. And yet, though he may well have been offended by the African tendency to confirm the spiritual life through ecstatic rather than through thoughtful spiritual experience, he might have found the most relevant instruction in the African attempt to reinterpret the Christian faith and to give to Jesus an appropriate African personality.

In early 1960, then, my wife and I were pursuing research into this religious movement, southwest from the Gabon plateau, where we had spent most of our two years, to the Ogowe river valley and thence down to the ocean itself. We moved slowly, spending days or even weeks in villages where the Bwiti cult was active. We were most interested in the early leaders of the cult: men who had been associated around the turn of the century with its inception. For it was their messianic experience in the central area around Lambarene which had given impetus to the later versions of Bwiti now active in such peripheral areas as we had studied on the plateau. We found to our disappointment that Bwiti in its area of origin was virtually defunct and the holy land where it had arisen had been appropriated or repossessed by alien creeds—most notably, missionary Christianity. The original messiahs were either dead or de-

parted and the center of cult life had moved north and west to Libreville, the capital of the republic.

In pursuing our sources we were obliged to come down off the inland plateau to the Ogowe valley and follow the river west to Lambarene. It was the hottest season of the year and we gained each degree of temperature for every three hundred feet we descended with very great misgivings. Lambarene lies, it is true, some two hundred kilometers from the ocean up the Ogowe, but the river has long since finished its tumultuous descent and is pushed rather than flows, for it falls very little more, its remaining miles to the sea. The town is therefore practically at sea level yet without benefit of sea breezes. Our life in makeshift quarters in African villages of the area, with their humid heat and swarms of sandflies, contrasted drastically with life upon the plateau.

We began to falter some hundred kilometers upstream, where we first hit the Ogowe at Ndjole. Here we were obliged to embark on two empty barges hauled by a battered old river steamer which had just unloaded goods at this furthest navigable point. A sleepless, all-night descent to Lambarene between shadowy and ominous banks, under a clouded moon, with occasional rain squalls and swarms of mosquitoes, was the first stroke against our vitality. The humidity and heat of the district of Lambarene itself was the second. So bush-beaten and wearied did we become that we lost our physical and mental resilience. What is for so many Westerners a spiritual pilgrimage became for us a search for much needed asylum. We came to Schweitzer's hospital as he intended men should come to it—in physical and mental need.

Perhaps this is the only right way to come to the hospital at Lambarene. Unlike those many visitors who were yesterday in Paris or New York we were not especially struck with the hurly-burly of hospital life. We were grateful for the improvement of our lot and for an old-fashioned hospitality that accepted all Europeans without question according to some unwritten colonial principle which lingers on with Schweitzer and must have been the only salvation for Europeans in the early days when black water fever, dysentery, and sleeping sickness were not well understood. Indeed, Schweitzer's hospital is unalterably colonial; it could not have changed much since the turn of the century. Nevertheless, we were at first grateful for just the atmosphere it provided. It took us in and treated us as fellow aliens caught up in an environment mutually understood as incomprehensible and full of enmity. In our dispirited condition we accepted this unstated premise of

our reception, though we were later to reexamine it insofar as it applied to Africans themselves.

It is a curious fact that we caught our first view of the doctor himself embraced by the portals of the Catholic mission on Lambarene island, directly across the river from the hospital. He was emerging from a requiem mass for a recently deceased colonial official. The curiosity was, of course, only personal, for Schweitzer had long before established a *modus vivendi* with the Catholic mission and seems never to have participated in the colonial quarrels over evangelization between Catholic and Protestant. French Catholic laymen took a rather hard view of Schweitzer, it is true, but one rarely found this in the priesthood. One is reminded, in an ecumenical age, that both Catholic and Protestant worshipped in the solitary church in Schweitzer's Alsatian village, Gunsbach. In respect to Christianity Schweitzer is not parochial.

We did not see Schweitzer again until we were admitted to the hospital. He was on a tour of inspection, accompanied by several assistants, when we were presented to him. He was clothed after his fashion in old loose-fitting white cotton clothes and a pith helmet. We saw a body too old to be powerful, but still tough and enduring. A twinkle in the eye was deeply buried beneath bushy brows. His toughness in that rugged climate is legendary and it is said of him that he has never suffered from malaria, surely a remarkable if not transcendental medical feat. The twinkle in his eyes is all the more striking for the ruggedness of the enclosing face. That twinkle has, no doubt, also had survival value, as it has assisted him in confronting the many exasperations of equatorial life with resilience and perspective. "So," his eyes seemed to say, "you too have been thrown up upon this desolate shore. Well, the fault is ours after all and we shall make a go of it." The twinkle might have been brighter than usual, for I think he thought it rather youthful and foolish of us to be living in such makeshift fashion in the African villages. He generously offered us the hospitality of his establishment, warned us that the African customs we were now studying were not the real African customs of former years and moved on to inspect, though not be absorbed by, a crowd of Africans, sick and visitors alike, gathering outside one of the wards.

His presence among them produced no outward signs of adulation, and as a matter of fact very little interest. Certainly our few moments with him had affected us far more. But this disparity between our views of Schweitzer and the view of the Africans he treats had struck us before. Though his hospital was everywhere known within several hun-

dred miles of Lambarene, we were surprised how little his personage was singled out for comment. We noted this in the difficulty we had in the villages in obtaining his African nickname, that sobriquet—what the French call “*nom d’encouragement*”—which all Europeans who impress themselves upon the Africans receive as a matter of course. Even the canoeman who paddled us across to the hospital and who asked, rather superciliously I thought, “*Monsieur va visiter le grand Docteur?*” seemed hard pressed to give us a native name other than the French one.<sup>2</sup>

In these later years the visitor does not see so much of the Doctor. He keeps as much as possible to his screened dwelling on a bluff overlooking the river. He comes and goes to the dining hall for meals, makes his periodic tours of inspection, accompanies some distant guest on a tour of the grounds, even assists in surgery, but otherwise remains closeted with those intellectual matters which have never ceased to occupy him since he first came out and from whose pursuit few crises, however grave, have ever long delayed him. The consequences of these endeavors are well known and so respected even at the hospital that he is safe from practically all disturbance. The responsibilities of the busy place are in the hands of two sturdy, middle-aged nurses, indispensable at Lambarene for many years. They work wonderfully to protect him from intrusion. His two old number one wives, say the Africans jokingly. They do cast a matriarchal spell upon the hospital. No one, however, mistakes the patriarchal source of their authority. These two extraordinary women complement each other remarkably—the one steely and efficient, the other warm and maternal, a fount of good natured kindness.

