# EXPLORING THE NEW AFRICA

by LEONARD KENWORTHY

If you want to visit the Africa you read about in school and saw in travelogues, you had better hurry to the nearest travel agency and book passage immediately, including several safaris into the interior of that once dark continent. For much of what you and I imagined Africa to be never existed and much that did exist is fast disappearing. As Stuart Cloete has said, "No continent has advanced so fast as Africa in so short a time."

My nearly five months of travel in that continent can be summarized in one brief conclusion—the extent and rapidity of change. As I recall my visits in Morocco, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, the Belgian Congo, Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya, The Sudan, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, a host of pictures flash into my mind like a stack of Kodachrome slides. A few of them represent the Old Africa; many more depict the New. I have arranged a few of them by topics and would like to project them for you with the pages of *The Progressive* as the screen.

## Hats and Clothes—Old and New

The first scene is on a Friday in Rabat, the capital of Morocco. Lining the road between the King's palace and the Mosque are hundreds of men and women—women in long white dresses and thin, gauze-like handkerchiefs held or tied over the lower part of their faces—and men in long djellabas in brown or gray with their hoods covering their heads—all waiting for a glimpse of the Sultan of Morocco turned now into a King. And as he rides past in his gold carriage, the women twist their tongues and pierce the air with their special kind of whistle—called "you-youing." This is a scene which one can still see, but it is fast disappearing.

Then quickly we shift to Kenya and I see an elderly member of the war-like Masai tribe with a piece of cloth thrown over part of his body, with a spear in one hand, standing on the side of a hill not far from the White Highlands. It would be well to look again, for he, too, is an oddity in Kenya where his kind is fast disappearing.

A third shot is of a street scene in Cairo, filled largely with men, most of them wearing the red fez or tarbouche which has been so common in the Moslem world but which few of the younger men wear today for it, too, is a symbol of the past.

Then, from the stack of slides on the New Africa, I select a few scenes. One is of the ultra-modern city of Casablanca in Morocco, with its 800,000 people. It shows the girls and young women in the latest fashions from New York, London, and Paris—a scene that could be duplicated in parts of other modern cities like Leopoldville in the Congo, Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, or Cairo.

The next slides are of groups of young men in the United States Information Service libraries throughout Africa, doing their homework or their research, dressed in Western business suits or even blue jeans, which they have probably learned about from American movies. And finally I see the cream of Ghana society gathered for a dinner and dance in the new Ambassador Hotel in Accra, some of the men in the kente cloth outfit with one shoulder bare and others in Western tuxedos; the women in stunning outfits, high-heeled shoes, and the latest hair-do's.

The naked or near naked savage that has existed in parts of Africa is still to be found in isolated areas, but for good or ill, Western ways have moved into Africa. You had better hang on to those picture postcards of the past, for a new day has come to Africa's 200 million men, women, and children and from now on we cannot think of them as movieland's naked savages beating the drums. We will have to think in terms of large cities as well as rural areas and jungles. And we will need to think of the thousands of Asians in East Africa, the thousands of Lebanese and Syrians in West Africa, and the large numbers of French, Italians, and others in North Africa, for they, too, are a vital part of this vast and growing continent. Finally, we shall have to revise our figures of this continent's population, for better health and general living standards will probably boost the total in Africa to about 400 million by the end of this century. These are some of the shifts we shall have to make as we think of the New Africa instead of the Old.

## Farming

In my mind's eye I see a market in Morocco with its many stalls and its

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donkey garage. On one side of a dirt path is a man fashioning a wooden plow with his hands and on the other side a man selling modern farm implements. Farmers are inspecting the new tools even though they will probably not be able to afford them. But at least some ideas have been placed in their minds and they may even be ready someday to talk about a farm cooperative in order to purchase such equipment and reap larger harvests.

A click of the mind and I see a series of pictures taken in many parts of Africa with people scratching the soil with sticks or crude wooden plows—for many of the small plots of ground in Africa are still being tilled in this fashion, often by women and children.

But from another section of my mental file I pull out other pictures of African farms and scenes flash from the highly scientific Firestone rubber plantation in Liberia, shots of the well run olive orchards of Tunisia extending as far as the eye can see, or of tea plantings in Uganda, worked with the latest machinery and methods.

In a brief space of time and with but a few samples, we have seen the tremendous changes in agriculture which are going on all over Africa today. Modern agriculture has been retarded by the communal ownership of land and its fragmentation by outworn inheritance laws, by the fear of the new, and the lack of capital to purchase more land or modern machinery. But changes are coming rapidly. Egypt is restricting land ownership to 200 acres per person and redistributing the rest from the feudal estates to poorer people. Kenya is consolidating the tiny patches of land in various spots owned by individual farmers and giving them small sections adjacent to each other. The cooperative movement is growing, with aid from several governments. And cash crops such as palm oil, cocoa, pyrethrum, and fruit are being introduced as a part of the movement to diversify agriculture and produce income with which to purchase the things demanded in the revolution of rising expectations.



