

## AN EXPERIMENT IN AFRICA

IN 1098, Robert, Abbot of Citeaux introduced into his monastery an adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict and thus gave rise to what is popularly known as the Cistercian Order. From this proceeded such houses as Fountains, Tintern, Melrose, Buckfast and Furness, the last two descending from the Cistercian house of Savigny, as also did La Trappe in France, founded in 1122. In 1664, the 'Thundering Abbot,' whom a recent biography has made more familiar if not too attractive amongst us, re-reformed his monastery, not least along the lines of manual labour: hence the 'Trappists.' It was these whom Bishop Ricards, vicar-apostolic of the Eastern Province of Cape Colony, begged, in 1879, to come to his assistance in South Africa; and in July 1880, a contingent of fifty arrived at Port Elizabeth. A start was made at Dunbrody. The locality proved too obdurate, and in 1882 the community removed to Durban and thence went inland to what is now Mariannhill. It seems difficult for religious congregations in South Africa to survive satisfactorily as branches of their original group: in 1909 the Mariannhill Trappists separated themselves from the Trappists, and became the 'Religious Missionaries of Mariannhill,' a congregation devoted entirely to South African work. Numbering at present about two hundred and fifty, of whom more than half are lay brothers, and predominantly German in nationality, the Fathers work in a very great number of mission stations, not only in Natal, but in the Cape Province and in Rhodesia, confining their work (save quite incidentally) to the native population.

The Mariannhill Fathers point out that those who wish to work for natives have the choice of doing so by settling within a native reserve, or by providing a mission farm of their own and surrounding themselves with such natives as like to accept their invitation.

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Great difficulties appear to surround the former method. The consent of the Chief has to be obtained, often a matter of extreme complication, especially if he be (as usually) a pagan—even more so, I surmise, if he have already granted permissions to Protestant denominations. Nor does it follow that a tribe accepts willingly those to whom their Chief has granted technical permissions. Still less does it follow that the Government will ratify the Chief's permission, or do so speedily, or on any generous scale. The Mariannahill Fathers acquired, therefore, a very great deal of land and developed it along their own lines, agricultural, that is, and industrial, establishing everywhere along with the farm churches, schools (boarding or day), convents, catechist-stations, hospitals and so forth. Often a single central station will have several outlying chapels attached to it. While most of the missions are by now self-supporting, others are not, and alms come from the U.S.A., from Switzerland, etc., to assist them. By far the majority of the schools are under Government inspection, though not, strictly speaking, control. In the large centres there are Mission Stores, controlled by natives for the benefit of the community at large, and also native banks. Between nine thousand and ten thousand boys and girls are at present being taught in the ordinary Mission schools, and, unless I err, it is hoped gradually to sell land in thirty-acre plots, or more, to native owners, building up thus, together with a sense of responsibility, proper native villages and communities of smallholders, thoroughly Catholic. I doubt if this plan has yet been put into execution on any quite large scale; but it is contemplated.

This seemed to me, when I visited Mariannahill, an admirable scheme chiefly in two ways.

First, we are obviously living in an age of immense acceleration, not only physical but mental. Machinery

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has not only made it easier for us to get about much more quickly, but to diffuse ideas more quickly, and (by broadcasting, for example) in such a way that practically everyone can get hold of them. The consequence is, that all sorts of people get hold of ideas that are several stages ahead, so to say, of those which they already possess. I cannot but believe that mental soil needs a long preparation before seed-ideas can be committed to it with any hope of a good crop. 'You do not trust the people,' they say to one if one suggests that there are plenty of ideas with which uneducated men are not able to cope. I trust them, but not so as to suppose that they can arrive instantaneously at every sort of right judgment. Why should they? We are always hearing about 'mental age'; and men and women can be very 'young for their years' not in the least because they are 'defectives,' but because no one has helped them to grow up gradually and totally. And everyone knows how ideas—to us, maybe, quite stale and sapless—are able to take root in youthful minds, shoot juicily upwards and throw out all sorts of leaves and even flowers, and then wilt, shrivel, become 'uninteresting,' and die, having exhausted the soil rather than so much as manuring it. I experience that I need to wait ever so long before I can trust my judgment about a new idea: I must 'unconsciously cerebrate'; all sorts of existing ideas will need to have new ones multiplied into them, and each and all will modify one another. So it seems to me to be a real tragedy when the native mind (which we must not for a moment believe to be as it were psychologically crippled) is suddenly provided with all sorts of new ideas, which take root, grow up, and flourish merely to make him miserable or angry. In a sense, the native mind is a millennium too young for its years. I do not deny that its development can be speeded up; but those who wish to treat him as a brother (and any Christian must wish

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that) ought by no means to treat him as if he were a European brother, for the simple reason that he is not one. Nor can we expect that an idea, familiar to us, and with our long special mental history behind it, will have the same sort of result in a native mind as it has in ours. Yet people of all sorts, not only natives, are pumping ideas at a colossal pace into native minds; and, as you might expect, crude and ugly growths are coming up very fast. Even were no agitator from outside to come, as come they do, to inflame native minds, the actual conditions in which the South African native lives are quite enough to supply him with inflammatory ideas, especially in the towns, and not only the large ones. For, natives tell one another things very fast; they imitate very fast, too—much too fast for healthy production of life. ‘Africa for Africans’ is a slogan imitated from many another we have heard; but what, when one hears it followed up in public by arguments such as ‘Christ was a European. What can he do for us? He worked for his fellow-Europeans. He never came to Africa. We do not want him.’ In one native paper, I read a whole ‘transvaluation’ of our Lord’s life into terms of Moscow-ism. Bethlehem proved housing shortage: the Apostles, when they ‘left all,’ ‘went on strike—downed tools’: the ‘end of the world’ meant a ‘general revolution’: Christ recognisably was out for the expulsion of the Empire and the setting up of an independent national kingdom . . . . Hence it is quite well recognised that *if* the native, taken in his pagan masses, tried to revolt, he would either fail because of lack of organisation (so he must be prevented from organising), or would have to be shot down. If it be alleged that the opinion of the rest of the world would be shocked by that, the answer too often would be: ‘What do we care for the rest of the world? We are ourselves.’ How often is that to be read or heard, even from the lips of respon-

