

The Education
of
King Peter

Edgar Wallace

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THE EDUCATION OF KING PETER

BY

EDGAR WALLACE

In the land that curves along the borders of Togoland, the people understand punishment to mean pain and death, and nothing else counts. There was a foolish commissioner who was a great humanitarian, and he went up to Akasava—which is the name of this land—and tried moral suasion.

It was a raiding palaver. Some of the people of Akasava had crossed the river to Ochori and stolen women and goats, and I believe there was a man or two killed, but that is unimportant. The goats and the women were alive, and cried aloud for vengeance. They cried so loud that they were heard down at Headquarters; and Mr. Commissioner Niceman—that was not

his name, but it will serve—went up to see what all the noise was about. He found the Ochori people very angry and more frightened.

"If," said their spokesman, "they will return our goats, they may keep the women, because the goats are very valuable."

So, Mr. Commissioner Niceman had a long, long palaver, that lasted days and days, with the Chief of the Akasava people and his councilors; and in the end moral suasion triumphed, and the people promised on a certain day, at a certain hour, when the moon was in such a quarter and the tide at such a height, the women should be returned, and the goats also.

So Mr. Niceman returned to Headquarters swelling with admiration for himself, and wrote a long report about his genius and his administrative abilities, and his knowledge of the native, which was afterward published in Blue Book (Africa) 7,943-09.

It happened that immediately afterward Mr. Niceman went home to England on furlough, so that he did not hear the laments and woeful wailings of the Ochori folk when they did not get their women or their goats.

Bailman, working round the Isisi River with ten *houssas* and an attack of malaria, received a helio message:

Go Akasava and settle that infernal woman palaver.

ADMINISTRATION.

So Bailman girded up his loins, took twenty-five grains of quinine, and, leaving his good work,—he was searching for M'Beli, the witch-doctor, who had poisoned a friend,—trekked across country for the Akasava.

In the course of time he came to the city, and was met by the Chief.

"What about these women?" he asked.

"We will have a palaver," said the Chief. "I will summon my headmen and my councilors——"

"Summon nothing," Bailman said shortly. "Send back the women and the goats you stole from the Ochori."

"Master," promised the Chief, "at full moon, which is our custom, when the tide is so, and all signs of gods and devils are propitious, I will do as you bid."

"Chief," said Bailman, tapping the ebony chest of the other with the handle of his walking-stick, "moon and river, gods or devils, those women and the goats go back to the Ochori folk by sunset, or I tie you to a tree and flog you till you bleed."

"Master," said the Chief, "the women shall be returned."

"And the goats," added Bailman.

"As to the goats," said the Chief airily, "they are dead—having been killed for a feast."

"You will bring them back to life," said Bailman.

"Master, do you think I am a magician?" asked the Chief of the Akasava.

"I think you are a liar," said Bailman impartially, and there the palaver ended.

That night, goats and women returned to the Ochori, and Bailman prepared to depart.

He took the Chief aside, not desiring to put shame upon him, or to weaken his authority.

"Chief," he remarked, "it is a long journey to Akasava, and I am a man fulfilling many tasks. I desire that you do not cause me any further journey to this territory."

"Master," said the Chief truthfully, "I never wish to see you again."

Bailman smiled inwardly, collected his ten houssas, and went back to the Isisi River to continue his search for M'Beli.

It was not a nice search, for many reasons; and there was every excuse for believing that the King of Isisi himself was the murderer's protector. Confirmation of this view came, one morning, when Bailman, encamped by the big river, was

taking a breakfast of tinned milk and toast. There arrived hurriedly Sato-Koto, the brother of the King, in great distress of mind, for he was a fugitive from the King's wrath. He babbled forth all manner of news, in much of which Bailman took no interest whatever. But what he said of the witch-doctor who lived in the King's shadow was very interesting indeed, and Bailman sent a messenger to Headquarters, and, as it transpired, Headquarters despatched, in the course of time, Mr. Niceman—who by this time had returned from furlough—to use moral suasion on the King of the Isisi.

