

THE UN-BELOVED COUNTRY

AMONG educated people in this country the prevailing image of South Africa is that shaped by Father Huddleston, the Rev. Michael Scott, Alan Paton (author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*), and those who—like William Plomer*—think as they do. How could it be otherwise? These are so plainly men of good will, brave, generous, and high-minded; they are imaginative, vivid, and articulate as well. Their characters command assent; their manner wins it.

And what opposes? Nothing, it seems, save a few old, rich men, the muddled heirs of Rhodes and Milner, who mumble that Huddleston makes trouble and rocks the boat; the chance visitor from South Africa, radiant with health and stupidity, who tells you that everything would be fine if it were not for a handful of agitators—meddling priests, half-baked “liberalists,” or “cheeky Kaffirs”; and a group of solemn Afrikaner professors, who produce immense, unreadable, and apparently irrelevant monographs about the beauties of *apartheid*. All these people are absolutely off the English intellectual wavelength. They do not speak our language, cannot make themselves understood. The divorce between them and us is absolute.

This is a great pity. What the liberals have to tell us about South Africa is certainly true; but it is not the whole truth. I do not accuse them of wilful suppression: far from it. What they see, and what they feel, they describe honestly and accurately. But they suffer from one signal disadvantage. They are themselves committed. They are themselves engaged in the battle they record. This sometimes makes them less than just to the motives of those who oppose them, impatient with the doubts and hesitations of those who cannot wholeheartedly follow them. Above all, their noble zeal to see South Africa radically altered often makes them ignore the fact that what South Africa *is* must govern—to a great extent—what it will be. If, for instance, the apparatus of South African oppression of the native were by some miraculous agency swept away overnight, the fears that had

constructed it and the resentments it had produced would still remain, and would powerfully influence the use made by the native of his new freedom.*

The liberal outlook in South Africa is thus incomplete in two ways: in sympathy or charity, and in what one might call conservative foresight. It thus tends to reduce to mere melodrama (hero-versus-villain, good-versus-evil) a dilemma which is in fact of Shakespearian complexity, profundity and sadness.

AMONG the delusions suggested by the liberal group is the belief that it includes all the sincere Christians and genuine idealists that South Africa has. There are, in fact, as many men of natural goodwill in South Africa as anywhere else, and many of them are in the other camp.† The *predikants* of the Dutch Reformed Church are a good example. Narrow and unrelenting they may be, uncompromisingly masculine, Old rather than New Testament Christians, with none of Father Huddleston’s winning charm and gaiety: yet they are often men of outstanding intellect and probity who are idealists—and apostles of *apartheid*.

Their ideas and Father Huddleston’s spring from common ground. From the bare *veld* they surveyed Johannesburg and other cities of

* Even the liberal groups seem to realise this fact intermittently—which may explain their frequent calls for “a change of heart” in South Africa. This, of course, is not the language of the statesman, who is compelled to do the best he can with hearts as they are, but of the idealist in despair.

† What South Africa really does lack, of course, is an intelligent, moderate “centre.” The inconsistency, pusillanimity, and intellectual nullity of the United party makes a dismal impression, especially when contrasted with Nationalist vigour, alertness, and sense of purpose. This ineffectiveness is often attributed to the vacuum left by the death of Smuts, or to some other chance cause. I would not agree. It is attributable rather to the *centrifugal tendency of South African politics*, which makes moderation intellectually unsatisfying or even impossible. What I mean by “centrifugal tendency” will, I hope, be clear to the reader before the end of this article.

* “Notes from South Africa,” ENCOUNTER, December 1956.

Mammon; saw black and white in unregulated economic contact and noted that both sides were corrupted by it. Perhaps a rustic envy of Johannesburg's wealth lent fire to their congregations: it certainly made them more acceptable to their congregations. Their hands, like Father Huddleston's, were raised in pious horror. But there the similarity ends. They did not believe—as he does—that the conditions of contact could be altered to make it fruitful for both sides. They decided instead that it must be broken off. Black and white—they said—must be separated.

The passion with which an ideal is held must be measured by what men are prepared to sacrifice for it. The *predikants* were prepared to make large sacrifices for *apartheid*. As Father Huddleston himself points out, the Dutch Reformed Church at the Bloemfontein conference of December, 1954, declared "that industry would have to do without black labour; that whites would have to do their own housework; that there would have to be a fresh approach to the land question"—which means that the land of some white farmers would have to be transferred to black. The Dutch Reformed Church, in other words, was prepared to sacrifice to *apartheid* white South Africa's prosperity and comfort, and presumably much of its own popular support. And in their teachings and writings the professors of Stellenbosch preached an *apartheid* equally pure, austere, and self-sacrificing—and impracticable.