### Revolution in Transport

From a whole series of pictures of people traveling in different parts of Africa, I select a few typical shots and find that many of them depict people walking to markets with tremendous loads of goods on their heads, of men astride their burros, or of men walking alongside animals that are almost hidden with crops or jugs or whatnot.

But many of these pictures are of people on bicycles, for this has become the poor man's automobile throughout Africa, and I have decided that if I were to go into business there today it would be as a bicycle manufacturer or salesman.

There are a few flashes also, of Africans in automobiles, especially in Uganda or in the big cities. Air transportation, too, has come into its own, with completely new airports or new additions to old ones, and with new companies like the West Africa or East Africa Airways, Ethiopia Airways, Misrair (for Egypt), or Tunis Air.

Yes, there is a transportation revolution in Africa which is important in at least two ways—in helping people to transport goods to markets and thus encourage them to grow more, and in helping people to move around and thus break down some of the tribalism and regionalism which are delaying the construction of national unity.

### Industrial Revolution, Too

In a market in Nigeria I looked at the many bolts of cloth from which women were selecting goods for dress-

es and head ties and I inquired where these lovely materials were made. Many of the patterns were local creations, I was told, but all the goods were made in England and other parts of Europe. How characteristic of the economies of colonial areas, I thought. Here was Nigeria with its own supply of cotton, shipping it to England to be made into goods from Nigerian patterns which were then sent back to Nigeria to be sold in their markets, at a great increase in price.

Then my mind shifted to a new textile plant in Kampala, Nigeria, to the many cement plants I had seen in various countries, and to the large Owen Falls dam project in Uganda which is furnishing electricity for plants in that territory and also for nearby Kenya.

In my collection of pictures I found a large number of dams or of plans for dams, because Africa is beginning to use its unsurpassed water resources, harnessing its water to help in the industrialization of the continent. Then I saw a group of men in the Sudan, important officials with whom I was having breakfast, arguing about how they could break the stranglehold which Egypt has on the waters of the Nile, so that the Sudanese could extend their important long staple cotton project and build some much desired small industries.

An industrial revolution is also in progress in Africa as the colonial powers begin to disappear and people demand more goods at lower prices.

## Old Flags—and New Flags

As I thumb my collection of mental slides, I seem to find many that include flags. A few show the Union Jack or the tricolor of France or the Belgian symbol, but most of them are of the bright new flags of new nations. One is of a government building in Tunis, brilliant in the sunlight with its tiny red and white flags. There is no special celebration to observe, but Tunisia has not had its independence long and its people are still proudly displaying this sign of freedom. Here, too, I find "shots" of the Independence Day parades in The Sudan on January 1 with the boys proudly carrying their new symbol and shouting in Arabic, "Sudan-Istiqual."

There is great pride in Africa in the independence of Ghana, Libya, Morocco, The Sudan, and Tunisia, and a constantly increasing demand for independence for others. While

I was in the Belgian Congo, first elections for city officials in the three major cities were held. The electorate was strictly limited, but it was the first move towards political participation in a country which has purposely concentrated on economic and social development, possibly with the hope that it would postpone political demands. And I can see Julius Nyerere, a leader of the independence movement in Tanganyika, telling me, "Five years ago anyone who suggested that we would gain our independence in ten years was considered a revolutionary; today anyone who suggests that we must wait ten years is considered a reactionary."

The nationalistic fever is running high and the colonial doctors have found no drugs with which to counteract it. The New Africa is to be one of free and independent nations and the only questions are when and under what conditions independence is to be achieved.

## Tribal Chiefs, Modern Leaders

My guide and I enter the parlor of the Asantahene, King of the Ashanti in Ghana, and as we approach the temporary throne, my companion prostrates himself on the floor, then rises and kisses the king's hand. Earlier in my stay in that country I had witnessed a memorable scene of a local chieftain walking down the village street with a tremendous yellow umbrella held over his head by one of his subjects.

Such sights can still be seen in many parts of Africa, but what a contrast they are to the many meetings I have had with the leaders of new nations and the independence movements. I can see the brilliant and charming Tom Morealle, a modern chief of the Chagga tribe living on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, talking about the elementary school program for his people, the success of the cooperative movement among his tribe, of the new $600,000 College of Commerce built in their capital, and of his recent trip to the United States. And I can see the polished and colorful Kwame Nkrumah sitting in his modern office in the Christiansborg Castle in Accra discussing the power of the labor movement in efforts to remake Ghana into a modern state.

Almost all of the leaders of modern Africa can hold their own with the statesmen of the world, and the only tragedy of the New Africa is the fact that there are so few well-trained men and almost no outstanding women political leaders to support the top men in their pivotal positions.

## Writers—and New Schools

In almost any of the major cities of Africa I can recall the sight of the public letter-writer or reader sitting under the shade of a tree or under the eave of some building helping the illiterate to decipher a note from a member of the family or writing for him a letter to a friend, for illiteracy is still tragically high, ranging from about 65 per cent in Tunisia to 90 per cent or more in large parts of this continent.