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sible persons, politicians included. These get furious if the natives in South Africa, particularly in certain parts of it, be alluded to as a 'nation of serfs'; but that certainly is what they are, and down to what they must be kept if they are to go on taking in new ideas at the rate at which they now do, and developing a race-consciousness and race-restlessness to correspond. Hence I cannot but admire the laborious and very slow mental as well as industrial education which Mariannahill is giving to so many; I know that there are other institutions trying to do the same, Oblates, Benedictines, not least the Dominican nuns: but these all have other occupations, too, whereas Mariannahill works wholly for the native and takes its time. How far its results will counter-weigh the hustled developments I have suggested, who can tell? Perhaps a small and solid block will prove stronger than a shoddy though voluminous mass.

The other reason why I admire some such system as Mariannahill's is that no word rings more often nor perhaps more angeringly in one's ears than 'segregation.' Frightened or contemptuous politicians use it; quite thoughtful and kindly people use it too. From time to time I have found myself wishing that a more complete segregation than any intended by such speakers could be put into practice, and 'Paraguayan reductions' made anew—but altogether because I find the modern version of our own 'civilisation' so detestable that I can think of no kinder act than to keep the native altogether out of contact with it. But, even though by 'segregation' the ordinary speaker means—or says he means—primarily a territorial one, and professes not to include questions of education, franchise and the like, what, I repeat, is any more the good of spatial segregation, when you cannot segregate thought? Though here and there I have noticed townships beginning to build tiny but solid houses for

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natives in their city-locations, I can but say I would infinitely prefer to live in a grass-domed hut in a kraal than in the tin shanties of unthinkable squalor in which the city native usually has to exist, and that is one more reason why I half-wish, at times, that natives could indeed be persuaded to remain in kraals. True, as things are, they might starve: but on wages of £1 10s. a month, in the towns, it is difficult to see how they can do much else. No doubt their physique is kept low by these very means; no doubt, despite all efforts, tuberculosis has still its splendid chance. But my point always is, that be the native never so segregated, in reserve or in location, his thought is no more segregated and cannot be. Here in a town, half the shops have wireless apparatus, and even if a native (obviously) can hardly afford one of his own, no one can stop him listening-in for all he is worth at such a shop, and indeed you see them doing it in crowds. And outside the town, any inn, any stores, can have its own broadcasting installation and everything gets through, even the most disintegrating doctrines. And as for the effect of the cinema or bioscope, as they say here, upon him, you can imagine it! To return for a moment to the weakness of hustled ideas—especially are they weak as *controlling* agencies. You may have lots of happy thoughts, and still not be able to use them for self-control. Of all growths, control is the slowest. And the licentious and revolutionary suggestions of the cinema, infinitely more potent in a native mind than in ours, simply provoke such natures to a casting-away of control. And bioscopes, after all, are made to be within their means; and as for the placards, I think they are at least one degree more erotic here than at home.

Hence once more we must be glad that the Mariannahill Fathers aim at constructing a total society. Their education is much wider than their schooling, and so

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modern inventions like those I have mentioned, do but little harm to those happy natives who live on one or the other of the missionaries' estates and are, after these long preliminaries, beginning to be landowners and have a stake in the soil of what is, after all, their country much more than it is ours. (Not exactly, *i.e.* aboriginally, their own country, because the Bantu came southwards into land already populated more or less by Hottentot or Bushman. These are now practically exterminated, at any rate the latter.) Certainly the outlook offered to them is not exactly what is offered to the European, and I am glad of it. European history in South Africa has not been a lovely thing. And it may well be that the main difficulty in the way of advance will be the Native himself, not when he is unwilling to advance (and indeed I doubt whether even in his vile conditions he is at all unhappy as a rule), but when he becomes too willing. He is the one who protests vehemently against any 'differentiation' between the education he receives, and what the White receives. I see no reason to be very proud about the White one. I cannot find, in South Africa, those 'intermediate' magazines which exist so numerous in England, and which testify to a very creditable level of cultural ambition. The average man, never to be an expert, yet really likes to keep really well informed about all sorts of topics and has every chance of being so. True, I think he uses his chances less and less, but there are several saddening reasons for that; and save for a desperate few, they say that in South Africa people are not conscious of that lack—for it has never yet had the chance of being a loss. Hence the native, when he asks for 'exactly what the White is getting,' is asking for what is none too admirable in itself, but also, for what quite probably even so, he cannot, *on the whole*, cope with.

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I hope that no one will think that these are the slapdash impressions of a tourist. There are certain problems which stare everyone save the complete idiot in the face : because one registers them, it does not follow that one professes to supply the beginning of a solution of them. All I can say is, that Mariannahill, along with others, is trying a most interesting experiment which looks as if it might contain the germs of success : anyhow it is much more interesting than that of the far loudlier advertised Lovedale institution, which lacks the philosophical principles from which all Catholic experiments must flow. Therefore we can but hope that the adult age of Mariannahill will approve the dogged, yet enthusiastic, circumspect yet audacious work of its first-beginnings.

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