It was not purity, austerity, and self-sacrifice, however, which commended *apartheid* to the South African electorate (commended it, indeed, to far more South Africans than vote Nationalist). It was that they saw in *apartheid*, or in certain parts of *apartheid*, their own interests reflected. The moment the *apartheid* ideal left the study of the professor or *predikant*, it became warped by the strains and stresses of South African life.* Such parts of it as suit the white man are implemented; such as do not are not.

In particular it has been doctored to attract a new and electorally influential class—the Afrikaner poor-white of the towns. The last few decades have seen a sort of reversal of the Great Trek; the Afrikaner has drifted away

* The classic example is the fate of the Tomlinson Report. Professor Tomlinson (an Afrikaner despite his name) was appointed chairman of a socio-economic commission to instil some system into *apartheid*. After five years' study, he produced a massive 37-volume document, urging vast expenditure on native housing and industry and a drastic regrouping of South Africa's population. "My report," he claimed, "will stand the test of ethics." What matter? Bewildered and saddened, he sat in the public gallery of the South African lower house while his report was torn to bits by the Nationalist Government.

from the land and the Nationalist vote no longer piles up ineffectually in rural *platteland* constituencies, but overwhelms urban ones as well. The urban Afrikaner is on the whole ignorant and ill-equipped for city life. He can only do jobs which the native, unrestricted, could do as well. He lives consequently in a perpetual state of fear which his arrogance hardly conceals. His idea of *apartheid* is a simple one: that the native should be kept down, moved on, shoved about and shown who's boss. For him the native is a threat and nothing else. Native welfare may worry professors and *predikants*; it does not worry him. And where *apartheid* works with manifest and exceptional injustice (as in the case of the destruction of Sophiatown and the mass removal of its inhabitants to another location outside Johannesburg) it is usually in deference to his wishes.

In charge of these very acts of injustice, you will often find an official in whose mind and conversation the wreckage of his idealism is still perfectly apparent: I have known several of them. He may quiet his conscience in various ways: by pointing out that Sophiatown *was* a slum (though there are twenty worse still standing); by suggesting that what appears at the moment to be injustice is only a small part of a grand plan, slowly unfolding in all its glory; or by explaining that, if he refused the job, somebody worse might accept it. He can be recognised by his manner, which is neither brutal nor stupid, but defensive, half-apologetic, over-explanatory. He will probably maintain that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs (a dictum which might serve as any idealist's epitaph). Sometimes, even, in a burst of candour, he will confess that he is weary and disgusted by the whole business. But he is committed and he knows it.†

THOUGH this corruption of an ideal is moving and illuminating in itself, I would not have spent much time on it if it were not typical of what a country like South Africa—irrevocably split into hostile camps—does to idealists. South Africa has its own way with good intentions. It wrenches them from the hands of their originators; twists them, warps them; makes them subservient to the fears and hatred which in South Africa, in the last resort, decide everything. *Apartheid* has declined into an instrument of Afrikaner oppression. This is well understood. But South African liberals are also working with forces which they do not seem wholly to understand, which have aims in view totally different from theirs, and which would,

† Alexander Steward's book *You are Wrong, Father Huddleston* gives a fair but unintentional portrait of him.

if they could, make South African a liberal's nightmare.

The attitude of South African liberals is based on a natural sense of shame that the black man should have been treated as he has been: so ill, with such injustice and bad faith. They regard it accordingly as their duty to see that this injustice is redressed. They are working for specific concessions, to be made by the white man after "a change of heart" brought about by fear or compassion. They do not envisage the end of white supremacy; but they believe that it should be made to work for the benefit of black as well as white. Nevertheless, two factors force the native alliance upon them—their own weakness, which makes them seek support where they can; and their belief that bridges must be flung across the widening gulf that separates black from white before it is too late. They assume—or act upon the assumption—that the native has the same objects in view as themselves. Since he marches at their side, they assume that he is going to the same place and will stop when they do. There could be no greater illusion.

The native can no longer be satisfied by concessions thrown to him by the white man. He wants not gifts, but power; he wants not specific rights, but *the power to determine his own rights*. Bitter experience has taught him that what the white man concedes the white man can also take away. Of course he would like to live where he pleases, do what job he likes, and escape from the continual humiliations of the colour bar. But above and beyond all these subordinate rights, he wants the power to make them secure: the power, indeed, if he wishes, to impose upon his white enemies all the disabilities under which he now suffers. His aim is not to make the white man see the light but—more likely—to show him the door. And how could one expect him to feel differently?

