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THE RÔLE OF A MISSIONARY
IN THE COLONIZATION OF MALAWI, 1875-1927

An assessment of the career

of

Dr Robert Laws

A Dissertation
presented to the Examiners
of the University of St. Andrews
for the degree
of
Master of Letters

by

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St. Andrews,
April 1971

DECLARATION:-

This dissertation embodies the results of the higher study undertaken by me on the topic approved by the Senatus Academicus of the University of St. Andrews in accordance with regulations governing the degree of Master of Letters in Arts.

I was admitted under Resolution of the University Court, No. 9, 1967, to read for the degree of M.Litt. as from 15th October, 1969, in terms of Ordinance C (Higher Study and Research 1970-71, pp. 1, 2(b)-7).

Kenneth N. Mufuka
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CERTIFICATE:-

I certify that KENNETH N. MUFUKA has spent no less than two academic years in full-time higher study in the field of Arts, that he has fulfilled the requirements under Ordinance C, Resolution No. 9 of the University Court of St. Andrews (Regulations for Higher Study and Research), and that he is qualified to submit the accompanying dissertation for the degree of Master of Letters (Modern History).

Supervisors
1st May, 1971.

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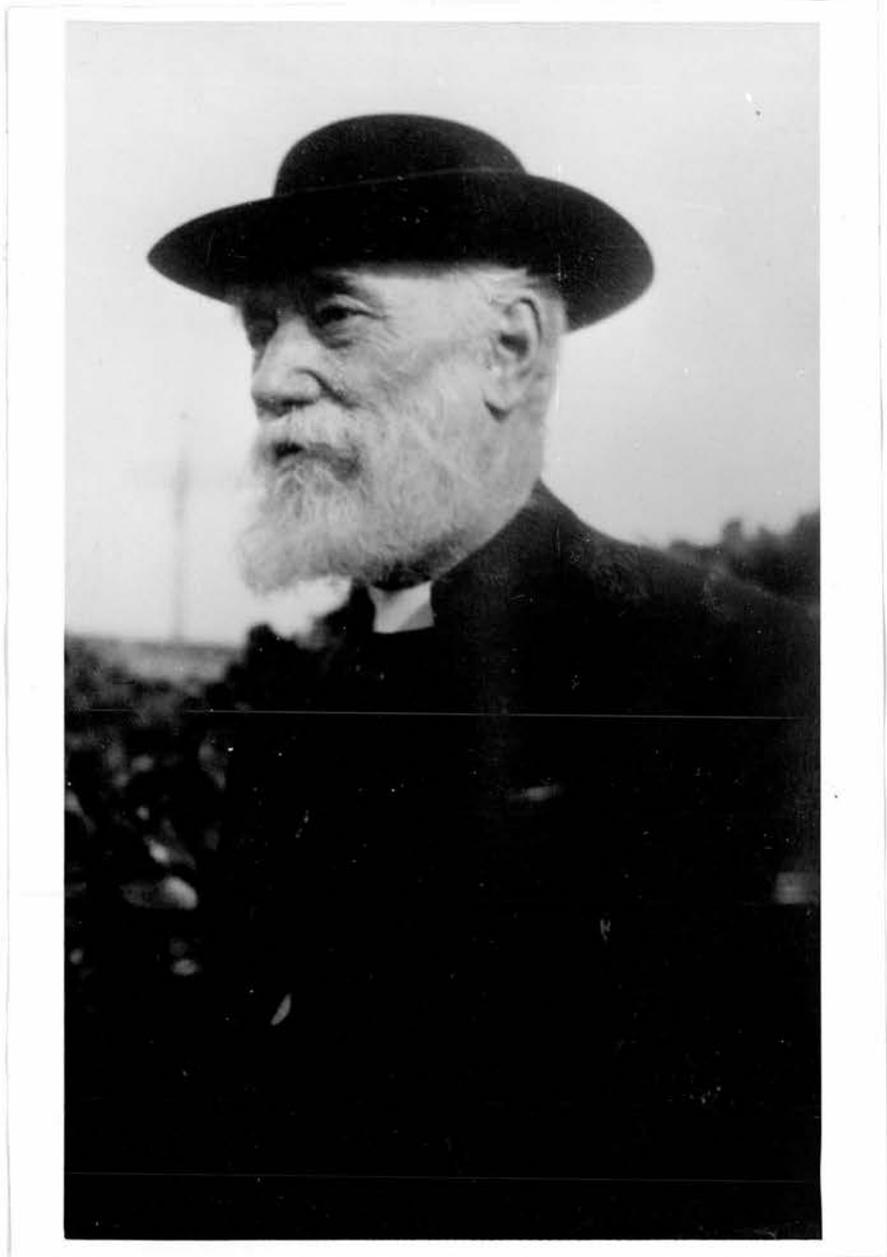
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Reverend Dr. Robert Laws, 1927

(From A. Caseby's own collection)



Two South African Africans were arguing one day on the unhealthy South African situation. One was inclined to censure the whole missionary enterprise in Africa, in this strain: "You see, the missionary came here and said, let us pray, and at the end of his prayer, we found the Bible in our hands, but lo! our land had gone!"

To which the other replied, "When Europeans took our country we fought them with our spears, but they defeated us because they have better weapons and so colonial power was set up against our wishes. But lo! the missionary came in time and laid explosives under colonialism. The Bible is now doing what we could not do with our spears."

(Rev. N. Sithole, African Nationalism
[O.U.P. 1968], p. 86.)

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO REVEREND DR. ROBERT LAWS' MISSION

(a) State of Malawi - 1875

When Dr. Laws arrived in Malawi some time in August 1875, that country was parcelled out among various tribes, more often than not at war with each other.¹ Later on in his life, Laws diagnosed this situation as due to what he believed to be a peculiarly African disease, mapfumo onse: "chiefs we all are."

But this state of affairs was a comparatively recent development which could be attributed to two factors, the slave trade and its attendant slave-raiding culture, and the migratory wave sparked off by Shaka Zulu in Natal, South Africa, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century a great and stable culture of the twin Zimbabwe and Maravi empires had bestraddled both sides of the Zambesi river. In present-day Rhodesia the remains of this great civilization are still visible in the stone-work forts which are scattered all over the country. The Maravi sister empire had achieved a certain degree of homogeneity in culture and language, Nyanja being the lingua franca of the empire. The culture was self-

1. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa (Methuen, London, 1898), Ch. 10. Johnston was the first British Commissioner. He listed at least ten major linguistic groups, but independent units must have numbered more than 500.

sufficient; it had its craftsmen and cotton farmers and its own weavers of cloth, and of all the people in Central Africa, the Maravi were the only bridge-builders. This culture was also unified by the mbona religious cults which tried to forge some continuity with the past. As a rule, African conquerors would attempt to please the gods of the soil which they had conquered, and this often led to the establishment of a bond between conquered and conquerors.

The empire had some international standing. Not only were there inter-marriages between the Maravi princes and their counterparts of the southern kingdom, but they had visitors from as far away as Portugal and Arabia. Gamitto, a Portuguese traveller in 1831, refers to Mwata-Kazembe, a descendant of the Maravi monarchs, as "Emperor", and even as late as that he gave evidence of a still highly-organized civilization.¹

From the time of Gamitto, foreign influences and interference, particularly that of the Portuguese and Arab slave-traders, helped to build up divisive forces which eventually overthrew the established order. External forces were aided by internal decay. Under a strong king the mbona cults and the Nyanja language served as bonds of unity, but they were not sufficiently strong to hold on their own

1. A.C.P. Gamitto, King Kazembe and the Marave, Cheva, Bisa, Bemba, and other peoples of Southern Africa, trans. Ian Gunnison (Lisboa 1831), Vols. I and II but especially Vol. I, pp. 17-63.

without military force. The Yao tribe, for instance, remained a distinct merchant group with a distinct language of their own and a culture less in line with their M^aganja countrymen than with their Arab trading partners, whose religion and manners they gradually adopted. In the mid-nineteenth century the Yao were building up a prosperous trade with the coast, one of the commodities of exchange being slaves. This trade was in opposition to or despite the king's interests, because the Yao increasingly ignored the prevailing customs laws. This growing independence was accelerated by their new-found proficiency in the use of fire-arms, which were easily available from Europe after the French wars. An observer noted in 1763: "It is more than fifty years since this monarch has been well obeyed and properly respected by his vassals."¹

To this destructive element must be added their allies the Swahili and the coastal Arabs who were nominally subjects of the Sultan of Zanzibar. Once in the interior, however, they acted as independent princes. With the help of these coastal peoples, men like Mlozi at Karonga, Jumbe at Khota-Khota and Mathaka of the Mosque were able to build formidable slave-trading principedoms on the lakeside. Though their overall influence was destructive and wasteful of resources, their large towns nevertheless became centres of

1. T.O. Ranger (ed.), Aspects of Central African History (Heinemann, 1968), p.24.

Islamic culture and art. The Yao, for instance, built up flourishing market towns in the south at Lowesa, Chiwololo, Musumba and Ngombo, to mention only a few. At these market towns they sold cloth, beads, ironware of sorts, and sometimes even guns; and in exchange they accepted ivory, gold, silver and slaves, which they disposed of at the coast. Six yards of calico were sufficient for a large elephant tusk, five yards for a healthy male slave, two and a half yards for a youth. Cowrie shells were sometimes used as a commodity of exchange also. Even Livingstone was moved to admiration when he saw the organizing ability of some of these merchant princes. He had "occasion to admire the very extensive drainage which had been effected on the hills. Cassava is cultivated on ridges along all the streets in the town which give it a somewhat regular and neat appearance."¹ This was the village of Mathaka, a Yao chief whom some Portuguese travellers had mistaken for an Arab because of the Arab culture and manners he had adopted.

Makanjila's town, of perhaps more than five thousand in population, even outshone Mathaka's in the arts and in splendour. He employed a mwaliimu, a Moslem schoolmaster, to instruct his people in the religion of the Koran. British Acting-Consul L.O. Goodrich visited this town in 1885 and described the palace as "a handsome building with substantial carved doors such as one sees in Zanzibar".

1. D. Livingstone, Last Journals (J. Murray, 1873)

When Johnston raided Makanjila's town in 1891, he carried off six boxes of letters written in both Swahili and Arabic.¹

These outstanding Yao leaders professed the Islamic religion and were totally opposed to Christianity, perhaps more so when the Christian powers began to oppose the slave trade, on which their wealth was built. Makanjila was converted to the Moslem faith c. 1870, while Mathaka, though converted in 1880, assumed the stature of a saint and was referred to as "Mathaka of the Mosque".

The Yao slave culture is of more than passing interest in this chapter. It stood as the most formidable opponent of European ideas, religious, cultural and imperialistic; yet paradoxically this very culture, by its disruptive nature, weakened the fabric of society to such an extent that the tribes put up only a weak resistance to European invaders. Some tribes even feared the Yao slave-raiders more than they feared the white men, and were willing to come to terms with them. The Yao system itself illustrates Laws' oft-used expression, "chiefs we all are".²

An ambitious Yao had a ready-made basis for power in his mbumba (kraal), which consisted of his brothers and sisters and their families, but not his own children, as the Yao are matrilineal.

1. Oliver, R., Sir H.H. Johnston (Chatto and Windus, London 1964) p.209.

2. The following assessment is based on J.C. Mitchell's article "The Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland," in African Studies VIII, No. 3 (Sept. 1949).

These blood-relatives remained the core of his support throughout life and even important chiefs had to return to this nucleus of support in times of difficulty.

Prior to the slave trade, the osyene (elder brother in charge of the mbumba) could distinguish himself in hunting and craftsmanship and the resultant increase in wealth would draw to him a large following. With the coming of the slave trade, organizing a few caravans to the coast represented a considerable amount of organizational ability and investment. Archdeacon Johnston of the Universities Mission saw a number of such caravans in 1881, each with as many as five thousand people altogether.¹

A characteristic of the Yao was their tendency to break up into small groups, unlike the massive patrilineal Ngoni kingdoms. Any ambitious Yao man could easily break away from his brother's mbumba and take away his younger sisters and their families to set himself up as an osyene in his own right. Internal quarrels within the mbumba were always taken as the excuse for such breakaways. But the osyene realised that a younger brother could repeat the same process with ease and leave him with a reduced following. Accordingly, in order to build up an independent and secure following, he took up slave wives and gathered a group of slave followers who were allowed

1. J. Rangeley, Nyasaland Journal, Vol. 16, no. 16 (Zomba 1954), pp. 15 ff.

to marry but, with their children, they remained entirely the property of the osyene. This slave following, if treated well, formed a much more secure foundation for a prosperous principedom than the old relationship based on blood ties. But it did mean that any man among the Yao who could capture ten slaves could set himself up as a mfumo with the power of life and death over his own household. Their weaknesses were therefore greater than their strengths: though they were able to hold up the Ngoni invasions by the use of fire-arms, and were able to build up a kind of neo-Islamic culture, their insatiable thirst for more and more slaves created a state of panic among their neighbours. One such neighbour was the Nyanja Chief Mponda, who welcomed Laws to Cape Maclear, apparently as a possible ally against these raiding chiefs.

While Laws was nursing up his infant mission in 1875 at Cape Maclear, the British navy was making slave trading too hazardous a task on the west coast of Africa. This led to the shift of the slave trade from there to East Africa, where it reached its peak at the time Laws came to Malawi. Various estimates put the number of slaves arriving at Zanzibar during these years as twenty thousand per year, Central Africa, and especially the Lake region, being the main source of supply. Among the main culprits were Jumbe, Mlozi, Mathaka and Makanjila, who have been mentioned earlier. There were two main routes, the northern route leading to Zanzibar being commanded by the first two chiefs, while the southern route, with its outlet

on the Portuguese-held territory, was held by the last two and their allies. Though the Portuguese subscribed to the Vienna Settlement of 1815 which outlawed slave trading, they co-operated with slavers under the umbrella of securing "indentured" labour for the coastal plantations. Livingstone actually caught two servants of the Governor of Mozambique driving a slave caravan. More frightening than the actual number of slaves reaching the coast was the amount of force necessary to secure them. Near Mlanje Livingstone wrote in his journal:¹

They almost depopulated the broad fertile tract ... along which our course lay. It was wearisome to see the skulls and bones scattered about everywhere; one would fain not notice them but they are so striking as one trudges along the sultry path, that it cannot be avoided.

The destruction caused by slavers probably accounted for more than ten times the actual number of slaves captured. The usual method was to surround the village at dawn and fire the grass-thatched huts. Those who came out were either killed or captured, for the slavers could not afford to let children and old people go away lest they should forewarn the next village. In any case the few who ever escaped were likely to die of hunger as the slavers often burnt what food they could not carry away.

The political significance of slave-raiding was disastrous. The peace and trust engendered by the Malawi empire were gone. Tribe

1. D. Livingstone, Last Journals, p. 98.

was set against tribe and general suspicion grew. Co-operation on an inter-tribal basis was a rare thing, and this fact enabled Johnston to pick the tribes one by one without much difficulty. On rare occasions the tribes showed a united front; for example when Makanjila formed a united front with three other chiefs, Johnston was routed and had to abandon his field gun.¹

Another force which contributed to the unsettled conditions in Laws' time were the Ngoni. The Ngoni were patrilineal, warlike, and retained their Zulu military drill. In order to keep their military organization intact they organized forays against neighbouring tribes which had the double purpose of securing food and of keeping their system in order. They were a terror to the peaceable Tonga and Maganja tribes, who in their turn often gave Ngoni presence as an excuse for their failures.² The Ngoni had crossed the Zambesi from Natal in 1832 under their leader Zvangendaba, wreaking havoc wherever they went, and passing by the western side of Lake Nyasa they had reached as far north as Victoria Nyanza. They retraced their steps to Lake Nyasa where they split into three groups in 1889 at the death of their leader. The Maseko Ngoni settled in the present Ncheu district, while those of Mbelwa settled in present-day central

1. R. Oliver, Sir H.H. Johnston, p.215.

2. Letter of Mrs. Laws to her parents (?1888 - date unclear)
Edinburgh University Library Gen. 561 +

Malawi. The third group, called the Mangwangwara, settled in present-day Portuguese Mozambique, north east of Lake Nyasa. The Ngoni of Mbelwa were to have important relations with Laws as the latter set up his Bandawe Mission among the Tonga and Tumbuka whom the Ngoni took to be their subjects.¹

This picture of a land in turmoil drawn in the preceding paragraph is one that often obscures the credit side of these warrior tribes. The Yaos' contribution to culture has already been referred to. In comparison the Ngoni had very few material trappings of civilization, but they were zealous for freedom. They governed themselves according to a well-practised constitutional tribal law. In times of national crisis all men were entitled to be consulted in a national assembly which, in the case of Mbelwa's Ngoni, was chaired by the prime minister, while the chief was barred from the debates. This democratic process was common among all Bantu tribes: even despots like Shaka Zulu were compelled by custom to call an annual assembly where the king listened to the grievances of his people without speaking back. This consultative aspect of African culture impressed the Blantyre missionaries so much that it was one of their fundamental differences with Johnston's despotic approach in his

1. A fuller account is given by T.O. Ranger in his chapter on nineteenth-century Malawi (Aspects of Central African History), and by E. Stokes (ed.) in his chapter "The Ngoni States and European intrusion" (The Zambesian Past).

dealings with Africans.¹

The ferocity and savagery of the warrior tribes have also been often exaggerated. Neither the Ngoni nor the Yao tribes were ever able to overrun their neighbours completely despite their reputed military skill. Even the Tonga, who often fell prey to Mbelwa's Ngoni in the Bandawe area, maintained their tribal organization intact. In the Blantyre region the Nyanja chiefs like Mwose held their own despite the fact that they were in the neighbourhood of the ferocious Yao slavers. Often two warrior tribes counter-balanced each other. The Ngoni were often forced to beat a retreat by the fierce Bemba group on the western plateau. The picture of an unmitigated terrorism conducted by the Ngoni and Yao tribes is therefore not an accurate one. Nor was the common impression among Europeans of a land devoid of any legal procedures where the mighty lorded it over the humble always true. Dr. Elmslie, who served as Laws' deputy in Ngoniland, lived at Mbelwa's court for more than ten years yet never witnessed more than three death sentences. He in fact saw the chief's rule as a "strong and sanguinary despotism ruling over a people powerful and free".²

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1. A.C. Ross, "The Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission" (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh), pp. 190 ff.
 2. W.A. Elmslie, Among the Wild Ngoni (O. Anderson and Ferrier 1899), p. 102.

Nevertheless, these warrior tribes had an extremely divisive effect on Malawi society and this was of great significance in relation to the advent of the missions. In a land which insisted on a chiefly structure for the transmission of all ideas, commercial, religious and political, and in a land like Yao-land where every tenth man was an osyene on his own account, the virtual ruler of his own city state, the early missionaries found themselves thrown into the role of chiefs, with all the temptations which political jurisdiction entailed. Indeed, every mbumba, missionary or otherwise, had to be seen to be capable of defending itself or it would fail to draw the adherents who alone could save it from decay. Laws put the problem he faced in a nutshell. He wrote home:

Is the Livingstonia Mission to be regarded as a mission ... to the South Sea Islands, trusting to God for protection though outwardly at the mercy of the natives when they think fit to rob or murder its members, or is the Livingstonia Mission to be regarded as a missionary colony? [Indeed] the natives are apt to look at me as chief of the English.¹

The missionary settlements were often limited to easily definable geographical limits, some distance from the chiefs who gave them the land. In such an area Laws could build his principality, laying down such rules as to the use of land or conduct to be followed as he deemed fit. He wrote to the Secretary of the Foreign Missions Committee, in 1880, "Each individual or family having asked to settle

1. Letter of Laws to Dr. G. Smith 2/6/1880 (MS7912), pp. 61 ff.

with us [agreed] to respect the customs of the station and submit to the discipline enforced."¹ It is worth noting that this pattern of enlarging a principality was very much in accordance with the line of action followed by prosperous osyenes who attracted settlers to their prosperous mbumbas.

That effecting a colonial-type settlement in the disrupted society of the day was all too easy is illustrated by Livingstone's twenty-two Makololo porters. When Livingstone decided to leave the Zambesi area after the death of his wife in 1862, he found that of his twenty-five Makololo porters only three were willing to go home. These men had been picked for Livingstone by his friend Chief Sebituane on a double score of physical fitness and general reliability. It has been suggested that when Livingstone saw the ravages of the Yao slave dealers on the peaceable Maganja people, he felt compassion for the latter and advised his Makololo men to set up a powerful paternalistic despotism over these people. This story illustrates very clearly that as few as twenty-two masterful men could organize a colonial settlement and be able to hold their own against the Portuguese force of seven hundred men led by Major Pinto. Obviously any foreigner, missionary or European settler, who could appear to be an ally of one tribe against another, was welcome.²

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1. Letter of Laws to Dr. G. Smith 2/6/1880 (MS7912), pp. 61 ff.
 2. The Makololo story is romantically told by E. Langworthy in This was my Africa (Stirling Tract Enterprises, U.S.A. 1950), pp.30, 64 ff.

