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- 1 Much has already been written on the humanitarian movements, particularly the antislavery movement, and on the iniquities of colonial rule in Africa, but Kevin Grant's is a book with a difference. It literally dissects and traces the history of the humanitarian movements, which exposed these iniquities and were ultimately responsible for the signing of the League of Nations Slavery Convention in 1930.
- 2 He begins by identifying three ideological strands in British humanitarianism. The first is the doctrine of trusteeship. This idea, which evolved in the 18th century from earlier roots, was based on the assumption that the British, with their Protestant culture, their political system, their technology and economy, were among the most civilized of peoples. Hence they had "a sacred trust" to manage the property of their colonial subjects—"child races"—and to incorporate them into the imperial economy until they had learned to govern themselves along "civilized" lines, at which point they would have the same rights as their erstwhile colonizers. The second ideological movement was evangelicalism—the duty to convert subject peoples to Christianity, to rescue them from slavery, and at the same time promote their virtues as free workers and consumers. By the early 20th century the third trend appeared—the advocacy of basic human rights for all peoples. This had support from two different sources—the trade union movement mainly concerned with defending the rights of British workers—and a group of merchants, who argued that free trade would guarantee the human rights of Africans through commerce and property ownership. "Commerce" they insisted, "would ensure the fundamental human right of freedom from suffering".
- 3 These merchants were allied with the Aborigines Protection Society (aps) and backed by chambers of commerce. Another society, largely composed of Quakers, founded in

1839, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, was dedicated to ending slavery “in all its forms” including indentured labour and the appropriation of indigenous land and labour.

- 4 This compelling book examines in detail the interaction between these three movements from the Berlin Conference of 1884 to the signing of the League of Nations Slavery Convention in 1926. The Berlin Act bound its signatories, which included all the European colonial powers with territories in Africa, to “help in suppressing slavery and especially the slave trade”, but its main aim was to secure free trade on the Congo and the Niger, and access to missionaries of all denominations. The Brussels Act, which followed, is barely mentioned in this book. It was primarily aimed at ending the East African export slave trade, however, it also declared that the best means of attacking the slave trade was by the imposition of colonial rule. It further stated that Africans should be “civilized” and their welfare promoted by initiating them into agricultural labour and promoting the “industrial arts”. Having thus signed treaties giving themselves carte blanche to “civilize” Africans in their own way, in their own time, on their own terms and in their own interests, the European colonial powers proceeded to carve up most of the continent between them.
- 5 They soon attacked slave raiding and trading. Slavery itself was more difficult to eradicate and each power took different action. However, having, at least in theory, abolished or simply ceased to recognize the legality of indigenous slavery, the colonial rulers devised various methods of mobilizing African labour in order to make their vast new territories self-supporting, and, eventually, a source of riches for the mother country. One method was to give concessionaire companies the right to the harvest of particular crops over large areas. Another was to mobilize men, women and children as forced labour, putting them to work in the colonial economy in sectors such as mining, road, rail and dock building, and cash crop production. A third method was to confiscate African land for European settlers, employing the displaced Africans as barely paid labour, or as squatters without rights of tenure. In another variant the French conscripted men for the army but used many of them on public works.
- 6 Much has been written on the various forms of oppression and the terrible suffering to which these policies gave rise, but this book fills a gap. It concentrates on the efforts of British abolitionists and their supporters to end these “new slaveries” between the 1880s and the 1920s. It examines in particular three case studies. The first is the campaign against the atrocities perpetrated in the Congo under the rule of Leopold II, King of the Belgians. The second is the campaign against the Portuguese methods of recruiting labour in Angola to grow cocoa on the islands of São Tomé e Príncipe. They captured or bought recruits up country in Angola and marched them in chains to the coast. There they were enrolled as “contract labour” and sent to the islands. Few ever returned. Lastly Grant examines the struggle against the recruitment of Chinese labour for the gold mines of the Transvaal, newly conquered by the British during the South African war. All of these “new slaveries” have been the subject of scholarly research, but the emphasis of this book is on what the author calls the “new abolitionists”, about whom as a group there has not been a “multifaceted study”. It is just this study which gives this book its main interest and its *raison d'être*.
- 7 Grant, like many other scholars of the antislavery movement, has restricted his field to the British abolitionists, since the British were the leading antislavery activists of the time. They had led the antislavery campaign from the start, and had conducted a long

diplomatic struggle against the foreign slave trade and expended men and money in the cause, making enemies as they did so. They, therefore, saw themselves as the natural leaders of the movement—the self-appointed humanitarian “watchdog” of the world—in a cause which had strong public support. Looking in detail at these three cases, the author has pulled together from many sources enough material to demonstrate that in every humanitarian cause there is somewhere an element of self-interest. It is just this interest that he carefully unravels in these three very different and carefully chosen examples.

