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ASSET OR LIABILITY.

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Two statements, mutually contradictory, are often made in regard to the Native people of our land.

On the one hand, one is told that "the Native is South Africa's greatest drawback" whilst from another angle we hear "how fortunate we are to have the Native". It seems, therefore, that there may be some profit and interest in considering these two contradictory opinions.

First then, let us say at once that, for the housewife, the Native has been an asset difficult to compute. Admittedly, we all know the clumsy nit-wit, the Jims and Charleys who claim proficiency in the culinary art and prove, on trial, to know little beyond peeling potatoes and turning the joint! - Of late years, too, we find the urbanised domestic (like his counterpart in Britain of some 30 years ago) becoming more truculent, assertive, demanding his pound of flesh, yet giving no more efficient service in return, whilst the sudden telegram or message, calling him to a sick father or a dead aunt, are irritations known to us all - and yet, with all their faults, there are many housewives who can tell of long years of devoted and loyal service from these same Natives, who are, at their worst, "a pair of hands and feet" and, at their best, a very real asset and comfort, - and our sisters in other countries, even in Britain to-day, are wont to waft envious thoughts towards us, especially when called upon to perform the multifarious duties so cheerfully, in this country, left to Jim, such as floor polishing, dish washing, and even "potato peeling."

The question arises, what has really been done about this point of efficiency? and "dependability"? How many recognised sources of training exist; in what way, or ways, has the Native mentally and psychologically been studied; what resulting methods have been used to cultivate a keener intelligence, a more co-operative spirit? Where are our schools of domestic science, our cooking classes, our night schools, for the mass of these people? Throughout the years there have always been sympathetic, self-sacrificing individuals, who have spent themselves in the cause of Native development, but where is the Nation-wide movement which is called for, in conjunction with wider facilities for free or "assisted" elementary education?

Now comes the second statement; "that the Native has been the curse of South Africa". - Yes, I have heard it put as strongly as that. The argument runs that because the Native is naturally lazy,

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lacking in initiative, ignorant and un-teachable, save perhaps in parrot fashion, because he hasn't learnt (seemingly by instinct) to appreciate at their accepted valuation the many and intricate ways of the white civilisation, because, with all, "he's just a black nigger, with the intelligence of an ape", therefore he has been the cause of the inferior quality or lack of standard in South African goods, the cause also of his white lord's disdain for and superiority towards all forms of manual labour - "that's Kaffir's work" is a phrase often heard, - especially in the country districts.

Let us then examine the two points of view more closely.

We have already commented upon the admitted shortcomings of his domestic service, - his ability we will leave for the moment. Similarly in Industry, in Agriculture, in posts of responsibility, we must admit to some foundation on fact for the case against our Native. But, are we being just, is it a reasoned and equitable case? Is the truth not nearer when we admit frankly two things? -

- (1) That until very recent years, the policy of this country has been dictated by selfish indifference, and -
- (2) secondly, by fear - the fear almost subconscious perhaps but very potent withal, that, if we give the Native a fair opportunity for showing his ability, then it will be a case of the survival of the fittest, - white civilisation will be put on its metal to prove and to maintain its claims to superiority.

The South African of the old school has based his attitude towards colour, partly on the Old Testament, Joshua IX.21, - "Let them live, but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water .." and partly it is the legacy of the original slave-owning settlers when slavery was an accepted custom of those days, and it has been convenient for such people not to re-examine their conscience too closely in regard to the New Testament application of these tenets. The remaining white population may, I think, be roughly divided into three groups, -

1. The negrophobists mostly ecclesiastic and scholastic who, saying "All men are equal in the sight of God" and "Education knows no colour bar" base their premise upon the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, whilst making little or no allowance for degrees of standards of development.
2. The antagonists of colour in all its manifestations, who regard all people, other than white, as their inferiors, all Natives as "black niggers", to be tolerated or exploited mainly for their own convenience or gain.
3. Between these two extremes stand, happily an ever increasingly large body of thoughtful educated humanitarians, who, while

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fully recognising the limitations and shortcomings of their black neighbours, are not disheartened, a body which, while appreciating the complexities, dangers and difficulties of the situation in which a small minority of white people live side by side with a vast mass of illiterates, where poverty, ignorance and hunger are ever prevalent, and where the primitive is being jostled and hurried by the sophisticated, yet accept these problems as a challenge, not only to white civilisation per se, but to the whole Christian ethic, - they recognise in increasing numbers that the day has come when we must indeed assume responsibility, when we are urgently called to become "our brothers' keeper".