One feature in this state of affairs was that even powerful chiefs like Mponda of Cape Maclear and Kapeni of Blantyre were willing to let the respective missionaries build up powerful autonomous entities within their borders. It was only when the missions prospered as chieftainships in their own right that their friends would feel they had worthwhile allies in times of need. That is to say, chiefs did not specifically tell the missionaries what they were expected to do but hoped that as good neighbours they would turn up with their armies in time of need.¹

(b) Background to missionary ventures in Britain

David Livingstone's journal, The Zambesi and its Tributaries, which was published in 1865, focussed British public opinion on the area of Africa now known as Malawi. Livingstone had been very careful to appeal to both philanthropic and selfish interests in the British nation. To rouse the interest of the first group he described in horrifying terms the ravages of the slave trade which he had seen with his own eyes and suggested that a gun-boat placed on the Zambesi might stop the trade at its source. To the second group he explained that the results of his experiments in cotton-growing on the Lower Shire river were promising, and that this crop was already

1. A comparison can be made with Moshesh of the Sutu who incorporated the Paris Evangelical Mission into the tribe because he needed their service to foster loyalty to him among his various tribes which he was trying to unite. The Malawi chiefs took the opposite view.

widely grown by Africans in that area. There was no reason why this crop should not supplant slaves as an important commodity of exchange. The Shire Highlands he described as cool and fertile and said that they could be used for "white settlement". His watchword became Christianity, Commerce and Civilization; a combination of these three factors would solve Africa's ills. Central Africa was very suitable for commercial enterprise as the Zambesi and Shire rivers penetrated the interior and could be used for navigation.¹

When the mission to Livingstonia was proposed, the best and most practical response came from Glasgow merchants while the Church officials were still engaged in learned argument. Laws' own church, the United Presbyterian, flatly refused to set up a mission for Malawi at Laws' suggestion. On the other hand, one of the Glasgow merchants who supported the venture, James Stevenson, Esq., who gave the first thousand pounds to the Livingstonia Committee, later became a director of the Central African Lakes Co. which was the most important trading company in Malawi until the turn of the century. At one time Stevenson gave £4,000 to the Committee to be used for building a road provided the Mission could set up two stations along the road and use the services offered by his Company.² Many others con-

1. D. Livingstone, The Zambesi and its Tributaries (J. Murray, London 1865), pp. 71, 101, etc.

2. Livingstonia Committee Minutes, p. 89 $\frac{1}{2}$ (MS7912).

tributed generously, the Moir brothers for instance, to mention only two. The Moirs later became directors of the Company in Malawi. Nevertheless, various groups other than merchants were represented at Glasgow's first public meeting organized by the International Association. The "Daily Review" in its editorial of November 11, 1876, reported that the hall was filled and there was only standing room and that among the dignitaries were Sir Bartle Frere, former Governor at the Cape, the Reverend Horace Waller who had been in the first Universities Mission to Malawi (~~which was abandoned by Bishop Mackenzie~~), two M.P.s., quite a number of merchants and clerics. The meeting unanimously passed a resolution that the Colonial Office be petitioned to enter into talks with the Scottish Churches with a view to co-operating in the venture.

At a welcoming home party on the 21st of February 1877, the Edinburgh "Daily Review" reported Dr. Murray-Mitchell as having said that now that the missionaries had opened the region, "the statesmen of Britain will do their part ... I doubt not the merchants of Britain will do theirs."

Co-operation between private interests and the government was not new. Livingstone's second expedition was partly financed by the British Government as it seemed that he was on the threshold of major geographical discoveries. The Government withdrew, however, when no commercial use could be made of his discoveries. When he was supposed to have been murdered in 1862, the Government took prompt action by

sending E.D. Young to find out the truth. In 1875 when the Scottish Churches wanted a leader of their expedition, the Royal Navy gave them the loan of Young for two years.

Co-operation continued even in international affairs. At the Berlin Conference on Africa in 1885, Laws and other members of the Scottish Churches were there to advise the Foreign Office and it is obvious they had something to do with the drafting of the article on missions. The article stipulated:

All powers exercising sovereign rights and influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes ... They shall protect and favour all religions, scientific and charitable institutions created for the above aim. Christian missionaries, scientists and explorers with their followers, property and collections shall likewise be the objects of special protection.¹

Quite naturally the missionaries were jubilant, especially when H.M. Stanley was appointed Governor-General of the Congo Free State with instructions to protect missionary bodies and commercial companies of all nations impartially. They saw this action of the King of the Belgians, who was President of the International Association, as directly stemming from the spirit of international co-operation shown at Berlin in 1885. This action was welcomed by the Free Church as "likely to result at no very distant day in opening up Central Africa to lawful commerce and Christian civilization".²

1. Free Church of Scotland Record, 1/1/1885 [hereafter called The Record].

2. Ibid., 1/6/1885.

It is significant that at this early stage of the Livingstonia Mission Committee in Britain, there was no suggestion of separation of interests: the commercial interests were freely discussed on the same level with religious interests, and the merchants felt it their duty to support financially the missionaries who wanted to open up Central Africa. It is also interesting to note that civilization was thought to be composed of three inseparable parts, viz commerce, Christianity and "good" government. Since the British Government was taken to be the model of "good" government, and very few people knew or cared to know the forms of African government, no African-led government could be "good" government.

(c) Laws and the Mission to Nyasa

William Laws was born in 1818 at Kidshill, Old Aberdeen. His interest in missions was roused early in his life at Sunday School by the Superintendent, Thomas Henderson of St. Nicholas, Union Grove, Aberdeen. Henderson used to thrill his charges with stories of daring and courage among fierce tribesmen and mysterious diseases. Henderson himself qualified for the ministry and left for British Guiana where he gave long and faithful service. However, poverty prevented William from entering the ministry as he had to leave school early to take up a job as a cabinet-maker. His hopes of serving as a missionary abroad were irretrievably shattered in a vision in which he was told he would never be a missionary. He decided to do the

next best thing. When he had a son he would dedicate him to God's service.¹

William was married to a United Presbyterian elder's daughter, Christian Cruickshank. On May 28, 1851, a boy, Robert, was born to this marriage, but two years after the birth Christian died of tuberculosis. William, who was now an elder at St. Nicholas' Presbyterian Church, "lifted him [Robert] over her coffin and by prayer dedicated him to the service of God in the missionary cause".²

The memory of his mother's still face remained with him all his life. For the next six years Robert lived at Kidshill with his Calvinist grandparents, who taught him to read using the Psalms, the Shorter Catechism and Calvin's works as set text-books. When William married Isabella Cormack six years later, Robert returned to live with his father. It was at this time that he met people who made indelible marks on his life. At Sunday School, he met Miss Melville who was from time to time throughout his life to come to his rescue with money and other help when the need arose. Miss Melville was a remarkable person. Through her Sunday school passed some of the greatest missionary names in Scotland. She taught the future Dr. Alexander Robb of Calabar, Laws himself, Laws' future wife,

1. Tradition gathered by Rev. A. Caseby, Anstruther, Scotland, who was Laws' colleague 1922-1933.

2. Laws Memorial Sermon given by Rev. A. Caseby, 26/3/1970, reported in Press and Journal (Caseby Papers, Anstruther, C. 17).

Margaret Gray, Margaret's brother, the future Dr. R. Gray of Rome, Dr. James Webster of Manchuria and Dr. Alex. Cruickshanks, to mention only a few.¹

Robert Laws' life was far from enviable. From the age of eight he helped his father in the carpentry workshop after school and had no friends at all apart from Alex Cruickshanks and Margaret Gray at the Sunday School. Isabella, his step-mother, was a hardened Calvinist who believed in duty rather than love, and was severely cold but proper in her behaviour. When Robert was twelve, old William had to close his shop and seek employment with Messrs. A. & W. Ogilvie of Aberdeen as foreman. Robert felt compelled to abandon his school career and help by being apprenticed, which he did for half-a-crown a week. At seventeen he was a qualified cabinet-maker. It now seemed his hopes of missionary adventure were doomed to frustration. But, like Livingstone before him, he had kept up his studies by attending night school and at seventeen, partly with the aid of a grant given him by Miss Melville, he went to Aberdeen University. Nevertheless, he could not make ends meet and was compelled to take up tutoring jobs during his spare time, while during vacations he often returned to cabinet-making. These were hard times, and often he was compelled to spend no more than half-a-crown on his food a week. He was also attacked by small-pox at this time, the marks of which

1. Miss Janet Melville, 1896, a pamphlet in Walls Collection, University of Aberdeen.

remained on his face as a sign of the hard times he had been through. He was awarded an M.A. degree when he was twenty and went to medical school in Glasgow in 1873.¹ At this time he became convinced that he was separated to serve in Livingstone's country (Central Africa). He put this suggestion to Dr. MacGill of the United Presbyterian Church's Foreign Missions Committee who pointed out that his cousin and former Sunday Schoolmaster Alex Cruickshanks would need help in Calabar (Nigeria) and that at that very moment they had a call for help from Jamaica. His biographer says the wise old clerics of the Foreign Missions Committee smiled at his suggestion which seemed impracticable.²

Christmas of 1874 found Robert in deep despair, his suggestion of starting a mission to Central Africa now clearly out of the question. He was preparing for his Licentiate in Theology and apparently working as a missionary at the Small-pox and Fever Hospitals, Glasgow.³ Unknown to him, events were moving inexorably in his favour. In that year, a remarkable Scots missionary, commonly referred to as Dr. Stewart of Lovedale (South Africa), who wrought

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1. Records of the Arts Class, 1868-72, University of Aberdeen.
 2. W.P. Livingstone - Laws of Livingstonia (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1921), p. 35; for details of his school days see ibid., pp. 17-40. See also Dundee Courier and Advertiser, 6/8/1934 (Casey Papers C. 18).
 3. Records of the Arts Class, 1868-72, University of Aberdeen.

wondrous works in that land where another Scots missionary, Dr. John Philip, had shed many a tear, had come home on missionary affairs. Stewart had a remarkable history behind him. In 1861, inspired by Livingstone's call to Central Africa, he had set out, partly at his own expense, to examine the practicability of such a mission. He arrived in Malawi in 1862 and met Livingstone at Shupanga. This was Livingstone's worst time in all his journeys. The then Reverend J. Stewart saw Mrs. Livingstone buried, a victim of malaria, then known as the white man's disease. During the same year Bishop Mackenzie's Mission in that area, founded at Livingstone's instigation, was abandoned when the Bishop himself fell victim to malaria. Among those left alive was Horace Waller. Others too were laid low by malaria, among them Stewart himself, who survived after being bed-ridden for two weeks. To crown it all, this populous area was devastated by the notorious Ajawa slave war. Not surprisingly, then, Stewart went home and abandoned the plans to found a mission there as impracticable. One thing he had learnt, however. He saw the knowledge of medicine as of vital importance in founding a mission in unknown regions, so he went to medical school and qualified as a doctor before being appointed to Lovedale in 1869. Part of his business in Britain in 1874 was to share the good tidings he was bringing from Lovedale. The Lovedale Mission had so impressed the tribes in the neighbourhood of what was known as British Kaffraria that they demanded a "second Lovedale" specially for themselves. Not being

used to empty talk, the people and their chiefs, according to Dr. Duff (reporting to the Commissioners of the Free Church General Assembly of 1875), had "contributed, within three months, the sum of £1,500! - an achievement, so far as I know, altogether unprecedented in modern missions".¹

These were the glad tidings Stewart had come to share with the home church. But his arrival in London coincided with Livingstone's funeral. In Scotland, Livingstone's birthplace, various groups were clamouring for a memorial to Scotland's greatest African explorer. This roused Stewart to his earlier dreams of mission in Central Africa. Now with the prestige of Lovedale behind him, the Commissioners of the Free Church General Assembly were bound to pay heed. The Glasgow Herald reported his address to the General Assembly in 1874:

... he would now humbly suggest as a truest memorial of Livingstone ... an institution ... to teach the truths of the gospel and arts of civilized life to the natives of the country ... in Central Africa ... [which would] grow into a great centre of commerce, civilization and Christianity. And this he would call Livingstonia.²

The scheme was given wide and enthusiastic coverage by the

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1. A. Duff - Proposed Mission to Lake Nyasa (an explanatory statement to the Commission of the Free Church of Scotland 3/3/1875), Church of Scotland Library, Edinburgh, A 360, p. 4.
 2. Glasgow Herald, 10/6/1874, article entitled "Livingstonia". C.S. Library, A 360.

national newspapers. The Daily Telegraph remarked that the scheme was "a design which is calculated to produce important results for the regeneration of Africa, while it establishes the best of memorials to the illustrious Livingstone!"

The Glasgow Herald commented on Stewart's scheme, "Certainly no proposal now before the public half so worthily embodies the idea of Livingstone's life."¹

It is not surprising that at the first public meeting in Glasgow held to raise £10,000 as initial capital for the Mission, £6,620 5s. was promised, while at a similar meeting in Edinburgh £3,000 was raised. It had been assumed all along that Stewart would lead what was now called the Livingstonia Mission, but the Africans of Kaffraria were still waiting for their Lovedale. Sense of duty forbade him to lead the Livingstonia Mission. It also turned out that the medical student, Mr. Black, whom they had supposed would fill Stewart's rôle as medical missionary, would not write his finals for a further two years. Meanwhile the other Scots churches were co-operating with the Free Church as best they could in a venture which public opinion preferred to call "a national memorial". The Reformed Presbyterian Church offered £1,000 to the Free Church's Livingstonia Committee. Dr. A. Duff, Secretary of the Foreign Missions Committee of the Free Church, was also in contact with the Established Church's Foreign

1. Newspaper reports 10/6/1874, (C.S. Library, A 360).

Missions Committee. These two would co-operate by sending an observer, A. Henderson, who would work with the Livingstonia Mission until he was able to set up on his own as an advance post for a future mission that Church which was being recruited. Dr. MacGill of the United Presbyterian Church remembered his difficulty in placing Robert Laws. It has been suggested that it was Miss Janet Melville who thought up an ingenious plan: the Presbyterian Church of St. Nicholas would loan Dr. R. Laws to the Free Church for a period of two years. The church offered to pay for his outfit and keep during the time he would serve in Central Africa. This was accepted, so Dr. Laws set out for Malawi as deputy to Lt. E.D. Young, who had also been borrowed (from the Royal Navy), to lead the expedition for two years. The loan of two years turned out to be two-and-fifty years in all.

CHAPTER II

PIONEER DAYS : THE EMERGING RÔLE OF CHIEF

Introducat^{tion}ion

Introduction

This chapter will deal specifically with two themes, that of relating the missionary message with British interests as against those of Portugal, and the rôle of chief that was thrust upon Laws by circumstances. Taking into account the various groups which supported the Livingstonia Mission in Scotland, it is only to be expected that the missionaries they sent out to Africa would be as patriotic as themselves. As pointed out in Chapter I, these interests could be identified as Protestant Christianity, commerce and good government which would seal the achievements of the first two. Working against the enemies of Britain was a duty any Englishman would have taken as a matter of course, but Laws even more so because his countrymen had entrusted him with the memorial of their national hero, Livingstone. This patriotic rôle, which could have been anti-Germany or anti-French, depending on circumstances, is closely interwoven with the rôle of chief which he began to play among the lake Nyasa tribes. This rôle is of crucial importance in understanding Laws' contribution to the whole period of colonization in Malawi, because it was about winning over these tribes that Britain and Portugal were quarrelling, and Laws' place among the African chiefs gave him special influence over those

settled in the mission, as well as over the neighbouring tribes. An irreconcilable factor, however, was that his temperament as well as his specific instructions from the Home Church were against the assumption of a political rôle, which they saw as threatening undesirable consequences.

(a) Dr. Laws and the Portuguese

It was not mere patriotic prejudice which drove Dr. Laws to associate his mission with British interests as opposed to those of Portugal. From the beginning Laws had reasonable cause to be suspicious of the Portuguese. The Portuguese disputed the Scotsmen's claim that the Lake Nyasa regions were given to them by Livingstone. They quoted a number of their own explorers who had preceded Livingstone, Alfonse de Albuquerque and Cameons being only two of them.¹ Laws' missionary party going into the interior was therefore regarded with suspicion by the Portuguese who decided to impose restrictive duties at Quillimane on goods bound for the interior. Apart from anything else, the Livingstonia missionaries would have considered this as enough cause for enmity with Portugal.

Perhaps the greatest cause of contention between the Portuguese and the Livingstonia Mission was that Young, the leader of the missionaries in the first two years, in his published journal accused the

1. E.D. Young, Mission to Nyasa - a Journal of Adventures (J. Murray, London, 1877), p. 194.

Portuguese of trading in slaves. Among Young's allegations was one to the effect that the Portuguese administration in Mozambique was heavily dependent on self-confessed criminals. Two of these officials had openly boasted to him about their part in the slave trade. According to Young, the Matabele, the Banyai and Batonga tribes who did not engage in slave trading themselves but who were keen to buy women and children in order to increase their populations, did so from the Portuguese.¹

Dr. Laws saw Portuguese ambitions in more practical terms. If the Portuguese were successfully to claim Malawi as their sphere of influence, then in all probability Protestant missions would have to give way to Roman Catholicism. While he was at Quillimane in 1879 he took the opportunity of finding out what evidence could be used against the Portuguese claim to Malawi. In a letter to Dr. Stewart of Lovedale he claimed that the Portuguese had friendly relations with Matipwiri, a slave-trading chief in the Shire Highlands. Should the Portuguese decide to formalise relations with him, British interests in that region would be jeopardised. These highlands had been described by Livingstone as fit for white settlement and were actually the heart of the quarrel between the Portuguese and the British. Laws' piece of "intelligence" was not as irrelevant to the correctness

1. Ibid.: trade restrictions p. 203, Portuguese slavery p. 200; see also pp. 196 ff. There is a comical side to Young's accusations, for Portuguese Viscount de Abriaga accused Young of having "asked ~~for~~ (i.e. bought) 2,000 African carriers" from the Portuguese (p. 217).

or incorrectness of the Portuguese claim as it would appear today. The missionary case for requiring Britain to assume administrative powers in Malawi was based on the assumption that Britain would be morally better fitted to assume the "burden" of administration than would Portugal. Perhaps more fearful news was that the Portuguese were sending two of their administrators ostensibly on holiday to spy out the condition of affairs in the highlands.¹ Two days later, Laws wrote a more urgent letter. He had discovered that the Portuguese were planning to open a strategic highway from Quillimane to the foot of Mount Mlanje which is situated in the highlands. He added that he was not writing directly to British Consul Dr. J. Kirk at Zanzibar because "you will know better how to put the matter than I do".²

Missionary antagonism towards the Portuguese remained until Britain was persuaded in 1890 to colonise Malawi in direct opposition to Portuguese claims, and this is a subject that will be discussed in Chapter III. For the moment, however, it is enough to say that Laws undertook the work of an intelligence officer due to the absence of regular Foreign Office officials in South Central Africa at the time. At the same time the missionaries believed that the scramble for the

1. Laws to Dr. Stewart, 26/7/1879 (MS7876).

2. Laws to Dr. Stewart, 28/7/1879 (MS7876).

Shire Highlands would be decided in Britain's favour if public opinion in Europe could be shown that the native tribes of these areas were friends and allies of the English against the Portuguese.

(b) Laws in the Chiefly Rôle

Relations with native tribes were complicated by two factors. There were very many petty chiefs in the country and the African tribes took the chiefly position as the nucleus of all organization. As has already been shown in Chapter I, even the slave trade and the Moslem religion were centred at chiefly courts. Successful merchants like Mlozi became chiefs; some merchants, indeed, became chiefs in order to engage in the slave trade more successfully. The conditions for chieftaincy were simple - a following, wealth, and the means to defend the first two from external enemies. This naturally implied administration of justice, including the death sentence, and getting involved in "alliances" with other tribes in time of war. Laws felt he could not accept the rôle a chief was supposed to play, especially the political jurisdiction involved in it. His temperament too, being shy, reserved and unassertive, was unsuitable for the duties African society demanded of him. Secondly, the Foreign Missions Committee had drawn up clear instructions based on the missionary experiences of Dr. A. Duff of India, which excluded political jurisdiction.

Dr. A. Duff had laid down under the heading "General Attitude to the Natives" [that]

[Natives] require much explanation in all dealings with them; they fear and respect a man who under the discipline of self-control is habitually quiet and firm in his demeanour, and who never loses his temper. In no case break your word to them, even though you have made a mistake in a bargain, or in promising too much in any payment. On the other hand, in no case let them, through unguardedness or want of proper enquiry on your part over-reach you. At all times make bargains perfectly clear. Counsel peace always between tribes and neighbours and in any case of tribal difficulty do not take any side, if you can possibly avoid taking it - remember that simple acts of kindness and courtesy are never thrown away, even on a savage people.¹

It never occurred to the Livingstonia Committee that any of their missionaries would be considered by the natives of the Lake districts as chiefs in a foreign land, and above all that it would be an everyday occurrence for them to summon offenders, sit in the seat of judgement and even administer justice, a whipping, deportation or even the death sentence! Nor did Dr. Laws himself relish such a position. Mr. Caseby writes about him as very shy and reserved, a man who would definitely have preferred the routine job of shepherding souls to God, away from the prominence of a chief.²

Dr. Laws himself is very emphatic about avoiding such responsibilities. Should "civilized" government become a necessity, he would prefer that ^alayman, Mr. J. Stewart, C.E., or even the African Lakes Company, be given the power to act as administrators while he himself kept to his own chosen field:

Personally, my opinion is that the less a missionary has to do with the government of a country as an active agent himself in its

1. Christian Express, 1.iv.1881 (N.L.S. MS7906).

2. Caseby Papers (C. 16 in Caseby's own library).

administration, the closer will he get to the hearts of the people and the greater influence will he have on their lives.¹

In the letter already quoted, Laws argued that there was a choice between a passive policy, such as was followed in the South Pacific Islands where missionaries had no military defence whatever and lived at the mercy of the chiefs, and a regular colony which would be organized on the basis of autonomy. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that the missionaries of the sister Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission were in no such difficulties as to what policy to follow. Dr. MacRae, their Foreign Missions Secretary, had told the Reverend Duff Macdonald of Blantyre Mission that that station was to be organized as a regular colony, the nucleus of a projected Christian state.² Macdonald himself appears to have been the exact opposite in character to Dr. Laws, explosive and not afraid of embroiling himself in a controversy. He was therefore the more willing to act as an administrator and, if need be, to enforce his will on the natives by force of arms. This difference between the two leaders is very important because, though holding widely different theories concerning their relationships with natives, and being themselves different in temperament, both men in practice followed very similar policies. Circumstances, indeed, did not give them any choice.