We had little opportunity to converse with the Doctor. The first day we were placed across from him at meals and he inquired into our work with polite curiosity. But he was not really interested in what we had to say about the Africans we were working with and the next day we were moved down to the end of the table, out of conversational range, where we were involved in more spirited discussion with members of his staff,

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<sup>2</sup> The nickname Schweitzer says he received in the twenties was “Captain”; this term does not carry in Africa all the truckling respect it bears in the American south. One of the European doctors who came to help Schweitzer received a more authentic name, “*Ntchinda-Ntchinda*”—“he who cuts boldly.” Schweitzer gives the first impression he himself had of this doctor, “A slender figure in the elegantly careless attitude of a cavalry officer.” (*The Forest Hospital*, p. 91.) It may have been this careless elegance that impressed itself on the Africans. Schweitzer is too stolid for them.

the greatest number of whom come from countries along the Rhine. They were extremely interested in African life outside of the hospital. Most of them had only left the hospital to go to Lambarene town and then only once or twice. They were eager to hear of the life of their patients in the village, which they knew next to nothing about. We gathered that life in the hospital is felt to be, by those who run it, self-sufficient and the tasks there demanding of total devotion. Attempts by members of the staff to widen knowledge by inquiry without are actively discouraged. Nevertheless our presence was regarded as an opportunity by many of them, and we were asked to give a talk or lead a discussion on African life the following evening. We had only to look around us at the table to understand that the desire expressed was authentic, for all of us were white and only the servants were black. Very rarely had an African made his way into that dining hall as a guest.

THE NEXT DAY we took the opportunity to tour the hospital and talk with the patients. In comparison with other mission hospitals, particularly the impressive Presbyterian Hospital at Ebolowa in the Cameroons, Schweitzer’s hospital is small, crowded and untidy. But it is untidy only as regards the crowding, for the hospital regime is precise and orderly. The piling of patients into bunks surrounded by relatives engaged in cooking shocks the European with an eye to the compulsive decorum of hospital life he knows from home. But the crowded sick huts at Schweitzer’s are found at other mission hospitals as well. To some degree they simulate the hub-bub and lack of privacy of village life. Quiet is rarely observed for the sick or dying in traditional Africa, nor is it desired by them. Only the dead receive such respect. Since the huts then are congenial to the African villager one can argue that they have therapeutic value. Still there was more crowding than in the villages. Life in the African villages as we had known it offers more healthy space and orderly living arrangement than in the hospital. While we had found village life not at all uncomfortable, by and large, we could not imagine ourselves living as the Africans do here. The virtue of equatorial life lies in moving the village to a completely fresh site every eight or nine years. Schweitzer’s hospital had the appearance and feeling of being on the same site much too long.

We had hoped that the quarters of the African orderlies—Africans have advanced no further than that in the medical work of the hospital—would be better. In his journals, Schweitzer makes an issue of providing them better quarters. (See *The Forest Hospital*, p. 127.) We were

disappointed to find them small and stuffy, hardly desirable. In contrast to the white quarters, they were not located so as to benefit from what little breeze blows in off the river. When one compares them to the quarters available to the *infirmier* working for the administration, one asks how Schweitzer can keep any competent Africans at all. But the atmosphere is in general a cheerful one. The only objection that we heard was from an up-country African who, living on the plateau, was not used to the riverain habits of defecation. In his own country men are very circumspect about such matters, digging deep, carefully covered pits off in the forest. Here one simply descends to the river under cover of darkness. Schweitzer has seen no need of providing any other facilities.

The Doctor, as anyone who has read his accounts will know, has taken great pleasure in pursuing the construction of his hospital. He has often turned over medical cares to others in order to engage in that alone. Schweitzer has a good bit of the entrepreneurial spirit about him, the inclinations and frame of a self-employed carpenter. He has been greatly gratified by the construction and planting he has managed in the primeval forest. His plant husbandry is remarkable and all possible fruits and vegetables are raised. He has also learned, as any equatorial veteran must, how to take advantage of the available local products. His table, consequently is justly famous for presenting a great variety of delicacies, almost all local in origin. In this he is again the old colonial. He depends very little upon imported products, unlike the new breed of European living in Africa who sets a table little different from, if not better than, the one he would set at home.

Later we had an opportunity to visit the kitchen. There was a high degree of systematization—a necessity in Africa, where the kitchen is the great source of infection. Still, so many locks on everything dampens a true culinary feeling; it is like baking a pie in a bank vault. The African cooks were evidently faithful ones who had been with the hospital a long time. But they were greatly circumscribed as to the store-rooms into which they could go. They did not have the run of their domain. It was really not theirs, after all, but the charge of the white lady with all the keys. One wonders if some responsible Africans couldn't have been found to run such affairs. Perhaps the Doctor's attitude precludes it. He sometimes states, in pastoral fashion, "The Negro is a child and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority."<sup>3</sup>

At lunchtime we all stood and waited outside the staff dining hall. A

young Swiss nurse, harried no doubt by a hard morning duty, said sharply to an insistent patient who had followed her up the path, "*Qu'est-ce que tu veut, mon maigre negre?*" More of the staff gathered waiting for the Doctor or one of the two nurses to lead us in. Someone played with one of the young chimpanzees, another with the baby gorilla, members of the extensive animal collection greatly loved and affectionately fed by the Doctor. Finally the Doctor came forth from his porch, clucked at his favorite chimpanzee, stopped to buy the entire stock of alligator skin wallets from a Hausa peddler—"The Doctor will pay for all," he said sweepingly—and entered the dining hall. The guest across from Schweitzer that day was an Alsatian doctor who formerly worked with him but now works for the administration in Libreville. He spoke to the Doctor with intensity of the success the administration was having in recruiting and training African medical assistants and the hopes for building cadres of African doctors. The young doctor was obviously attempting to interest Schweitzer in this plan but the old man, at first surprised, turned skeptical, then returned his attentions to his plate of vegetables. Afterwards we talked with the guest. He would not be critical with his fellow countryman but he apparently left Lambarene because, though the hospital cured sick Africans, it did not make them more capable of dealing with a modern world.