From such evidence as we have been able to collect, it is clear that the King was not in a melting mood: it is an indisputable fact that poor Niceman's head, stuck on a pole before the King's hut, proclaimed the King's high spirits.

His Majesty's ships *St. George*, *Thrush*, *Philomel*, and *Phoebe* sailed from Simons Town, and H.M.S. *Dwarf* came down from Sierra Leone, and in less than a month after the King had killed his guest he wished he had not.

Headquarters sent Bailman to clear up the political side of the trouble.

He was shown round what was left of the King's city, by the flag lieutenant of the *St. George*.

"I'm afraid," remarked that gentleman apologetically,—*"I am afraid that you will have to dig out a new king. We've rather killed the old one."*

Bailman nodded.

"I shall not go into mourning," he said.

There was no difficulty in finding candidates for the vacant post. Sato-Koto, the dead King's brother, expressed with commendable promptitude his willingness to assume the cares of office.

"What do you say?" asked the admiral commanding the expedition.

"I say 'no,' sir," said Bailman, without hesitation. "The King has a son, a boy of nine; the kingship must be his. As for Sato-Koto, he shall be Regent at pleasure."

And so it was arranged, Sato-Koto sulkily assenting.

They found the new King hidden in the woods with the women folk, and he tried to bolt; but Bailman caught him and led him back to the city by his ear.

"My boy," he asked kindly, "how do people call you?"

"Peter, master," whimpered the wriggling lad, "in the fashion of the white people."

"Very well," said Bailman. "You shall be King Peter, and rule this country wisely and justly, according to custom and the law. And you shall do hurt to none, and put shame on none; nor shall you kill, or raid, or do any of those things that make life worth living; and if you break loose, may the Lord help you!"

Thus was King Peter anointed monarch of the Isisi people, and Bailman, with the little army of blue-jackets and houssas, went back to Headquarters; for M'Beli, the witch-doctor, had been slain at the taking of the city, and Bailman's work was finished.

The story of the taking of Isisi and the crowning of the young King was told in the London newspapers, and lost nothing in the telling. It was so described by the special correspondents who accompanied the expedition that many dear old ladies wept, and many dear young ladies of Mayfair said, "How sweet!" And the outcome of the many emotions that the descriptions evoked was the sending out from England of Miss Clinton Calbraith, who was an M.A. and unaccountably pretty.

She came out to "mother" the orphan King, to be a mentor and a friend. She paid her own passage, but the books that she brought and the school paraphernalia that filled two large packing-cases were subscribed for by the tender readers of *Tiny Toddlers*, a magazine for infants. Bailman met her on the landing-stage, being curious to see what a white woman looked like.

He put a hut at her disposal, and sent the wife of his coast clerk to look after her.

"And now, Miss Calbraith," he asked, at dinner that evening, "what do you expect to do with Peter?"

She tilted her pretty chin in the air reflectively.

"We shall start with the most elementary of lessons—the

merest kindergarten—and gradually work up; I shall teach him calisthenics, a little botany—Mr. Bailman, you're laughing!"

"No, I wasn't," he hastened to assure her; "I always make a face like that—er—in the evening. But tell me this: do you speak the language—Swaheli, Bomongo, Fingi——"

"That *will* be a difficulty," she said thoughtfully.

"Will you take my advice?" he asked.

"Why, yes."

"Well, learn the language." She nodded. "Go home and learn it." She frowned. "It will take you about twenty-five years."

"Mr. Bailman," she said, not without dignity, "you are making fun of me."

"Heaven forbid," said Bailman piously, "that I should do anything so wicked."

The end of the story, so far as Miss Clinton Calbraith was concerned, was that she went to Isisi, stayed three days, and came back incoherent.

"He is not a child," she cried wildly. "He is—a—a little devil!"

"So I should say," agreed Bailman philosophically.

"A king! It is disgraceful! He lives in a mud hut, and wears no clothes! If I'd known——"

"A child of nature," said Bailman blandly. "You didn't expect a sort of Louis Quinze, did you?"

"I don't know what I expected," she said desperately; "but it was impossible to stay—quite impossible."

"Obviously," murmured Bailman.