But I can see, too, the sumptuous University Colleges in Ghana and Nigeria, the new inter-racial Royal Technical Institute in Nairobi, Kenya, and scores of new elementary schools in every nation—500 of them built in 1957 in Tunisia alone. Everyone agrees that Africa is hungry for education. Yet, what an enormous task it is when one realizes that in countries like Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco 50 per cent of the population is now under 20 years of age. and when one understands that all basic materials have to be written in several dialects as in Ghana and Nigeria, with their several languages taught in the early grades.

The most discouraging factor is the lack of imagination regarding an indigenous type of schooling. Lacking such foresight, many schools in the New Africa are continuing to educate little Englishmen, little Frenchmen, or little Belgians instead of little Sudanese, little Ghanaians, or little Moroccans prepared to cope with the problems of their countries.

### Prejudice—and Respect

It is late afternoon in Leopoldville in the Congo and as I sip my lemonade in the outdoor cafe I see a ten-year-old Belgian boy toss onto the sidewalk the coin which his father has given him to give to the waiter, saying in French, "That's for you . . . " while his parents and older sister sniggered. Or I relive the day in Kenya when I saw a hoary old settler with his white sideburns and goatee wave his stick at two African girls who got in his way on the sidewalk and bellow at them, "You black—."

But there are many more snapshots of the New Africa which pass through my mind as if in a filmstrip —the plastic surgeon in Kenya who devotes two or three days a week to free surgery for Africans who need his help; the inter-racial, international work camp group building tuberculosis cabins at the Quaker Hospital at Kaimosi in Western Kenya; the free mixing of peoples of all colors and nationalities in Ghana; the home in which I lived in Nigeria where beautiful brown twins moved freely from their dark skinned Nigerian father to their white skinned American mother.

Prejudice is a world problem and Africa is plagued by it, but there is some progress in Kenya and elsewhere in overcoming it and much freedom from prejudice in large parts of West Africa.

### Homes, Shrines, and Churches

I close my eyes and think of homes across Africa, and my first recollection is of a round hut made of mud with a thatch roof, with two beds, a small shelf for utensils, one really beautiful wooden stool with bright beads pressed into the soft wood, and the black roof inside the hut almost invisible because of the smoke. This was home to a family of six persons in a village in Kenya; it was a symbol of the Old Africa. And if I close my eyes again and think of water and wells, a whole procession of muddy, disease ridden pools come to mind—wells and streams which bring disease if not death and make people talk about Africans as "lazy" because they do not have the health to cope with their daily work.

But offsetting these typical scenes are many Kodachromes of clinics and hospitals, mid-wives, nurses, and doctors trying to raise the health standards of villages and towns, and of hundreds of new homes in Morocco, Tunisia, the Belgian Congo, and other parts of Africa which represent the wave of the future in this continent. An enormous job remains to be done to provide even minimum standards of health and housing for the millions of Africans living in sub-standard conditions today, but a creditable start has been made and ambitious plans laid for further campaigns in these basic fields.

It is evening and the drums are beating in a nearby woods; slowly the crowd plods its way down the path to the ju-ju shrine. There may be comfort and excitement in the rites which will be conducted there this evening, but this shrine of superstition hardly belongs in the New Africa. I pause in the museum in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanganyika before the weapons used in the circumcision rites—and realize that these weapons are still being used in many parts of Africa and that "bush schools" are still being conducted for groups of boys and girls who have reached adolescence, often under conditions that would appall the most ardent champions of the theory that all cultures are "relative."

And then I think of the breakfast conversation in a liberal Moslem home in The Sudan as I listen to an account of some of the efforts to adapt the teachings of Islam to modern Africa. I realize that Islam is gaining strength in the New Africa not only because it makes fewer demands upon its adherents than Christianity and condones polygamy, but that it has no long history of race prejudice and is trying in some quarters at least to find reinterpretations of ancient truths for modern times.

And I recall the fact that almost every leader of the New Africa with whom I talked had mentioned that his education had been in mission schools, no matter how critical he might be today of Christian missions. My mind slipped back to Christmas week in Kenya where I spoke at a service with 300 persons present, many of whom had walked miles to attend, and to another gathering of three hours on Christmas day with nearly 600 persons present—and I wondered how many persons in my home community in Indiana would so ardently attend services that day.

The caliber of missionaries must certainly be improved and the programs of missions radically altered in the future, for the religious movements of the New Africa must also be Africanized and their personnel more and more drawn from Africans.

### Conclusion

There are hundreds of other Kodachromes in my mental collection of African scenes, but these should suffice to give some idea of one visitor's impressions of a part of this vast continent. The Old Africa is fast disappearing. It was picturesque, colorful, and appealing as well as primitive, distressing, and at times revolting. Much that was good in it is disappearing as well as much that was bad, crowded out by the rush to modernization and Westernization. Old problems are being replaced with new ones. For good or ill a New Africa is appearing with which we in the United States must reckon increasingly and realistically—and whose friendship we must cultivate, and cherish, now and in the years ahead. For large parts of Africa have entered the international community of our day and other parts are hammering on the doors of this turbulent world community of 1958.