We rested in the afternoon and in the hour before supper we fell in with a bright young American from Massachusetts full of inside stories about the hospital and about the patriarchal ways of the Doctor. Schweitzer, however, remained a great man to him and he understood clearly how the Doctor had fallen into the pattern he has. His own job was one of general assistance and handy work and some construction. He had architectural plans for the improvement of the hospital but Schweitzer was very resistant, emotionally committed to the present situation. Many others have come out to help him, like this American boy, all eager to expand and improve the hospital. But they have all been prevented from leaving too great a mark, for it is after all his hospital—and from all indications very much a part of him. "That which I desired," he tells us when he first made his decision to come to Africa, "was to act personally and independently."<sup>4</sup>

That supper was our last at Lambarene. We were served another hearty meal under storm lamps. The air was quiet and to the east a storm brewed. The Doctor sat at the center of the table in the full glare

<sup>3</sup> *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (London, 1955), p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Out of My Life and Thought* (New York, 1949), p. 87.

of a lamp, with his staff gathered at either hand. Conversation was subdued but, at our end of the table, continuous. We were engaged in an exceptionally interesting conversation with a Dutch surgeon about the physical consequences of certain African traditional practices, particularly witchcraft. We discussed the phenomenon of auto-suggestion and the occasional deaths which seem to have no apparent cause but fear of witchcraft itself. After dinner the gathering quieted and Schweitzer, as is his custom, picked a text from the New Testament for comment. It was from the book of Matthew and, speaking in German, he explicated to us the words in which the Saviour may be said to have anticipated and even desired his own crucifixion. Afterwards he moved to an old piano and played the tune of a hymn which we located in our German hymnals and sang. His shoulders and body were heavy with age but his hands and fingers still had a life of their own and moved slowly but gracefully over the keys. Abruptly the dinner time was over and we were surprised to see everyone get up and follow the Doctor out, for we had expected many to stay and participate in our discussion. But only the young American stayed and we talked long into the night. He asked us many excellent questions for he was eager, he said, to leave the hospital and learn to know African life as it really was. He was full of what someone has called America's chief asset, "a capacity for the direct approach to the life of others without distance, prejudice, or reprobation." We gave him encouragement and cited our own experience with village life.<sup>5</sup> We returned to our chamber very late. It was a night of those fiery bright stars so characteristic of Africa, but it was strange how little sound we heard which was characteristically African. Occasionally something jumped or splashed in the river and from time to time a bird cried in the forest. But we might truly have been deep within the primeval forest. We heard none of the sounds of village life to which we had become accustomed.

The next day we took our leave. We thanked all those who had been so kind to us. The Doctor had not yet made his appearance so we left our thanks for him as well. Our last view of the hospital from the canoe was of an occasional African going to and fro. And down at the edge

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<sup>5</sup> The congeniality of that long evening's discussion is not easily forgotten. The intense interest of this young man, Mark Higgins, smoothed over the disappointment we felt with the others. In several months' time he did leave Schweitzer, with a pack on his back, to travel through Africa village by village. At the end of the summer of 1960, mistaken for a Belgian, he was shot to death in the Congo by a rampart member of the *force publique*.

of the water, all in white, one of the nurses stood looking out across the river, with an air of brooding. We were too far to see who it was and the next moment we were swept around the point of the island.

NOW RESTORED once again we were anxious to pick up the trail of our research. The very next evening we sat up till the early hours observing the elaborate ritual of a nativist cult house in a village thirty miles northwest of Lambarene. The season was as hot as ever and the hut in which we stayed harbored clouds of insects, but we felt regenerated and more committed to our work.

This work in the ensuing months occupied us entirely, and we forgot about our sojourn at the Lambarene hospital. At last we were led to the outskirts of the capital, Libreville. Here we encountered young Africans educated in France. They were members of the elite, and almost all waxed indignant when we discussed Schweitzer. It is true, they said, he is our only historical monument and he has cured many people, but he has done nothing to help us face the future. We are not at home in his hospital and we never learned anything there. He is "*tout simplement dépassé*." Often this vituperation was excessive and we were bound to defend the Doctor. Few of his detractors had read anything he has written or followed the awesome parabola of his life. Few had alleviated the suffering of a single one of their fellow beings.

In early August of 1960 we returned to Europe to attend the International Anthropological meetings in Paris. One late evening in a hotel off the *rue Mozart*, not far from the *Musée de l'Homme*, we were listening to the radio and were surprised to hear as part of the midnight news the taped remarks made by the President of Gabon, Leon Mba, upon an official visit to the Schweitzer hospital. He thanked the Doctor for his long labors and contributions to the well being of the Gabonese people over so many years and he recognized that it was he, Albert Schweitzer, whose presence has made Gabon known to the world. He therefore made him a Grand Officer of the Equatorial Star, highest award which Gabon can confer. Dr. Schweitzer's reply was brief. He thanked the president, said he had no intention of giving up his work and, in fact, expected to die at Lambarene and be buried there.