1. Letter of R. Laws to Dr. C. Smith, 2/6/1880 (N.L.S. MS7916), pp. 66 ff.

2. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 171.

That Laws was not given a choice in his relationships with natives was partly due to the natives' expectations of the Englishmen. One of the reasons why the African tribes were eager to have mission stations in their areas was that they reckoned the English might prove to be useful allies, especially if the tribes were small and often molested by bigger ones. E.D. Young says the Makololo exploited their friendship with the English with devastating effect in relation to a detachment of the Ma Viti (probably the Ngoni). He says:

Two days after, the Ma Viti detachment passed me on their way back to the hills. They were still very nervous in my presence, but it was entirely owing to the fearful stories told them by the Makololo concerning me - of course with an object! So long as they can impress the Ma Viti that they have such powerful allies as the English, they consider themselves safe from all molestation on their part.¹

Perhaps the most important factor leading to the assumption of chiefly status by Dr. Laws was his abhorrence of slavery. This abhorrence was no secret, and runaway slaves therefore often resorted to the mission stations at Cape Maclear and Blantyre as centres of refuge. These former slaves virtually became "citizens" in the new community in which the white men (Azungu) were chiefs. Besides, the status of "mission-boy" was not an empty honour: the mission subjects were the best-clothed by virtue of their proximity to the labour market, and to all intents and purposes the Europeans could defend their territories. There are a few entries in Dr. Laws' diaries which clearly reveal that

1. E.D. Young, Mission to Nyasa, p. 212.

to the African mind he was no less than a chief. One entry reads:

Today Makandanje brought a man and his two wives, wishing to settle here. They came from Tshipole ... told them they could have a month's trial under the usual conditions.¹

During Dr. J. Stewart's visit a subject of Mpemba's came to the mission station:

He was in a woeful condition ... and said that he and twenty-one others were about to be sold by Mpemba, a slaving neighbour of ours ... We approached the island cautiously. They exhibited no fear. They seemed to know at once that they were now under protection that would always prevent them "being sold". ... if any one comes here simply to escape being sold, we shall protect him to the utmost. In the evening they slumbered peacefully in several huts, after an abundant supper and under a flag which expressed to them what they called the protection of the English.²

This exemplifies clearly-defined terms perhaps widely known by the Africans of the surrounding district.

Another case cited in his diary is that of Ropa:

... a man Ropa, having squatted in a Livingstonia village, committed a crime of rape on a girl of tender years. He received twenty-four stripes and was deported.³

All these cases reflect the emergence of an area of authority or chieftainship governed on a regular system of laws, complete with penal deterrents when necessary. But how was it that a man like Laws, who was opposed to taking over political jurisdiction, could have put himself at the head of such a state? The Ropa affair illustrates Laws'

1. Laws, Diary, 10.iv.1880 (E.U.L. Gen. 563 +).

2. J. Stewart, Livingstonia: Its Origin (Andrew Eliot, Edinburgh 1894: prepared for the Foreign Missions Committee of the F.C.S. for private circulation), pp. 64 ff.

3. Laws, Diary, 13.x.1880.

dilemma. Macdonald of Blantyre had become aware of an African custom which was bound to involve any missionary in trouble. He says:

For instance, if a headman of Kumpama's go and say "Chenyono has killed a subject of mine, I have caught a subject of his and want to kill him," the chief's answer will be, "He has done you wrong, do according to your heart."¹

This would mean the missionary would have to chop off the offender's head if he was the offended party! This is a situation the Livingstonia Committee had not envisaged. In Ropa's case, though it was agreed that he was to receive twenty-four stripes, nobody was willing to inflict the sentence, and it seems Dr. Laws was actually saved the actual administration of the lash by African evangelist William Koyi. Nevertheless, the final responsibility lay with him. It appears Laws had come to terms with the reality of administering punishment in the form of the whip and had decided to take Deuteronomy XXV.3 as a guide. The verse reads:

Forty stripes save one he may give him and not exceed; lest if he should exceed and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile to thee.

It should be added that consistently with his sensitive nature, Laws called a halt at twenty-three in Ropa's case because he was sick at the sight. In another similar case of a thief, mentioned by his biographer, Laws was hesitant to punish the self-confessed thief so that the Africans laughed - "Ha! the English talk plenty but they don't

1. D. Macdonald, Africana, Vol. II (Simpkin, Marshall & Co., London 1882), pp. 255 - 257.

punish."¹

But Laws could only have been pressed into assuming this important rôle if he had no choice. He was in fact well placed to play it. Livingstonia Mission impressed the natives as a comparatively very wealthy and powerful city state. He had the largest boat on the Lake, the Ilala, and when he wrote home that the Arabs and Swahili who still carried on the slave trade on the Lake tried to shy away from the boat, he probably did not quite comprehend his reputation as a powerful chief.² The Arab dhows were no match for the steam-driven Ilala either in speed or in carrying capacity. This reminded his enemies of his ability to pursue them on water as well as on land.

As an individual, he was probably handling more commercial goods than any single chief in the neighbourhood. In 1886 he wrote home with justifiable pride of the new-found prosperity enjoyed by his followers since his arrival in Malawi:

It may interest commercial friends to know that the Livingstonia Mission has been the pioneer in opening up a new market, which has already drawn over 50,000 yards of cotton, twenty-five tons of beads, seven tons of soap, besides other varieties too numerous to be detailed here.³

Nor was he less zealous in developing the commercial thoroughfares. The Livingstonia Mission engaged fully-qualified engineers from time to time until this aspect of its mission was taken over

1. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 135.

2. Record, 1/12/1875: "Livingstonia".

3. Letter to the F.C.S. Record (1886), p. 110.

~~was built~~ by the first colonial government. Dr. Laws' first civil engineer was James Stewart, C.E., who built a seventy-mile road avoiding the Murchison Cataracts on the Shire River, the cost of which was shared with the Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission. It was while James Stewart was surveying an ambitious scheme to connect the north of Lake Nyasa to Tanganyika Territory that he died in 1886.¹

The significance of Laws' commercial rôle should not be underestimated. We have seen how the weaker chiefs boasted of their friendship with the English as a means of frightening their enemies. At the same time, these so-called fierce and war-like tribes, like Mbelwa's Ngoni, for instance, were quite jealous of Dr. Laws' work among the weaker tribes, not only for the protection afforded by the mission, but particularly because the mission brought economic benefits to these tribes.

A closer examination of the circumstances leading to the famous "Crisis in Angoni-land" in 1888 will help to bring this point home. The warrior Ngoni were traditional enemies of the Tonga, among whom Laws' Bandawe Mission was situated. The Ngoni, who addressed Laws as the "chief of the Mission" resented his residence among the Tonga, as this precluded any wars with them. This serves to emphasise the point already made that this was possible only because the English were

1. James Stewart, not to be confused with his cousin, Dr. James Stewart of Lovedale. I have also pointed out in Ch. I that the Malawi Africans were the only bridge-builders in Central Africa so that Laws' ability in that respect was not surprising to them.

thought to be too powerful to attack and that their presence among the Tonga was taken as evidence of their sympathies with that group. In this case, however, there was more to it. Dr. Laws, having won Mbelwa's confidence by his practice of medicine, used his influence to conclude a treaty with Mbelwa in which the latter agreed not to attack any tribes in the vicinity of the Mission. Taking advantage of this treaty, the Tonga built up a vast confederation in the neighbourhood of Bandawe and began to pose a threat to Ngoni supremacy. They also encouraged the escape of their women and children who had been captured by the Ngoni in earlier wars.¹

In 1887, Mbelwa sought to be rid of the military predicament he had put himself in by agreeing to a treaty with Dr. Laws. He had a second reason for so doing, in that the Bandawe Mission had in effect brought economic prosperity to their enemies, which the section led by his brother Mtwaro seemed to believe was a more important consideration than the first. In the milandu called in August 1887 by the Ngoni prime minister (the chief did not participate directly in these debates), Laws was summoned before the parliament and presented with a reasoned case. Mtwaro's party challenged Laws to abandon Bandawe Mission Station and to build his head station in Ekwendeni among themselves, which was sensible both strategically and commercially. Dr. Elmslie noted the emphasis of the second reason rather than the first:

1. F.C.S. Record, 1.iv.1885, p. 141. For Laws' attempts to encourage a Tonga confederacy see W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 170.

It is not missionaries these outsiders desire / Mbelwa's brothers / but the wealth we are supposed to give; and because they desire to attack the Atonga, which they cannot do, because friends of Mombera [i.e. Dr. Laws] are living at Bandawe, and has hitherto prevented war being carried to the lake in fulfilment of a promise made to Dr. Laws many years ago.¹

In accordance with their desire to participate in the commercial benefits of the mission, the Ngoni had for a long time been willing to let Dr. Elmslie, whom they saw as Dr. Laws' representative, settle among them, with the proviso that he would not teach their children the gospel of love and peace. The Ngoni, after a reasoned argument with him, came to the conclusion that imbibing the Christian religion as taught by Elmslie would mean the end of war as a way of life.

African evangelist William Koyi, in a letter to the Record, ^{had} explains how the Ngoni at Mbelwa's court were unwilling to listen to the gospel at all and occasionally used veiled threats of deportation if he did not comply with their requests for gifts:

To some extent, especially among the head chiefs, it is necessary to comply with these requests, but to do so, to the extent the Angoni wish, would be to permit the imposition of blackmail which would be ruinous to the progress of the country.²

The results of this great milandu show how the status and influence of this great white Chief could have ramifications beyond the tribes with which he had direct dealings. The Ngoni could have a free hand in the west towards Bemba-land and in the south where the Chitenchi Tonga were as yet unaffected by the teaching of the missions.

1. F.C.S. Record, 1.viii.1887 (N.I.S. P.56).

2. Ibid., 1.v.1885, p. 141.

But at all costs the Tonga in the vicinity of the Bandawe Mission were not to be molested.¹ The Ngoni of Mtwaro's district were to have their own mission station after all.

Perhaps by far the most important result was the appearance of a peace party, presumably sympathetic to the missionary cause, among the Ngoni. In the long run this could have the effect of destroying the coherence of the tribe which normally acted on a consensus of opinion. Dr. Laws, writing after the first great milandu, says:

The upland mission had produced such an effect that the once wild Zulu tribe found themselves face to face with the question, shall we forever abandon war, lay aside the spear, and accept the word of God?²

In the same letter, he hastened to add that temporarily "the war-loving (traditionalist) portion of the tribe had gained the ascendant, provoked by the Arab slave-traders". Trouble with the Arabs arose from the depredations of an unruly warrior group which had attacked an Arab caravan, thus provoking the latter to revenge. The Arabs were in fact mustering a force of three thousand guns, while at the same time their traditional enemies, the Tonga, were waiting to strike a simultaneous blow should the Arab threat materialise. This led to a second Ngoni crisis in 1888, and Dr. Laws was once more summoned to give his opinion at the milandu. Earlier Dr. Laws had written to Dr. Smith:

Should these two parties come to blows, there will be cruel and bloody work indeed. More significantly Dr. Elmslie thinks that were it coming to its worst, Mombera would take refuge in the mission

1. Ibid., l.iii.1888

2. Ibid., l.xii.1887, p. 364.

house.¹

There was nothing new in factionalism in tribal politics, but the emergence of a faction whose ultimate source of strength was outside the tribe was a new element in tribal politics. Left to themselves, the factions were always in a state of continuous motion, finding new levels of equilibrium among themselves. But this would be impossible if one faction, rather than come to terms with other factions, should seek refuge in the mission house. The influence of the Livingstonia Mission was moving towards destroying the internal checks and balances within the Ngoni tribe, and indeed between the different tribes in the Lake districts as well. This had the effect of weakening tribal resistance to foreign aggression, and this was Dr. Laws' major contribution to the Empire, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter III.

The notorious Blantyre Affair of 1880-81 which arose from the ill-treatment of Africans at the Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission was an important landmark in the development of Laws' mission in Central Africa. It was also a challenge to the chiefly rôle of a missionary.

(c) Laws and the Blantyre Affair

The Blantyre Affair shows how the combination of three factors, the gospel, trade and the European obsession for so-called "civilized" government, faced with the realities of each man for himself in Malawi

1. Dr. Laws to Dr. G. Smith, F.C.S. Record, 5.iii.1887.

at the time, could lead to extremes. The Church of Scotland was horrified at Macdonald's assumption of civil jurisdiction over the Africans, while the Livingstonia Committee maintained throughout the debate that laws was never at any time guilty of assuming civil jurisdiction. The committees of both churches spoke from a gross misunderstanding of the realities of power in Malawi and laws did not say anything unless asked.

Theoretically, Macdonald had acted properly according to instructions from Dr. MacRae of the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee. MacRae had encouraged the execution of justice in relation to Africans in certain situations. The Church of Scotland as a body repudiated MacRae's views which were given to Macdonald privately. MacRae, however, held his position, arguing that Macdonald was guilty of excesses, but not of a departure from principle. It was A. Chirnside's pamphlet which described the offences he had seen committed while elephant-hunting in the Blantyre area. Describing one such crime, he wrote:¹

Flogging with the whip [which he had brought to England, three-and-a-half-inches wide] is an everyday occurrence, three lads in one day getting upwards of 100 lashes; and it is a fact that after being flogged on several occasions, salt has been rubbed on their bleeding backs.

Another charge was the waging of war on neighbouring tribes. In one such case Macdonald and a lay missionary, Fenwick, had led the war party:

1. A. Chirnside, F.R.G.S., The Blantyre Missionaries - Discreditable Disclosures (W. Ridgway, 1879), p. 14.

[At the] first streaks of dawn ... the usual hour for surprizing an enemy in Africa ... [As a result] ... nine killed was the loss of those opposed to the mission party. There have been several previous wars to the above and subsequent one, but all have arisen since the shooting of the native for the alleged murder of the woman.¹

The "shooting of the native" was a horrible affair indeed. The native was sentenced by a hurriedly-gathered tribunal and sentenced to death by shooting. A volley of shots wounded but did not kill the man, until an African chief who was standing nearby, in his compassion at the suffering caused the man, forcibly took Macdonald's gun and despatched the victim.

Duff Macdonald, who was dismissed by the Church of Scotland, together with Fenwick and Buchanan, was unrepentant and his own Africana in fact authenticates Chirnside's horror stories. He confesses in one case that, even while the Church of Scotland's Commissioner Dr. Rankin was still making his enquiries at Blantyre, an African, resident in the mission city state, refused to undertake some compulsory labour which was thought an essential service:

He was then told that his home would be burned down, when he replied that he did not care; and the result was that he sat with his family and looked on until his house was reduced to ashes.

Unashamedly, he goes on to say that this type of discipline "is indeed the only kind of justice they are familiar with".² Dr. Rankin implicated Dr. Laws in the excesses committed at Blantyre:

1. A. Chirnside, Blantyre Missionaries, pp. 20 ff.

2. D. Macdonald, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 255-257.

At the time of the murder there were present at Blantyre, from Livingstonia, Dr. Laws and some others, who assisted in the first enquiries, and expressed their views as to the suitable punishment, i.e. capital punishment. At the time of execution, these visitors had left again, so the final responsibility rests with the Blantyre people themselves.

More painful to the Free Church was Dr. Rankin's conclusion that "the Livingstonia rulers at Blantyre of course originated this system".¹

Since Mr. A. Henderson's confessed failure to run Blantyre in 1877, Dr. Laws and other Livingstonia missionaries had been taking turns to keep an eye on Blantyre until Macdonald, the new head, found his feet. Dr. G. Smith and the Free Church officials were quick to defend the Livingstonia missionaries' conduct. To Laws, Dr. Smith wrote of Dr. Rankin:

That unhappy man Dr. Rankin keeps [writing] the Scotsman a series of letters of so un-Christian character, some that [are aimed] to detract from all others - that his own Church of the Blantyre Mission are (sic!) severely damaged, while scoffers at all Christian missions have material that delights them.²

Dr. Laws, describing a murder which occurred during his superintendence at Blantyre, wrote cautiously of his own part in it, " ... after some trouble, he [Chief Kapeni] began to see that we did not feel inclined to joke about murder and he ... promised to find out the person." But Laws was so conscious of the explosive nature of civil jurisdiction that he added a request for guidance "in view of such a thing happening

1. Christian Express, 1.iv.1881.

2. G. Smith, Private Letter to Dr. Laws, 10.iii.1881 (MS7897).

at Livingstonia". He had good reason, for the Livingstonia Mission at Cape Maclear was fast growing and numbered at the time three hundred and twenty-seven souls.¹

Contrary to common belief then and now that Macdonald and Laws followed different policies the major divergence lay only in their personalities, not in their policies in relation to natives.² Africans would probably put it in their own idiom, and say that Laws was a chief worried by his heart while Macdonald was a chief without worries of the heart (i.e. conscience). Their careers, then, differ in practice but not in theory.

Laws' biographer cites an untraced letter to Macdonald, probably before his war with a neighbouring village:

For your own sake be cautious. To overpower the natives with the arms you have would be a comparatively easy matter compared with fighting the public at home for the rest of your life.³

How true these words were! Yet the two men both believed in the necessity of having the nucleus of a Christian state, Macdonald uncompromisingly and Dr. Laws cautiously as was his nature. In a letter to Dr. Smith, he argues that in fact the nucleus of a Christian state formed round the mission station would impress the natives as to the benefits of Christianity. But, seeing that this would be an explosive issue, he suggested that Mr. James Stewart be appointed civil magistrate

1. Letter from R. Laws to Rev. T. Main (MS7876), pp. 24 ff.

2. Historian A. Holmberg in African Tribes and European Agencies (Scandinavian University Books, 1966), pp. 236 ff., gives as late as 1966 the orthodox view that Laws had nothing to do with jurisdiction as practised at Blantyre, either there or at Livingstonia. This is also Laws' biographer's view (W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia).

3. W.P. Livingstone, op. cit., p. 170.

in the Livingstonia Mission area.¹ This would follow the precedent of Penwick's acting, as apparently he did, as lay superintendent at Blantyre under D. Macdonald. Whereas Macdonald would confess as to what he was about, Dr. Laws kept his peace unless compelled to speak. In a letter to Laws, Smith wrote of the Blantyre affair:

As in this matter, it has been said privately that you on one occasion administered fourteen or twelve stripes to a man guilty of rape [i.e. the Ropa affair].²

As a matter of fact, the Foreign Missions Committee only received an account of the Ropa affair after this rumour, at their specific request, years after the case. It is also interesting to note that, whereas the whip used by Macdonald was three-and-a-half inches wide, the one quoted by Laws was one-and-a-half inches wide.

In addition, Laws maintained a prison service of sorts. In his diary an entry of 10th April 1880 reads:

Kaliwinge let out of prison today. Ndola, who had to supply his food, certainly did not keep him on short commons.

Another fellow, Mlolo, was fined six yards of calico by Laws for stealing Mpembe's boat. He was however given the option of restitution of the boat.³

In another case, one of Mpembe's men was summoned to Dr. Laws'

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1. Livingstonia Committee Minutes (N.L.S. MS7912), pp. 66 ff.
 2. C. Smith, Private Letter to Dr. Laws, 10.iii.1881// (N.L.S. MS7897).
 3. Laws, Diary, 3/3/1881.

court. He refused to comply, and shot Mtasima, the messenger, with an arrow. The wound "was bound up and M. put next door till next day when he would be lodged in prison".¹ There is an interesting tradition that Laws had a special seal which depicted blood and that this was given to the messenger who on showing the sign of blood invariably impressed the natives as a messenger of the great white chief.

Laws at one time wrote of the realities of life in Malawi:

Our circumstances here, and surroundings are more those of an army on the march where punishments for crimes have to be short, sharp and decisive ...

Besides, any family "allowed to settle with us must submit to the discipline enforced". But he preferred to be ruled by consent: "Here at Cape Maclear we are the rulers by voluntary assent of the people ..."²

There is no doubt therefore that the circumstances prevalent in Malawi led the sister missions to carve out earthly principedoms as a matter of survival in the absence of an overriding African power. As to the short-term results, Macdonald, Fenwick and Buchanan of Blantyre were dismissed. The subsequent careers of Fenwick and Buchanan are interesting as a reflection on the character judgement of the Commissioners. Fenwick murdered Makololo chief Chipatula in 1884 in a drunken brawl and as an act of revenge, Chipatula's sons chopped his head off and hanged it on a very high pole in their village as a lesson to all

1. Ibid.

2. Laws to Smith, 2/6/1880, (N.L.S. MS7897).

white men who passed through their village. Buchanan became a prosperous coffee-planter, having been at one time Acting Consul of British Central Africa (now Malawi).¹ The Blantyre Mission was reorganized under Dr. C. Scott and it dropped its expansionist aims. Dr. Laws having been exonerated from direct implication was left untouched. The Blantyre Affair, however, left him a nasty memory and his realization that political jurisdiction over Africans was a sensitive issue was reinforced more than ever. He began to see that a native state in which the mission played the role of adviser might not be possible after all. Direct colonial rule was a necessity,

"... but in view of the scramble for Africa [1875 +] ... this [a native state] could hardly be expected. I therefore hoped Nyasaland would become a British Protectorate."²

At the same time the conclusions of the Blantyre Commissioners could not change the realities of power in Central Africa, so, despite the Affair, circumstances often forced the Livingstonia Mission to act contrary to instructions. In 1886 the people of Nymberi, a northern Konde group, killed twelve of the Mission porters passing through their country. Nymberi definitely expected retaliation, perhaps war, for he sent spies to the Mission to solicit intelligence as to the Mission's supposed line of action. To Laws, perhaps with the Blantyre

1. Langworthy, This Was My Africa, p. 124; for Fenwick and for J. Buchanan see H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 68.