- 8 The first of his case studies is the Congo Reform Campaign—the biggest humanitarian movement of the time. It is of particular interest, as Grant shows, because of the very diverse aims of its supporters. As early as 1886 the Baptist Missionary Society reported atrocities committed by representatives of King Leopold’s Congo Free State. Other missions were well aware of them by the mid-1890s. However, none of them wanted to publicize them for fear of jeopardising their main work—the conversion of Africans to Christianity. They only launched their public campaign against the “Congo atrocities” after the labour demands of the state and the cruelties of its representatives threatened their own access to African converts and potential converts. Moreover, Protestants were forbidden to build new mission stations, while Catholic missions were allowed to expand. Their evangelical work threatened, they called for public support. They brought with them a new and most effective form of propaganda—the magic lantern slide show—which galvanized public attention in Britain and elsewhere. Their message was spread from pulpits all over the country and their pictures attracted thousands of viewers and many donations. Among the leading proponents of this campaign were the former Congo missionaries, John and Alice Harris.
- 9 The Congo reform movement was next joined by the Aborigines Protection Society and its allies—members of chambers of commerce representing the merchants who found their trade hampered by agents of the Congo Free State. Their aim was to ensure free trade, which, they claimed was mutually beneficial to Africans and to British merchants. Their spokesman and publicist was E. D. Morel, a talented journalist who believed that Africans should have the right to their land, and the freedom to sell their produce for their own benefit. Moreover, whereas missionaries prioritised conversion to Christianity, Morel and the aps believed in cultural relativism—that African cultural and religious beliefs should be tolerated. The missionaries and the merchants were thus uneasy bedfellows, with different long term goals. Nevertheless they co-operated to form the Congo Reform Association. When the Association found its finances running out, it was rescued in 1904 by yet another group—the Quakers, particularly William Cadbury, who was a leading member of the Antislavery Society. Cadbury, known for his philanthropy in Britain, was already coming under fire for buying his chocolate firms’ cocoa from the Portuguese islands of São Tomé e Príncipe. The final player on the stage was the British government. Although its own consuls had confirmed the Congo atrocities, it had no desire to jeopardize its relations with Belgium in the interests of African labour. Moreover, it feared charges against its own colonial labour policies might follow. Grant deftly discusses how each of these disparate groups came together and then split apart.
- 10 The same kind of analysis follows in the next two examples. The first concerns the use of Chinese indentured labour imported to work in the gold mines of the newly conquered Transvaal after the South African War. Here the main contenders were the

British trade unions, the Liberal Party and the nascent Labour Party, supported by radicals and non-conformists, lined up to bring down the Conservative government which had endorsed the recruitment of Chinese in order to restore gold production. The opposition cared little for the welfare of what they called Chinese “slaves”. The main aim of the Trade Unions was to protect the British working classes from cheap labour, and to bring down the Conservative government, which had held out hopes during the war that at its end British working men might find skilled jobs in the mines. The object of the Liberal Party was to win the election in 1906. Once the election was won by the Liberals, largely on other grounds, little more was heard of the treatment of Chinese on the Rand, but their recruitment was ended in favour of cheap African contract labour imported from Portuguese Mozambique and other areas. Grant also discusses the role of racism in this chapter.

- 11 In his final example, Grant discusses the dilemma of Cadbury Brothers, which bought its cocoa from the Portuguese islands of São Tomé e Príncipe, grown, as has been seen, by slave labour. Here again each party had its own interests to defend. The antislavery society denounced the so-called contract labour on the islands as barely disguised slavery. William Cadbury tried to fend off the attack of the antislavery lobby until he found an alternative source of cocoa, which he eventually located in the Gold Coast by 1910. The British government, for its part, was reluctant to disrupt its good relations with Portugal, particularly as it needed African labour from Mozambique to work in the gold mines of the Rand.
- 12 The final chapter covering the period 1914-1926, stresses the divergent post-war aims of the Antislavery Society, led since 1910 by John Harris, of Morel, of the Labour Party, of the British government, of the United States President, Woodrow Wilson, and lastly of a much respected former colonial governor, Frederick Lugard. The debate brought to the fore the concept of imperial rule as a “sacred trust” but a trust devoted, as Lugard put it, to the “mutual benefit” of Europe’s industrial classes and of “native races”, who would be raised to “a higher plane”. With the establishment of the League of Nations as an experiment in international government, the conquered German colonies were shared out by the victors to be ruled under the supervision of the League’s Mandates’ Commission in the interests of their peoples, who were to be led to the point where the ruling power decided they were sufficiently mature to rule themselves. Evangelicalism played no role in trusteeship at this point.
- 13 The book ends with a description of Harris’ role in persuading members of the League to form the Temporary Slavery Commission and shows how Lugard, a leading member of the commission, forced the hand of the British government by sending them a draft convention against slavery. The British and the other colonial powers doctored the resulting Slavery Convention to suit their own interests. Slavery was loosely defined and its various forms were not spelled out, nor was a date set for the universal outlawing of the institution. Worse still, Africans were not assured of their rights to land or its products. It was an instrument with which the imperial powers could live.
- 14 Strangely Grant does not mention the role of the International Labour Organization or the Forced Labour Convention of 1930. Both of these were important in terms of the struggle against the “new slaveries” of the 20th century.
- 15 A brief epilogue carries the story up to the establishment of the United Nations. It shows how the political left, calling for native rights to land, and endorsing cultural relativism as part of “the sacred trust”, was joined by nationalists in the empire,

demanding independence. Their combined efforts, and Britain's depleted powers, led eventually to the acceptance of the right to self-government, and the jettisoning of ideas of racial superiority. Grant sees in the language of the un charter an ideological compromise between the era dominated by the European great powers and the post-World War II world of superpowers and decolonisation. He urges further scrutiny of the ways "in which the privileges and rights of international government" still "derive from the imperialist vision of civilized hierarchy, capitalist development, and the sovereignty of the state".

- 16 This short book tackles big concepts and poses at the end an important question for further thought. It is a pity that the last chapter and the epilogue are so condensed. They have clearly the makings of another book, about a very different post-World War II world in terms of power, politics and the agendas of the various un agencies and the ever-proliferating non-governmental organisations and the foundations which largely support them.
- 17 The book is well produced with a memorable cover juxtaposing a photograph of Queen Victoria and her family seated in a palace garden, with a picture of six miserable Africans in chains and rags under armed guard. This picture alone well illustrates the haunting title: *A Civilized Savagery*.