

Aggrey of Africa *speaks*

Among the leaders of modern Africa, James E. Aggrey (1875-1927) ranks very high. He preceded the present period of stress on political independence and social and economic progress, but he pointed the way to these gains for Africa.

He was an eloquent speaker, a pioneer educator for a distinctive type of African education, a dedicated Christian minister, and an effective reconciler of races. Although he died in 1927, his life has been an inspiration to thousands of Africans struggling to seek solutions to the vexing problems of these turbulent times.

Aggrey was born in Anamanu, Ghana (then the Gold Coast) in 1875, a member of the Fanti tribe. He was educated in mission schools and later taught in village schools and served as headmaster of a secondary school in Cape Coast.

In 1898 he sailed to the United States for further study at Livingstone College in North Carolina and later at Columbia University. For over 20 years he taught at Livingstone College, preaching throughout that period, largely in rural churches. In 1920 he was honored by appointment to the Phelps-Stokes Commission to study education in West Africa, an unusual distinction for an African in those days. In 1924 he served on a similar commission for East Africa. The last few months of his life were spent as Vice-President of Achimota College, which he hoped would someday become the University of Africa.

Upon Aggrey's death the Secretary of the International Missionary Council said, "He was one of the most Christlike men I have known and he was perhaps the greatest interpreter of men to one another that I have ever met."

ON AFRICA AND ITS FUTURE . . .

"Africa is really the big question mark among the continents. Occident or Orient? Conflict or Concord?"

"There is a Youth Movement coming in Africa that some day may startle the world. This restlessness all over Africa stands for self-discovery and self-realization. It tells of power just breaking through. The great continent has been asleep a long time. Now it is waking up. The Africa of twenty years ago is now gone and gone forever. There is a New Africa coming today and it is a challenge to civilization."

"Now the way is opened that Africa, my Africa, may be helped to realize herself, in order that she may soon take her place in the sisterhood of nations, and under wise guidance stretch forth her hand to God by serving her day and generation."

"I am anxious that Africa should be 'civilized', not westernized, and that the civilization should be Christian. We want a Christian civilization, and thus together with the best in our own culture we may make a definite contribution to twentieth century civilization."

"To those who have fire, I give more fire; and to those who have might, I want to give might mightier than man's. I want to sing a song of hope to the despairing; to breathe the breath of life that will chase away all hating. I believe that right will undoubtedly conquer wrong, virtue conquer vice, and harmony take the place of discord."

I plead with the Christian church to make Africa the First Christian Continent."

ON GOD . . .

"You would be surprised and shocked often at the tremendous harm done by the conception that God is white and the devil black, in the minds of simple African followers."

ON JESUS . . .

"To the African's soul the name and personality of Jesus . . . answers all questions. We always felt there ought to be somebody like that. Africa is ahungering for the Christ, and Christ Jesus can take that continent in a generation if His disciples will give Him the chance."

"Neither Latin nor Greek can save us, nor even mathematics . . . only Jesus can do it."

ON CHRISTIANITY . . .

"The kind of Christianity we have to practice is to go around helping other people, and then when they pray they will say, 'Amen'. There is too much talking; talking is cheap, unless you want to use a long-distance telephone. Then you have to pay the price."

"The Christian man who comes among us must be one of us . . ."

"The one thing I am most proud of is my conversion to Christianity and the great help I daily have from communion with the Father by his Son and through the Spirit. God and I are on good terms. He understands me and makes me work hard every day to reach his standard for me, because, wonderful to relate, he has such confidence in me. I pray in deep humility that I may never disappoint Him."

ON SERVICE TO GOD . . .

"We each have some little talent to use for God, and if we empty ourselves of self, God will turn it into such a wonderful thing, that, like Moses, we find we shall flee from it."

ON EDUCATION . . .

"We shall make moral character the clear and conscious aim of education and direct all activities . . . to its attainment."

"By education I do not mean simply learning. I mean the training in mind, in morals, and in hand that helps to make one socially efficient. Not simply the three R's, but the three H's — the head, the hand, and the heart."

"No race or people can rise half-slave, half-free. The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family."

"I know that some say if you educate the black man, he will enter into competition with and eventually overwhelm the whites; but that is altogether the wrong view. As the Africans grow to desire more of life, they will become greater consumers, and the white men who have always handled the money, will handle more. That is why I plead for education, and above all for education that is not of the head only, but of the hands, too. The fight for race supremacy is foolishness."