I switched off the radio and listened to the late evening sounds of Parisian traffic—the ebb and flow of a metropolitan civilization. I was put in mind of Africa and thought of the evenings at just this hour that we had listened to the persistent drumming out of dances or ceremonies in ours or adjacent villages. Then I remembered the quietness of the

Schweitzer hospital. It struck me that very often its founder must have gone to sleep with the church bells of Gunsbach in his mind's ear. For us Africa had been a noisy continent abundant with all kinds of the most human activity. One recalls what Schweitzer has written in one book and repeated in another: "Solitude of the primeval forest how can I ever thank you enough for what you have been to me."<sup>6</sup>

II

In this daily and hourly contest with the child of nature every white man is continually in danger of gradual moral ruin.

*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*

IT IS DIFFICULT now to detach the historical Schweitzer from the legends spread about him—spread to express other needs than his. The task of singling out this personality and knowing it through the real tensions it lives by has been further complicated by a more recent spate of iconoclasm. In view of the sentimental exaggerations in his favor, harder-hearted attempts to pull him down no doubt express a healthy impulse to get a truer picture of him. But this impulse has gone too far when it tries to nullify an extraordinarily meaningful life. We even hear it argued today, by the critical spirit exceeding itself, that Schweitzer's decision to go to Africa was taken in calculation of the greater attention it would bring him. Hence that burst of publicity he knew in the fifties was a portion of his egocentric plan. Schweitzer appears egocentric enough and, in fact, can be, as we discovered, an imperious old patriarch. Nor is his Protestant conviction of unworthiness such as to prohibit him his enjoyment, despite occasional protestations, at being lionized. But the whole furor of recent years, one can imagine, he mostly regards with a twinkle—useful for the support it brings the hospital, bothersome for the public appearances it necessitates, objectionable for the kinds of visitors it inspires to show up in Lambarene, and in all cases an unhealthy sign of the frivolity and futility, the concern for external values, into which Western civilization has descended. In order to be saved, men shift their attentions to darkest Africa, instead of searching within themselves and strengthening their own traditions.

Schweitzer is now an old man and despite the simplicity of some of his

<sup>6</sup> *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p. 107; *The Philosophy of Civilization* (New York, 1950), p. xi.

doctrines he is a profound and complex one. The major feeling we had in his presence was of a difference in generations. Only in confronting him did we really come to understand what he means when he says that he remains in discord with the spirit of his times. The explanation we at first assigned for this disparity was a colonial one: Schweitzer and his hospital were lingering remnants of an old colonial society in which the relationships with Africans were fixed in domination and subordination, greatly limited by strong feelings of superiority and inferiority, and supported by such categories as "primitive" and "civilized." We, on the other hand, felt post-colonial and anxious to understand Africans by approaching them directly and with flexibility, without benefit of such categories of prejudgement. What shocked us about Schweitzer was how colonial he seemed. It was summed up in his refusal to learn any African language, invite Africans to his table, make any more than casual if penetrating observations upon the life of the people he ministered to. One would have thought it was, if not an act of simple humanity, at least a doctor's responsibility to know as much as possible of the life history of those he serves.

Schweitzer seems, in short, to have been too easily assimilated into the colonial culture with its stereotypes of native mystery and barbarity. As we read through *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, his first account of life at Lambarene, we find references to the dark mysteries of native life outside the hospital, his inability to get information from his patients because of the threat of witchcraft. He has the impression, so typically colonial, that secrets are kept from him and he confesses that Europeans will never be able to understand native life—exactly what any newcomer outfitting for a stay in the bush was told time and again by his colonial acquaintances. Evidently Schweitzer, like most colonials, had allowed himself to be victimized by those Africans who served him and who wanted to preserve their special intermediary relationship with their master by emphasizing the incomprehensible barbarities of native life. The myths of dark Africa were preserved by those who profited from them—not only the colonials, because these myths rationalized their superior position, but by those Africans who wished to preserve their privileged position between their own people and the white man.

But it would be a gross misrepresentation to suggest that Schweitzer was a common colonial. That system of pre-established human relationships, the colonial situation, exerted a stronger influence upon him than he to this day acknowledges. Yet he was too perceptive, with too strong an inner commitment, to be easily absorbed by colonialism. We have



ample evidence that he resisted many attempts to make him a good colonial. Colonials talked incessantly of the laziness of the African.

For my part I can no longer talk ingenuously of the laziness of the negro. . . . The negro is not idle but he is a free man; hence he is always a casual worker, with whose labour no regular industry can be carried out. (*Primeval Forest*, p. 83.)

Colonials often referred to the senseless and endless discussion and dispute in which Africans engage. Schweitzer saw it as an "unspoilt sense of justice such as is, on the whole, no longer felt by Europeans" (p. 58). Colonials claim to be shocked by the immorality and promiscuity of the African. Schweitzer out of his ethical preoccupations credits them with having an "unerring intuition" in these matters. "They are particularly sharp in perceiving," he says, "whether any white man is a real moral personality or not. If the native feels that he is, moral authority is possible; if not it is simply impossible to create it."

The child of nature not having been artificialized and spoilt as we have been has only elementary standards of judgement and he measures us by the most elementary of them all, the moral standard. Where he finds goodness, justice and genuineness of character, real worth and dignity, that is, behind the external dignity given by social circumstances, he bows and acknowledges his master. (*Primeval Forest*, pp. 96-97.)

Even in the realm of thought Schweitzer resists the colonial notion of pre-logical mentality—of life lived out by the African in a mythopoeic haze. He tells us:

The child of nature thinks a great deal more than is generally supposed. . . . Conversations I have had in the hospital with old natives about the ultimate things of life have deeply impressed me. The distinction between white and colored, educated and uneducated disappears when one gets talking with the forest dweller about our relations to each other, to mankind, to the universe and to the infinite. "The negroes are deeper than we are," a white man once said to me, "because they don't read newspapers," and the paradox has some truth in it. (*Primeval Forest*, p. 110.)