This group, with perhaps greater realism than either of the other two, whilst recognising and accepting the potential qualities of intelligence and the axiom of full opportunity for all to progress, see also that for the Native people, en masse, the time is not yet ripe for unrestricted preferment. It is this group which holds perhaps the soundest basis for hope for the Native people themselves.

There is, however, urgent need for all those interested not only in the progress of the Native as such, but in the preservation of a peaceful and neighbourly relationship, that is, need to do more than treat them kindly, or to acknowledge their right to a better way of life. It is vitally important that such well-wishers bring thought and study to their aid, and again that the resulting knowledge be crystalised in action and fearless expression of their view point.

As an aside upon the need for greater knowledge and understanding of this people whose lives are lived, as it were, concurrently and side by side with our own, it has been borne in on the writer, from many angles, how astonishingly little the majority know about them, their customs, traditions and way of life, as, for example, an instance recently, when, of a gathering of some 40 Europeans, only a fraction had ever previously heard a lecture by an educated Native, or held an intelligent conversation with one - where surprise was expressed at the fluency and command of our language, and the poise and dignity of the speaker. And yet by far the greater number of that gathering were well disposed and kindly people. But friends, goodwill is not enough, unless it be translated into active help and better understanding.

Furthermore, there still remains in this country an all too large section of educated people, who have entirely failed to recognise or realise the various stages of Native development which are taking place all around them. Evolution is a steady force which overrides all prejudice, and, like King Canute of old, we are powerless to stem the rising tide of self-expression, the urge for development, now strongly pressing forward all depressed peoples, not least the Natives of our own country.

We are apt to forget that, when we took these people into our homes, our offices, our factories, for our own convenience, we opened a door into their minds, and we are unable again to clamp down the forces of enlightenment engendered by their experiences and contacts, upon the virgin soil of their eager searching minds. It must remain a grave indictment of our vaunted superior intelligence that we have, up to now, failed so lamentably in giving right direction to that awakening, have not guided that eagerness into more useful, more purposeful, more wisely and widely educated channels.

Each stage of that awakening requires its own particular approach, and hence creates a further complication in the manner and method of development. There are the purely and diminishing number of Primitives still to be found in the Reserves and the depths of the country, especially does this apply to the women who have been slower in their out-reaching to the new idea. Then come the - what I will call - the Veneer of sophistication, usually to be met with in the younger domestic and new comer to town, and who has mastered the three R's and little else, in scholastic education. Then we find the urbanised, educated Native, who has probably spent several years at a Mission School, and has acquired some real knowledge in those subjects in which he has been instructed. Further, is the Teacher and Clerk Class, largely a de-tribalised community by virtue of long residence in towns, up to 3 and 4 generations, and who have lived in the Native location and villages near or attached to Europeans towns, entirely divorced from Tribal life and customs, and lastly - at the top - a small, but very real percentage of what can and would be recognised, even by European standards, as well educated people; men and women who have reached the point at which they are able to reason and deduce, who can read behind the headings of the written word, and have an intelligent understanding of the trend of conditions, the difficulties arising from racial differences, the intricacies of Government.

Despite our tardiness and inertia in regard to such matters as have already been touched upon in this paper, there is much ground for optimism in the definite, if slow, awakening and stirrings of conscience of Government and public, which have been evinced in increasing tempo during the past decade and are becoming more and more evident each year - a deeper recognition by many sections of the country's opinion, of the white man's burden of responsibility towards this vast section of the population, - a striking and most encouraging instance of this recognition comes, just at the moment of writing, through an announcement in the local Press, to the effect that our City Council plans to build a Hostel, Flats and training and recreational facilities for Native women, most of whom are employed in the City, thus meeting an acutely growing need, and should do much to assist in the uplift of a section of the people. The City Council should be congratulated on its far-seeing and courageous decision.

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Hot foot on the publication of the City Council's proposed plan, comes an earnest and critical protest from the leaders of the Native Community, serving once more to emphasise the immense difficulties which are inherent in any attempt to reconcile civilisation and barbarism.

For all this, such stirrings of conscience move all too slowly for rapid and ever changing conditions of these present times. War conditions have greatly aggravated a situation whereby our Natives are being increasingly brought under subversive influences (of which there are all too many in our midst) and whereby a spark may at any moment light a fire, the consequences of which cannot easily be assessed.