"To you who are teaching in the villages as well as in the large cities I send a cheer. I know your loneliness, your trials, and temptations. I know, for I am one of you."

ON A DISTINCTIVE AFRICAN EDUCATION . . .

"With the coming of Western civilization . . . African boys and girls tended to be cut loose from tribal ties. In many instances the educated became neither Western nor African — losing the best, and often imitating the worst of both. Too often the African was taught that everything African was heathen, wrong, ungodly. The importance of the Gold Coast Government's experiment at Achimota is that it will retain the best things African and couple them with the best things Western. African fables, sculpture, and art and drama, which in my opinion, rival those of the Greeks, will be elevated and added to the culture of the West. The African's 'wireless', — the wonderful system of drum messages, his psychic and remarkable intuitive power, and his understanding of nature, will be able to soothe the rushing, grinding, materialistic heart of the West."

ON AFRICA'S GIFTS TO THE WORLD . . .

"You white folks may bring your gold, your great banks, your sanitation and other marvellous achievements to the Manger, but that will not be enough. Let the Chinese and the Japanese and the Indians bring their incense of ceremony, but that will not be enough. We black people must step in with our myrrh of childlike faith. If you take our childlikeness, our love of God, and our love for you, whether you hate us or not, then the gifts will be completed — the gold, the frankincense, and myrrh."

"Some people took to war; we took to love. Some people took to hate; we took to song. Some people took to anger; we took to laughter. Some people took to despair; we took to hope."

ON PRIDE IN BEING A NEGRO . . .

"No first-class educated African wants to be a white man. . . . Every educated Negro wants to be a first-class Negro, not a third-class European."

"I am proud of my color; whoever is not proud of his color is not fit to live."

"I am glad that I am black, that God knew His business when He made me so, and He wants to do something through me."

"If I went to Heaven and God said, 'Aggrey, I am going to send you back; would you like to go as a white man? 'I should say, 'No, send me back as a black man. Yes, completely black' 'Why?' 'Because I have a work to do as a black man that no white man can do. Send me back completely black.'"

"I believe that the Negro has a great gift for the world; the gift of the idea of meeting injustice and ostracism and oppression by sunny, light-hearted love and work. I believe he is going to teach that to Asia and to the white folk."

ON RACIAL PREJUDICE . . .

"Some white people ought to be transformed into Negroes just for a few days, so as to feel what we feel and suffer what we suffer."

"The presence of something that is not like ourselves always produces an emotion, either an emotion of adoration for something like ourselves but higher, or an emotion of contempt for what you consider to be lower. Psychologically color prejudice is the emotion of contempt for something not like yourself."

ON SOLVING THE RACE PROBLEM . . .

"It is in the spiritual realm that the prejudice disappears."

"I have no time for revenge . . . that's not African."

"Many imagine that all Whites are bad, that you have not a single friend among them; but I have found that you have more friends than you think."

"To my people one 'let *us* do', is worth more than a thousand 'you must do's'. Africa is a child, but our paternalists fail to observe that this child is growing. They also forget that in many instances it is more important to work *with* than to work *for*."

"If you beg, you must not be surprised if they treat you like a beggar. And I believe that there will be a better kind of cooperation between us and other races the sooner we pass the begging stage."

"You can never beat prejudice by a frontal attack because there is mere emotion at the root of it. Always flank it."

"You can play a tune of sorts on the white keys, and you can play a tune of sorts on the black keys, but for harmony you must use both the black and the white."

ON PERSONAL DEDICATION . . .

"I pray that God may continue to make me humble, meek and mild in my own interest, but bold as a lion, impregnable, as adamant and as determined as Fate when it comes to working for Christian cooperation, for the elevation of my race, and for the protection of childhood and womanhood."

ON THE WORLD VIEW . . .

"I am a debtor to all men, to all civilizations, to world Christianity, and to all kinds of educational programs."

"No nation can find its own salvation by breaking away from others. We must all be saved or we must all perish together."

"What I say is this: no man down, all men up — all of them, white, black, yellow, brown; all — all men up, and no man down, each of us as races making our best contribution to the life of all, for each of us has a contribution to make."

ON HIS LIFE . . .

"To this end I was born that I might bear testimony to the truth that men should be too busy to muse over personal wrongs when they are working for the good of humanity. . . . I am busy working for harmony."

"The burden of my life is the line in 'In Memoriam' . . . 'So much to do, so little done.' "

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