"Of course, I knew he would be black," she went on; "and I knew that—oh, it was too horrid!"

"The fact of it is, my dear young lady," said Bailman, "Peter wasn't as picturesque as you imagined him: he wasn't the gentle child with pleading eyes; and he lives messy. Is that it?"

This was not the only attempt to educate Peter. Months afterward, when Miss Calbraith had gone home and was busily writing her famous book, "Alone in Africa—By an English Gentlewoman," Bailman heard of another educative raid. Two members of the Ethiopian Mission came into Isisi by the back way. The Ethiopian Mission is made up of Christian black men, who very properly, basing their creed upon holy writ, preach the gospel of equality. A black man is as good as a white man any day of the week, and infinitely better on Sundays, if he happens to be a member of the Reformed Ethiopian Church.

They came to Isisi, and achieved instant popularity, for the kind of talk they provided was very much to the liking of Sato-Koto and the King's councilors.

Bailman sent for the missionaries. The first summons they refused to obey; but they came on the second occasion, for the

message Bailman sent was both peremptory and ominous.

They came to Headquarters—two cultured American negroes of good address and refined conversation. They spoke English faultlessly, and were in every sense perfect gentlemen.

"We cannot understand the character of your command," said one, "which savors somewhat of an interference with the liberty of the subject."

"You'll understand me better," remarked Bailman, who knew his men, "when I tell you that I cannot allow you to preach sedition to my people."

"Sedition, Mr. Bailman!" said the negro, in shocked tones. "That is a grave charge."

Bailman took a paper from a pigeonhole in his desk—the interview was taking place in his office.

"On such a date," he said, "you said this, and this, and that."

In other words, he accused them of overstepping the creed of equality and encroaching upon the borderland of political agitation.

"Lies," said the elder of the two, without hesitation.

"Truth or lie," answered Bailman, "you go no more to Isisi."

"Would you have the heathen remain in darkness?" asked the man reproachfully. "Is the light we kindle too bright, friend?"

"No," said Bailman, "but a thought too warm."

So he committed the outrage of removing the Ethiopians from the scene of their earnest labors, in consequence of which questions were asked in the English Parliament.

Then the Chief of the Akasava people—an old friend—took a hand in the education of King Peter.

Akasava adjoins that King's territory, and the Chief came to give hints in military affairs.

He came with drums a-beating, with presents of fish and bananas and salt.

"You are a great King," he said to the sleepy-eyed boy, who sat on the stool of state, regarding him with open-mouthed interest. "When you walk, the world shakes at your tread; the mighty river that goes flowing down to the big water parts asunder at your word; the trees of the forest shiver; and the beasts go slinking to cover when your mightiness goes abroad."

"Oh ko ko!" giggled the King, pleasantly tickled.

"The white men fear you," continued the Chief of the Akasava; "they tremble and hide at your roar."

Sato-Koto, standing at the King's elbow, was a practical man.

"What seek ye, Chief?" he asked, cutting short the compliments.

So the Chief told him of a land peopled by cowards, rich with the treasures of the earth, goats and women.

"Why do you not take them yourself?" demanded the Regent.

"Because I am a slave," said the Chief, "the slave of Baili, who would beat me. But you, lord, are of the great. Being King's headman, Baili would not beat you, because of your greatness."

There followed a palaver that lasted two days.

"I shall have to get busy with Peter," wrote Bailman despairingly to the Administrator. "The little beggar has gone on the war-path against those unfortunate Ochori. I should be glad if you would send me a hundred men, a Maxim gun, and a bundle of rattan canes, I'm afraid I must attend to Peter's education myself."

"Lord, did I not speak the truth?" said the Akasava Chief, in triumph. "Baili has done nothing! Behold, we have wasted the city of the Ochori, and taken their treasure, and the white man is dumb because of your greatness! Let us wait till the moon comes again, and I will show you another city."

"You are a great man," bleated the King, "and some day you

shall build your hut in the shadow of my palace."

"On that day," said the Chief, with splendid resignation, "I shall die of joy."