2. R. Laws, Reminiscences of Livingstonia (Oliver & Boyd, London 1934), p. 63.

Affair in mind, force was out of the question, but something had to be done quickly if the Mission was to regain the confidence of its porters. The Reverend Alexander Bain was sent to hold a milandu with Nymberi, to which the latter reluctantly agreed. Bain left Nymberi in no doubt that the white men could fight but that they would only do this if he refused the peace treaty. To seal the peace treaty, Nymberi would have to pay a return visit to the Mission (Bandawe) and see the white chief there. It is clear from Nymberi's pains, the spies, the hideout in which A. Bain found him and the numerous gifts he lavished on him, that he was under no illusions that if a trial of strength came things might not be too easy for him.¹

In the following year, 1887, Laws' handling of the M'Currie case proved him to be a decisive and shrewd chief. Mr. M'Currie was supervising a large group of Africans in brick-making at Bandawe. Earlier Mrs. Laws had observed, "The people round us were becoming bold and insolent and one day Mr. M'Currie's workers refused to work up to his requirements; no doubt they annoyed him greatly." In a fit of temper, it seems, "he fired a gun which contained small shot and in this moment of self-forgetfulness he wounded half a dozen."

Laws, on hearing this, and trying to prevent "tales from being carried", bandaged those who had been wounded, assessing their wounds: "The wounded received cloth according to damage done."²

1. F.C.B. Record, 1.vii.1886, p. 211.

2. Letter of Mrs. Laws to her parents, 11.x.1887 (E.U.L. Gen. 563 +).

The Livingstonia Committee unanimously approved of Mr. M'Currie's instant dismissal by laws and expressed sympathy in these "difficult times".¹

(d) The chiefly role inescapable

By way of conclusion in this matter, it is important to establish whether laws could have reasonably avoided the role which he eventually assumed against his will. To begin with, it is important to establish the African essence of chieftainship. In African law and custom the chief is the person responsible for the welfare of the group which acknowledges his authority both to that group and in international law. The first pre-requisite, that of responsibility to the group, raises no problem since, as has been shown in Chapter I, those who disagree with the chief are free to break away. Nor does the tribe need to be homogeneous, though the chief's own family always forms the hard core of the tribe. There would be nothing peculiar about the "mission" tribe and its various components, for merchant chiefs too had various members gathered from their travels.

It is, however, the second condition of chieftainship, that of international responsibility, which is vital to this study. In short, laws was responsible for the behaviour of his tribe both inside the Mission and outside it in relation to other tribes. More serious still,

1. Livingstonia Committee Minutes, (N.L.S. MS 7913). It is interesting that as late as 1904 the London Missionary Society still found ~~it~~ it necessary to forbid missionaries the use of the whip on African offenders.

in African international law he would be responsible for members of any tribe while they were in Mission country. There was no way of avoiding this responsibility because whatever decision he took he would be asserting a principle of intertribal law. For instance, D. Macdonald observed in a chapter entitled "International Law":

If a subject of Malemya be killed in a village of Kapeni's by men of Kumpama, Malemya expects Kapeni to catch the criminals and hand them over to him; and Kapeni must do so, otherwise he becomes a party to the crime.

That is more, Kumpama does not need to raise a finger himself against the criminals even if he knows them. All he needs to do is to send an innocent-looking message to Kapeni asking, "Where are those men of mine that went to your territory?"¹

This law would apply in the case of the Tonga porters working for the Mission who were killed by Nymberi's people. Dr. Laws could not have avoided responsibility for their lives by pleading lack of magisterial powers over Nymberi without drawing on himself the charge of conspiracy. He therefore acted correctly by entering into negotiations with Nymberi and coming to a satisfactory conclusion. Even if the Tonga were on their own business in Mission territory and killed by an enemy tribe not directly under Mission authority, the chief in whose territory the crime was committed would become the prosecutor in consultation with the injured party.

1. D. Macdonald, Africana, Vol. I, p. 192

There is also an interesting side-light to this principle of international relations. If a neighbouring chief apprehended a thief with Mission goods, he might bring him along and say, "He has done you wrong, do according to your heart."¹ There was no way of avoiding civil jurisdiction in such cases. Refusing to do anything about such a matter would mean missionary property was prone to violation on a scale which would be intolerable. Even without this, there is evidence to show that Europeans in Central Africa were prone to loss of property more than any other group.

For instance, there was one custom, completely innocent but not accepted by Europeans. Macdonald observed that "the person that takes a cob of maize (out of hunger) leaves the stalk so as to convey a well-known meaning to the farmer who ... is able to say, 'Oh! it is a poor man that has eaten because of hunger.'" This was not a crime but was taken as such by Europeans. Also, because Europeans on the whole seemed to own more property than their numbers warranted, many Africans believed that "stealing" from a European was merely doing social justice. Macdonald once more observed that, on the whole, "natives were fairly honest among each other. When one is plundered by a companion, he exclaims, 'If you had stolen from a white man, then I could have understood it, but to steal from a black man ...'"²

These were the unavoidable realities of life in Central Africa in

1. Ibid., p. 186.

2. Ibid., p. 182.

Laws' time. The only way of avoiding scandals was to have one undisputed chiefly figure who could deal with these affairs on behalf of the Mission. The advantage of this important rôle, from Laws' point of view, was that he was unavoidably brought into inter-tribal relationships and could use his growing status for the benefit of the church and the empire. The new rôle of mediator between tribes, and between tribes and the British Empire, is inseparable from his function as a successful chief in his own area. This wider rôle will be the topic of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

LAW'S' RÔLE IN THE PACIFICATION OF MALAWI

Before discussing laws' role as a Christian missionary drawing away the Tonga and Ngoni tribes from their ancestral religions towards Christianity and at the same time persuading them to accept British colonial rule, it is important to establish a few principles of African society.

There is no such thing as a "church" in traditional society, yet at the same time religion permeated into the totality of life on a scale perhaps incomprehensible to the western mind. The reason is not far to seek. Religion was intertwined with custom, law and medicine. For instance, a man possessed by a spirit (in Nyanja, chirombo) might be mad or in fact a representative of the departed ancestors, performing a respected interpretative function in his tribe. Similarly, the man often represented as a witch-doctor would in fact play a dual rôle, both medical and religious. More profoundly still, the tribesman is not worried about the immediate cause of an event, for instance habitual theft, or a series of fatal accidents; but he does go to great expense in time and wealth to find out whether his relationship with living or dead relatives is what it ought to be. When harmony in society has been restored, punishment for theft or cure for the injured fit themselves into their proper perspective; and this involves both legal and religious procedures.

From our point of view it is important to note that the culture and religion of a tribe is a closed, integrated world with strikingly collective traits. This means that the tribal traditions had the effect of imposing conformity within the tribe, both on an individual and a collective level. At the same time, religious reorientation and the fact of conversion depend upon the individual and the group being able to break with the customs, rites and traditions of the collective.¹

This leads us to a second principle. People generally tend to absorb new ideas by fitting them into their preconceptions. It has been maintained in Chapter II that Africans had an obsession with the chiefly principle, and that circumstances forced laws to fit into this image if he were to function at all. If we combine the Africans' obsession with the chiefly principle and the conception of religion as part of the totality of life, we find the missionary faced with an abnormal responsibility in relation to his converts. From the political point of view, the convert lays himself open to acculturation; or, looking at it from the nationalistic point of view, the convert makes himself vulnerable to foreign agencies in a way a traditionalist would never be. This is the significance of Christian missionary influence in relation to imperial designs. The ritual of baptism represents a major breakaway from traditional allegiances:

It is like throwing away our life - a drastic image of absolute break with the customs and beliefs of the tribe. And in a positive sense it means a change of allegiance, the taking of service under a new lord.²

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1. B. Sundkler, The World of Mission (Lutterworth 1965), p. 189.
 2. Ibid., p. 209.

The newly-converted Christian joins a new fellowship of believers, having become a member of the mbumba (Yao) or Banja laMaChristu (Nyanja), the tribe of Christ. Every banja or mbumba has a mfumo (chief), and even if the missionary believes himself to be no more than a brother, prejudices and preconceptions die hard and he is forced to take up the chieftainship of the fellowship. Naturally he leads the fellowship according to his own prejudices: if French and Catholic, along a French and Catholic imperial path; if British and Protestant, along a British and Protestant one.

Two things need to be emphasised before we examine concrete examples. Christian conversion disrupted the unity and stability of the tribes and made them vulnerable to foreign pressures in a way hitherto unknown.¹ Secondly, the converts themselves having broken with the totality of tribal regulations naturally transferred the same allegiance and total ^{loyalty} to the missionary leader.

1. Not all missionaries accepted total disruption of tribal connections. W.V. Lucas, laws' contemporary in nearby Masailand (Tanzania) (1883-1945), refused to accept individual converts for seventeen years until the whole tribe was converted and he had Christianised the tribal totality. He took the Lupanda (initiation) rite; substituted a nurse for the witch-doctor for the circumcision; kept the chief to teach the boys the tribe's honour; the six weeks they were in the bush, they received catechismal lessons and their heads were shaven as before until after baptism and confirmation. They then received new clothes and new names and were returned to their expectant parents in the shadow of the Church and tribal elders, after which they became men in the tribe and the faith. (E. Sundkler, op. cit., p. 189).

1. Effects of Conversion

Though Nyasaland Administrator H.L. Duff says, "I venture to think that the true history of the country begins with its direct administration by the Imperial Government,"¹ in fact British history in Malawi begins with Livingstone and the Livingstonia missionaries. It is necessary to include among those influenced by them even those men of affairs, like chiefs, who for the sake of their position could not openly confess Christianity but who could be said to have constituted a "missionary party" in their respective courts. One such man was Chief Chipatula, a very important chief among the Makololo. Chipatula had been one of Livingstone's porters and was one of those who welcomed the Livingstonia missionaries in 1875. We have already seen how, according to Young, his people used their friendship with the English to scare their Ngoni enemies. Macdonald has it that Chipatula sent his sons to the Blantyre Mission very early in its history, even though the neighbouring tribes were still suspicious of the English. Moreover, Chipatula was generally known as a "son of the English", and whenever he quarrelled with Matekenya, a Nyanja chief, the latter sent word to Blantyre asking what the English would do if he went to war with their son.² Needless to say, the Makololo could be counted the most faithful to the English. They were hostile to the Portuguese and fought a savage war to keep them out of southern Malawi.

1. H.L. Duff, Nyasaland under the Foreign Office (G. Bell and Son 1903), p. 16.

2. D. Macdonald, Africana, Vol. I, p. 187.

Another man who must figure in Laws' story is Albert Namalambe, his first convert in 1881. Namalambe became a pillar of the Church and the envy of his people, and in a way the showpiece of what the English could do.¹ It was not so much the new doctrine of the "Book" which impressed the Africans, for among them too there were spirit mediums who lived lives of chastity and self-denial. But Namalambe's security and happiness in the "shadow of the English" were apparent, and he impressed his African observers as visibly a new being. He assumed an English name, wore European-style clothes and even sat at table in holy communion with the English.

It is not surprising that soon after Namalambe's baptism, Jonathan, an African who had been working with Namalambe in the mission station for some time, approached Laws in secret to find out wherein lay Namalambe's secret of happiness, while he himself seemed to be perpetually in a depressed state.²

When Laws left Cape Maclear for Bandawe, he left Namalambe as "head" of the place. To his contemporaries he, like Chipatula, must have become "a son of the English" which in those days would have been more than a compliment.

Laws also noted in his diary that, soon after organizing a Christian marriage for four couples, the people were so impressed by

1. Laws, Diary, 2/3/1881.

2. Ibid.

the festival spirit of the school decorations and the dinner arranged for the couples that three more couples soon offered to be married in church. In December 1882, he was able to baptise three more converts to the Church. From this time on, there was no reason to look back.¹

One of Laws' early converts who was to play an important rôle in Johnston's administration was a Tonga man, Bandawe by name. He rose to the rank of Sergeant in Johnston's Colonial Army, and because he was an English speaker and proved loyal to the imperial cause he became "invaluable as an intelligence officer, honest and trustworthy and unfalteringly brave, who counted much in the establishment of British rule in Nyasaland".²

It was no accident that the Makololo country was the first region declared a British Protectorate in 1889 and that the Makololo chiefs had been willing to sign treaties with Acting Consul J. Buchanan. Following these so-called "friendship treaties" in their spirit, the Makololo chiefs and people sought refuge in Blantyre Mission when the Portuguese army sought to destroy them.³

Since Laws had withdrawn from Cape Maclear in 1881 his influence was better felt among the Tonga and Ngoni tribes.

The Ngoni sealed their own fate when Chief Mbelwa refused to expel

1. Laws, Diary, 17/12/1882.

2. H.H. Johnston, The Story of My Life, p. 35.

3. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, pp. 87 ff.

Laws' Mission at Njuyu in 1887 even though his milandu insisted that he should do so.¹ Significantly, he was faithfully supported by a portion of the elders who probably knew Laws personally. The immediate result was in fact the planting of a second mission station at Ekwendeni among Mtwaro's people, who had been the most hostile section in the milandu.²

In the following year, Dr. Elmslie and Mr. W. Koyi were allowed to teach children. Though it was to be six years before their first convert came forward, Dr. Elmslie noted: "The attendance of children and young men is a very hopeful sign of the fruit that will yet appear."³

One year later Elmslie was able to report to the Home Church:

I can now record that in those districts where we have laboured, these services [pre-harvest thanksgiving] have taken the place of the heathen feast of the first fruits. Yet none in the districts overtaken by meetings began to plant until thanks were expressed to God and prayer offered for their labours.⁴

The first two Ngoni converts came forward in 1890. But by 1894 the Christian fellowship could boast of a thoughtful and intelligent son and heir to Chief Mtwaro:

A nice fellow he is, very gentle, a great friend of the Mission ... in fact a teacher in the school. His counsellors would have him drop his mission sympathies, but he won't, and may prove a

1. F.C.S. Record, 1/8/1887.

2. Ibid., 1/3/1888; see also ibid., 1/8/1888.

3. Ibid., 1/10/1888.

4. Ibid., 1/3/1889.

God-send in the days to come.¹

It was at this time that a dynamic young minister, Donald Fraser, came to Ngoni-land and almost wrought an apostolic revival. The revival spread over a number of years, 1894 - 1898, and these years are important as giving the framework within which the Ngoni fell under colonial rule. Fraser organized open-air meetings and he describes one such meeting as follows:

The paths to the south were alive with people. And men sat on ant-hills as the companies passed and cried out - what mean these things? Has an army come among you? Are you going to a new country? We are going to the baptisms. Come and see!²

There was no doubt that the Ngoni were being deeply moved towards a new life, and these events must have shaken the confidence and foundations of tribal beliefs, much to the chagrin of the traditionalists.

There were also various ways in which laws won the favour of the Malawian tribes and held out the European way of life as a real alternative to tribal life. It has been shown in the previous chapter how many Africans escaped possible slavery and placed themselves under laws' sovereignty. There were others who ran away from tribal jurisdiction merely because there was an alternative. As early as 1880 Laws quarrelled with a neighbouring chief, Mpenge, simply because the

1. F.C.S. Record, 2/4/1894.

2. Livingstonia Letters, 16/4/1894.
NO 73 - 103.

latter's subjects preferred the Laws way of life to his.¹ Laws wrote in his diary that Chief Mpengo

complained of many of his people having run away and complained of several having come here [Cape Maclear] in his absence. I told him I had no desire that his people come here but if his men behaved [badly] he could not expect [his people] to stay.

Perhaps one of Laws' lasting achievements was the creation within a very short time of a labour pool of semi-skilled and skilled artisans whose very skills were dependent on European civilisation. This is probably because Laws himself was an old-fashioned jack-of-all-trades and had found his many gifts invaluable whenever he needed to supplement his fees or merely to survive. He was a skilled carpenter, a brick-layer, an amateur seaman, a doctor, a preacher and an administrator as well. However, the Tonga took to the Livingstonia Mission and learnt what could be taught with surprising rapidity.

As early as 1883, F. Morrison, Chief Engineer of the African Lakes Company, noted that on board the Livingstonia Mission steamer Ilala

it was very encouraging to me ... to see a native crew so attentive and so efficient at their work as that of the Ilala and especially to see that natives could be left alone in the engine room. I did not once see the natives being interfered with by the master.²

In another passage he "could not speak too highly of my Livingstonia boys ... I work them very hard but I never hear a grumble. [An aside] I never ask them to do what I would not do myself."³

1. These had nothing to do with conversion or specific cruelty in the tribe at all (Laws, Diary, 16/7/1880).

2. Morrison Diaries, 23/1/1883 (E.U.L. Gen. 1804).

3. Ibid., 18/3/1885 (Gen. 1808).

Laws had also gradually overcome the work-shyness of the Tonga and the neighbouring tribes. Previously, they considered themselves deserving leave and rest if they had earned two pairs of clothes or so. As a result they rarely stayed at the Mission or with the planters for more than a month.¹ But because the Livingstonia Mission was a reliable and considerate employer the supply of workers gradually outstripped the demand. Mtwaro's famous demand that Laws should build his chief mission station at the latter's headquarters can be seen as an attempt to give jobs to the boys,²

Macdonald had said the African's earthly possessions could all be carried in a bundle on his head and that "their wants are few".³ But things changed. Young men began to demand the illustrious Christian marriage from Dr. Laws for which they ^{would} have to save for long periods. It is obvious that an insatiable thirst for material prosperity drove the Tonga into the work camps of the settlers and the Protectorate government. Some even went to South Africa and everywhere testimonies indicated that Laws had done his job well. In Malawi itself, long before the Protectorate, the Bandawe boys were in great demand among the white farmers, and the African Lakes Company employed the biggest number. Mr. A. Casson of the Company wrote of the Tonga as the most

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1. Livingstonia Journal, 1875 (MS 7907).
 2. F.C.S. Record, 2/4/1894 .
 3. Africana, Vol. I, p. 39.

reliable and dependable and willing to work away from home.¹

When in 1911 Rev. A. MacAlpine was instructed to tour the South African mines and see how the Livingstonia boys were faring, a manager on the Johannesburg mines told him that the Livingstonia (Malawi) boys were "an active and intelligent type of native, and somewhat more reliable than the representatives of many other tribes on the Rand".²

Even Commissioner Johnston, who was biased against missionary endeavour and had employed Moslems and Sikhs in his service, saw the need to employ the Tonga. "We were beginning to employ as police the Atonga natives of West Nyassa."³

Laws was not a man to miss the opportunities gradually opening for the Bandawe Africans. He in fact opened a labour agency and stood as security to the chiefs for Africans recruited through his agency. He also encouraged contracts of at least a year. In one such case Chief Chikoko asked Laws to cause the return of his men from a labour camp because the one-year contract had expired. More interesting still, Laws writes to F. Moir of the African Lakes Company giving a bad report of an African elephant-hunter who had registered for a job through his agency. The elephant-hunter, Laws argues, cannot "be trusted without

1. African Lakes Company Records, quoted from H. Macmillan, "The Origin and Development of the African Lakes Company," unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1968), p. 190.

2. Livingstonia News, 1/4/1911, pp. 27 ff.

3. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 118.

European supervision ... I have prepared him for your negative."¹

The smooth running of this scheme was attributed "to the missionary standing for the proper treatment of the natives, and on the other hand, F. Moir, whose personal interest in them and desire for their good by his Christian work continued the influence of the mission".²

The growing thirst for material wealth among the Malawi Africans prior to imperial rule helped create a favourable medium through which Commissioner Johnston was to work. It is a fact that the earliest nationalists found this growing materialism inconsistent with the preservation of nationhood. Johnston found a ready-made pool of collaborators able and trained to serve as soldiers, clerks and policemen. Five years after the advent of the Administration, laws estimated that the African Lakes Company alone employed 1,400 Tonga and that other European planters in the Shire Highlands had taken 4,000 more.³

The Livingstonia Mission was so well placed in its training in skills that Deputy Commissioner Sharpe had to borrow an African printer

1. Laws to F. Moir, 13/5/1887 (MS 7914).

2. The Aurora, 1/4/1900 (C.S. Library).

3. F.C.S. Record, 1/1/1895. The classic example of materialism v. nationhood is in Exodus 16.iii in which Moses was challenged by would-be collaborators with Egypt. It is also true that early African resistance movements tried to reject European materialism as they saw in it the cause of their bondage. T. Ranger in Rebellion in S. Rhodesia 1896-7 (R.E.B. London, 1967: pp. 354 ff.) argues that the freedom fighters were to forsake all European material wealth and Christianity until and unless African control was established over the first.

for the Government Gazette from Laws.¹

(b) Laws and the Establishment of Colonial Rule

One of the results of the Blantyre Affair of 1881 was that the Foreign Office decided to send Consul Foot in October 1883 to the Lake Nyasa region to look after the interests of the missionaries and Englishmen settled there.²

Laws at the same time was convinced that, in the absence of a European government, missionary endeavour would suffer a setback. He saw two alternatives for this problem. Either the missionaries would have to take a more open part in the political organization of the areas in which they worked, or the African Lakes Company would have to be persuaded to administer Malawi. Laws was too sensitive to press the first scheme, though he was personally in favour of it. He put it to the Foreign Missions Committee that the disadvantage of letting the African Lakes Company administer the territory was that a time would come when their administrators would be divorced from missionary interests.³ He advised the Committee, however, not to take separate action but to assist the African Lakes Company in securing titles, as any other procedure might lead to commotion and trouble with the chiefs.⁴

1. Letter of Dr. Laws to Deputy Commissioner Sharpe, 30/11/1894 (MS 7874).

2. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 68.

