

Chapter 25 **The Arrival of the Europeans**

European imperialism in Africa brought about changes in the culture and daily life of many Africans. The following selection is from the autobiography of Prince Modupe, who lived in the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana. In it, Prince Modupe describes the arrival of a missionary in his village during his boyhood. The prince came to the United States in 1922 and chose to stay. Read his recollection and answer the questions that follow.

Everyone was abuzz about the expected arrival of the white man with the powerful juju (magic). If his magic was more powerful than ours, then we must have it. That was Grandfather's decree. Grandfather wanted our people to have the best of everything. I doubt now that he had the slightest notion of the sweeping changes the new juju would bring with it. . . .

We believed in the existence of a demon who was said to be white in color. But of course this man we were expecting could not be an ogre or Grandfather would not receive him. There were a few other white, or nearly white things in our lives—cotton, white chickens, white cola, grubs in rotten stumps, white ants. These seemed natural and everyday enough but a white human was beyond simple imagining. . . .

Finally, the white man arrived. My first sight of him was a delightful relief. He did not appear to have demon quality and was not really white as milk is white, not the portion of him which showed, at least; he was more the color of leather. His wife and a little girl-child were with him. . . . The child had hair which hung to her shoulders and was the color of gold. It was in ringlets like shavings from the chisels of our wood carvers, not springy and crisp like mine. The three were led across the clearing to the royal stool where my grandfather sat. . . . The white missionary placed gifts at Grandfather's feet . . . a Bible, a camera, a mirror, a kaleidoscope, shoes, a high hat, cigarettes, matches, canned goods, shiny trinkets, and yard goods [cloth]. . . .

The photographs which the man brought showing bridges and cities, trains, boats, big buildings, were not impressive to us. . . . Having had no experience with the diminished scale of things in a photograph, we gained no concept of magnitude. But there were other pictures which disturbed me deeply. They were bright depictions of heaven and hell, which I later learned were made expressly for mission use. In them, all the bright angels hovering over the golden streets had white faces. The tortured creatures in hell with the orange-red flames licking over agonized contorted bodies all had black faces! . . .

Grandfather invited the white man to stay to dinner and for the night. The invitation was accepted. . . . For the first time in my life I felt doubt about the desirability of a brown skin and kinky hair. Why did gold grow above the faces of little white girls, who according to the pictures sprouted shining wings as soon as they went to live in the glorious compound of worthy Deads, a compound glowing with gold under their pale little feet? . . . Why did the horned demon who fueled the fires of hell have a black face like us?

Perhaps the real reason why my limbs trembled and my hands shook was that a little of the pride and glory which I had felt in being a youth of my tribe had gone out with the light of this eventful day.

Adapted from *The Epic of Modern Man*, edited by L. S. Stravrianos (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966).

Vocabulary Use a dictionary to find the meanings of the following words:

- diminished _____
- magnitude _____
- depiction _____
- contorted _____