THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE AFRICAN:

By

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1. One of the burning questions in South Africa to-day is that of the educational needs of the Africans. There is a large body of South Africans, including most of the Africans, who are convinced that education is the panacea for all the problems created by the juxtaposition of White and Black in this country. Diametrically opposed to this view is that of those who believe that our problems are either created or accentuated by ill-advised attempts to interfere with the simple arcadian life of the African by giving him that supreme destroyer of happiness and tractability - education. Finally some of our fellow-countrymen are simply indifferent to the question, and do not care which way it is settled as long as the solution makes no inroads upon their incomes. Perhaps one ought to say that there are some who are at a loss to see how any important matter can ever be settled satisfactorily when it is tackled in the desultory fashion which has for so long been the rule in South Africa.

The Meaning of Education:

2. One of the most fruitful sources of disagreement in this matter consists of the widely differing views held regarding the meaning of the term education. To many the word education implies Western education, and knowing the limitations of the latter, they are not prepared to see the Africans saddled with its evils. For some education means book-learning, and that, they are sure will render the Africans, as it does other people, unfit to take his place among the workers of the world. No doubt other misconceptions exist, but these need not detain us here.
What requires emphasis is the fact that we must divest our minds of the notion that education means Westernisation. That conception is just as offensive to the Africans as it is to the European, though for different reasons. Western education is better known in the world to-day because of its greater conquests in the realm of knowledge and experience. We admit that it is superior in many respects to such systems of education as have been devised by Eastern or other nations; but its most ardent admirers ought to realise that education is capable of a much wider and more fundamental interpretation than even Western education can lay claim to. Is not education rather the reconstruction of our experience in the light of the past experience of our fathers, our neighbours, other races and of mankind everywhere? While its roots should be laid deep in the soil of our national background, must it not be nourished by elements derived from outside of itself?

The whole task of any educational system is to put man in touch with the whole field of human experience, so far as that is possible within the life-time of an individual. Understood in this broad sense, education is needed by men everywhere, no less by Western nations than any other but certainly by the so-called backward races of the world. Every man or woman who can properly be called backward is a hindrance to the society to which he belongs, and it is the duty of those who know better to strive to alter such a man's situation, with his help, so as to make him an asset rather than a liability to his country.

5. How it does not matter what phase of African life you examine, you will find that the Africans are still in a very backward condition. Look at their social life, turn to their industrial life, their church or spiritual life, their observance of the laws of health, their housing conditions, their knowledge of how to govern themselves and to organise various aspects of their lives, examine all these aspects of Native life and you will be struck by the fact of their backwardness. It is no disgrace to us members of the African race to have to admit this. We know that the same deficiencies have existed and still exist in other sections of our population. But our concern is that these conditions should not remain a day longer than they must among us, and we feel that while education will not do everything, it will open
eyes of our people to their own nakedness.

Objective in Education.

4. As to the kind of education which the Africans require, I think we need to keep three main objectives in view. In the first place we need a type of education which will fit the Africans better to take their place in the body politic of South Africa. In the old days when we lived under a much simpler system of social organisation, the education we needed was much simpler in consequence; but to-day we live under conditions which may well baffle the most sophisticated; and intelligent membership of the modern state requires us to be in possession of sufficient knowledge to enable us to adjust ourselves to our changed and changing environment.

How can we in fairness expect an ignorant man to see the importance of improved methods of agriculture, the necessity of working at his job not intermittently but permanently, the justice of bearing his share of the burden of taxation and of maintaining law and order? In view of our relations with those with whom we live here in South Africa, Europeans, Indians or Coloureds, we need to be educated. We have no desire to take a back seat to any section of our population in regards to our usefulness to our country. We have been heers of wood and drawers of water, humble occupations which no one need despise; but in addition to supplying the brawn required in such of the up-building of South Africa, we venture to think that we could be just as useful in other directions, if we were given the right type of education. We need the development of a knowledge of the civic activities involved in community life, in state and national life together with appropriate ideas, standards, and habits; the development of a social conscience or a sense of social responsibility. This sense of oneness with others was developed to a certain extent in the old tribal life, which has served its day however much sentimentalists may deplore it; to-day we need a fresh orientation of our relationship to our fellow-countrymen on the one hand and to the State on the other. How can we do this without education?

5. But apart from this we need education as prospective workers and producers in this country. Think of the awful waste of money, time and other more valuable/........