When the moon had waxed and waned, and come again, a penciled silver hoop of light in the eastern sky, the Isisi warriors gathered, with spear and broad-bladed sword, with *ingola* on their bodies and clay in their hair.

They danced a great dance by the light of a huge fire, and all the women stood around, clapping their hands rhythmically.

In the midst of this there arrived a messenger in a canoe, who prostrated himself before the King, saying:

"Master, one day's march from here is Baili. He has with him five score of soldiers and the brass gun which says *ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!*"

A silence reigned in court circles, which was broken by the voice of the Akasava Chief.

"I think I will go home," he said. "I have a feeling of sickness. Also, it is the season when my goats have their young."

"Do not be afraid," said Sato-Koto brutally. "The King's shadow is over you, and he is so mighty that the earth shakes at his tread, and the waters of the big river part at his footfall; also, the white men fear him."

"Nevertheless," said the Chief, with some agitation, "I must

go, for my youngest son is sickening with fever and calls all the time for me."

"Stay," said the Regent, and there was no mistaking his tone.

Bailman did not come the next day, nor the next. He was moving leisurely, traversing a country where many misunderstandings existed that needed clearing up. When he arrived, having sent a messenger ahead to carry the news of his arrival, he found the city peaceably engaged.

The women were crushing corn, the men smoking, the little children playing and sprawling about the streets.

He halted on the outskirts of the city, on a hillock that commanded the main street, and sent for the Regent.

"Why must I send for you?" he asked. "Why does the King remain in his city when I come? This is shame."

"Master," said Sato-Koto boldly, "it is not fitting that a great king should so humble himself."

Bailman was neither amused nor angry. He was dealing with a rebellious people, and his own fine feelings were as nothing to the peace of the land.

"It would seem that the King has had bad advisers," he reflected aloud, and Sato-Koto shuffled uneasily.

"Go now and tell the King to come—for I am his friend."

The Regent departed, but returned again alone.

"Lord, he will not come," he said sullenly.

"Then I will go to him," said Bailman.

King Peter, sitting before his hut, greeted Mr. Commissioner with downcast eyes.

Bailman's soldiers, spread in a semi-circle before the hut, kept the rabble at bay.

"King," said Bailman,—he carried in his hand a rattan cane of familiar shape, and as he spoke he whiffled it in the air, making a little humming noise,—"stand up."

"Wherefore?" said Sato-Koto.

"That you shall see," said Bailman.

The King rose reluctantly, and Bailman grabbed him by the scruff of his neck.

Swish!

The cane caught him most undesirably, and he sprang into the air with a yell.

Swish, swish, swish!

Yelling and dancing, throwing out wild hands to ward off the punishment, King Peter blubbered for mercy.

"Master!" Sato-Koto, his face distorted with rage, reached for his spear.

"Shoot that man if he interferes," ordered Bailman, without releasing the King.

The Regent saw the leveled rifles, and hastily stepped back.

"Now," said Bailman, throwing down the cane, "now we will play a little game."

"Wow, wow—oh ko!" sobbed His Majesty.

"I go back to the forest," said Bailman. "By and by a messenger shall come to you saying that the Commissioner is on his way—do you understand?"

"Yi-hi," sobbed the King.

"Then will you go out with your councilors and your old men, and await my coming according to custom. Is that clear?"

"Ye-es, Master," whimpered the boy.

"Very good," said Bailman, and withdrew his troops.

In half an hour came a grave messenger to the King, and the court went out to the little hill to welcome the white man.

This was the beginning of King Peter's education, for thus was he taught obedience.

Bailman went into residence in the town of Isisi, and there he held court.

"Sato-Koto," he said on the second day, "do you know the

village of Ikau?"

"Yes, master; it is two days' journey into the bush."

Bailman nodded.

"You will take your wives, your children, your servants, and your possessions to the village of Ikau, there to stay until I give you leave to return. The palaver is finished."

Next came the Chief of the Akasava, very ill at ease.

"Lord, if any man says I did you wrong, he lies," said the Chief.

"Then I am a liar," answered Bailman; "for I say that you are an evil man, full of cunning."

