PREFACE

SINCE the invitation was accepted to attempt this essay on Britain and Africa the United Kingdom has sought to make or has made several important changes in external policy, each of which has taken substantial time to formulate and to negotiate. The decision to apply for membership of the European Economic Community (the Common Market) under the Treaty of Rome was followed by protracted and fruitless negotiations. The Monckton Commission's detailed review of the constitution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland culminated in disagreement and eventual dissolution. There is never finality in international relations but the unsuccessful outcome of both these major ventures has necessitated the rearrangement of a book which has its focus upon the contemporary world. Thus a chapter on British Central Africa, on which the author is writing a separate study, has now been divided and absorbed into the chapters on Southern and Eastern Africa.

It is unnecessary to emphasize to the readers for whom this series is intended that of all parts of the world with which Britain is concerned, Africa has undergone the most profound upheaval during the past decade. But there may be point in saying that the overall form of the book has been designed to try to meet the challenge of dealing with an uncomfortably contemporary topic. There are now several new and up-to-date political and economic handbooks on Africa which obviate the need to overload the text with facts and figures, details of political parties and the like. Attention has been given rather to more fundamental general issues and to a consideration of British-African relationships over time. Recollection of the depth and nature of the historical relationship between Britain and each zone of Africa is essential if the problems of the urgent present are to be seen in proper perspective.

There is scarcely any problem which is new in Africa, certainly not in the area of special professional concern to the author—the achievement of unity, in the sense of political, social and economic co-operation, between peoples of different ethnic, cultural or racial origin. Realistic optimism as well as deeper understanding require
that this fact be kept in mind. Human nature in Africa is the same as elsewhere and some recent romantic generalizations suggesting the contrary have hindered rather than helped national and international policy. Intractable problems of national, regional or continental unity will not be wished away by superficial assumptions that Africans are less prone to identify themselves in ethnic terms, still less by assertions that ethnic divisions between Africans are less important or of a different kind than those elsewhere in the world. Few if any of the better-known inter-African tensions—Somali-Ethiopian, or Hutu-Tutsi in Rwanda, for example—are solely ethnic in character but group identifications are nevertheless regrettably potent and frequently lethal. The same observations apply to the more widely known relations between Africans and Europeans, Africans and Arabs, and Africans and Asians.

My approach to Africa’s problems and to the overall relationship between Britain and Africa nevertheless remains one of underlying confidence. There have been many acute tensions and difficulties during the years of rapid political change since 1948. Several are not only unresolved but are very probably going to be accentuated in the decades immediately ahead. Breaking-point was reached over South Africa’s membership of the Commonwealth in 1961. It might be reached again in other cases, possibly over Southern Rhodesia, Zanzibar or even Ghana. But damage can be repaired by constructive action and more rewarding courses can be adopted within and between countries. Leaders of the African states and of Britain, commanding the support of substantial majorities in their countries, have repeatedly emphasized their confidence in the future. While such faith continues the remotest goals are attainable.

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