There is a quite extraordinary failure, among Europeans generally, to recognise that human nature is fundamentally akin, no matter what the colour of the skin. Amazingly often one is forced to recognise that, where the ordinary rights usually acknowledged to be fundamental to man's well-being, such as food, clothing, shelter, employment, home and family, - when these impinge upon our Native people, these fundamentals are disregarded and assumed to have lost significance. The most glaring instance of this is in our system of migrant labour. In our homes, our factories, our Mines, our Roads etc., all Native labour is called from often great distances from the home of the labourer, entailing for him long periods of absence, with the now increasing apparent result that discipline is relaxed. The women fail to keep their lands under full cultivation, the children lack a father's authority, the youths fall a prey to un-regulated living, and, most serious of all, as a direct consequence of this employment system, is the quite appalling incidence and spread of V.D. and kindred diseases, and the increasing unfaithfulness and lack of sense of financial responsibility as between husbands and wives. Yet, these Natives who abhor and deplore such conditions are expected to concur in these rules, made for the convenience of his white employer, whilst he daily sees more clearly the increasing disintegration and ruin of his own home and way of life. We cannot expect him indefinitely to remain so subjected; it were well we hastened to go forward and meet his difficulties before we are forced to do so.

Admittedly, as mentioned previously, there is to-day an accelerated awakening of interest on the part of Europeans, and many and varied efforts are being planned and implemented for the welfare of Africans, but we still lack an integrated policy, and much effort is stultified either through lack of funds, or lack of public support, and, at best, still touches but the fringe of the urbanised people and rarely reaches to the rural elements at all.

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As things are to-day, we find several somewhat conflicting developments.

The War proved that thousands of Natives have been able to operate machinery very skilfully; they were also invaluable at Field Dressing Stations, in 1st Aid and in Hospitals, though, as a whole, not yet fitted to take full or sustained responsibility. Concurrently with this development we find increasing recognition of the vital necessity for more skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled Native labour. All the important commissions set up in recent years to survey Economic and Industrial conditions, have concurred in the opinion that more use must be made of our Native population, that we cannot much longer tolerate the strict and stultifying Labour Colour Bar, for in so doing we limit our own economic expansion. It would seem to be patently obvious that a better educated, better trained, more intelligent Native population means higher standards of living, greater purchasing power which create wider markets both for production and consumption, and therefore more scope both for European and non-European, - a fact which is, however, only now somewhat grudgingly being recognised, though some of the best and wisest economic brains have long urged such a policy.

Side by side with this upsurge of potential ability and intelligence, occurs the anomaly that the Reserves are rapidly deteriorating, - why? It is one of the direct results of the system described earlier in this talk, of the segregation of the men from their homes, which has resulted in the husband and father being entirely removed from his sphere of influence and authority, and his occasional visits can have little beneficial effect. Then too, there are no young men to do the heavy ploughing etc., since the urge for higher wages and more varied life has drawn them also to the towns. Moreover, Government is only recently and rather tentatively tackling the question of a drive to train the Natives in better methods of agriculture, soil conservation, veld improvement, cattle breeding, etc., and naturally, all this will be a long term matter, and will require patience, tact and financial outlay. The Native, like all Primitives, is conservative in his ways, timid of innovations, and Tradition is a strong force, hence again we glimpse the liability of our connection with these people, it remains, however, an obvious fact that only by sustained and understanding approach to this problem can South Africa become a land of plenty, inhabited by a healthy and happy people. They must be trained and educated to understand the advances in agriculture, etc., they must learn to realise that the good life necessitates effort, both of brain and body, that Health, Hygiene, and good foods produced under healthy conditions, are fundamental to the well being of all, and that they too, must play their part in the rehabilitation of the soil and crops of the land which belongs to us all.

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There is considerable lack of understanding regarding the term "malnutrition" - It is not sufficiently realised that "hunger" is not the only cause. Children, even adults, in quite wealthy circumstances can still suffer from this complaint, for it is the quality and correct sequence of food, which is the governing factor.

It is really only in recent years that scientific study has been brought to bear on this subject and we now know that, not only the food itself, but the ground and conditions under which it is produced is an important con-commitant.

This then, is the point at which we touch the general lines of this talk, for it is to the Reserves and the Farmers we must go for improvement, not only in the quantity produced, but the better methods which must be inculcated, in the actual areas of production, and therefore, the need for sympathetic and enlightened guidance in all agricultural, horticultural and pastoral schemes.

This, too, is where misunderstanding arises, and we read of a responsible Minister affirming that "there is no real evidence of 'hunger' in certain areas of the Reserves". No, possibly they MAY be able, if they are fortunate, to stay the pangs of 'hunger', but the lack of quality and variety, the lack of milk and vegetables, constitute serious malnutrition, especially when coupled with shortage of sugar, fats, meat and the Natives' staple food - mealie meal.

While we would urge upon Europeans the need for service, in the giving of instruction, in the following up of, and assistance in schemes for bringing about better, more scientific, and more practical results, it seems to the writer most vitally important that the Native people themselves be expected to co-operate in furthering any schemes for their own improvement. They must be led along lines of co-operative thought, and not be permitted to expect to have all things brought to them, with little or no effort on their part, - along that line lie indolence and selfishness. Give them knowledge and guidance, and then Responsibility; put the onus of success upon themselves, and I feel the resulting response will be gratifying.