"If it should be," said the Chief, "that you order me to go to my village, as you have ordered Sato-Koto, I will go, since he who is my father is not pleased with me."

"That I order," said Bailman; "also, twenty strokes with a stick, for the good of your soul. Furthermore, I would have you remember that down by Tembéli, on the great river, there is a village where men labor in chains because they have been unfaithful to the Government and have practised abominations."

So the Chief of the Akasava people went out to punishment.

There were other matters, of a minor character, requiring adjustment; but when these were all settled to the satisfaction

of Bailman, but by no means to the satisfaction of the subjects, the Commissioner turned his attention to the further education of the King.

"Peter," he said, "to-morrow, when the sun comes up, I go back to my own village, leaving you without councilors."

"Master, how may I do without councilors, since I am a young boy?" asked the King, crestfallen and chastened.

"By saying to yourself, when a man calls for justice, 'If I were this man, how should I desire the King's justice?'"

The boy looked unhappy.

"I am very young," he repeated, "and to-day there come many from outlying villages, seeking redress against their enemies."

"Very good," said Bailman; "to-day I will sit at the King's right hand and learn of his wisdom."

The boy stood on one leg in his embarrassment, and eyed Bailman askance.

There was a hillock behind the town. A worn path led up to it, and atop it was a thatched hut without sides. From this hillock could be seen the broad river with its sandy shoals, where the crocodiles slept with open mouth, and the rising ground toward Akasava, hills that rose one on top of another, covered with a tangle of vivid green. In this house sat the King in judgment, beckoning the litigants forward. Sato-Koto was wont to stand beside the King, bartering justice.

To-day Sato-Koto was preparing to depart, and Bailman sat at the King's side.

There were indeed many litigants.

There was a man who had bought a wife, giving no less than a thousand rods and two bags of salt for her. He had lived for three months with her, when she departed from his house.

"Because," said the man philosophically, "she had a lover. Therefore, Mighty Sun of Wisdom, I desire the return of my rods and my salt."

"What say you?" asked Bailman.

The King wriggled uncomfortably.

"What says the father?" he said hesitatingly, and Bailman nodded.

"That is a wise question," he approved, and called the father—a voluble and eager old man.

"Lord King," he said hurriedly, "I sold this woman, my daughter. How might I know her mind? Surely I fulfil my contract when the woman goes to the man—how shall a father control when a husband fails?"

Bailman looked at the King again, and the boy drew a long breath.

"It would seem, M'bleni, that the woman, your daughter, lived many years in your hut, and if you do not know her mind

either you are a great fool or she is a cunning one. Therefore, I judge that you sold this woman knowing her faults. Yet, the husband might accept some risk also. You shall take back your daughter and return five hundred rods and a bag of salt; and if it should be that your daughter marries again, you shall pay one half of her dowry to this man."

Very, very slowly he gave judgment, hesitatingly, anxiously, glancing now and again to the white man for approval.

"That was good," said Bailman, and called forward another pleader.

"Lord King," said the new plaintiff, "a man has put an evil curse on me and my family, so that they sicken."

Here was a poser for the little judge, and he puzzled the matter out in silence, Bailman offering no help.

"How does he curse you?" at last asked the King.

"With the curse of death," said the complainant in a hushed voice.

"Then you shall curse him also," said the King, "and it shall be a question of whose curse is the stronger."

Bailman grinned behind his hand, and the King, seeing the smile, smiled also.

From that time on, Peter's progress was rapid, and there came to Headquarters from time to time, in the course of years, stories of a young king who was a Solomon in judgment.

So wise he was (who knew of the formula he applied to each case?), so beneficent, so peaceable, that the Chief of the Akasava, from whom tribute was periodically due, took advantage of the gentle administration, and sent neither corn nor fish nor grain. He did this after a journey to far-away Ikau, where he met the King's uncle, Sato-Koto, and they agreed upon common action. Since the crops were good, the King overlooked the first fault; but the second tribute came due, and neither Akasava nor Ikau sent; and the people of Isisi, angry at the insolence, murmured, and the King sat down in the loneliness of his hut to think upon a course that would be both just and effective.