3. Livingstonia Committee Minutes (MS 7912), pp. 66 ff.

4. Ibid., 3/3/1885.

Having placed the services of the Livingstonia Mission in the hands of the Company, Laws felt that the war-like Ngoni would give the stiffest resistance to colonization, and his plan was to enter into preliminary negotiations with them as well as with the Tonga nearer Bandawe, and to delay the conclusion of the treaty with the latter until the former had signed.

The plan almost succeeded and the Ngoni showed their willingness to sign the treaty.

In the end, however, the plan failed, for three reasons. Dr. Clement Scott of the Blantyre Mission, who was on leave in England in 1886, campaigned against what he believed to be the greed of chartered companies.¹ Dr. Scott was in principle against rule by companies whose main motive was profit, whether it be the African Lakes Company or Rhodes' B.S.A. Company. His views are best summarised in his own words, written when this matter was revived four years later:

We are surprised that at this time of day people here and at home should be misled as to the meaning of a Chartered Company. The same spectre in India plundered the Nabobs' treasures, this same lean spectre here must fill the pockets of its shareholders with money from the African.²

The second reason for the failure of Laws' plan was that the second deputation sent to finalise arrangements with the Ngoni consisted of

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1. H. Macmillan, Central African Lakes Company, pp. 244 and 245.
 2. Life and Work, (1/10/1890).

Stuart and Stevenson, Dr. Elmslie was asked to give as much help as he possibly could. But Stuart and his companion were taken to drink, with results so deplorable that at one point, from Elmslie's verandah, they invited African women to share their beds.¹ For this obscenity they were fined and were only saved from serious consequences because the Ngoni held Laws responsible for their behaviour. But, most surprisingly of all, the Ngoni refused to sign the treaty on the grounds that, judging by their behaviour, Stuart and his companion did not belong to Laws' tribe!

The third reason for failure was that Consul Howes, who had succeeded Foot, was strongly biased against the missions and their allies, the African Lakes Company, and told the Makololo chiefs who had agreed to treaties with the Company that he, Consul Foot, was the Queen's representative and not the Company. The chiefs, who considered themselves "sons of the English", felt cheated and repudiated the treaties.²

The Livingstonia Mission Committee was at the same time trying to impress the Foreign Office with the necessity for colonizing Malawi. They invited a common front, and naturally the Blantyre Mission is absent from the list of those who lobbied the British Government at the Berlin Conference in 1885. Laws was there, as well as Mr. Moir and Mr. Ewing of the African Lakes Company.³ Though the Livingstonia

1. Dr. Elmslie to Dr. Scott, 20/8/1895 (MS 7876).

2. H. Macmillan, Central African Lakes Company, p. 248.

3. F.C.S. Record, 1/1/1885, P.3.

Mission was cheerful about the results of their attendance at Berlin, they were to be disappointed by the results of their direct approach to Lord Salisbury.¹ Lord Salisbury saw their invitation to colonize Malawi as "impracticable" and the best he could do was to ask the British Minister in Portugal, Mr. Petre, to negotiate for favourable terms for them with that country, which controlled the coastal area adjacent to Malawi.²

The Livingstonia Mission was, however, adamant. This time it got the signatures of the African Lakes Company, the Church of Scotland, the Royal Geographical Society, the Anti-Slavery Society and the Universities Mission to its memorandum of March 1887.³ This time Lord Salisbury was alarmed and said so in no uncertain terms. The scheme proposed by the missionaries and the African Lakes Company would involve Britain in an unprofitable "war with countless savages who filled those territories". They were to be satisfied at the moment with the hope that "civilization" and "Christianity" would tame the "savages" in Central Africa.⁴

The idea of a protectorate would have been abandoned in favour of the African Lakes Company gradually assuming civil authority in Malawi had it not been for the indecisive Arab war which erupted at this time.

1. F.C.S. Record, 1/6/1885.

2. F.O. to A.L. Co., 25/2/1887 (MS 7873).

3. Memorandum 127, 9/3/1887, (MS 7873).

4. F.C.S. Record, P. 56, 1/8/1888.

The Livingstonia Mission, among others, was quick to see the war as a struggle between the "Arab slavers" as they called them, and the power of civilization and Christianity as represented by the African Lakes Company and the Livingstonia missionaries.¹ This may have been so in the widest sense as involving Christians fighting Moslems, who at the time did not have religious quibbles over slavery. But looking at the immediate causes of the war, one is compelled to view it as actually rooted in the desire of both parties to acquire supremacy over the local tribes. The Livingstonia Mission had opened a sub-station at Mweni-Wanda's in the north under the Reverend A. Bain, and later Dr. Kerr Cross was to succeed him. It has been mentioned above² that the Livingstonia Mission was helping the African Lakes Company to acquire titles from African chiefs with a view to imposing political sovereignty over them. Clearly, were Arab influence to predominate, the region might be lost to the Mission and consequently their allies, the Company, might find it difficult to acquire political sovereignty. Yet, paradoxically, the Arabs seem to have been such competent traders that the Company was often unable to pay its debts to them for as long as a

1. Dr. Laws saw the A.L. Co. as defenders of the faith: "our defenders" he called them (A. Holmberg, African Tribes and European Agencies, pp. 251 and 253). For an account of Mlozi see also J.W. Jack - Daybreak in Livingstonia (Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), pp. 271 ff.

2. P. 66.

month or two. This seems to have been the immediate cause of trouble.

Fotheringham, the Company agent in that district, recounts how the Arabs, bored at doing nothing while waiting for the Company to pay them, often came to fatal blows with the locals.¹ The Arab-led Swahili groups which sold ivory to the Company were well-armed with guns and averaged a thousand men in each group. Clearly the local Konde and Wanda tribesmen could not stand against such forces with only spears and bows and arrows. It also appeared to the Arabs that, if they were to wait for long periods with such a number of men, it would be more convenient if they were to carve out a large principedom in Northern Malawi, which would become the focal point of their trade with the coast. This appears to have been the underlying factor behind the specific quarrels with the Company. For instance Kasote, a Konde chief and friend to Fotheringham, was murdered by Salim bin Majim's followers in a drunken brawl and about two weeks later Mwini-Mtete, an important chief, also known to Fotheringham, was shot dead by Ramathan's men. Ramathan and Salim bin Majim were both Arab merchants, owing allegiance to the Arab slave-merchant prince Mlozi. Fotheringham, from whom the Arabs had been waiting for their pay for weeks, was naturally involved as mediator since he was known to both parties. The war followed, the Konde, the Wanda, the Company and the Livingstonia Mission lining up on one side

1. For this account see L.M. Fotheringham, Adventures in Nyasaland: A two years' struggle with Arab slave-dealers in Central Africa (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1891), Ch. IV.

against the Arabs. Actually every one of these groups was fighting not so much to defend the others but to defend its own life and survival.

The immediate impact of the Arab war was to compel the Livingstonia Mission to renew its propaganda and agitation for a British Protectorate, or, alternatively, Chartered Company status for the African Lakes Company to enable it to undertake this task.

Being heirs to the Anti-Slavery Campaign, the missions used the horror stories from the war zone with great effect to stir up the public conscience in Scotland and hence the attention of the British Government. In March 1888 the Record told its Scots adherents that though the Livingstonia Mission was in mortal danger from an Arab attack,

At the same time there is no occasion for serious alarm. Both Consuls are on the spot. Mr. O'Neill (the Consul) and Dr. Laws are as equal to any emergency as men can be under God. The two mission steamers, - the Ilala and the Charles Jansen are likewise at hand for service.¹

In August the Record again reported that the Mission at Mweni-Wanda had to be closed. More significantly, the Reverend A. Bain and Dr. Kerr Cross were to join a second expedition being organized by Mr. F. Moir, manager of the African Lakes Company. This expedition against the Arabs met with disaster, but the Record was apparently determined to turn defeat into success:

Mr. Frederick Moir has since been invalided, and will soon be with us in Scotland to further rouse public opinion on the subject.²

1. F.C.S. Record, 1.iii.1888.

2. Ibid., 1.viii.1888

In the same month a circular letter was distributed among all the Free Church Sunday School children entitled "Rev. A. Bain's 300 slave children",¹ The letter was an appeal for both sympathy and material support for the three hundred African children who had been made homeless by the Arab war. In another case, Dr. Kerr Cross had been instrumental in following an Arab party and actually releasing twenty-nine men and women who were on their way to the slave markets on the coast.² Yet another story from Dr. Kerr Cross which was meant to rouse the public conscience was that:

Every now and again we receive news of the Arabs or some of their allies having attacked such and such a village, and killed so many men and captured women.

In another village of my personal servant Sande ... they fired volley after volley into the houses. Then panic ensued ... every man was butchered, every woman and boy and girl and cow captured and marched off.³

Lord Salisbury was willing to grant a charter to any company which had sufficient capital to pay its way in Malawi. What he was not prepared to accept was that the Treasury should pay the bill for the administration, partly because the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, Mr. Goschen, was supposed to be a "little Englander".⁴ The Company, having failed to dislodge the Arabs, decided to amalgamate with

1. Circular letter by A. Bain, 1.viii.1889 (MS 7877).

2. F.C.S. Record, 1/1/1890.

3. Letter of Dr. Kerr Cross to F.C.S. Record, 5/9/1889; also in MS 7906.

4. See R. Oliver, Sir H.H. Johnston, p. 152.

Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company and to raise jointly a capital of £1 million.¹ Laws was alarmed at the prospect of the African Lakes Company being swallowed up by a bigger company, and particularly at the immoral influence which big company men would have on Africans, "and notably that native women would be kept by agents of the latter at their various stations".²

The Livingstonia Mission's argument that the Arab war had necessitated their having to ask the "... British Government for the redemption of the pledges of Lord Palmerston and Lord Clarendon given through Livingstone to the chiefs in Nyasa-land just thirty years ago"³ would have gone unheeded by Lord Salisbury had it not been for a new development at the southern end of Lake Nyasa, historically and in point of time inseparable from the Arab war in the north. One of the reasons why the Arab war went badly for the African Lakes Company was that vital supplies were held up at the coast by the Portuguese. For instance, arms and ammunition in transit were prohibited unless a permit had been granted in Lisbon.⁴ At the same time, "Portugal subsequently tried to

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1. A.L. Bruce to G. Cawston, 31/3/1890 (Quoted from H. Macmillan, Central African Lakes Company, p. 314.).
 2. Livingstonia Committee Minutes, 21/4/1890 (MS 7912).
 3. F.C.S. Record, 1/8/1888. See also letter from Anti-Slavery Society to Dr. G. Smith, P. 24 (MS 7873).
 4. A.L. Co., to Dr. G. Smith, 26/8/1889 (MS 7873).

introduce regulations requiring that all vessels navigating the Zambesi should use the Portuguese flag only; and be owned and manned by Portuguese subjects, and even went the length of arresting a British vessel plying on the rivers."¹

The Portuguese were in fact trying to press their claim on the fertile Shire Highlands in which the Blantyre missionaries and other British planters had already settled. The Makololo, who were the "sons of the English", were settled between the Highlands and the Portuguese and were clearly an impediment. Portuguese Lt. Coutinho decided to teach them a lesson and with an army of seven hundred guns drove them out of their country until they sought refuge at Blantyre Mission and he himself was only thirty miles from that mission station.

The Livingstonia Mission in collaboration with others had changed their tactics. They had given up sending private petitions to Lord Salisbury in favour of rousing public opinion against Portuguese atrocities and the possible loss of "Livingstone's land". At the same time their petitions, the greatest of which was the Memorial which was circulated and signed by ten thousand humble ministers of the Gospel and elders of the Church of Scotland in 1889, was in fact a show of public support rather than a mere appeal to the wisdom of Her Majesty's ministers.² The Reverend Horace Waller was commissioned to write a

1. W. Ewing, Secretary, A.I. Co., to Glasgow Herald, 26/12/1889 (MS 7853).

2. The Memorial (MS 7905, p. 61) was signed by members of the C.S., F.C.S, U.P.C. Original is actually undated.

reasoned argument in favour of their case for requiring British protection in Malawi. In 1890 Horace Waller published his pamphlet, entitled Great Britain's Case against Portugal, a copy of which was sent to Lord Salisbury.¹ The pamphlet was meant to appeal to the patriotic instinct of the Scots. He argued simply from the premise that Livingstone had bequeathed Nyasaland to Britain and Mrs. Livingstone's as well as Bishop Mackenzie's death had sealed the gift with blood. The Portuguese, moreover, were slavers and were in fact detested by the natives in those territories. Besides, the reader ~~was~~ ^{is} reminded that the British Government had spent 30,000 ^{lira} on Livingstone's second expedition and the missions there had a capital investment of more than £45,000, ~~and~~ ten thousand natives having received medical attention at Bandawe alone in the year 1884. The Buchanan Brothers had carved for themselves an estate of 50,000 acres. It was surely unreasonable to let the Portuguese occupy the territory in which they had built and owned nothing.

The Anti-Slavery Society, after receiving some information from the Free Church, briefed Sir R.W. Fowler to ask a question in Parliament.² Some of the information alarming to the Livingstonia Mission was that the African Lakes Company was considering withdrawing its services from Nyasaland and working in the Congo Free State where the Belgian King

1. H. Waller, Nyasaland - Great Britain's Case against Portugal (E. Stanford 1890).

2. Letters from Anti-Slavery Society to F.M. Comm., 25/2/1888 and 2/3/1888 (MS 7873).

offered protection to merchants.¹ The Livingstonia Committee was to take all available opportunities to address public meetings on the Nyasaland case.² The missionary propagandists received support from surprising quarters. The Times in an editorial said of Lt. Coutinho's action in Makololo-land:

Whether Major Pinto (Pinto had been replaced by Coutinho) attacked the Makololo or the Makololo attacked Major Pinto is a question we can never settle and need not argue. He (Coutinho) had no business among the Makololo at all.³

An even more surprising ally in the battle for public support was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had been in fact an impediment to Nyasa-land colonization due to his unwillingness to release Treasury funds for the purpose. Chancellor Goschen, addressing his constituents at Piccadilly in 1889, used Livingstone's words to influence his audience:

I have opened the door, I leave it to you to see that no one closes it after me. (Cheers!) No one is to close the door after Livingstone ... The Portuguese, we maintain, have no shadow of a right to those lands of which I have spoken.⁴

It was the Portuguese episode, not the Arab war, which moved the British Government to declare a Protectorate over Malawi. The first move came from Acting Consul Buchanan, who proclaimed the Shire Highlands a Protectorate as a direct result of the Makololo-Portuguese war

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1. Letter of H. Waller to F.M. Comm., 14/4/1888 (MS 7873).
 2. Livingstonia Papers (MS 7873) p.48.
 3. The Times, 24/12/1889.
 4. The Mail, 22/1/1889.

in September of 1889.¹ But this declaration would have been ineffective had it not been backed by Lord Salisbury's ultimatum to Lisbon. Lord Salisbury instructed his envoy in Lisbon:

You are therefore instructed to repeat to Senhor Gomez a categorical request for an immediate declaration from the Portuguese Govt. that the forces of Portugal will not be permitted to interfere with British settlements on the Shire and Nyassa, or the country of the Makololos ... and you will request that you may receive an answer before the evening of the 8th instant!²

It is not clear what Dr. Laws' part in the latter stages of the negotiations with Portugal could have been. But it is clear that the Home Committee of the Free Church depended almost entirely upon him for authoritative information and advice in their joint actions with other missions and societies. In 1890, however, we find Dr. Smith thanking Dr. Laws for supplying him with important information which led to the declaration of the Protectorate.³

It may be that Lord Salisbury was at last able to stand up to the Portuguese not because he had been convinced by the memorials and petitions of the missions but because "an extra-ordinary fellow from South Africa, Cecil Rhodes, the South African gold mining tycoon" had offered to pay £10,000 a year for the administration of Malawi in exchange for a charter to administer Southern and Northern Zambesia.⁴

1. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 66.

2. Published in The Mail, 20/1/1890 (MS 7906).

3. Dr. Smith to Dr. Laws, 18/1/1890 (MS 7898).

4. H.H. Johnston, The Story of My Life, p. 234.

Armed with the promise of £10,000 from Rhodes, and with £2,000 in his pocket for immediate expenses, Commissioner Johnston arrived in Malawi in the summer of 1889.¹ His strategy was to leave Acting Consul Buchanan in the south to deal with the Portuguese and make treaties with the Makololo and other Shire Highland chiefs. Deputy-Consul A. Sharpe would go north-westwards towards Lake Tanganyika avoiding the Ngoni strongholds. He himself proceeded to settle the Arab war. Contrary to what was expected of him by the missions, that he would take sides with their forces against Mlozi, he pensioned off Jumbe, a known Arab slaver, and formed a lifetime friendship with him.² He acted as mediator between the African Lakes Company and Mlozi and concluded a peace treaty in 1891.³ He then hurried south, leaving the Northern Ngoni unmolested for the time being.

The story of the Ngoni deserves special attention because of the part played by Laws in their subjection. There is a strong tradition that Laws, one of the few Scots missionaries whom Johnston could stomach, advised him to leave northern Ngoni-land to the Mission.⁴ Johnston was apparently willing to do this because the Shire Highland chiefs were restless and he was keen to found a "system" of government there first.

1. H.H. Johnston, op. cit., p. 237

2. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p 134 ff.

3. Ibid., p. 135.

4. A. Caseby. This is supported by circumstantial evidence.

Secondly, the Blantyre missionaries were giving him trouble and it would have been unwise to create enmity with laws as well. In fact, according to A.C. Ross, he formulated a strategy which would at least keep the Livingstonia Mission quiet.¹

However, in 1896, he returned to the north to deal with Mlozi, whom he hanged.² Having "dealt with" that region, he felt strong enough to deal with the Ngoni, but Dr. Laws once more persuaded him to leave the Ngoni for the time being. To Deputy Commissioner Sharpe, Laws wrote:

We may not get the credit for it, but there is a preparation for British rule going on in Ngoniland which may yet make it the easiest transfer of power in British Central Africa.³

Sharpe was apparently convinced. In reply he wrote, "Write and tell me when you are satisfied and I will act at once."⁴

While the northern Ngoni were being prepared to swallow the pill by Laws, the southern Ngoni of Mpezeni were being subjected to provocations by Sharpe so that he could have an excuse to deal with them. In 1894, Mpezeni sent an invitation to Ngonomo (the northern Ngoni prime minister, as Mbelwa had died in 1891) to join him in a war against the British. Ngonomo was in favour of a united front and called a general council of the tribe. Ngonomo got the shock of his life. The missionary party, consisting mainly of young men taught by Elmelie already referred to, "then demonstrated to the old men that their voice

1. A.C. Ross, "Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission", pp. 199 - 200.

2. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 143.

3. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 283.

4. Ibid., p. 284.

was no longer a power in the tribe. All the young rose up and left in a body to attend [Church] service." ¹ Whether Ngonomo was pressurised to give up the regency by the missionaries cannot be established at this late date. But it was to the missionaries that Ngonomo went to plead his innocence when he realised that the tide was against him. He then left the district with a few followers to find peace away from the Mission. ²

With Ngonomo out of the way Sharpe and laws were able to get their own candidate as the paramount chief. It is significant that Mbelekelwa, whose claim to the chieftaincy was very doubtful, was installed according to Christian rites in 1887. ³

Laws kept his word to Sharpe. In 1904 he wrote to him that the time was ripe for a ceremonial takeover in Ngoniland. Sharpe called a great milandu and explained to the Ngoni that British protection would not include internal interference in tribal affairs. Thereupon he introduced a Resident and declared Ngoniland an imperial possession. ⁴

The southern Ngoni of Mpezeni were not so lucky. Different reasons have been put forward as causes of the Mpezeni war. According to J.K. Rennie, Chief Mpezeni wrote to Sharpe c. 1897 in this vein: "I

1. Elmslie, Among the Wild Ngoni, pp. 294-5.

2. Aurora, 1/6/1896, p. 24 (C.S. Library).

3. Elmslie, op.cit., p 296

4. Quoted in Stokes, op. cit., p. 329.

wish no war. All Chipeta was mine, and now you say it is not. Mwasi was my slave [i.e. subject] and you killed him in war."¹ The official reason given by the Administration was that Mpezeni's warlike Ngoni had imperilled the lives of two British South Africa Company European prospectors and that the Administration was called to defend their lives. Blantyre's Life and Work clearly knew better and clearly rejected this as an excuse. It said, "The feeling of most people is that the cause of war is altogether an unjustifiable one."²

The result of the war is more interesting, as Laws saved the Administration from what might have become a major scandal. The Administration captured 10,000 head of cattle and sold them. Colonel Manning wrote to Lord Salisbury:

I do not imagine the total cost to the B.S.A. Co. will be more than £2,000. This will be covered ten times over by the value of the cattle captured in the expedition, so that ... the Company will reap a handsome profit.³

But the Blantyre Mission was to have launched a vigorous campaign against this "unjust war" if Laws had not cut them short. Blantyre's Life and Work argued from the premise that the war was based on trumped-up accusations, and was therefore an unjust war. As to the cattle,

If they are to be removed from the country as if they were the booty consequent upon a justifiable war, we feel sure it would be regarded by every fair-minded resident in the country as a deplorable instance of injustice.⁴

1. Quoted in Stokes, op. cit., p. 329.

2. Life & Work of British Central Africa, 15/4/1898.

3. E. Stokes (ed.), The Zambesian Past, p. 330.

4. Life & Work, 15/4/1898.

Dr. Laws' Aurora replied in a tone sympathetic to the Administration, and since he was the expert on Ngoni affairs the Blantyre Mission could not prosecute the matter further. Life and Work quoted Laws' Aurora as saying that the Ngoni military power "must have been a continual source of anxiety to the Administration", and that he trusted that the fact that "this danger has been removed swiftly, and we trust finally, will be a source of satisfaction to all who know what the Angoni raids mean".¹

There is no doubt that had the two missions been of one mind in defending Mpezeni's rights, the Administration would have been faced by a formidable opposition the result of which would have been unpredictable.