From such commentary we should be led to suppose that there has been considerable congeniality between Schweitzer and the Africans,

for their thought and their ethical inclinations, in his early accounts at least, seem not so far removed from his own views—his own reaction to the philosophical conceits of the nineteenth and twentieth century and his return to the *pensée élémentaire*, the optimistic and virtuous rationalism of the eighteenth century. In fact, Schweitzer finds slumbering within the African "an ethical rationalist."

Certainly Rousseau and the illuminati of that age idealized the child of nature but there was nevertheless truth in their views about him—in their belief, that is, in his possession of high moral and rational capacities. (*Primeval Forest*, p. 111.)

It is the misfortune of the African, we are told, to be bound up by superstitions which cloud his vision. But that he believes in a correct view of what is truly good as attainable by reflection cannot be denied. "It is the duty and joy of the religion of Jesus," he says, "to release the African from his superstitions so that he might reflect freely upon the good and act accordingly. On the whole I feel that the primitive man is much more good natured than we Europeans are. With Christianity added to his good qualities, wonderfully noble characters can result." (*Primeval Forest*, p. 113.)

These statements betray, of course, a naive view of the nature of culture contact. Still they are explicitly uncolonial and they argue for a strong attachment between Schweitzer and the African, his "children of nature." As far as we have knowledge from our experience in Gabon, and in and around Lambarene, this attachment has not been the case. We have no evidence that the Gabonese consider Schweitzer a moral personality or that they have granted him moral authority outside the technical authority he has as head of the hospital. Between Schweitzer and the Africans there lies a distance which is bridged only by an abstract sympathy and not very much of the reciprocal respect which ought to characterize the relationship. In the land of his labors Schweitzer is largely unhonored for he has remained distant to those he has taken under his charge, even though he has relieved them of great pain.

In view of the declared affinities in his early journals we can only ask how this can be so. Partially, at least, there is a resentment in Schweitzer, an unrequited expectation that the African has not been "won over" to Jesus in just the way he expected. Africans, contrarily, but understandably, have tended to adopt the most crassly materialistic attitudes of the European. This resentment and deception is not surprising for

it was typically colonial. Men with a shallow fellow-feeling were often drawn to the colonies where their sentimental expectations about primitive human nature were quickly disabused. Thus wounded, the more cruelly since they lacked any sophisticated means of dealing with their disenchantment, they overreacted, withdrawing into that perpetual invidious comparison which was colonialism. There is something of this in Schweitzer although much modified by his intelligence and character. What surprises us the more with him, however, is that although the ethic of reverence for life<sup>7</sup> makes no distinction between what he regards as evolved and inferior forms of life yet Schweitzer failed to convey respect for, let alone interest in, the African way of life.

It is not Schweitzer's moral authority alone, of course, that has been called into question in Africa. His own accounts of African life make very clear that the spectacle of two world wars, appearing to the African as the most vicious kind of internecine strife, have very greatly impaired the white man's ethical and religious authority. It clearly appears to the African that the white man preaches to Africa what he is incapable of putting into practice himself. In native eyes, the failure of Schweitzer's own moral authority is part of a general European moral collapse.

Beyond this general feature of the history of our century, however, the reason for the social distance that has been established in the hospital between it and its surroundings and between Schweitzer and the Africans, lies in what might be called the "organizational commitment" of the colonial enterprise, the source of a hypocrisy to which even Schweitzer was susceptible and which was readily apparent to Africans.

Schweitzer recognized the dangers to integrity which the colonial situation posed.

I wish to emphasize a further fact that even the morally best and the idealists find it difficult out here to be what they wish to be. We all get exhausted in the terrible contest between the European worker who bears the responsibility and is always in a hurry and the child of nature who does not know what responsibility is and who has never been in a

hurry, . . . those who now speak savagely about the natives may have come out to Africa full of idealism but in the daily contest have become weary and hopeless, losing little by little what they once possessed of spirituality. (*Primeval Forest*, p. 97.)

Schweitzer avoided a savage response to African inefficiency but he did come to cast Africans permanently into the role of untrustworthy children. Of all the colonial advice which Schweitzer received, warnings about the unreliability of the African were the only ones which he allowed to be borne out entirely in his experience. For other colonial complaints he sought deeper understanding. The unreliability he seemed to have accepted from the first at face value, perhaps because it threatened that to which he was greatly committed: the orderly life of the hospital. It does not seem to impress to him that Africans found Europeans, from their cultural view, also unreliable. His obvious ethnocentrism here accords ill with the universality of his ethical principles.

In any case Schweitzer, like all true colonials, became more and more convinced that Africans were totally unreliable. This failing on their part came to assume a permanent importance and is, in his old age, one of the important facts about Africans which Schweitzer feels compelled to confide to guests. This view hardened into an *idée fixe* and prevented him, apparently, from attempting to advance the knowledge and technical proficiency of his African personnel. It also meant that the rapid events of decolonization after the second world war escaped his appreciation as anything either desirable or plausible. It was foolhardy to turn the affairs of government over to those who were unreliable. His fixation upon this childish irresponsibility seems to have swallowed up his earlier estimates of African justice and morality, with which it conflicted. It is hardly surprising either that this spirit of mistrust was sensed by Africans and affected the quality of his moral authority among them.

All this cannot be heaped upon Schweitzer alone, for the development of social distance was a common colonial phenomenon and is based upon a fundamental contradiction in colonialism itself—a contradiction which is, ironically enough, manifested in Schweitzer's African career. The irony becomes apparent when we compare how Schweitzer explains his decision to go to Africa with what actually occurred in running the hospital. In *Out of My Life and Thought* he faces the reader's obvious question as to why he didn't undertake service to others in Europe rather than in Africa. Such action in Europe would have put him, he points out,

<sup>7</sup> Schweitzer's phrase in the original German is "*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*" which is translated into French and its rationalist tradition as "*respect pour la vie*" and into English, more congenial to German mysticism, as "reverence for life." Since Schweitzer, appropriately an Alsatian, is both a mystic and a rationalist something between respect and reverence would seem to be the appropriate translation for "*Ehrfurcht*." The French word is his choice.

at the disposition of some established service organization. What Schweitzer wanted, given his long-standing objections to the increasingly organizational features of modern life, was an action which was personal and independent, to which he could devote himself solely and freely (p. 97). Medical work with Africans offered that possibility, or so it seemed. Yet a hospital is, after all, if run effectively, an organization, and in a very few years Schweitzer became committed to requirements for order and systematization, regardless of the personalities of those involved.

