

A well known author and critic here reviews a first novel by a former New Age editor, Jack Cope,

THE FAIR HOUSE, BASED ON THE ZULU REBELLION

THE writer who takes an historical incident as the theme of a novel sets himself a difficult task. The mere narration of dramatic and exciting events does not in itself constitute a work of art. These events must be described in terms of the human participants so that the reader knows not only the facts, but shares and takes part in a human experience.

The Zulu Rebellion of 1906 is the theme of Jack Cope's first novel, "The Fair House," and despite the fact that his main characters fail to convince, he has handled the story so imaginatively and with such compassion that he has succeeded in bringing a moment of history impressively to life.

MATURE WRITING

The writing is mature and controlled. There is no fumbling for style, nor unevenness. Natal of fifty years ago is vividly recreated. At a ball at Government House, "the amateur soldiers were like birds of paradise in uniforms of dazzling brightness . . . black lace on red, gold and blue, silver and green."

In familiar contrast is the Victoria Location in Pietermaritzburg where "Wood and dried dung and coal stolen from the rail-trucks burned in clay hearths or the open braziers set at the doors. A stench of rot and human excrement and urine mixed with the smell of smoke."

The backdrop is Natal itself—the wild luxuriant countryside, the "curtain of mountains, blue, crystalline, rising in sheer crags." The climax of the book—the encirclement and destruction of the Zulu impis in the enHome gorge—is described so lucidly that the reader feels he is an eye-witness.

KNOWLEDGE OF ZULUS

In his portrayal of the Zulu people Jack Cope refutes those who believe that there must always be a glass wall between white and black and that no white writer can write with truth of those not his colour. He has a knowledge of the Zulus, not only in the broad sense of knowing their language, customs and history, but an understanding of them as people. He has depicted them as angry and confused, refusing to submit and to forfeit their way of life for slavery. Their revolt was a protest and an attempt to regain their independence. But they learnt, as everyone must learn, that the past is irretrievable. The very forces which they were resisting had already moulded them and made them different.

This is clearly conveyed in one of the most effective scenes in the book where the ceremonial doctoring of the impis is followed by a reading from the Book of Lamentations by a Christian Zulu wearing the broken figure of Christ on a cross around his neck.

WHITES CONTRASTED

In counterpoint to the Zulus are the whites who react blindly, having only one answer to the grievances of the black man—to

teach him a lesson, to show him, not the superiority of Western civilisation, but the superiority of Western arms. To the old rallying cry of "Save our women and children" the mounted regiments set out. Because the Zulu was a "savage," "civilised" methods of warfare were abandoned. The horrible incidents of the actual conflict are described with a restraint which is impressive.



Jack Cope.

The minor characters are excellent. The portraits of Col. Elton, the Commander-in-Chief, a ruthless killer, and his equally ruthless lieutenants are terrifyingly real. There are other minor characters drawn "in the round"—Bambate, the war leader, Noringile, a Headman of immense dignity who accepts that he belongs to the past, Koko, his wife, a passionate convert to Christianity—the canvas is richly painted with living people.

A FAILING

This makes the failure of the writer to portray his main characters as people in whom we can believe, difficult to understand. Tom Erskine, the young Natal farmer who loves and respects the Zulus and tries to avert the catastrophe, never comes to life. Though we are told that he has grown up among the Zulus and is an honoured guest in their homes, the motivation for his actions does not come across.

Delicately handled though it is, the reader is unmoved by the love story of Tom and Linda de Wet, an orphan of the concentration camps of the Boer war. The major Zulu character, Kolombe, one of the leaders of the revolt, blood brother to Tom, rejecting his tribal gods and yet setting himself against the white man, remains a symbolic figure of the Zulu at the crossroads, rather than a man. Possibly Tom, Linda and Kolombe are so unconvincing because each gives the impression of being a composite portrait—a convenient peg for the writer on which to display the complexities of the situation—the relationship between Boer and Briton, Briton and Zulu, Boer and Zulu. This sacrifice of artistry to the mechanics of the story detracts considerably from

the value and impact of the novel. Because our sympathy is not aroused for the main characters, the ending is an anticlimax.

Nevertheless "The Fair House" is a book of tremendous power. Reading it is a bitter and poignant experience, for we cannot regard it simply as a period piece. It is in fact a contemporary novel—we cannot congratulate ourselves that in fifty years we have advanced so far in human understanding that a tragedy such as this cannot be re-enacted in our time. We who believe in the dignity and equality of every human being have still to defeat that attitude of mind which denies this principle and which has bespattered our history with blood. P.M.A.

Rainy Night In Jeppe

JOHANNESBURG.

MAY 10 in Johannesburg was a rainy night. In Jeppe an African was knocked down by a car, and the impact sent him rolling several yards down the street where he lay unconscious.

Two Indian youths were among those who witnessed the accident. They telephoned for an ambulance.

On the telephone they were asked the race of the person involved in the collision.

"African," said the youngster talking on the 'phone.

"Sê maar kaffer," said the voice on the other end, and the telephone was banged down.