1. Ibid., 15/7/1898.

CHAPTER IV
LAWS AND THE STATE

1. Introduction

From the very fact that the Missionary Societies in Malawi had used their combined influence to persuade the British Government to colonize that country, they regarded themselves as having a special relationship with the Governments of the Protectorate. Unfortunately, from the very beginning when H.H. Johnston was appointed Commissioner in 1889, the missionaries found themselves in disagreement with him — partly because Johnston was scornful of their experience in Africa, and partly because he and they differed in outlook on almost any given problem due to their different rôles in society.

Laws seems to have followed a consistent policy throughout his career. He avoided controversy at all costs and only tackled those items in public affairs which had a direct impact on the Livingstonia Mission and its adherents. This policy had a two-fold result. The dynamic leadership at Blantyre under Scott and Hetherwick suffered from the lack of support which Laws' immense prestige in Administration circles in Malawi and in the Scottish Churches at home would have given them in their quarrels with Commissioner Johnston. Often their

vociferous behaviour was compared to their disadvantage with the cool attitude of Dr. Laws. Secondly, the Administration went out of its way to comply with Laws' requests, knowing they were few.

Laws could have had plenty to quarrel about with Johnston if he had wanted. Johnston was a self-confessed believer in palmistry and necromancers.¹ He was scornful of missionaries and no doubt impressed them as such. The Livingstonia Committee noted in 1891 that "the Convener ... feared that Consul Johnston ... might not be sympathetic with the Mission in their work".²

Horace Waller wrote an urgent appeal to the Livingstonia Committee reporting that Commissioner Johnston had made use of slaves as porters from Zanzibar to Malawi.³ In this case the Livingstonia Committee rightly felt that it would make petitions only after detailed information from Dr. Laws, who was then due in Scotland on furlough. As was characteristic of Laws, that was the last heard of the matter.

It may be also that the Missions suffered loss of investments in Chikhusi's country because Johnston did not inform the Foreign Office diligently enough about missionary activity in that area. As a result, the Berlin Treaty of 1891 left the mission station in British territory but left the people on the Portuguese side. The Committee was also disappointed that a Livingstonia Mission station

British Central Africa p 92 ff. 190 ff.

1. H.H. Johnston, The Story of My Life.
2. Livingstonia Sub-Committee Minutes, 4/1/1891 (C.S. Library).
3. Ibid., 23/1/1891.

in Kararamuka's country had been included in German territory.¹

In addition Johnston was an avowed friend of the Moslems, whose Swahili allies the missionaries considered as forming the hard-core slavers. He pensioned off Jumbe, whom the missionaries saw as a notorious Moslem Swahili slaver, and had designs to hand over Malawi to the rule of a "wicked" company, the British South Africa Company, based in South Africa.²

Another very serious charge levelled against Johnston by the Blantyre Mission in particular was that his plan of pacification relied too heavily on war with the chiefs. If war was such a necessity, how had they been able to live with the Africans for fifteen years without an army? they asked. According to Ross, Johnston had noted that there was a difference in policy between the Free Church of Livingstonia and the Established Church at Blantyre. It seems highly likely that he decided to treat the two societies differently under a deliberate policy of "divide and rule"; at least, he stated clearly that he would try to build up the Universities Mission of Archdeacon Marples as a rival to Blantyre.³ These rivalries, and more seriously the taxation which followed them, raised the most bitter controversy at this time. Johnston argued: "All the

1. Ibid., 23/6/1891.

2. A.C. Ross, "Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Blantyre Mission," p. 194.

3. Archdeacon Marples was a close friend of Laws. See letters in Professor Shepperson's Collection, Vol. A (Edinburgh University).

chiefs ruling anywhere near Blantyre have concluded treaties which deal with this question of tax."¹ Hetherwick replied that those who did make pressurised by Acting Consul Buchanan to do so.²

It is significant that Dr. Laws persuaded Johnston not to "deal with" the Ngoni and Tonga chiefs as he had done with the chiefs in the Blantyre area. The Blantyre Mission had in fact offered to help in one case, that of Chikhumbu, but Johnston rejected the offer.³ The result of this understanding with Laws was rewarding, as has already been seen in Chapter III. More significant still was the fact that Laws' sphere of influence was left untouched by the notorious taxes which so vexed the Blantyre leaders in the south.

However, the poll tax was imposed in the Livingstonia area in 1897 (five years after its imposition in the south), without consultation with the chiefs. There were definitely some missionaries in the Livingstonia Mission who could have stood against this imposition; four shillings per head per annum was extortionate. Henderson, one of Laws' educationists at Livingstonia, explained ^{in a letter} to his wife that the average monthly wage of an African was two shillings and eightpence and that it would take about three months to save this amount. He says:

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1. H.H. Johnston to Dr. Hetherwick, 4/7/1892 (MS Nyasaland and Kikuyu 1891-96, C.S. Library).
 2. Hetherwick to Dr. G. Scott, 25/7/1892 (ibid.).
 3. Life and Work in B.C.A., 1/8/1891.

If only we could see some real lasting good coming out of our taxation, however, we should not demur, but we don't. The last action of our worthy commissioner — I won't give him a capital letter — is to impose a game tax ... and now we must pay one pound a year before we can use them [the guns]. There are just three [two?] things untaxed in B.C.A., machinery, air and water.¹

These taxes were supposed to pay for Johnston's army and police.

But, according to Henderson,

the police force creates far more crime than it checks, Life and property are least safe near Gvt. centres. The armed forces are officered by men who have come here simply to secure early promotion ... The Protectorate is seething with discontent. The Planter, the organ of trade, is full of attacks on the Gvt. and so bitter is the feeling of hostility against Sir H.H. Johnston ... that it is thought likely that he will not return before December when he will be entitled to retire ...²

Laws' policy was made clear to his junior colleagues: "Dr. Laws is very much for keeping quiet and leaving alone ...," wrote Henderson in one letter.³

But there were other things against which Laws could at least have protested. Henderson wrote to his wife of a visitor to Livingstonia Mission on his way to the north of the Lake. He says:

They had also a young fellow ... returning from Blantyre where he stood trial for wantonly shooting in cold blood without any provocation whatsoever two natives. He wanted to test a rock rifle and shot at them as if they were trees. He was convicted and fined £70 or six months imprisonment. Well, after that the A.L. Co. is sending this fellow to be assistant manager in the Tanganyika and Mwero districts, and the man whom he is to

1. Henderson's letters to his wife in R. Shepherd (ed.), The Pioneers of Modern Malawi (Lovedale Press, 1968), Letter 32, 27/6/1897.

2. Ibid., p. 253.

3. Ibid., Letter 27, 12/3/1897, p. 226.

assist is his own brother, a man I came across once, a ruffianly beast. One wonders, one is forced to consider anxiously whether any grounds whatsoever are sufficient to prevent one speaking out about the things one sees and hears about. Dr. Laws is very much for keeping quiet and leaving alone, but the question comes to be if it is right to keep quiet, whatever the cost of speaking out may be. People at home would not believe the things that one sees and hears of being done by people in authority here.¹

The labour problem in the eighteen-nineties was still in its infancy but grew with the years and has never been solved to this day. There were three aspects to the problem, over all of which the missions and the Government were bound to differ. In the first instance, Johnston believed Africans to be incapable of tackling the higher technical skills and proposed to import Indian workmen to fill this gap. Dr. Scott was very vigorous in his attack on this policy:

There seems to us little need of imported labour. We need not yet fall at the feet of John Chinaman or Chunder Sen. A few grains of respect for the race we have here, mixed with our daily calculations, and taken with every meal, would soon give us a proper colonistic tone, and add wonderfully to our peace of mind.²

The second aspect of the labour problem was the planters, who in the absence of any government supervision were taking "children of tender age [and putting them] to all kinds of work only fit for able-bodied men and women."³

Apparently Laws paid no attention to these aspects of the labour problem, probably because, as Buchan pointed out, the Missions themselves employed young people as part-time workers after school hours

1. Ibid., Letter 27, 12/3/1897, p. 226.

2. Life and Work in B.C.A., 1/4/1891.

3. Ibid., 1/3/1890.

or as part of their education.¹ But there was a third aspect of the problem which affected the Livingstonia Mission more than anywhere else. Henderson wrote in 1897:

Wages are steadily rising around Blantyre and a visit of a few months to it ensures the earning of a small fortune. Unfortunately scarcely a single boy has gone to Blantyre without being spoilt by it. The first shock comes to these boys in seeing white men entirely ignoring God and living, many of them, in open gross sin. There are exceptions ... but as a whole we prefer to have nothing at all to do with boys who have been to the capital.²

The problem of losing his best lads sometimes before the completion of their courses, and more seriously the un-Christian influence of the south, was a major challenge to Laws. The problem was later traced to the education he and other missions gave the African, an aspect which will be discussed later in this chapter. One reason for Laws' inattention to the problems brought forward by his brother missionaries in the south was his pre-occupation with the Livingstonia Institution, which he hoped would grow into the university of Central Africa. The grand plans which he submitted to the Livingstonia Committee, but which were unfortunately rejected, were copied from the tower building of King's College, Aberdeen University.³ There could well have been another reason compelling Laws to keep his peace with the Administration and the British South Africa Company. He was trying to acquire titlehold to an area a hundred square miles in extent for the

1. Ibid.

2. Henderson Letters, No. 35, 25/7/1897.

3. The Plan is in Mr. Walls' Collection, University of Aberdeen.

4. ~~Laws to Dr. G. Smith, 6/11/1894 (MS 7377).~~

Institution, and any quarrel with the Company or the Administration would have jeopardized his chances of getting the land at the cheapest price.¹

In relation to the labour problem, he wrote to Acting Commissioner Sharpe about the difficulty of keeping his apprentices throughout their courses. Here it must be mentioned that Laws hoped to make Livingstonia a city of Christian craftsmen, leaders and teachers of the African race. He hoped to open a coal-mine there -- the existence of this mineral he tried his best to conceal from the British South Africa Company and this was the cause of his quarrel with H.H. Johnston. He would train blacksmiths, hospital assistants, telegraphists, teachers, nurses, theologians and agriculturalists. He therefore persuaded Mr. Sharpe to pass an Indenture Act which would compel the apprentices to stay for five years. Sharpe replied:

I shall do anything in my power to assist you in the matter. I should say that with regard to indenturing apprentices, the apprentice himself and his parents should have very distinctly explained to them that the boy is practically not a free agent for the term of five years and these contracts will then be able in the case of an apprentice leaving his employment to compel him to return.²

We should note in passing that this arrangement could also be used by planters to perpetuate the practice of child labour and thus defeat the aims of the Blantyre crusaders.

1. Laws to Dr. G. Smith, 6/11/1894 (MS 7877).

2. A. Sharpe to Laws, 30/11/1894 (MS 7874).

The relationship between Laws and the Administration is worth closer examination because of the extreme restraint used in dealing with controversial issues. There is no doubt that each party realized the need for keeping the friendship of the other, and indeed in the past this friendship had been beneficial to both parties. The issue which kept the two sides in correspondence for more than a decade was Laws' desire to acquire an area of a hundred square miles.

Acquiring a hundred square miles of land in British Central Africa was no problem at all. H.H. Johnston had fixed three pence as a fair price for an acre.¹ But Laws had chosen a piece of land which he believed to be well endowed with mineral deposits. He confided to Dr. G. Smith of the Foreign Missions Committee:

I am anxious to secure the mineral rights, as I think, indeed am sure there is a seam of coal at Florence Bay - which we could easily work for our needs.²

The British South Africa Company also believed that the land required by Laws was the most fertile in northern Malawi and as such should be reserved for themselves. Laws minimised these two possibilities as much as possible. He wrote to the Acting Commissioner in 1894, "With regard to gold or other precious metals I have seen no visible gold anywhere ..." and as to the supposed fertility of the land, "For any other purpose, so far as I can judge the land is practically

1. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, pp. 112-113.

2. Laws to Dr. G. Smith, 16/12/1894 (MS 7874).

useless."

He reminded Sharpe that the Livingstonia scheme was in fact for the benefit of the natives and the advancement of the country, and would thus tend to increase the value of the property of the British South Africa Company as well as helping the work of the government of British Central Africa.¹

As if to show that the land question was only a quarrel between friends, Laws added that he was sending one of his best African printers to operate the Government Gazette printing works. It is worth noting in passing that the Blantyre Mission had refused to be helpful — partly because the Government Gazette was supposed to rival Blantyre's Life and Work.²

Laws determined to handle this misunderstanding in private. "Any ... publication might cost us a good deal in the difficulty of securing the ground we wish and also in an increased price to be paid for it."³

The man sent by the Administration to investigate Laws' claims was Mr. J. Swann, a man who had every reason to be grateful to Dr. Laws. It was Mr. Swann who, as Provincial Commissioner, had been responsible for the Mpezeni war and the Ngoniland colonisation.

1. Laws to A. Sharpe, 30/11/1894; also Sharpe to Laws, 30/11/1894 (MS 7874).

2. Ibid.

3. Laws to G. Smith, 6/11/1894 (MS 7877).

The results of the Ngoni episodes have been noted.¹ The Queen had honoured Swann for it, so he had every reason to confide in Laws; he had also been saved by Laws' timely intervention from a nasty controversy over the 10,000 head of cattle they had commandeered from Mpezeni's people. He there confided in Laws: "Some Editors of African Mission papers [Blantyre?] have gone out of their way to howl at what they called unrighteousness." His views on Africans were: "History says these people were to be slaves of slaves to their Brethren. Blantyre says they are equals ... They are the work of our Creator. Yes, so are horses" As to Dr. Laws and his Aurora, it was all praise. "Come then Aurora and let us see more distinctly our several paths ..."²

Laws had therefore every reason to be satisfied when Mr. Swann came to Livingstonia. He wrote to Dr. G. Smith: "Mr. Swann will decidedly report in our favour."³

Two other British South Africa Company officials who dealt with Laws' land question had their different reasons to court his friendship. Major Forbes, Administrator of North-East Rhodesia, was very much aware of the usefulness of the technical skills which Laws was teaching. It was obvious that for a long time there would be a scarcity of skilled Europeans and Laws' pupils were already

1. A. Swann to Laws, 14/2/1897 (Gen. 561+).

2. Ibid.

3. Laws to G. Smith, 6/11/1894.

in demand. Rhodes had in fact given him a fifty-pound annual donation for the training of telegraphists.¹ Lord Overtoun thanked Major Forbes more than once for his "kind reference to Dr. Laws and the work of the Livingstonia Mission" made to Rhodes.² The second man was Mr. Codrington, who replaced Major Forbes. Mr. Codrington wanted a medical missionary situated in Mwenzo, the Company's headquarters, for whose services they would pay a third of his salary, £100 per year.³ Major Forbes before him had also suggested to Laws an invasion of Bemba-land by missionaries as he had reason to believe they would be warlike if tackled by the Company directly.⁴ It was finally Major Forbes who granted the land required by Laws in 1905.

There is a detailed record in the Caseby Papers of how the vast amount of land acquired by Laws was utilised. Laws tried various types of mountain wheat in the Livingstonia area with a view to making the Mission self-sufficient in flour.⁵ He also started a scheme of re-afforestation; the number of trees, ranging from fruit trees to plantation trees, reached the million mark in Caseby's time.⁶ He also employed trained agriculturalists to advise the tenants on improved methods of land tilling and succeeded in persuading the

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1. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 267.
 2. Lord Overtoun to Major Forbes, 19/11/1897 and 23/11/1897 (MS 7873).
 3. Codrington to Laws, 20/10/1888 (MS V31).
 4. Major Forbes to Lord Overtoun.
 5. Laws to Caseby, 25/4/1928 (Caseby Papers, C4).
 6. Caseby Memorandum to the Young Commission, 7/5/29.

African tenants to use cattle-drawn iron ploughs.¹ More important still:

Up to this year the charge for rent has been ... six pence per year ... for apprentice mission workers and students in training ... and all other tenants per holding one shilling per year. The rent has been collected in cash or in foodstuffs.²

There are three very important aspects to the imposition of rent in an African context. Admittedly, some of the tenants were immigrants, but nevertheless they would consider themselves more indigenous to the land than the mission authorities. Secondly, the African viewpoint as to the use of land was that it was a free gift from God and that every man was entitled to use only the part necessary for his survival, without let or hindrance. From this viewpoint, then, Laws' imposition of rent and regulations was an unwarranted interference with God's gifts. Thirdly, the sixpence or shilling rent should really be seen as adding to the burden of the annual poll tax which was, at four shillings, equivalent to at least two months' paid employment, at the rate of two shillings and eightpence a month.³

It should also be noted in passing that the tenant-landlord relationship was fraught with misunderstandings and was one of the immediate causes of an uprising in 1914 in the Blantyre area.⁴

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1. Laws to Caseby, 8/1/1921 (Caseby Papers, C12).
 2. Caseby Memorandum, p. 3.
 3. Henderson Letters, p. 253.
 4. G. Shepperson, Independent African (Edinburgh University Press 1958), pp. 198ff.

About this time (c.1913), the building of the Beira to Blantyre railway was making rapid progress and it was feared that it would bring an influx of Indian and European settlers in its wake. If African titlehold to land was not defined by law, the African might find himself bought out.¹ As usual, Dr. Hetherwick had clear ideas of how this was to be avoided: the Colonial Office must be pressurised to pass the necessary law and to this end a united voice from the Free Church and the Established Churches of Scotland would no doubt carry weight at the Foreign Office. At this time Laws was a government-appointed member of the Governor's Legislative Council and it may be that Dr. Hetherwick was not sufficiently confident of Laws' sympathy to ask him to raise the question in that Council. He therefore took what he perhaps felt to be the best alternative. He wrote to the Foreign Mission Committee of his Church, asking them to seek co-operation with their Free Church counterpart. Fairley ^{Daly} ~~Daly~~ then wrote to Laws:

Dr. Hetherwick deals with the land question of Nyasaland, and shows that the natives have no titles to their land and not even reserves. He urges Government to look into the matter before the railway from Beira is completed, which is likely to bring into the country large numbers of Europeans and Indians, and he desires that the Foreign Missions of the two Churches urge the matter upon the Govt. We are quite willing to do anything to strengthen your hands on this matter, but are wondering whether it would not be better to allow you to bring the matter up in the Leg. Council as from your Mission Councils or Consultative Board of Missions. Seeing that Colonial Govts. rather resent suggestions ... from the homeland, especially the C.O., looking upon such as outside interference, we feel

1. In 1897 there were 200 Indians and 500 Europeans in Malawi.

suggestions coming from yourselves unitedly might receive sympathetic consideration. If you agree with us in this you might cable two words, DO NOTHING. ¹

It is in fact likely that Laws himself had his own tenant-landlord quarrels to deal with. Indeed in one case a District Commissioner was called to judge the dispute. Admittedly this case was reported three years after his departure, but it is common for land disputes to drag on, even for decades. ²

Daly, Secretary of the Livingstonia Committee,
Apparently by January ~~1913~~ had not heard from Laws, and wrote again:

We wish to be guided by you men on the spot, and will do anything you suggest to strengthen your hands. Meanwhile we are asking the F.M. Comm. of the Church of Scotland what they are doing in response to the statement by Dr. Hetherwick. ³

Over the years Laws had developed an easy solution to problems that embarrassed him. He said nothing and did nothing about them.

Meanwhile, another cause was worrying Dr. Hetherwick. A few cases of sleeping-sickness had raised the fear that an epidemic could only be avoided by drastic measures which would include the slaughter of all animals in the affected area as well as controlling the movements of people in the area. It appears that a Fauna Association had persuaded the Malawi Administration not to do the first, while the second precaution seemed unattractive to the Government. The

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1. F. ~~Daly~~^{Daly} to Laws, 9/12/1913 (MS 7868).
 2. Minutes of F.M.C., May 1930 (C.S. Library).
 3. ~~Daly~~^{Daly} to Laws, 14/1/1914.