This growing commitment to organization becomes apparent to us in his subsequent accounts of his African experiences in *The Forest Hospital at Lambarene*. Here the complete absence of discipline among the Africans he treats arouses in him a complex feeling of sympathy and despair. This waywardness has most serious consequences upon the work of the hospital. At one point he ruefully reports that, "My hospital is no longer what it used to be" (p. 70). But Schweitzer is too much the systematic European and too committed to a successful enterprise to allow his sympathy for the native way of life and the different rhythms of work and different forms of social discipline which characterized it to stand in his way. Though he recognizes that regular work "demoralizes these children of nature" who are accustomed to periodic intervals of *dolce far niente* (p. 142), and though he recognizes that with Africans one cannot adhere rigidly to principles since principles are applied among them according to circumstance and situation, yet he opts finally for "order and subordination" in the hospital.<sup>8</sup> He establishes a set of minimum principles to which all Africans must conform. If they do not, he says, they cannot pass muster as virtuous and rational beings even though, as we remember, these bureaucratic principles of behavior were surely not part of his earlier insight into the virtue and rationality of the "child of nature." We see herein the organizational demands of the hospital situation changing Schweitzer's estimate of the natives. It must even be said, very likely, that the colonial situation into which he thrust

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<sup>8</sup> One source of difficulty for Schweitzer, which, in his generalizations about Africans he did not fully realize, apparently, arises from the fact that the equatorial Bantu with whom he was working are a highly equalitarian and fractious people. Elsewhere in Africa he would have encountered peoples more accustomed to a hierarchy of authority and arbitrarily imposed organizations—at least to a more highly organized life.

himself changed Schweitzer himself, for it caused him to betray his original insights, his own principle of respect.

A frightening epidemic of dysentery which spread from ward to ward because of African sociability provided the crucible for his attitudes. "The unsuccessful struggle repeated day after day to impress upon them regularity and order uses up one's nervous vigor" (*The Forest Hospital*, pp. 77-78). "To find order and system coming into the chaos of the hospital would give us all new courage" (p. 124), he says, and quotes with some appreciation a remark current in the hospital at the time. "How beautiful Africa would be without its savages . . . they do not feel gratitude for what we do for them" (p. 78).

Yet Schweitzer in the midst of all this frustration struggles for a larger perspective. The African after all cannot be really blamed for different customs. A great deal of the difficulty, he recognizes, has been produced by colonization itself, for most of his patients have been torn away from their homes to work in colonial enterprises in which their lives were reduced to that of human animals. If they do not feel gratitude even that can be understood. All the rest of the Europeans have come to Africa for profit, so the Doctor too must have come out for the same motive. It might even be argued that he cures them for the single-minded colonial purpose of getting them the more quickly back to work.<sup>9</sup> We become aware of the tension in Schweitzer between his humane comprehension of the situation into which he has cast himself with the Africans and the demands of the situation itself. Yet withal the situation demands an order and a discipline which suppresses one's humanity. At last he confesses,

I daresay we should have fewer difficulties with our savages if we could occasionally sit around the fire with them and show ourselves to them as men and not merely as medicine men and custodians of law and order in the hospital. But there is no time for that. All three of us are really so overwhelmed with work that the humanity within us cannot come out properly. (*The Forest Hospital*, p. 79.)

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<sup>9</sup> Africans, it might further be pointed out, were quick to perceive that many of the "benevolent colonials" had come out as much to assuage their own moral torment as to relieve the misery of Africa. Schweitzer recognizes this clearly. "We are not free to confer benefits on these men or not, as we please; it is our duty. Anything we give them is not benevolence but atonement." (*Primeval Forest*, p. 124.)

III

I bought from the natives a young fish eagle which they had captured on a sand bank in order to save it from their cruel hands. But now I must decide whether to allow it to die of hunger or to kill each day a quantity of small fish to keep it alive.

*Out of My Life and Thought*

The Doctor's answer to the dilemma into which he thrust himself was social distance. He cites, in warning, the example of an idealistic missionary who left the mission to live among the negroes as their brother absolutely. "He wished to be recognized as a member of the village. From that day his life became a misery. With his abandonment of the social interval between white and black he lost all his influence, his word was no longer taken as 'the white man's word' but he had to argue every point with them as if he were merely their equal." (*Primeval Forest*, pp. 95-96.)

The reader who has followed Schweitzer's philosophy with its emphasis upon the fundamental equality of all life will start at the last phrase, "merely their equal." But he will also be reminded of Schweitzer's discussion of the cure of sleeping sickness. Glad as he is at being able to end the suffering of his patients, when he looks into the microscope at the trypanosomes he nevertheless recognizes that here too is life which claims respect but which it is necessary to destroy in order to save another life. So with a fish eagle which he buys from the natives to save it from destruction. Existence constantly imposes a tortuous trial upon that principle which is the cornerstone of his ethical philosophy: the reverence for life. One needs to sacrifice one life for another. The criterion of permissible sacrifice seems clear enough. Life can be taken when it menaces the existence of other life. Applicable in the case of the trypanosome this criterion does not carry us through the case of the fish-eagle and the fish. For the fish do not menace the fish-eagle.

