

29. Colonial life

Edward Morel *The Burden* (1903)



Edward Morel, a British journalist in the Belgian Congo, drew attention to the abuse suffered at the hands of imperialism in 1903. Congo was perhaps the most famously exploitative of the European colonies. Ironically, Morel refers to the White Man's Burden by R. Kipling by reversing it.

It is [the Africans] who carry the 'Black man's burden'. They have not withered away before the white man's occupation.

- ... In Africa, especially in tropical Africa, which a capitalistic imperialism threatens and has, in part, already devastated, man is incapable of reacting against unnatural
- 5 conditions. In those regions man is engaged in a perpetual struggle against disease and an exhausting climate, which tells heavily upon childbearing; and there is no scientific machinery for salving the weaker members of the community. The African of the tropics is capable of tremendous physical labours. But he cannot accommodate himself to the European system of monotonous, uninterrupted
- 10 labour, with its long and regular hours, involving, moreover, as it frequently does, severance¹ from natural surroundings and nostalgia, the condition of melancholy resulting from separation from home, a malady to which the African is specially prone. Climatic conditions forbid it. When the system is forced upon him, the tropical African droops and dies.
- 15 Nor is violent physical opposition to abuse and injustice henceforth possible for the African in any part of Africa. His chances of effective resistance have been steadily dwindling with the increasing perfectibility in the killing power of modern armament²...
- 20 Thus the African is really helpless against the material gods of the white man, as embodied in the trinity of imperialism, capitalistic exploitation, and militarism...

1. **severance:** separation

2. **steadily ... armament:** it. *si stanno progressivamente riducendo a causa del perfezionamento delle armi moderne*

Ada Leslie

Life in the Colonies (1894)



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The young Victorian lady Ada Leslie married an English officer who was posted to Burma and she spent most of her life there, including her honeymoon, as she states in the following letter, one of the many she sent from abroad.

Prome, Burma, December 5th 1894.

My dearest Pollie,

I hope you received the box of Wedding cake & newspaper containing the announcement of my marriage all right. I am sorry I have not had time to write to you before, but I have written

5 several times to Nellie, so I hope you have heard of me through her.

I have had such a busy & tiring life since I came out & have suffered so intensely from the awful heat that I have been positively found to neglect a number of people. And then I am constantly moving about the district with my husband, so that sometimes for days I do not get many letters written.

10 The cold weather is just beginning now, already I feel stronger. After Christmas I hope to be able to write some long letters. You must not think I have forgotten you amid all the strange scenes of my new life. Jose demands very long letters from me – I am obliged to write to her every week. So I must ask her to write & tell you about me sometimes.

15 I find it quite impossible to get any Christmas cards, so I am sending you some photos that my husband has taken. Later I hope to send you some of my house.

My husband you know, is in command of a district about as large as the county of York. Prome is the head-quarters with a native population of 32,000 inhabitants. Then there are 2 sub-divisions under European Junior Officers, with any number of station under national officers.

20 For two or three weeks out of every month at this time of year, my husband is constantly on the march, inspecting all the divisions & stations. He has to visit all scenes of crime to report on murders, robberies etc. I accompany him almost everywhere. [...]

The year is divided into three parts in this country – namely the hot weather, the rains & the cold weather. It was the commencement of the wet weather when I first came out & very heavy rains fell all most continually for 5 and a half months – it's frightfully depressing.

25 Wishing you all a bright & pleasant Christmas and happy New Year.

I am always your affectionate cousin

Ada Castle