

The Ever widening - Ever - narrowing World

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The modern world may be said to exhibit two apparently contradictory tendencies, namely that it is ever widening and ever narrowing. By the continual extension of the modern world is not meant that its geographical limits are ever on the increase, arctic and antarctic explorations and astronomical discoveries notwithstanding. What seems to be continually expanding is our knowledge of both the natural and social conditions obtaining in the various parts of the world. This has been made possible by the vast improvement of our methods of keeping in constant contact with the world as a whole. Better means of communication--the cable, the telegraph, ^{the telephone} the wireless, the aeroplane; better, speedier, safer and more comfortable methods of travel--the train, the ship, the motor car, the airship and the aeroplane; better methods of recording ^{and disseminating} our information--writing, ^{printing} the telephone, the telescope, the photograph, the gramophone record, the ~~xxx~~ film, television, the radio, the library, the newspaper have all combined to widen the range of our interests and to increase the depth of our knowledge. At least from the point of view of our conceptual apparatus the developments of modern science have made it possible for us to say with greater degree of certainty than was dreamt of a hundred or even fifty years ago that our citizenship is not of this or that country but of the world at large. And yet this vast increase in the bounds of both our physical and intellectual contacts has brought with it limitations which may be considered by some to be both irksome and cramping. Making the world a neighbourhood has also increased our awareness of the repercussions of the different types of operations in which we engage both at home and abroad. Just as within the limits of any particular country no person can be today a thoroughgoing individualist, no country can afford, nor indeed be allowed to live unto itself. The results and effects of economic imperialism, of ~~materialist~~ militaristic policies, racial theories and even the programmes for the extension of different types of religions are matters which have to be

justified both as regards the manner in which they are being pursued and also, on occasion, as to the necessity ^{for} ~~of~~ ^{very} their existence ~~at all~~ before the bar of world opinion, however unorganised and apparently ineffective the latter may be with regard to giving effect to its judgments. The comfortable isolationist policies of a generation or two ago are more difficult to persist in and the fact that some of them are unable to bear the scrutiny of the world may account for the reactionary tendencies observable in certain quarters. Whether we like it or not the increase of our control over natural forces, the consequent expansion not only in our knowledge but also in the scale of our operations in practically every department of human ^{activity} ~~life~~ has also extended the sphere of our moral obligations, giving a striking confirmation of the saying that much will be expected from him unto whom much is given. There seems to be no escape from the concatenation of privilege and responsibility, however simple or however highly differentiated our society may be.

In such an ever narrowing and ever widening world the matter of culture contacts, the impingement of one civilisation upon another, becomes increasingly important. In no sphere is this impingement more ~~than~~ important than in administrative matters especially where the new civilisation has behind it ~~powerful~~ military prowess, powerful legal sanctions and enhanced prestige, and in no place is the resulting disintegration and disturbance of the social equilibrium ^{new} more clearly than in the Union of South Africa. When Jan van Riebeeck and his brave band of followers landed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 for the purpose of establishing there a settlement which would make Table Bay a more useful port of call for Dutch ships on their way to and from India and the East, the southernmost point of Africa became one of the most interesting centres of culture contacts and race relations in the whole world. The objects of their settlement which included providing fresh food for the passing ships brought them into contact with the Bushmen and later the Hottentots who inhabited that part of the country; but in any conflict that arose the issue was soon settled in favour of powder and shot. It was not until the latter part of the 18th century that the white settlers who were beginning to look upon the land as their own by indisputable right encountered more formidable opponents in the Bantu who coming from their home somewhere in the eastern part of Central Africa were migrating southwards driving before them the Bushmen and the Hottentots. Then followed a succession of more serious so-called "Kafir Wars", first with the Xhosas in the Eastern part of the Cape of Good Hope, then with the Zulu in Natal, the Basuto under Moshesh in the Free State and the Bapedi under Sekukuni in the Transvaal, until the end of the 19th century when it may be said that the Bantu tribes were finally overthrown and made subjects of the different Colonial Governments. But although peace was now established all over

the country, the conflict was by no means at an end. It had simply taken a different form, no less grave and requiring no less courage and wisdom, albeit it was fought with no death-dealing weapons. It was a conflict of cultures rather than one of physical prowess which had set in, the problem being how to build up a South African Nation from the divergent elements of the population with their differences in cultural heritage and racial background.

One of the commonest results of the contact of cultures is social disintegration, especially where a primitive culture such as that of the Bantu is juxtaposed with one ^{that} abounds in the complicated if not subversive influences of present-day European civilisation. The Bantu in an attempt to adjust ~~themselves~~ to modern society with its aggressive individualism, inter alia, have to or are called upon ~~to~~ give up conceptions of the fitness of things which they held dear in the old days, with the result that the equilibrium of Bantu society has been seriously disturbed, and the individual Native finds himself out of step with the ordinary march of events in his social environment. In ~~no~~ aspect of life is this disturbance of the social equilibrium more disconcerting than in the field of legal relationships. To say this is not ^{to} suggest that ~~the~~ legal are the most important relationships in ^{the life of the} Bantu or ^{in that of any other people} ~~indeed any other life~~. But legal relationships are more amenable to observation and so have attracted attention more than any others; ~~and~~ yet it may be supposed that dislocations in the sphere of law and order are merely symptomatic of other more inward disturbances which require closer investigation and demand more subtle analysis. When ~~the~~ Bantu find that their form of marriage is not recognised and that the result of the coming of the white man has been to bastardise their whole race, when the hereditary chiefs ^{to} whom they fought and died in the past have been deprived of their ceremonial and administrative