After ten minutes the ambulance station was again telephoned, and after a delay an ambulance arrived.

The two ambulance attendants refused to pick up the unconscious African lying in the street.

From among the spectators the two young Indians, a European and a Coloured did so. They placed the African on the stretcher and in the ambulance while the ambulance men stood by watching.

Then the ambulance drove off.

BASUTOLAND SEDITION CHARGE

MASERU.

Mr. Josiel Lefela, leader of "Lekhotla la Bafo," the Basutoland peasant organisation, has been charged with sedition following a meeting held in the district of Mafeteng recently.

Mr. Lefela was due to appear in the Mafeteng court on May 3, but had earlier been injured in a bus accident and so could not reach Mafeteng on time. He was subsequently arrested for contempt of court at Thaba-Chitja on the way from his home to Mafeteng.

After doctors had reported that it was impossible for him to appear because of his health, Mr. Lefela was allowed to return home to convalesce.

The case will be heard when he has recovered.

Jo'burg Council's Ghetto Plan

"Vertical Expansion" Proposed to Board

JOHANNESBURG.—Group Areas Board hearings have now resumed in Johannesburg before a committee of the Land Tenure Board, and various schemes for removing and resettling the Non-European population are being laid before the Board.

Most detailed proposals thus far have come from the Johannesburg City Council, which, in its plans for Indians in the city, has hit on the theme of "vertical expansion."

Explained by the Council's Non-European Affairs Department Manager, Mr. W. J. P. Carr, the Council has calculated the Indian population living in and close to Johannesburg, and has "sought mathematically to reconcile this with the carrying capacities of the areas we recommend."

It is thought that about 25,000 Indian men, women and children have to be accommodated and provided with trading sites.

It is permitted to erect buildings up to six storeys in such suburbs as Burgersdorp (adjoining Fordsburg); and the plan is to permit the Indians in these areas to expand only upwards—into the sky!

On the basis of blocks of flats each having three bedrooms, a living room and bathroom, it was estimated that Burgersdorp could carry a population of 16,800 and 200 shops.

The present population of Burgersdorp is 1,354 Indians, 124 Europeans, 572 Coloureds and 154 Africans.

Five storey buildings for Fordsburg proper are advocated.

The Diagonal street area should carry 11,496 residents in seven-storey blocks.

In these plans demarcating certain areas for Indians the population to be displaced consists of 695 Europeans, 1,851 Coloureds and Malays and 2,363 Africans.

LENASIA

The Council plans recognise Lenasia as an area for Indian occupation but recognise that it cannot provide any alternative for traders removed from their existing sites.

The Council proposals provide for Indians trading outside prescribed Indian areas retaining their licences under permit.

Trading only by Indians would be permitted east of Diagonal Street.

Stands in Langlaagte were, also proposed for Indians.

Turning to the Coloureds and Malays, the Council representative said they should be settled in Western Native Township, Claremont and Newclare North. Africans in these areas are to be removed to Meadowlands under the Western Areas Removal Plan. Coloureds would continue to live in Coronation and Albertsville. Protea, the new Coloured township, is to accommodate the rest of Johannesburg's Coloured population in single-storey detached dwellings.

MALAYS

The Malay people would live in Newclare south, the railway line being the border between them and the Coloureds.

On the question of Pageview (in earlier plans this was proposed as a

White area) the Council is non-committal and makes no proposals.

For the Chinese population the Council proposes four blocks in Commissioner Street west, to provide 74 shops and accommodate 2,500 people. Three thousands Chinese are also provided for south of the Main Reef Road and near Industria.

Already in the evidence placed before the Board there are some conflicting proposals.

The City Council suggests Newclare and Claremont for Coloureds, and the Transvaal Indian Organisation, which says it opposes the Group Areas Act but submits evidence under duress, wants these areas for Indians.

The City Council envisages a small Diagonal street area for Indian occupation, but mining houses want this area to be declared White.

The Board proceedings are continuing.

Why Teachers Were Dismissed

JOHANNESBURG.

THERE are two main reasons why 116 African teachers have been dismissed by Dr. Verwoerd's Bantu Education Department, says the African National Congress Youth League.

Firstly, it is intended to reduce the staff, so that they make way for the trained Bantu Education staff and the women teachers who will receive Bantu Education salaries. Secondly, it is intended to intimidate the remaining teachers so that they cling more tightly to their jobs and regard them as precious jewels. There is no doubt too that later, when the Youth Camps have been established, the teachers who have been dismissed will be called upon to offer their services in the Youth concentration camps, to train the Youth in submission, ploughing, and mining.

The A.N.C.Y.L. invites the teachers to join the masses of the people in their battles against the growing arrogance, contempt and ruthlessness of the fascists. The A.N.C.Y.L. wishes to assure the teachers that by being dismissed from Verwoerd Schools they have been dismissed from the dishonourable and treacherous duty of shackling their people in perpetuity to the brutal oppression and exploitation by the farmers and miners. "We call upon them to join the forces of progress, the forces whose future is just beginning to blossom," the statement concludes.

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