Livingstonia Committee was confused because "Mr. D. Millar (Committee member) urges us to do nothing, but Drs. Hetherwick and Prentice urge immediate action. We are in difficulty."¹ As in the first case, Laws was silent. F. ~~Daly~~^{Daly} could not help noting that the Committee were "much disappointed that the answers have not yet come from Livingstonia to the exhaustive queries which were sent out, I believe, to you".²

It would appear that Fairley ~~Daly's~~^{Daly} letter refers both to Hetherwick's land campaign and to the sleeping-sickness crusade as well. M. Gelfand says the Government had been making investigations into this disease since 1908.³ But Hetherwick says clearly that all these commissions and investigations were only a means of buying time in favour of the Fauna Association which had "weighty names among its members and weighty names carry weight in official circles".⁴

However, Laws actually did bring his immense influence to bear on the Government on an issue which directly affected his Livingstonia trainees. For a long time he had been training medical orderlies and assistants, yet the Government in its Indian Medical Practitioners Bill had ignored them in favour of Indian practitioners. Laws had a simple plan, a Native Medical Practitioners Ordinance which

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1. F. ~~Daly~~^{Daly} to Laws, 20/2/1914 (MS 7868).
 2. Ibid., 23/4/1914.
 3. M. Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers (Blackwell 1964), pp. 301ff.
 4. Life and Work in Nyasaland (Oct.-Dec. 1913), No. 5.

would act as a supplement to the first one. Naturally the Livingstonia Committee was jubilant: "We read with much pleasure what you told us of the Medical Practitioners' Ordinance. It shows the advantage gained to missions by the presence on the Legislative Council of one like yourself."¹ As to the sleeping-sickness crusade, the Committee went on despite Laws' neutrality and reminded Lord Harcourt at the Colonial Office of the "Mission's ... responsibility in the matter, as it is largely through the action of the missions that the territory in question is now British ... and also because they have used their influence with natives to carry out the laws, and many of the Natives look up to them for protection."²

A Christian Marriage Ordinance was also passed during Laws' tenure of office in the Legislative Council, but it is not clear what part he took in its formulation, though Fairley ^{Daly}~~Daly~~ believed the subject to be a very important one.³ Laws seems also to have persuaded the Administrator of the Rhodesian territory under the British South Africa Company to give him a grant of seventy-five pounds for the extension of church work in the territory adjacent to Malawi.⁴

1. Fairley Daly to Laws, 14/5/1914 (MS 7868).

2. Fairley Daly to Rt. Hon. Lord Harcourt, 13/3/1914 (MS 7868)

3. Fairley Daly to Laws, 26/11/1913.

4. Ibid.

(b) Education: A Paradoxical Contribution

This section will try to show that Laws' greatest and most lasting contribution was in the field of education. This is the more paradoxical because the lasting effects of his "English" education on the Africans went beyond the intended effects and contrary to his aim.¹ Whenever these undesirable results, whose long-term effect was in fact to render superfluous the empire he had worked so hard to establish in Malawi, were pointed out to him in their infancy, he did his best to deny them, let alone admit that they were the results of his handiwork.² In fact his efforts contributed to the birth of an infant but fundamentally anti-imperial nationalism. His education plan was basically modelled on the English tier system, the lower primary school followed by the upper grades, after which the schools forked into academic institutions for prospective academics and technical schools which took both trade apprentices and full-time trainees.

Regarding the ceaseless efforts Laws made to secure this education, it should be recalled that he entered into an agreement with Commissioner A. Sharpe to make his five-year apprentice scheme enforceable by the Government. The idea was to compel boys to remain

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1. Laws was greatly influenced by Dr. Stewart of Lovedale and Dr. Duff, both of whom were staunch supporters of an "English" education.
 2. S. Sharpe's book, The Contribution of J.N. Farquhar to Protestant Thought in India, shows how Duff's English education did not in fact destroy Hinduism but reinforced it and created the foundations of Hindu nationalism.

who would otherwise have run off before acquiring their certificates.¹ In 1905 he entered into an agreement with the Blantyre Mission and the Dutch Mission which served to standardise the education of Africans in Malawi in those portions where these missions operated.² Laws was a strong advocate of educational grants to missions, though not in the quarrelsome vein of the Blantyre Mission.³ He was also willing to get these wherever he could. He managed to get all his telegraphic equipment supplied by Rhodes' British South Africa Company as well as getting an annual grant of fifty pounds for the training of Africans in that field.⁴ Eventually the Government of Malawi contributed an annual amount of no less than £1,000 in 1914, which however the Blantyre Mission mocked as being equivalent to two pence a child.⁵ Laws' Native Medical Practitioners Ordinance was a further step in his scheme of things, since it assured all the nurses he trained a recognized place and salary outside the mission stations.⁶

The results of these measures were that education was sought after, no longer to enhance knowledge about Christian life, but to enhance the quality of life, and for its own sake. A South African

Laws to A. Sharpe 30/11/1894¹⁴

Generally referred to as the Education Code, it was the first step in inter-denominational co-operation reported in Life & Work, No 1, 1910.

3. Life and Work of Nyasaland, No. 1 (1916).
4. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia, p. 267.
5. ~~Ibid.~~ ^{L+V No 1 1916} School enrolment in 1914 was 12,000 pupils in the colony.
6. Ibid.

missionary, observing how the Southern African had become keen on education, wrote to the Free Church Record thus: "The native is keener on education than on any other thing under the sun;" and this could apply to the Malawi African as well.¹ With a certificate and years of apprenticeship behind him, the educated African was prepared to seek his fortune wherever opportunities were offered: in the Rhodesias, the Congo and as far off as South Africa. Those who thought of the "native ... as a mere beast of burden, to be exploited for the lowest possible wage, or for no wage at all if that were possible," found labour scarce in Malawi.² This was part of a growing problem in the first two decades of this century. When Henderson of the Livingstonia Institution said that, even there, they preferred to have nothing to do with Africans who had been to the south, he probably feared they were prepared to demand equitable wages in return for their labour.³ The Free Church, calling the Native Problem "the greatest in the world", gave its diagnosis in the Record of 1914: "The Europeans civilize and educate backward communities ... but are afraid of the consequences and their fear makes them act unjustly."⁴

The Interdenominational Missionary Conference at Muera in Malawi.

1. J. Luke, "A Matter of Colour," F.C. Record, 1/2/1914.
2. J.H. Morrison, "First Impressions of the Native Question," F.C. Record, 1/6/1914.
3. Henderson Letters, 25/7/1897.
4. Record, Editorial, 1/2/1914.

in 1910 heard a special paper read to them on the matter.¹ Taking the example of Blantyre, which was half the size of the Livingstonia Mission, of all the apprentices since the Indenture Act of 1900, ninety per cent had left for the Rhodesias and South Africa before their terms were expired. Of those who completed their terms, only 34 per cent remained in the country. In the past ten years, of the fifty teachers trained there, only six remained with the Mission while the rest either gave up teaching altogether, joined government service or went to the south. The problem must have been on a colossal scale in Laws' Livingstonia, partly because his area was comparatively undeveloped while the Blantyre area, possessing the railway line, Government buildings and European settlements, at least had better chances of employment. Moreover, whereas the Blantyre Mission had a total following of 12,000 in 1914 and only over 300 schools, Livingstonia had 43,000 followers and 550 schools.² In 1910 the Missions estimated an annual figure of 17,000 leaving Malawi.³

Both missions and planters had organized joint petitions to the Government to discourage labour migration to the south. It may be asked what the aim of mission education had been in the first instance if now they were dissatisfied with this state of affairs. Education, according to the writer of the 1910 paper at the Missionary Conference,

1. Life and Work in Nyasaland, Sept.-Dec. 1910.

2. Statistical breakdown in Laws Collection (E.U.L. 563+).

3. Life and Work in Nyasaland, Sept.-Dec. 1910.

was intended to prepare Malawi Africans to meet the "incoming tide of civilization with a well instructed army of teachers", but the African for his part had "taken advantage of our machinery ... for his own ends-- that he may get gain."

The paper saw the villain as "the acquisition of English [which] opens to the student lucrative positions ... to take up money-making pursuits instead of Christian work". The author comes to a conclusion echoed by the Livingstonia News, which said, "The chief hindrance to the attainment of our aim is our abuse [i.e. teaching] of English."¹ The Reverend A. MacAlpine, who toured South Africa and Southern Rhodesia on behalf of the Livingstonia Mission to assess the numbers, was told by a mine manager in Johannesburg that the Malawi African there was an active and intelligent type, the very man who could have made a self-supporting and self-perpetuating Church in Malawi possible.² The Livingstonia News also noted sorrowfully in 1912 that on returning home, invariably the emigrant would be lost to the faith, and often, to the perplexity of the Church, used his new-found wealth to pay bride-price for more than one wife.³ In any case Laws was suspicious of any commercial metropolis, having noticed as early as 1894 nearer home at Karonga that the release from tribal restraints, unless replaced by some new order, led to a peculiar and

1. Ibid.

2. Livingstonia News, April 1911.

3. Ibid., 1/8/1912.

perhaps frightening laissez-faire attitude.¹

In 1929 he reminded Caseby how he had untiringly preached in and out of season scientific tilling of the land as more rewarding than migrating to the South African gold-mines.²

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There was yet another problem which could be traced to education, from whose results Laws and his contemporaries were at pains to dissociate themselves. This has been called the "Ethiopian" movement. The idea of an "Ethiopian Church" arises from Biblical references such as the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Queen of Sheba, Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross, and others, which might give the impression that an African church was as old as the European Church and stemmed directly from early Christian times, in its own right. The existence of Ethiopia as an independent state might have further reinforced the Ethiopian prophets' dreams of a new Africa free from foreign intervention in church or state. This creed was first introduced to Malawi by immigrant workers returning from South Africa where "independent" African churches had mushroomed since 1885. Once the idea of an independent church — a church, that is, free from mission control — had taken effect, some of the prophets in Malawi came to be not veteran workers in South Africa but simply educated

1. Laws to Dr. G. Smith, 3/12/1894 (MS 7874).

2. Laws to Caseby, 8/1/1929 (Caseby Papers, C.12).

Africans who wanted to run their own show. A sympathetic Blantyre missionary noted in Life and Work that in countries where Africans had had a chance to participate in church affairs at the highest level, as was the case in Basutoland, such a movement had not arisen. He also noticed its political significance, which was no more than "the desire of nations to have separate existence untrammelled by foreign supervision". He also noted that one of their aims was "whipping the British until they reached the banks of the Thames".¹

One of the pamphlets distributed by the Ethiopian prophets fell into the hands of Dr. Elmslie, who was thoroughly alarmed by the anti-imperialistic theology expounded in it. He published his views in the Livingstonia News, of which Laws was editor. Since Elmslie was Laws' deputy, it can be expected that the views expressed in that paper were common to both. The pamphlet was entitled The Divine Plan of the Ages.² The paper seemed to be challenging the missions in their sympathy with the imperial government when it stated:

To claim that these imperfect kingdoms, with their imperfect laws and often selfish and vicious rulers, are the kingdom of our Lord and his anointed is a gross libel upon the true kingdom of Christ ... before which they shortly must fall ...

and — perhaps a co-incidental hint to those who sought to thwart the spreading of knowledge to the African — the pamphlet warned:

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1. Life and Work in Nyasaland, April-May 1914.
 2. Livingstonia News, 1/10/1909.

Men are beginning to use their reasoning powers ... and they will act out of their convictions so much more violently as they come to realize that a deception has been practised upon them in the name of the God of justice.

If the followers asked what was to be done about these wicked empires, the answer was very clear: "The thing to be expected so far as the empires of the earth are concerned, is their utter destruction." Perhaps even more significant from the colonist and missionary point of view was that the

Ethiopian prophets declare^[d] that because of the increase of knowledge a still more general and widespread dissatisfaction will finally express itself in a world-wide revolution and the overthrow of all law and order

This and other pamphlets were prepared in the United States but reached Malawi Africans from their relations in South Africa. The prophets themselves also acted as agents. Elmslie was definitely not amused by this pamphlet. The Livingstonia region, moreover, had the greatest number of migrant workers in South Africa and was the worst affected by this movement in Malawi.

The Livingstonia News (edited by Laws) noted with dismay that the prophet Kenan Kamwana prophesied of a new state of Malawi in which things "would be managed by natives themselves and [[]there would be[]] freedom from taxation and foreign rule".¹ Nevertheless, the movement affected Laws personally in that Charles Domingo, one of the most successful prophets, was an orphan child who had been given to Laws

1. Livingstonia News, 1/3/1909.

by Dr. Stewart of Lovedale and brought up at the Mission all his life. Some time in 1907 he broke away from the Livingstonia Mission, in which he was an elder, and set up his own church in the vicinity.

More remarkable was Kamwana, already referred to in this chapter. The Livingstonia News noted with bitter sarcasm:

This lad was educated in the Bandawe schools, where he got his education, books, etc., free and was at the Overtoun Institution.

On his return from Johannesburg where he had imbibed the Ethiopian philosophy,

his first step was to go round the whole district talking cautiously with the people, carefully noting their desires and any dissatisfaction that existed among them, and so getting to grips with the situation. The first move was to sound privately the elders of the Church and teachers and try to persuade them to leave the missionaries and take the work upon themselves.

"Kamwana," the Mission paper went on to confess, "was ... a strategist and struck the weak points very cleverly."

The paper, which had tried to paint Kamwana as a Sodomite, confessed that he forbade polygamy but left to the husband the choice of which wife was to go. In line with the thirst for knowledge among Africans he demanded free and universal education in Malawi. He baptised after confession, a slap in the face of Livingstonia which sometimes took as long as two years giving a catechumen lessons before baptism. Kamwana's teaching came after baptism and admission into the Christian fellowship.

Kamwana was thrown into prison by the Governor of Malawi, and

his followers believed that Laws had had something to do with it. Whatever Laws might have said to the Governor, his paper was jubilant at the Governor's action. It told its readers:¹

All in Nyasaland who have seen anything of the movement under Kenan Kamwana will have no doubt regarding the wisdom of His Excellency in taking action before the movement attains greater proportions.

And — perhaps trying to catch the attention of the Government — it reminded its readers that "missions are accredited agencies whose influence is on the side of good government."

It never appeared to Laws that, whatever might happen to Kamwana and Domingo as persons, they were literally correct in proclaiming that their spirit was the spirit of a new Africa. In his spiteful reaction to the prophets' claims that they were in fact able to manage their own affairs in church and in state, Laws was only being loyal to his age. But it is still surprising that, despite the enormous capital and time he put into the training of Africans, he did not realize their potential to achieve the aims of the prophets. Perhaps his love for empire blinded him to the significance of the educational schemes which he himself had taken so much time to implement. With reference to the Africans' ability to manage their own affairs, he said in his Livingstonia News that he doubted very much whether "at the present time any movement not directly under European control can long remain healthy".²

1. Livingstonia News, 1/8/1909.

2. Ibid., 1/8/1912.

Earlier, the Government had sent a representative to the Livingstonia Mission to investigate the disturbances caused by the Kamwana movement. Apparently, the Government Officer put his finger on the root of the matter, and questioned the effects of education on the African. He hinted at the possibility that the spread of knowledge has the effect of unsettling the African and making him dissatisfied with imperial ties. The Mission was apparently unaware of this effect and assumed that the "right" education given by themselves had in fact the effect of making the Africans loyal to the Government. The Mission paper pointed out to the Government Officer that already, "but for the solid work done by the Missions, the Government would have had a large thing to deal with." It then went on: "We were able to show him that the methods we follow, apart altogether from the spiritual necessity of following these, have been, by producing a sound church and class, on this occasion, the saving of the country"¹

The Mission remained out of sympathy with the movement, and continued to find it an embarrassment until it was finally eradicated by the Government in 1914. In the intervening years the Livingstonia News printed reports of its preachers being ridiculed and meeting with "silly opposition" in hitherto friendly districts. In 1910, Bandawe school enrolment remained static but more than half the pupils must have followed Kamwana's ideas of a free education for the school fees

1. Livingstonia News, 1/2/1910.

fell from seventy pounds the previous year to thirty pounds. At Ekwendeni in Ngoniland, a drop in school enrolment led to the redundancy of many teachers.

Even the rebellion led by an African, Reverend John Chilembwe, B.A., B.D.,¹ in 1914 did not convince Laws that the spread of knowledge was contrary to the interests of imperialism. Chilembwe had built up a successful mission station at which he taught politics straight from the Bible. This had a disconcerting result: even when informers had reported of Chilembwe, before the attempted revolution, "that he was preaching sedition to his followers", nothing had been done.² This was because Chilembwe taught politics with the Bible as his textbook and therefore left no evidence of subversive literature whatever.

Chilembwe's affair will be discussed in greater detail in the next sub-section.

(c) 1908-1928 : Years of Honour and Liberalism

In 1908 the Scottish United Free Church conferred on Laws the greatest honour that church could give to its serving ministers, the honour of serving in the capacity of Moderator for a year. Laws'

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1. See Shepperson, Independent African, Chapters IV and V, for a detailed account of Chilembwe.
 2. Proceedings of the Legislative Council in Nyasaland (Public Records Office, London CO.626/6), 10/3/1915, p. 6.

grandiose plans for a colony of Christian workmen in Malawi were being increasingly frustrated. No serious development had come to the region and the poor level of pay still prevalent in Malawi drove the young and ambitious out of the country. On these young men he would have built a strong and self-supporting native church. His invitation to the Livingstonia Africans to use new methods of agriculture as an alternative to labour migration to South Africa had only limited results.¹ Those in the Livingstonia estate and neighbouring countryside abandoned the hand-drawn hoe in favour of ox-driven ploughs. But migration and an honest society was still a far cry. In fact there was a new and frightening development, the emergence of a class, mission-educated but sceptical in matters religious, particularly as they found their legitimate aspirations frustrated by the colour bar, a system whereby men are judged by their colour and not by their ability.² Laws could not be blind where his Livingstonia lads were concerned. In addressing the Scottish Commissioners of the General Assembly of 1908-9 he saw this problem as a world-wide one and one that concerned the Empire as a whole. He spoke from a liberal viewpoint, seeing the problem as lack of justice in the Empire. It should be explained that a liberal imperialist in the early decades of this century believed in and fought for racial equality and justice, especially in public affairs, but stopped short of self-government for

1. Laws to Caseby, 8/1/1929.

2. Quoted from Livingstonia News in Proceedings of the Legislative Council in Nyasaland, 11/3/1915, p. 11.

colonial peoples. If this ideal had been followed, it would probably have weakened nationalistic movements and therefore strengthened the Empire. This is a very different proposition from the nationalist point of view -- the desire of peoples to rule themselves wrongly if they so choose. Laws would definitely have been alarmed if people ^{had} expressed such a view. He however admonished the clerical gentlemen that the lesson to be learned from the Indian Mutiny was the need for a just and fair treatment of the Indian people as well as all colonial peoples. The horrors of that mutiny were intended to prick the conscience of the people and were also divinely motivated as a call to duty. Nowhere would this call to duty be more apparent than in Africa where the colour bar was rearing its ugly head. He advised as an urgent necessity the setting up of institutes of race relations as part of certain colleges. This colour bar, he argued, was dangerous to the Empire in that it removed personal communion between the white man and the African, a bond very important to the security of empire.¹

In the same speech he emphasized the rôle of a Christian and an industrial education. Europe and Britain must tap their vast resources in order to extend the gospel to China and Asia. He feared that should China achieve greatness without the moderating influence of the gospel, it would become a "yellow peril" to Britain and to Europe.

1. Laws, Moderatorial Speeches, 1908-9 (Gen. 563+).

Laws never repented of the idea that education and Christianity had a rôle to play within the context of the Empire. In 1913 the Governor appointed him a member of the Legislative Council, in which he proceeded to secure the rights of educated Africans. In 1914 a Medical Practitioners Bill brought before the Council would have excluded a "considerable number of trained [African] nurses. Their qualifications ought to be considered. He spoke from experience having trained some of those lads."¹ The Governor had no objection to the presence of these mission-trained medical practitioners, but what did Laws want to do with them, put them on the Medical Register as well? Apparently the Governor thought such a measure too radical. Laws solved the problem: "He would put [them] ... in a second grade and let the public have an indication to what class they belonged."²

In the debate on the Native Tenants Ordinance, 1914, for which Hetherwick had been campaigning, Laws said little; but the little that he said must have made him appear an enemy of the settlers. The Ordinance was a far cry from Hetherwick's demands, in that it applied only to European landlords and African tenants, excluding the rest of the African population without any clear guidance as to their rights on the land. However, Mr. Livingstone Bruce, a notorious descendant of Dr. Livingstone, a man who was sceptical of the African's abilities and even more so in relation to mission attempts to develop these

1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 13/3/1914, p. 7.
2. Ibid., p. 8.

abilities, challenged the Ordinance on two accounts. "He believed the native was not yet born who loved work for work's sake," and that giving him the option of paying his rent in cash if he so desired was a licence to laziness which would damage the farmers. In addition, the African was already a nuisance who felled timber for firewood and ruined the soil by growing his crops. He himself only kept Africans because he extorted two months' unpaid labour every year. Laws made matters worse by thinking of his trained nurses or carpenters who would be forced to work for two months instead of taking up more remunerative jobs and then pay cash in lieu of rent. Bruce feared that already there was no preventative in the Bill to stop the native tenant "suddenly turning round in the middle of the planting season and insisting upon payment of rent in lieu of service", and Laws would in fact have this inserted clearly.¹

Laws faced the greatest challenge to his views in 1915 over the Chilembwe uprising. As already mentioned, Chilembwe was by no means the half-baked educated African the Chief Secretary tried to make of him. There was nothing wicked about him or his followers. In fact the Chief Secretary of Nyasaland noted with bitter sarcasm that the correspondence captured showed the leaders were professing and pious Christians and that one of them was in fact an elder of "a well-known church in this neighbourhood" (Blantyre).² He was referring to John

1. Ibid., p. 14.

2. Ibid., 11/3/1915, p. 14.

Kufa, Medical Assistant and Elder at Blantyre Church.