Furthermore, in this revival of a sense of responsibility and self respect, and in the improving conditions, we will be giving them back that which is being rapidly sapped under existing circumstances, renewed interest in and care for their own homes and Reserve lands.

Better nourishment, too, pre-supposes better health, higher resistance to illness and heightened intelligence for the population and greatly to be desired in building our New South Africa.

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Now this brings me to say a few words in conclusion about the splendid National organisation which is the direct outcome of the war, and which is now in process of being formulated.

Doubtless you have all heard of the National Health Foundation, the germ of which was originated amongst the men on active service, in Italy, - in memory of their fallen comrades. As you will remember the project was born when a few Officers "up North" discussed a suitable form for such a Memorial, and were persuaded, rather diffidently, to put forward their ideas to the troops in general. They were agreeably surprised at the ready response given to their proposals that such a memorial should take some form of benefit to (in its original form) Africans, such as health clinics, etc. Later, on bringing their suggestions to the Union, this original proposal was widened to embrace "the needy of all races". The originators of the scheme, together with service men in general, felt that thus would they pay enduring tribute to those "who have given life itself" for the cause of true Freedom and Justice for all men, and that those who had given so much would be well pleased with so realistic and lasting a memorial. Apart from the material benefits envisaged by such a scheme, the psychological and ideological is indeed encouraging. One feels there is indeed Hope for South Africa when her youth and young manhood begin to study and consider the great problems of adjustment and justice as between black and white, rich and poor, and show evidence of wishing to break away from the narrower, bitter racialism of the past.

Appreciating that, as a first step towards implementing such a project, money would be needed, the hat went round and there on the Battlefields a sum of - I think my figures are correct - £10,000 was immediately forthcoming, and has since been greatly augmented by subscriptions. After discussions and consultations, the final decision for name and scope was made, and The National Health Foundation came into being. To explain its scope, I cannot do better than quote from a pamphlet of the Race Relations News, which has given these details in brief form -

The immediate programme of the National War Memorial Health Foundation shall be:-

- (1) To plan and initiate the establishment in every needy locality, rural and urban, of a people's centre or agricultural settlement where health-promotive work will be undertaken. To proceed as early as possible with the establishment of centres for the different racial groups of the population as pilot models on which others can be based.
- (2) To co-operate with organizations, official and voluntary, which undertake health-promotive service work, such as:

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- (a) health education of the people;
 - (b) food clubs for cheaper foods;
 - (c) physical education of youths, adults; etc., etc.
- (3) To educate and organize public opinion on health and welfare matters.
- (4) To work with Central, Provincial, and Local Authorities and press them to deal with fundamental causes of ill health.
- (5) To help men and women of all races to obtain training to serve the nation's health".

In short, this is a project to help the people to help themselves, through better education and wider knowledge and greater effort in the cause of health and happiness.

The criticism often heard that our Natives are too lazy or too stupid to benefit by teaching, is refuted by facts, though naturally there are, as in every community, the intelligent and not so intelligent, the industrious and the laggard, - but in judging this primitive people, let us remember his background and his traditions, and ask ourselves, in considering his white counterparts, is there really so much difference? Do our white farmers, as a body, show such marked energy, intelligence, and co-operation in matters such as crop-rotation, soil and veld conservation, tree planting, etc.? Dr. Burnett, the expert who visited our farm lands recently, seemed not to think so!

Finally - Differences there will ever be, and we may be grateful for them; entire uniformity would be so dull- Differences in Race, in Culture, in approach, in intelligence, in customs and tradition, but fundamentally Humanity is mainly similar in its reactions to love and hate, to hunger and plenty, health and sickness, in its love of home and family, and its desire to own at least a portion of the land; all humans show much the same inclinations.

In the struggle for survival, in the normal processes of evolution, Providence works slowly, and we as individuals are apt to become impatient, looking for results from our efforts, but such impatience will surely lose us all we are set to gain.

And thus we return to the question of my title page -

And are we to be content to leave this vast reservoir of research, this field of potential value, this opportunity for human endeavour, - are we to leave it to the hap-hazard, repressive, "survival of the fittest" methods of the past, so that it will

remain for ever a reproach to us, and a liability to our successors, or, are we to accept the challenge, and with understanding, knowledge sympathy and the aid of science, go forward to build, from its great potentials the greatest among the many very great assets of this continent of Africa in general, and the Union in particular?

It is for us - each of us - a question of immense importance.

Emp. Ellis

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