Curiously, such is the case with colonization. In Schweitzer we see, in more enlightened form it is true, the whole contradiction of colonization: the sacrifice of the natives for a greater good. Schweitzer's lament for his humanity inhibited at having to be custodian of law and order in the hospital is nothing else than a sacrifice of the respect he owes to the life of the Africans because they menace some greater good. Certainly, though, it cannot be argued that it was the Africans who were preda-

tory. Like colonization, after all, Schweitzer's hospital was imposed upon them. It came to perch among them.

What is particularly bothersome is that it sometimes appears in Schweitzer's writing and in the life of the hospital that the greater good to which respect was being sacrificed was simply the survival of the hospital as an organization, as a system, as the structural extension of the personality of its founder. Insofar as this was the case Schweitzer's hospital is the perfect paradigm of the colonial situation whose hypocrisy it was to justify itself because of the uplifting of the natives, yet which never hesitated to sacrifice the natives to the good order and efficient organization of the colonial system.

Of course it is grotesque to identify Schweitzer with the cruder aspects of colonial exploitation, though he defended low wages and forced labor by reference to the civilizing mission. (See *Primeval Forest*, p. 95.) It would be more generous to say that Schweitzer withheld his humanity from the Africans so that the hospital might more efficiently assuage their suffering. Nor should it be assumed that the hospital at Lambarene is simply an organizational thing run with a compulsive eye to order and efficiency. Anyone who has been there will recognize that this is not the case and in fact one of the complaints leveled against Lambarene is its failure, in spite of all the funds available to it, to modernize. Schweitzer is no doubt mindful that his hospital began as a "personal and independent enterprise" and his resistance to modernization is a resistance very likely to impersonal organization. But he has not really succeeded. There is, nevertheless, something of the Teutonic desire for order in the hospital, and in a tour visitors may be forgiven for recollecting a concentration camp of the last war. A humanitarian ethic is the organizing rationale at work at Lambarene, and that is the crucial difference; but the external situation of ragged inmates in barracks subject to the control, benevolent to be sure, of inscrutable outsiders imparts the same feeling.

The colonial analogy, whatever violence it does to Schweitzer, remains in essence correct. Schweitzer, like all colonials, whatever humanitarian motives inspired him, imposed a system upon a people according to which, in the end, he judged that people's behavior and in whose name he justified impersonal treatment however mild. It is this that one felt at Lambarene and it is this which the Africans apparently have long felt about Schweitzer and his hospital even when, in the same breath, they recognized how much good he was doing them. Out of the frustrations involved in imposing this system was forged that unalterable view

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of the Africans as irresponsible children which prevented Schweitzer, like so many colonials, from actively preparing them for the future or even preparing them to cope effectively with the system imposed upon them, and which they were increasingly desirous of controlling.

In the midst of these contradictory pressures Schweitzer asks what the general intercourse between whites and blacks can possibly be in the colonial situation. "Am I to treat the black man as my equal or as my inferior?" he asks. But he does not give us a direct answer.

I must show him that I can respect the dignity of human personality in everyone and this attitude in me he must be able to see for himself; but the essential thing is that there shall be a real feeling of brotherliness. The negro is a child and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority. We must therefore so arrange the circumstances of daily life that my natural authority can find expression. With regard to the negroes then I have coined the formula . . . "I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother." (*Primeval Forest*, p. 96.)

The answer to his question must be more directly stated. In point of fact the ideal of fraternal equality seems never to have been realized and what communicates itself to the Africans despite Schweitzer's ready wit and good humor is their fundamental inferiority rather than equality. "The combination of friendliness with authority is, therefore, the great secret of successful intercourse," he says; and indeed who can deny that this combination of contraries is one of the best guarantees of a happy social integration. But perhaps the strain between these attitudes was too great in a colonial situation with such burdens as the Doctor imposed upon himself. It was the impersonal authoritarianism which impressed itself upon the African.

With all the pressures which the hospital organization exerted towards impersonalization and disrespect for those it was organized to serve, Schweitzer would have more effectively resisted the trend and more effectively combined a sympathetic friendliness with authority had he been armed with what it is commonplace to call today a cross-cultural understanding. With all his argument about true thought and a common spirit leading all men to the same ethical conclusions, he was too much a product of nineteenth-century evolutionary thinking to grant as much meaning to the life of Africans, to their evening drumming for example, as to the life of Europeans summoned around the churchbells of

## *In Quest of the Historical Schweitzer*

Gunsbach. It would have been helpful had he more fully articulated to himself what he briefly perceived when he first went to Africa: that Africans had created and maintained for thousands of years their own integrated cultures, embodying in some respects even more admirable principles than latter day civilization in Europe. Such a thorough-going, rather than a casual, objective understanding would have enhanced his subjective respect for African life. For when we ask ourselves why Schweitzer failed in this respect it is because objectively he understood Africans to be at such a different stage as not to be completely understandable. Nothing is so detrimental to feelings of benevolence, as to think its objects are really incomprehensible. So Schweitzer's attempts at understanding Africans were, despite his early efforts, foresworn.

### IV

"It is the tragic element . . . that it is so hard to keep oneself really humane and to be the standard bearer of civilization."

Lord Lugard

There is much in Schweitzer's philosophy that reminds one of stoicism: the emphasis upon virtue and respect for others, the proclamation of the integrity of the individual regardless of circumstance, the willingness to accept reality at face value, the constant appeal to reason, yet a final attraction to mystical premises, and a great sincerity and simplicity in the presentation of thought. Above all we find the recognition in both that theirs is a degenerate and possibly a disastrous age in which despotisms of all kinds offer to obliterate the individual. Schweitzer himself testifies to the attraction which stoicism exerted upon him and his inability ever to disengage himself effectively from the authority of its doctrine.