The general truth of this will be accepted by those who have watched the development of a nationalist movement in, say, India or in any British colony. The moment a subordinate objective is achieved, all interest in it is lost; agitation is switched to achieve the next; moderate leaders give place to extreme; and "permanent," "once-for-all" settlements are overturned like ninepins one after another, until, step by step, power is won. In South Africa this is no longer a matter of probabilities, intuition, or guesswork. The final objectives of African nationalism have been repeatedly stated by its leaders in the most sober terms, e.g. Chief Luthuli, President-General of the African National Congress, speaking on the B.B.C. Among his stated objectives are "the attainment of universal adult suffrage in the

Union of South Africa"—a country in which black outnumbers white by thirteen to two. What Chief Luthuli wants, in other words, is a South Africa in which the white electorate is entirely swamped by the black, in which the white man's privileges, rights, property, livelihood, and even life are entirely at the black man's mercy. Chief Luthuli is regarded as a moderate man. He was speaking to an audience he does not wish to antagonise by threats or by intransigence. It is fair to assume that he expresses the African's minimum political demands. Yet, as the next speaker (a native defending *apartheid*) retorted, the white man would concede these minimum demands "only over his [the white man's] dead body."

Chief Luthuli, of course, rejects the use of violence. To say that this is the language of conscious weakness rather than of conviction is not to impugn Chief Luthuli's personal good faith. It is merely that his means are obviously inappropriate to his ends. Non-violence, passive resistance, and "the Defiance Campaign" are ideas imported from India which have all the prestige of having won independence there. But they will not succeed in South Africa. In India they were used against a handful of officials with guilty consciences, already on the defensive, half-afraid to use force, half-willing to go, and doubtful only as to the time. In South Africa they are used against an Afrikaner population (in particular against an Afrikaner police force) which is united, resolute, and violent; which is in Africa, it considers, by right and in Africa, it considers, to stay; which *must* stay in Africa because it has nowhere else to go. It cannot retire on a pension to grumble in Cheltenham or Budleigh Salterton; in Africa it lives, or dies. Against such an adversary non-violence is absolutely futile. If people like Chief Luthuli do not come to realise this, they will assuredly be supplanted by people who do.

South African liberals seem strangely blind to native ambitions and to the fact that violence must be involved in achieving them. They find it only too easy to sentimentalise over the weak and oppressed, to exaggerate their real virtues and add wishful ones to them. They claim to be the only South Africans who have any human contact whatever with the native or the slightest idea what he is thinking about. And in a sense they may be right. Between the ordinary South African and the native there yawns a rift unparalleled in any other single state: a state which was created by prejudice and indifference, and which is now widened by legislation. For many South Africans the native is merely a menace—as vague and faceless as the Yellow Peril to Kaiser Wilhelm. He is something which appears and does the work; which comes in the morning

from heaven knows where, and goes heaven knows where when work is done. If there has ever been a Christian society with less paternal interest in its poor, I know nothing of it. In the circumstances, the native in South Africa truly shows a patience in adversity, an inexhaustible gaiety and capacity for fun which is quite astonishing and which, I am sure, too often misleads his liberal friends.

It is not merely that it is doubtful, as Mr. Sampson, the ex-editor of "Drum," implies,* whether South African liberals know any more about the native than the others do. It is that they ignore the brutal facts of a tragic situation. In every oppressed man there is a potential oppressor, in every man treated with cruelty and injustice a man possibly thirsting to repay all, with interest. Read with this insight, the most moving documents of native suffering in South Africa (though written with quite a different purpose in mind) must suggest very forcibly what the native is thinking about. Treated in the way these documents describe, the native would be more than human if his mind were not clouded by hatred, if he did not dream continually of revenge—"a Night of the Long Knives." Remember, too, what schooling in the use of political power the native has received from the Afrikaner: who dare say he has not learnt this terrible lesson?

South African liberals protect and encourage African leaders, listen to them expounding their grievances with patience and moderation and march beside them in dignified processions of

protest. But do they know what thoughts lie behind the patience and the dignity? And do they suspect that for those they protect the supreme humiliation may be the necessity of expounding (with appropriate moderation) their grievances to a *white man*? And do they understand that their protégés are marching to an entirely different destination—a destination to which only violence, bloodshed, and destruction can lead them?

"I'm convinced that communism is not a serious danger in South Africa," Father Huddleston told Sampson, "otherwise I wouldn't be doing what I am... it'll be a terrible thing if I'm wrong." In the strict sense of the word, Father Huddleston is probably right. But "communism" does not embrace all evil; there are evil things outside it. There was a *jacquerie* before Marx, and a Terror before Lenin. "Extreme nationalism," said Chief Luthuli, "is a greater danger [in South Africa] than communism, and a more real one..." If Father Huddleston were wrong about that, that too would be a terrible thing.

THE tragedy of South Africa is to be a land without unity or repose. It has no long, unfolding past, out of which the future could be peacefully evolved; nothing rocklike upon which reform can be securely based. All is agitation, with hysteria not far below the surface.† There is in South Africa no vast, steady, still centre of opinion: only centrifugal extremes, to which men are irresistibly drawn.

