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SAGA-BOOK OF THE ZULUS

FATHER BRYANT'S MASTERPIECE OF NATIVE HISTORY

The Rev. A. T. Bryant has written what he calls a superficial and incomplete effort to make good the deficiencies of the past in regard to native history, the material for which was gathered casually as he went through life and as occasion offered. Actually he has compiled a record of the Zulu area which, in thoroughness and authority, not merely goes beyond anything that has yet been done in the Union or Rhodesia, but sets a new standard in that respect. He calls it "Olden Times in Zululand and Natal," and it practically ends with the death of Shaka (as Father Bryant insists on spelling the name of the great Zulu militarist); but at the commencement there is a fascinating excursion into older times and greater distances—an inquiry as to where the Bantu tribes of South Africa came from, and how they evolved into their present divisions.

His explanation is not new, but it is more definite in details and better supported by facts than most of those that have been put forward; and he is especially clear in dealing with puzzling complications in the otherwise accepted division into the three types of Nguni (Zulu-Xosa), Sutu (Bechuana-Basuto) and Thonga ("Shangaan").

The ancestors of the three South African families [he writes] parted company on their downward march in the central continent, perhaps more than a thousand years ago, and since then the speech, customs and physique of their respective offspring have taken a course of natural development along widely different lines. . . . Of the Bantu triad, the Sutu family may be said to display, in language, character and culture, a slightly heavier bias towards the Tonga than towards the Nguni family; while the Nguni family, on its part and in the same respects, seems more nearly akin to the Sutu than to the Tonga—the Sutus thus representing a species of intermediate type.

THE TRIBES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

He considers that the whole of these people, while still one entity, were deflected westward by the impassable Zambesi. They crossed the river, or rounded it about its sources—dropping, as they did so, and prior to any contact with the Bushmen, the Hereros to populate the west. "Thence they swung round into the central pasturelands between Lake Ngami and the Upper Zambesi, at that time swarming with herds of game, and found themselves in Bushman's Paradise." The Bushmen and the desert gave an eastern trend to the ever-continued southward march, and north of the Limpopo the migrating people, now becoming numerous, split into separate groups:—

One of these parties elected to remain behind, there where they were, in or about the upper Limpopo region. Their descendants, though of much-diluted blood, are the local baKoni (=Z. aba Nguni) clans, the baHurutse, baKwena, baMa-Ngwato, baNwaketsi and others of the present days.

After their brothers had departed from the coast, there came, from the north or north-east a quite new and foreign Bantu element—we think, of a Venda-Karanga type—building in stone and earth, wearing a loin or breech cloth, speaking a clickless language of the "mono prefixal" family, greater in numbers than they, who, mixing with them in blood-relationship, created a new hybrid Bantu type, with a new hybrid tongue, which to day we call the Sutu.

This well-reasoned statement that the Bechuana, Basuto and Bapedi tribes derive their obvious difference from the Zulu type by long-continued admixture from the tribes now found in Southern Rhodesia, is characteristic of the logical way in which Father Bryant faces problems, for which there is little information.

CREATORS OF THE ZULU POWER.

He deals not merely with the broad history of the Zulus, their relations and neighbours, but goes deeply into the legend of every important clan, individual and movement, as far back as an untiring industry, a keen critical faculty and a constructive imagination can carry anyone; and it need hardly be said here that Father Bryant is not only an accomplished Zulu linguist, but commands the confidence of native informants to an extent almost unique to-day. His story of the origins, rise and peculiarities of the Zulu power and his details regarding Dingiswayo, Senzangakona and the man who rose to fame on the foundations they had laid down—Tshaka—are particularly complete.

It is not surprising to find him giving the knock-out blow to the legend, due to Shepstone and founded on a misunderstanding, that Dingiswayo, the originator of the idea of a

great Zulu power, went to Capetown or elsewhere and saw European troops drilled and organised. The real story, which was elucidated by Fynn, is even more romantic, and Father Bryant finds it true and has told it in a striking manner. Dingiswayo met a solitary white man—a mysterious wanderer, who was afterwards tragically murdered. From him, and from him alone, Dingiswayo learned what he knew of European ways, whether of war or of trade. As for the Zulu regimental system, it was always there, ready to be developed. Dingiswayo, looking round on a country divided among clans, torn by wars and inaccessible to European trade,

concluded, with uncommon insight, that all this was attributable to lack of unity and peace under a common leadership. An alluring vision of what might be gradually formed itself and illumined his soul. Here was he seated amidst this darkness and disorder, and yet possessed of the power to put his noble schemes into operation. Two great projects accordingly came to impress themselves on his imagination—he would introduce at once culture and cohesion into the little African world around him.

It was this benevolently conceived system which Tshaka turned to account to terrorise South Africa in a manner whose effects reached the Atlantic and the Great Lakes.

DINGISWAYO'S WHITE FRIEND.

The identity of the White Stranger is an enormously fascinating problem in itself:

A century or more has passed since that unknown pioneer (the first of our race to penetrate thither by the overland route) received his only reward—a painful death in the wilds of Zululand; and there he has since lain. Is it too late to give even his name a passing thought? Who was he?

When Fynn supposed that the stray white man may have been a certain "Dr. Cowen," we feel, despite his wide error as to dates—he placing the incident about A.D. 1750—that there was good reason for the surmise.

Dr. Cowan, it will be recalled, was in charge of an expedition which travelled to Bechuanaland in 1806, whose members were reputed to have been murdered near the Limpopo.

It may be admitted that as the author travels away from the Zulu area his accuracy becomes less deadly. For instance, he accepts Moodie's account of two infants of the Van Rensburg party having survived, grown up, married, and having been with their family sent to the magistrate of Lydenburg; but this unlikely story seems to have been disposed of for good by Mr. W. H. Neethling's report to State Secretary Reitz that the people in question were Albinos, characteristically Bantu in feature, who came originally from Kosi Bay. When Father Bryant gets really far away, into Rhodesia, he makes one or two statements yet more open to criticism; but in all such cases it is only incidental information that is at issue—nothing that affects his own area and his real theme.

HIS BREEZY STYLE.

The bulk of the book is devoted to the Tshaka period, the attention to detail, here or elsewhere, being only equalled by the vivacity of the varying narratives: for Bryant is an artist, who never gets into the rut of a continuous history, but dashes off picture after picture to make up an ordered and completed volume. His diction is a little pedantic at times, but his style is free and usually breezy, and he has an eye for the dramatic. He never minces his words and seldom wastes them. This is a typical passage:—

With a brand new army at his disposal, Shaka at last felt strong enough to administer "justice" more effectively, both at home and abroad, and to start cleaning out the Augean stable.

First of all he would put in order his own house. He would sweep it clean of all uncles, nephews and such like against whom he harboured a grudge. He did not take long in discovering just cause why Mudli, grandson of Ndaba, Zivalela, son of Jama, and divers others should be at once consigned to the Tower. But in his dungeons—3ft. of hole, one apiece, well underground—there was no lingering incarceration; only prompt and eternal rest.

The book is full of real human interest as well as deep knowledge; and it is refreshing to find that the Union Government was partly responsible for the financial support which enabled Father Bryant to arrange for the issue of a work whose dimensions, though not large, argue a substantial cost of production.

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