Laws, fearful and hoping that a Commission of Enquiry might exonerate their "properly" educated Africans from blame, put a motion to the effect that the influence of Chilembwe outside his own church should be ascertained, and that it should be established what class of Africans constituted the group. No sooner had the Governor agreed to take note of this view than Bruce lashed out at the missionaries. He moved that pending the enquiry all schools managed by Africans should be closed. Defending his motion Bruce argued that higher education given to the African at mission schools drove the African to seek work in the south, where he imbibed these ideas of equality. Quoting the Blantyre Life and Work, "We are largely becoming an institution for supplying educated labour to certain parts of Rhodesia and South Africa."¹ "The fact that the rebellion had been entirely engineered by those educated natives was to his [Bruce's] mind the most pernicious feature of the whole affair. In short it was a rebellion of mission trained natives."²

Even Laws' prestige and learned argument could not convince these diehards. Laws argued that education could no longer be denied to the African. In South Africa, this denial had directly led to the expansion of the Ethiopian movement, and in any case they would still find their way abroad. Closing the native-run schools would

1. Life and Work in Nyasaland, June-July 1911.

2. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 11/3/1915, p. 11.

affect not higher education, which Bruce complained about, but elementary education, of which he had no complaint. The demand for highly educated Africans was more than the supply and Bruce himself had applied to Laws for one such African. The lad, having served his term, however, refused to return. Contrary to common belief, the missions in fact taught loyalty to the Empire. He (Laws) had had the pleasure of showing the previous Governor a lesson in the catechism taught at Livingstonia. It read: "What is one's duty to his country? (Answer) To respect and honour the King and all in authority, to obey the laws and to do the best for one's neighbours." As a whole, education had in fact facilitated better trade as the requirements of the native rose.¹

Laws could as well have preached to the deaf. Mr. James Fiddes heartily supported Bruce's motion, the Chief Secretary and the Governor were sympathetic to it and the Attorney-General advised that the two opposing views were worth presenting to the Commission; the question then might be considered as sub judice, and to enter into controversy over it before the Commission met would be inadvisable. There the matter ended.²

Both viewpoints were unfortunately correct in their own way. Laws rightly came to the conclusion that since the spread of knowledge could not be stopped, it was better to control it. One of the

1. Ibid., pp. 11ff.

2. Ibid., p. 14.

reasons for the spread of Ethiopian literature was that it was free and Africans used it for reading lessons. Laws was wrong in one fundamental thing: any form of knowledge, whether Christian or not, is contrary to the selfish interests of empires. This is what the Ethiopian prophets saw very clearly; and said so in no uncertain terms. His teaching about loyalty to the King could easily be turned into loyalty to an African leader, while retaining all the essential rhythm of the catechismal lesson. Laws was forced to take a liberal stand largely because his colleagues in the Legislative Council and the Government were so naive. Nevertheless they saw that the mission-boy was a threat to their dreams of lording it over the ignorant masses, if only because the mission lad often saw himself as a little mzungu. There was nothing more horrifying to the settler than the church elder, who spoke to the white man in the spirit of divine brotherhood.¹ However, naive they were: for instance the Commissioners asked Hetherwick why educated Africans no longer lifted their hats to the white man, and Hetherwick, as was his custom, bluntly told them that, if they did the same, it would show that "two gentlemen have met".² To Bruce and the settlers, the missions had no business to put such ideas into the heads of the Africans. The missions did not put them there, the tribal resistance leaders Mlozi, Mpezeni and others organized inter-tribal movements which could be the pride of any

1. H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa, p. 195.

2. Shepperson, Independent African, p. 369.

nationalist to-day. But the missionary only developed the African potential into new channels commensurate with the twentieth century. From this point of view Bruce was right to attack them but wrong in assuming them to have less worthy motives than his own, as the catechismal lesson clearly shows.

This polarization worried Laws throughout his last years. It meant his Livingstonia lads would never get justice, or full acceptance of their potential. When in 1928, one year after his retirement, he was made a Burgess of his native city of Aberdeen, he returned to the theme of 1908. The European, he said, was becoming aloof from the African. This time he blamed it on increased facilities of transportation, so that the European saw Africa as a land of get-rich-quick, after which he would return to die in England. He was also suspicious of the wicked influence of South Africa and Rhodesia. This time he suggested a federal arrangement consisting of Malawi, Zambia and British East Africa, with a common currency — a picture very similar to the East African Community formed in the fifties. His federation would exclude South Africa and Rhodesia.

Laws need never have worried. His Livingstonia lads became the spearhead of a national movement that destroyed colour by the stroke of a pen. It is fascinating to conjecture whether Laws would have approved the result in Malawi, if not the methods used.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Laws went to Malawi in 1875 with a burning desire to preach to the heathen and by converting them create a new Africa. Three principles dominated missionary theology in his time. For instance there was an increasing emphasis on Christ's last command to the Church: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations ... and lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the earth " (Matthew 28.19-20).

Duff, in his charge to outgoing missionaries in 1833 entitled, Missions, the Chief End of the Christian Church, argued that Jesus' command cited above was the sole justification for an outward-bound church, and that a church that disobeys that command "ceases to be evangelistic --- it must cease to exist as a true church of God".¹

Very closely related to this outward-bound approach to the Gospel was the theme of a special universality of man. This theory was expressed in the prize-winning essay on Missions in 1838, one of whose sponsors was Duff. The Reverend R. Hamilton put the theory of man's brotherhood thus:

1. A. Duff, Missions, the Chief End of the Christian Church (A. Elliot, Edinburgh 1877), p. 12. This sermon was in such popular demand among Free Church missionaries that it underwent no fewer than six reprints.

No matter what may be the interests of classes and countries, there is a proper equality and indefinable oneness in the species.¹

The third principle which motivated almost every missionary in Laws' time was the moral duty of the technological societies to couple their technical aid to developing countries with moral leadership. Missionaries considered themselves especially ordained of God to be the conscience of the nation in its dealings with developing societies, without which Europe would be giving the world "flesh without the soul".²

Laws and his party had received these and similar instructions from Duff and the Foreign Missions Committee. In addition Duff believed that a missionary assuming the rôle of a chief in a foreign land would be acting contrary to the interests of the Christian message. Perhaps Duff had in mind the situation in India: a missionary building himself up in rivalry to a Maharajah or a Nabob would have looked ridiculous indeed, both on account of the comparative poverty of his treasury and on account of the scarcity of his military resources. But this was not so in Malawi, where every tenth Yao man was jealous of the independence of his mbumba. It was the missionary

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1. ~~ix~~ R. Hamilton, prize-winning essay, Missions, their Authority, Scope and Encouragement (Hodder and Stoughton 1938), p. 20.
 2. J.R. Mott, The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions (Church Missionary Society, London 1910), p. 40. J.R. Mott was the Chairman of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference's Committee on Evangelization (1910). His findings were published by the Church Missionary Society with recommendations that all missionaries take heed.

who could look down on the pitiable resources of those who called themselves chiefs. In fact some powerful chiefs, like the Makololo, were proud to call themselves "sons of the English" and hoped that their enemies would take account of this before engaging them in war. The unsettled conditions created by the twin forces of slave raiding and the Nguni invasions seemed to have made the pursuits of art and religious philosophy only possible under the protection of powerful chiefs. The chiefs whom Laws worked with were not interested in giving this protection. They would not administer justice where only mission interests or property had been attacked. Mponda at Cape Maclear was quite willing to leave Laws to his own devices. After all, it was only if Laws appeared to be a powerful chief in his own right that he would be useful as an ally. Mbelwa of the Ngoni was more interested in removing the Mission at Bandawe as it appeared to be a buffer state between the Ngoni state and their former subjects, the Tonga, as well as being an economic asset to the latter. Laws therefore had no choice but to operate within the framework of chieftaincy which African society compelled him to assume. Quite apart from the necessity to survive under the unsettled conditions, what he taught could only have been shown to be practicable if practised in a tribal context. For instance, how could he teach the duties of Christian marriage unless the candidates forsook the principles of tribal marriage, which among other things taught polygamy and bride-price as beneficial to the tribe? How could he avoid the impression that baptism was an initiation ceremony prior to the admittance into

the Christian tribe? If he followed a consistent pattern in burial rites, the Africans might see it as a pattern demanded by the Christian tribe. As far as Africans were concerned, one was born, lived and died in the tribe. Without a tribe, there is no life. A man must belong to "something", or who would bury him if he died? — as the Africans put it to this day. Laws was seen and compelled, quite contrary to his instructions and inclination, to give the Christian converts the protection and leadership which chiefs in their own tribes could have given them.

Then there is the crucial point of language. People build their understanding on their assumptions. Laws could not put himself in any rôle other than that of chief. He could say he was leader of the Mission, overseer, the chief representative of the Home Board — and all the Africans could say in their language was that he was chief: there is no other word for the position he occupied. Yet the translation would carry serious connotations in the minds of those who heard it.

. . .

Once Laws had established himself, he used his power as best he knew how. His rôle in bringing about a peaceful takeover in Ngohi-land will not be repeated here. But it is necessary to emphasise that in doing what he did, he was only acting as was expected of him by the society that sent him. There were many Free Church theologians who believed in all good conscience that Britain was ordained to

administer foreign territories as she did and that this was compatible with the principle of being "thy brother's keeper".

Free Church theologian Professor Ramsay, addressing African students at Lovedale in 1896, asked them, "How is it that Great Britain has done so much and that people in this big land Africa have done so little? ... because we believe in God."¹ Another Free Church theologian, Dr. Murray-Mitchell, wrote in the Church Record about "Changes in India":

As for British India, even a severe critic must confess that the sway of Britain in her Asiatic empire has been beneficent and wise. May our country more and more recognize the grandeur of the work to which divine providence has called her in the East.²

One of Laws' claims to fame among his countrymen was that he helped win a large piece of territory for the Empire. On the day he was admitted to the rank of Burgess in his native city of Aberdeen, the Provost explained why he was being thus honoured:

His interests were not fully expended in the interests of Christianity and civilization. He has, in addition, done a great work for the empire, in that his labours have had the effect of opening up the regions in which he found his lifework to trade and commerce.³

In Laws' day there was nothing sinister about the alliance between commerce and religion or between religion and imperialism. It can be recalled that it was in fact a combination of these three interests

1. Record, 1/9/1896.

2. Ibid., 1/4/1896.

3. Speech by the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, 26/9/1928 (Walls Collection).

that had made the Livingstonia Mission possible at that historic Glasgow public meeting in 1874. Then, former Cape Governor Sir Bartle Frere, Rev. H. Waller and merchant J. Stevenson, later Chairman of the African Lakes Company, had worked side by side to find the money for Livingstonia, the merchant giving the first £1,000 to the Committee. If Laws then took time to help the merchants and imperialists, it was all in the spirit of one good turn deserves another.

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There is no doubt that Laws gave all in his power for the benefit of his country and empire as well as for the gospel he preached. In turn he was well rewarded. The King awarded him the C.M.G.;¹ other honours have already been mentioned: called to the Legislative Council, made a Burgess of the city of Aberdeen and given an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by Aberdeen University. What the citizens of his native town, any more than the King or indeed Laws himself, were not aware of was that to the African his greatest contribution was Christian education, particularly that form termed advanced education, which was the surest means by which the empire he had served so well was undermined. The last section of Chapter IV, on his growing tendency towards liberalism, shows clearly that he did not quite comprehend the anti-imperial forces he had unleashed. There were however times when he sometimes had a glimpse of the

1. Letter from the Secretary of the Knights of St. Michael and St. George, 20/8/1923 (Gen. 562+).

double-edged nature of education when he told the Legislative Council:

With regard to education ... he felt they were dealing with edged tools. He did not want in his mission to educate men to be forgers [let alone to preach sedition], neither did the board schools at home, but that did not prevent a cashier of the Bank of England being dismissed for embezzlement.¹

And with all sincerity:

He thought that without egotism he might say he was as loyal as any man in this country to the King and to the Government of the Protectorate.²

This chapter need not go over the evidence again. But it should be emphasised that because the education was given by so loyal a son of the Empire as Laws, and for the purpose of achieving quite different goals from those actually reached, it was the more thoroughly and sincerely given. To be precise, however, it must not be forgotten that the African used education to achieve more than what was earmarked for him. The writer in Life and Work in Nyasaland (1910) quoted earlier put the rôle earmarked for Africans as "the making of leaders and teachers. On his part, the native has taken advantage of our machinery, but for his own ends — that he may get gain."³ By a "leader" in those days was meant no more than a district commissioner's interpreter or an enlightened headman who encouraged scientific methods of agriculture. The African achieved all this, whilst at the same time demanding the human dignity of guiding his own future

1. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 11/3/1915, p. 12.

2. Ibid.

3. Life and Work in Nyasaland, Sept.-Dec. 1910: "Labour Migration".

in the manner accepted -- so the Mission school taught him -- as a common right in Europe. When the missionaries taught about "proper equality and an indefinable oneness in the species",¹ it of course did not occur to them that Chilembwe might think himself as worthy as any man on earth to take the position of Governor of Nyasaland. Laws was as deeply shocked as the settlers.

On reflection it could be argued that in fact Laws achieved posthumously what he had set out to do. Taking the widest view of the nature of the Gospel he preached -- that all forces, whether human or demonic, that made man's life on earth a tale of miseries should be removed by the power of Christ -- towards the fulfilment of this end he created a missionary body which taught in schools and preached in churches to well over a third of all Malawi Christians. This means, in practical terms, that one in every three educated Africans was trained at one or other of the Livingstonia schools. Laws himself was well aware of the need to train Africans to take positions of leadership in certain cases (if only because there were not enough European missionaries to go round); to this end he gave them advanced education which enabled them to stand up to tyrannical chiefs, superstition, witchcraft and other oppressive systems. Similarly, once it had been established that the worst tyrannies of the century were the twin forces of colour-bar and colonialism, it was not a long step

1. R. Hamilton, Missions, their Authority, Scope and Encouragement, p. 20.

for these men to stand up to them equally boldly.¹ Laws did not encourage imperialism for its own sake; he believed it to be at that time the greatest force for good. If he could have been convinced that imperialism was failing to come up to expectations, he might well have supported certain aspects of the nationalist movements which drew their inspiration from the Ethiopian movements. It has already been pointed out that in his last years Laws was becoming disillusioned by the greed and vindictiveness shown by his countrymen, of whom Livingstone Bruce was only the representative.

1. The Free Church Record (1/2/1914, Editorial) called the colour bar "the Greatest Problem this century".

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 - (i) Letters to Caseby from R. Laws, mainly between 1922 and 1932.
 - (ii) An important memorandum by Caseby on the Livingstonia Mission Estates to the Young Commission 1928.
 - (iii) Various important articles to Fife newspapers 1922-1927, and a series to the Daily Telegraph about the same time concerning the Livingstonia Institution.
 - (iv) Caseby, and his married daughter are probably the few remaining souls who saw and worked with Dr. Laws.
- Andrew Walls Collection, Dept. of Rel. Studies, University of Aberdeen:
 - (i) An interesting collection of Mrs. Laws' love-letters to Dr. Laws.
 - (ii) Various collections also equally important.

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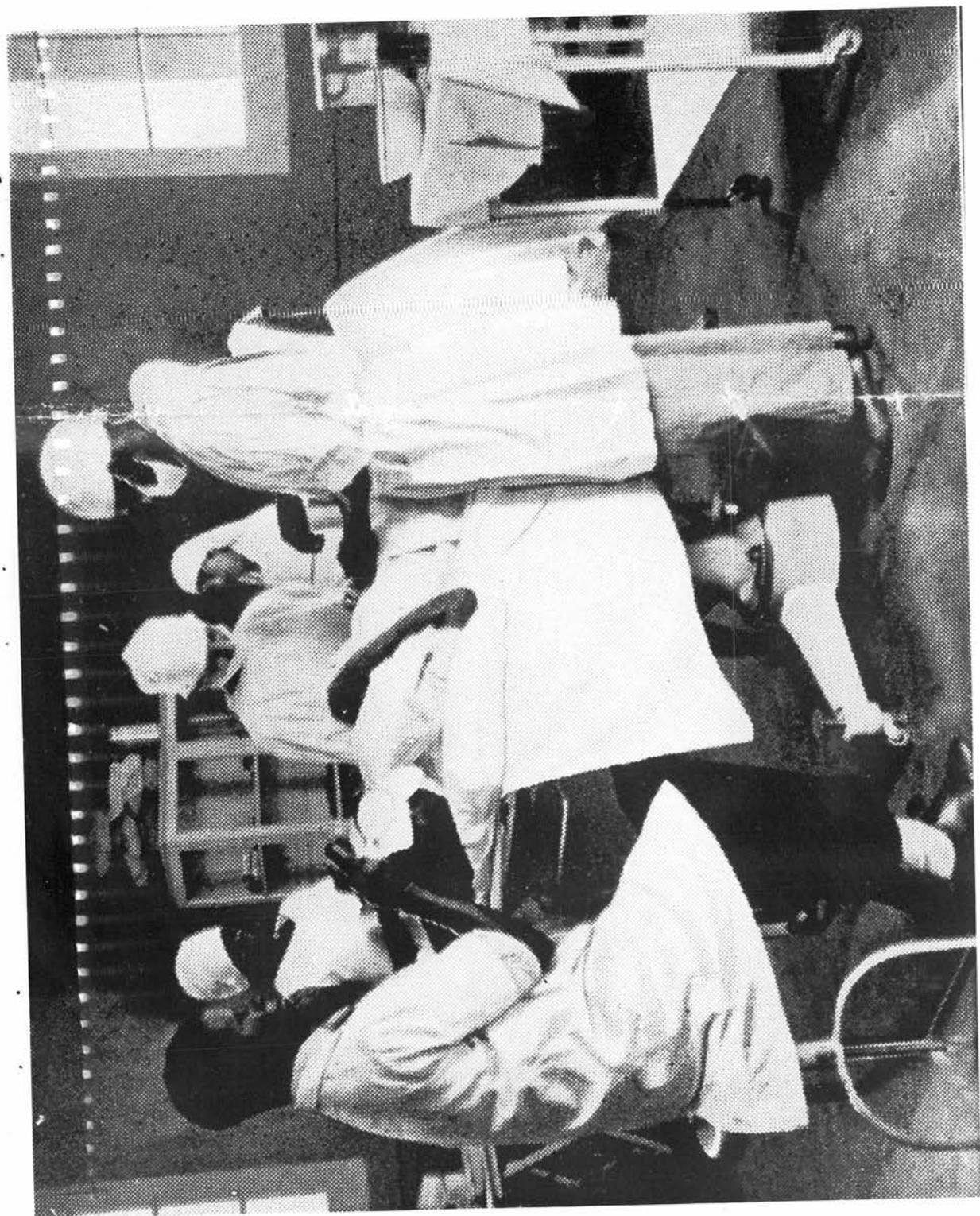
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PLATE II

Higher Education: The Livingstonia Medical School

(From Andrew Walls' Collection)



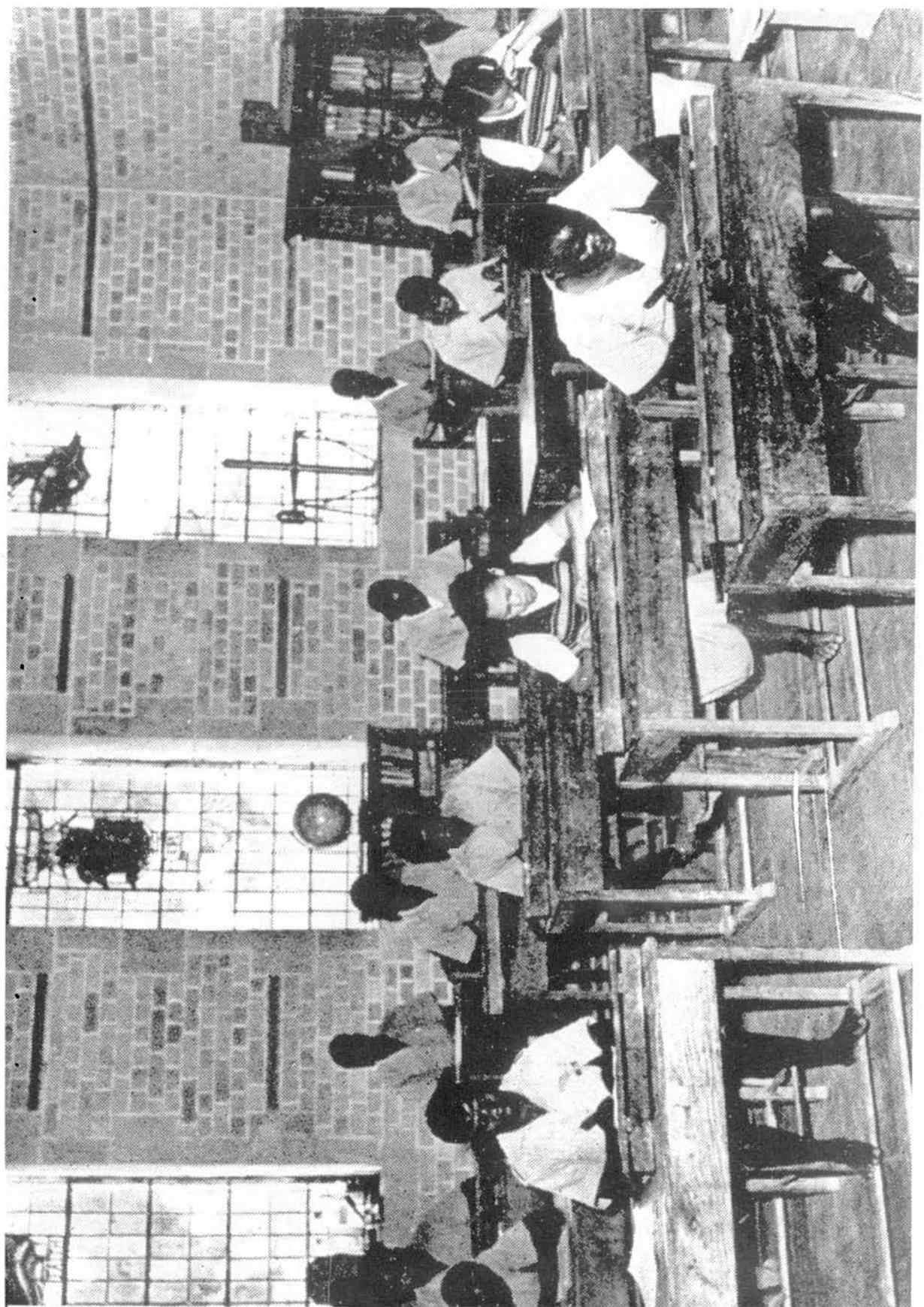
Huntington Medical School.

PLATE III

Plate Three

Higher Education: Livingstonia (High) School, c 1927

(From Andrew Walls' Collection)



Wilmington (N.H.) School