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functions and are now merely "amapoyisa"(constables),when they find their parental authority reduced by the white man's law to mere paternity,can they be blamed for becoming disconsolate and dejected and occasionally "fearing the Greeks even when they come laden with gifts" ?.Wistfully they yearn for the old days when their social solidarity could withstand outside attack,when they were "men" and not "boys"; otherwise for them life is not worth living,for in their view native society is in ^{constant} danger of collapse and all the best elements of Bantu culture--of ubuntu(humanity as conceived by the Bantu)--seem destined to be irretrievably lost.

In a sense this Bantu lament for the "good old days" is no new phenomenon and has been the cry of opponents to new movements in every part of the world. It may be said by some that for this reason it ought not to be heeded at all,for if such cries had been given ear to in other parts of the world,Galileo would have been allowed to die with his new conception of the universe,the steam engine would never have replaced the dog-cart and the stage-coach,Christianity would never have seen the light,^{of day} and however doubtful may be the blessings which accompanied these ^{and} other developments in human history,the urgent problem for us is to adjust ourselves to the world as it is today--for on that alone depends the survival of any people --instead of pathetically appealing to Providence to turn back the clock and give us yesterday.

On the other hand more sympathetic souls clamour for the control of ~~modern~~ introduction of modern civilization among primitive peoples in order to save them the mental anguish and the sudden loosening of wholesome sanctions with consequent social disaster which unregulated movements have caused elsewhere. Granted that these movements are inevitable, is that any reason for calling upon those who seem helpless in the face of them to resign themselves to their fate with no greater consolation than the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest".

The Classification of the Native Peoples of South Africa. B.S. 9/1934

The Native inhabitants of Africa south of the Zambesi and Kunene rivers are generally held to belong to four different ethnic groups: Bushmen, Bergdama and Bantu. The Bushmen, at one time spread over almost the whole of Southern Africa, are today confined principally to the Central and Northern Kalahari Desert and the adjacent districts. Their culture is very primitive, for they live in small, scattered nomadic bands which lead a purely hunting and collecting existence, practising neither agriculture nor pastoralism. The Hottentots formerly occupied most of the Western half of the region ~~which~~ which we are concerned, but are now mainly found in the Southern districts of South-West Africa. They are predominantly a pastoral people, herding cattle and sheep, and live in larger communities than the Bushmen with a more complex system of social organisation. The Bergdama also inhabit South-West Africa; and like the Bushmen, live in very small nomadic groups, deriving their subsistence primarily from hunting and collecting, although some of them also keep goats. The Bantu although historically the most recent ethnic group to enter South Africa are now spread over the whole country, except for the Southern half of South-West Africa and the Western and Central districts of the Cape. They are most densely settled in the Eastern half of the country. In the centre and West they are much less numerous, although ^{they} still greatly outnumber the other native peoples. They are also on a distinctly higher level of culture than the others, combining cultivation of crops with animal husbandry as their principal forms of subsistence; their communities are on the whole much larger, their social organisation somewhat more complex, and their systems of government and law much more fully developed.

As we are concerned more particularly with the Bantu in this paper we shall follow Dr Schapera in his remarks on the extraordinary variety of cultural types to be found in this group of the native inhabitants of South Africa.

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Both the Bushmen and the Hottentots have declined considerably in strength and in numbers as a result of their contacts with the Bantu on the one hand and the European settlers on the other. The whole culture of the Hottentots has fallen into decay; while such groups of Bushmen as still survive appear to be gradually dying out or at least merging with other peoples, especially the Bantu. The Bergdama seem to have suffered less in regard to numbers, but their culture too is apparently undergoing rapid transformation. The Bantu, on the other hand, are still vigorous and powerful. They have been able, moreover, to preserve much of their original cohesion and culture, and in some cases to offer a strong resistance to the disintegrating effects of contact with Europeans. Their traditional life and habits have nevertheless inevitably been affected by the extension of European control over the whole of South Africa. In some parts of the country the process of culture change have been fairly extensive; in others, which the Europeans did not reach until fairly recently, it has so far ~~not~~ made but little headway. There is, however, at the present time hardly a single tribe which does not already show signs of having been affected, if only superficially, by the economic and political institutions of the Whites.

The transformation of Native life in South Africa is a factor of primary importance which must be kept in the foreground of all discussions in regard to ethnographical research. In one respect it considerably narrows down the field in which a study of native cultures in all their traditional manifestations can still be made. On the other hand it also suggests new problems for research which have hitherto been only slightly explored: such problems, e.g. as the changes that have taken place in Native life, and the processes by which the Natives are adapting themselves to the new conditions of life that have resulted from their subjection to Western civilisation."