Fashioned for conflict, South Africa offers its choice: for black supremacy, or for white? Some—the best, maybe—reject the choice in favour of justice for both. But South Africa will not be denied. She takes those who seek justice through separation or *apartheid* and makes of them the unwitting tools of white supremacy; and she takes those who seek justice through integration or liberalism and makes of them the unwitting forerunners and agents of black supremacy. Using both impartially, she hammers the native into a revolutionary force; the one loading him with chains, the other helping him to struggle free; both fashioning him into the instrument of final, bloody, irrevocable disaster.

Colin Welch

* "Whites are things to be used," a native journalist told him; "they can be very useful if they're handled properly. . . . You must get as much as you can out of them, obviously; and whatever you do you must avoid annoying them. . . ." "Handling whites," comments Sampson, "is an important part of an African's education; he must flatter the white man, study him, coax him, handle him with the greatest care, and at all costs avoid disfavour. . . . The mock humility of Africans towards whites is usually successful, and the whites remain largely ignorant of the deception."

† How near, the recent riots in Twist St., Johannesburg, suggest. Here was a crowd which any dozen Metropolitan policemen could (according to one observer) have handled with ease. In South Africa it provoked batons, gun-fire, and bloodshed.

Comment

“Two Wandering Satellites”

In his excellent article on Poland and Hungary published in your January issue, Peter Wiles writes:

“In these two countries, so deeply disgraced by anti-Semitism, many Jews naturally react by being anti-Polish or anti-Hungarian as the case may be. I suggest that, in a crisis, Hungarian Jews like Gerö and Hegedüs would experience less emotional hesitation before calling in the Red Army than a pure Pole like Ochab.”

As far as Mr. Wiles' general statement goes, I think one might very well argue that the emotional attachment of Polish Jews to Poland is astounding precisely because of Polish anti-Semitism. Even in the late thirties, when anti-Semitic barbarism was at its height, many Polish Jews clung to a somewhat idealistic view of a Polish liberal and universal “essence” to which they could belong. This has often been expressed by Polish writers of Jewish origin. The particularities of Polish anti-Semitism did create a certain “anti-Polish” complex, but this—strangely enough—is far more frequent among non-Polish Jews.

In the particular situation to which Mr. Wiles refers, the facts in Poland are contrary to his thesis. Gomulka's adversaries, in the Polish Politburo, who planned a “coup d'état,” who had their direct contacts with Moscow, and who might have called in the Red Army if they had had the chance (they did probably call Khrushchev and the Russian generals to Warsaw) are not only “pure Poles,” but rabid anti-Semites. The “Natolin group,” who are the Polish Stalinists (Witaszewski, Zenon Nowak, Mazur, Klosiewicz) was acting, between the 7th and 8th Meeting of the Central Committee, according to a programme which was interpreted in the following terms by *Po Prostu*, the leading “revolutionary” weekly (October 28th, 1956):

“1.—Democratisation is equivalent to anarchy and to bourgeois liberalism. The ‘intelligentsia’ is the most dangerous element. It should be kept down by physical force if need be (for instance, by beating them with gas-pipes—according to the plan of General Kazimierz Witaszewski).

“2.—Another source of disorder is the press. Its big mouth should be kept shut.

“3.—The character of our relations with the U.S.S.R. must remain unchanged, and every demand of equality or of Polish sovereignty must be fought. . . .

“4.—A purge of the State and of the Party must be undertaken not according to moral or political principles, but according to racial criteria, and in particular, to purity of Aryan blood.”

This programme is based on complete subservience to Russia and on anti-Semitism. In fact, anti-Semitism, while also copied from Moscow, was a very useful tool for the Natolin group in its efforts to fight against the forces which demanded more truth, independence, and democracy. Among the “dangerous” elements of the Polish “intelligentsia,” Jews played an important part. Adam Wazyk, quoted by Mr. Wiles, is of Jewish origin. So are Antoni Slonimski, Pawel Hertz, Jan Kott, Artur Sandauer.

Mr. Wiles stressed the part played by Staszewski, the secretary of the Warsaw Party organisation in the decisive October days. It so happens that Staszewski's opposition to the Natolin group—and to any form of Russian interference—may have been strengthened by the fact that Polish Stalinists opposed his election to the Central Committee on account of his Jewish origin.

In pre-war days, Polish semi-fascist youth organised a famous pilgrimage to the shrine of Czestochowa, in which Catholic devotions were a curious superstructure for nationalist megalomania and anti-Semitism. A huge students' demonstration took place last November in that same Czestochowa. Some slogans carried by the students, like “Poland for Poles” were reminiscent of those of twenty years ago. But they were immediately followed by others saying: “Down with anti-Semitism.” Both were directed against the Natolin group.

Mr. Peter Wiles says himself that “Moscow is extremely anti-Semitic.” Poles—and Polish Jews—realise that. No efforts of Polish liberals could ever counteract the inveterate Polish anti-