"I really am sorry to bother you," wrote Bailman to the Administrator, again, "but I shall have to borrow your houssas for the Isisi country. There has been a tribute palaver, and Peter went down to Ikau and wiped up his uncle; he filled in his spare time by giving the Akasava the worst licking they ever have had. I thoroughly approve of all that Peter has done, because I feel that he is actuated only by the keenest sense of justice and a desire to do the right thing at the right time—and it was time Sato-Koto was killed; but I shall have to reprimand Peter, for the sake of appearances. The Akasava Chief is in the bush, hiding."

Peter came back to his capital after his brief but strenuous campaign, leaving behind him two territories that were all the better for his visit, though somewhat sore.

The young King brought together his old men, his witch-doctors, and other notabilities.

"By all the laws of white men," he said, "I have done wrong to Baili; because he has told me I must not fight, and, behold, I have destroyed my uncle, who was a dog, and I have driven the Chief of the Akasava into the forest. But Baili told me, also, that I must do what was just, and that I have done, according to my lights, for I have destroyed a man who put my people to shame. Now, it seems to me that there is only one thing to do, and that is to go to Baili, telling the truth and asking him to judge."

"Lord King," said the oldest of his councilors, "what if Baili puts you to the chain-gang?"

"That is with to-morrow," quoth the King, and gave orders for preparations to be made for departure.

Half way to Headquarters, the two met, King Peter going down and Bailman coming up. And here befell the great incident.

No word was spoken of Peter's fault before sunset.

When blue smoke arose from the fires of houssa and warrior, and the little camp in the forest clearing was all a-chatter, Bailman took the King's arm and led him along the forest path.

Peter told his tale, and Bailman listened.

"And what of the Chief of the Akasava?" he asked.

"Master," said the King, "he fled to the forest, cursing me, and with him went many bad men."

Bailman nodded again gravely.

They talked of things till the sun threw long shadows, and then they turned to retrace their footsteps. They were within half a mile of the camp, and the faint noise of men laughing and the faint scent of fires burning came to them, when the Chief of the Akasava stepped out from behind a tree and stood directly in their path. With him were some eight fighting-men, fully armed.

"Lord King," said the Chief of the Akasava, "I have been waiting for you."

The King made neither movement nor reply, but Bailman quickly reached for his revolver.

His hand had closed on the butt, when something struck him, and he went down like a log.

"Now we will kill the King of the Isisi, and the white man also."

The voice was the Chief's; but Bailman was not taking any particular interest in the conversation, because there was a hive of wild bees buzzing in his head, and a mazy pain; he felt sick.

"If you kill me, it is little matter," said the King's voice, "because there are many men who could take my place. But if you slay Baili, you slay the father of the people, and none can replace him."

"He whipped you, little King," said the Chief of the Akasava mockingly.

"That also is true," said the King's voice calmly; "yet many little boys have been whipped without shame."

After a long interval:

"I would throw him into the river," said a strange voice; "thus shall no trace be found of him, and no man will lay his death to our door."

"What of the King?" said another. Then came a crackling of twigs and the voices of men.

"They are searching," came a voice, in a whisper. "King, if you speak, I will kill you now."

"Kill," said the young King's even voice; and he shouted, "Oh, M'sabo! Beteli! Baili is here!"

That was all that Bailman heard.

Two days later he sat up in bed and demanded information. There was a young doctor with him, when he woke, who had providentially arrived from Headquarters.

"The King?" He hesitated. "Well—they finished the King. But he saved your life.—I suppose you know that?"

Bailman said "yes" without emotion.

"A plucky little beggar," suggested the doctor.

"Very," said Bailman; then, "Did they catch the Chief of the Akasava?"

"Yes. He was so keen on finishing you that he delayed his bolting; the King threw himself on you and covered your body _____"

"That will do."

Bailman's voice was harsh and his manner brusque at the best of times, but now his rudeness was brutal.

"Just go out of the hut, doctor—I want to sleep."

He heard the doctor move, heard the rattle of the "click" at the hut door; then he turned his face to the wall and wept.

[The end of *The Education of King Peter* by Edgar Wallace]