In making this comparison it is useful to consider the case of Marcus Aurelius, who, while proclaiming the equality of all human beings, was yet obliged for political reasons to persecute the Christians and slaughter barbarians. A slave like Epictetus had a much easier time being a stoic. For stoicism and Schweitzer's ethical mysticism are philosophies best realized by those who are passive and to whom things are done in a bad world. There is something of stoicism in traditional Africans and it is appropriate in them in their subservience to the forces of the universe. But those who seek, like Schweitzer and Marcus Aurelius, to engage actively in the affairs of the world are inevitably led to confute their

philosophy insofar as its cornerstone is the reverence for life. It is particularly grievous if this inevitability is glossed over with an optimism, though Schweitzer despite his indomitable good humor and his life affirmation claimed to be optimistic in nothing more than hope and will—never in understanding.

In short, one cannot consistently respect life yet attempt to ameliorate its conditions. Life is too interdependent. Too many forms of life have a vested interest in the situation as it is. Moreover in order to do anything about men's affairs one must dominate them, thereby setting up hierarchies of respect, with some people inevitably worthy of more respect than others. Unmitigated benevolence is an illusion, indulged in by those who see the virtuous will as an active principle at work in the universe. They are inevitably led to kill trypanosomes, serve up fish to fish eagles, and disrespect the natives they come to serve.

The hypocrisy of colonialism is that it lived on this illusion of benevolence. Only a few like Lord Lugard recognized the price being paid for progress and checked in that recognition the overly ruthless application of the system. Though we can document here the degree to which Schweitzer's benevolence failed and his virtuous will lost its virtue, for it lost its real respect for the African—yet there is ample evidence that he recognized the dangers and the tension in his life between the virtue to which reason had led him and the actuality of human relationships on the Equator. Schweitzer was no Hegelian in spite of his rationalism and optimism. He never claimed that reason inevitably manifested itself in reality. He was ready for disenchantment. He did not strike a bargain to gain happiness in Africa by giving up everything in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

There is something of the hypocrite in every humanitarian but Schweitzer saw clearly the enduring tension between reason and reality in his African hospital even though, as is understandable, the older he became and the more widely revered, the less will or opportunity he had to confess it. Something of the hypocrisy of colonialism settled upon him. In any case we cannot reach him in history without understanding the tensions he lived with though he may have given the impression, as one of his admirers called it, of a "highly integrated psychophysical

<sup>10</sup> Says Schweitzer with resignation after having to do battle with every new patient in order to impose regularity and order upon them, "We are learning the full meaning of the interesting fact that we are allowed to spend our life among savages." *The Forest Hospital*, p. 78.

organism."<sup>11</sup> In point of fact we learn one thing from Schweitzer's thought and another thing from his life in the hospital.

What we learn is not without utility for those of us in the West who face the underdeveloped world with a will towards ameliorating the conditions that prevail there. Whatever kind of disrespect for the African life around him had been forged by long years of frustration, Schweitzer nevertheless faced intellectually the problems of modernization which African leaders and those that would aid them still confront. His mistrust of the course of civilization prevented him from ever attempting to do much about these problems. This is what we blame him for. But he saw the problems clearly enough. He calls these problems the problem of civilization and he saw colonization as working against the true development of civilization (see *Primeval Forest*, pp. 95-96). What must be done for the native is to create in him the right kinds of needs. One cannot but bemoan the false needs for useless luxuries and dissipation engendered by colonialism (*The Forest Hospital*, p. 98). The difficulty is that the scheme he proposed for making the Africans efficient and dependable men in the Western sense—by first tying them down, like his own ancestors, to agricultural responsibilities—would so postpone development as to, in effect, obviate it entirely. In this it was like many colonial schemes, almost all of which were overrun and made irrelevant by the steamroller of history. Still Schweitzer saw the problems clearly enough and what he saw as opposed to his plan is relevant today.<sup>12</sup>

Since he saw clearly but planned and performed inadequately he is, though the man of another era, still relevant. For he manifests certain truths which are independent of the historical circumstances which shaped his career. We can learn first of all that when men are called upon to help others they are involved in such contradictions that their intended benevolence will in some degree defeat itself. We can see that the systems which men have set up in order to organize themselves and their environment for greater goods may become ends rather than means, impersonalizing those within them. We can learn that the situa-

<sup>11</sup> A. A. Roback, "Albert Schweitzer the Man," in *Albert Schweitzer Jubilee Book*, A. A. Roback, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Schweitzer repeatedly decries the rush towards intellectual status on the part of the African. Education, he concludes, is not primary. "The beginning of civilization with them is not knowledge but industry and agriculture." This judgment could only have been put forth in a thoroughly colonial context. Yet it is remarkable the extent to which the mottoes of the newly independent African states emphasize work and industry.

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tion in which we thrust ourselves will possess its own logic, whose exigencies will often work against that system of reasonable aid and development we have in mind. But what we can learn and what Schweitzer cannot teach us is the necessity for a cross-cultural perspective—the knowledge that one is bringing elements from one culture, where they have been integrated, and attempting to graft them onto another culture which may need them to survive but into which they must be painfully integrated. When we see how various cultures, whether technology is their mainspring or not, are to some degree integrated and meaningful wholes, we are better able to preserve respect for the individual members of these cultures and manifest an appropriate sympathy for those who have become detached from their tradition.

Schweitzer has become a stranger to us now. Should we try to bring him to the present he will ever return to his own time, the turn of the century and a colonialist world of which he became, grudgingly but inevitably, the product. In his African situation he shows us plentifully human frailty. Yet he is, as he has projected himself into history, still symbolic of the spirit. And he offers us a word in the tasks we have a will to fulfill. The tensions he faced in the act of benevolence remain relevant to us today—or for those at least, like Schweitzer, to whom aid to the less fortunate is not simply a technical and self-interested task but a moral responsibility. We can hope to improve upon his performance as we learn from his failings. But the lesson is inescapable. Moral acts in a pluralistic world frequently have unexpected consequences, not the least of which may be the immorality of those who embarked upon a moral course of action in the first place. Thus the situations in which well-intentioned men place themselves may yet separate them from their most serious convictions. By becoming aware of the contradictions involved in our own sincerities we can perhaps avoid being taken in by them.