Problems of Bantu Youth: A Study in Culture Contacts

I. Modern Interest in Youth. It would be difficult to find a period of history when a greater interest was taken in youth than at the present time. All the world over, in conferences, in pulpits, in schools and colleges, and last but not least, in homes, the problems of youth are being seriously considered. It is being increasingly realised, in strange contrast to the old attitude towards youth as things that should be neither seen nor heard, that young people have interests peculiar to themselves, a life of their own to live, and rights and privileges to which they are just as much entitled as adults are to theirs. Young people are making claims which are startling, and are raising the question, "What shall we do with our children?". This wave of interest in the men and women of tomorrow has swept over South Africa also. The year 1930 was recognised in some South African Churches as "Young People's Year" when a special effort would be made to get to know the point of view of Youth, and so devise ways and means of winning them back to the Church which seems to have lost its grip over them. Few conferences in South Africa aroused as much interest or gave rise to as much serious thinking as did the Bantu-European Conference held in June 1930 at Fort Hare under the auspices of the Student Christian Association, an organisation of young people. The decisions young people of both the white and the black races made at that conference provoked the disfavour of not a few older people, but even in spite of adverse comment Youth seems to be prepared to stand by those commitments. In Bantu circles there are the same disturbing demands for self-expression on the part of Youth, and the same anxiety on the part of adults lest the freedom of the immature lead to a more rapid social disintegration than is already taking place among them. "Quo Vadis?" is constantly being asked of Youth. Any study of the impact of Western civilisation on the Bantu must include a consideration of what is happening among the Bantu Youth of today.
2. The Boy in the Bantu Home. In order to see our problems in their proper perspective, it seems necessary to study the background of the Bantu boy so that we may see, if possible, to what extent these problems are the natural result of his environment and his upbringing. To begin with the life of the boy prior to the arrival of the European, it may be said in a general way that the boy was an object of comparative neglect. He was "a man of all jobs". It was he who had to rise at daybreak to lead his stock to the grazing-grounds, where he had to appease his voracious but unsatisfied—and perhaps unsatisfiable—appetite with wild fruit and honey and rats and other more palatable foods; there he had to compete for grazing and watering with all the other herds of the village, and if he was not fortunate enough to possess the power of defending his rights by wielding the stick and through the stone with unerring aim, he had to be satisfied with the worst in everything, including the risk of a thrashing at home for being a poor herd-boy. In his hunt for mats and bee-hives he often forgot all about the cattle which in the meantime strayed into the neighbouring fields; any man whatever passing the fields at this stage and seeing this neglect of duty was at liberty to get hold of the culprits and make them do the severe penance of receiving the hardest bounds of which he was capable. No one dared to report at home the beating, though perhaps undeserved in the case of some, for fear of being handled in a more painful way. To the casual observer this seemed to be the height of neglect; yet no opportunity was ever lost of giving that training in obedience, that respect for elders, that habit of assisting the weak and that restraint of speech before and about elders which are in these more sophisticated days conspicuous by their absence among the young people. Out in the open veldt he developed his physical powers of endurance and became inured to all the hardships of primitive life; for himself he discovered the arcana of Nature regarding both Flora and Fauna; his powers of observation and intelligence were developed in hunting expeditions in company with his fellows, in looking for strayed stock, and he acquired a mastery
of his language which nothing could take away. When he went through the Initiation school, he received more direct instruction in the subjects mentioned above to which were added a course in tribal history, in tribal law and custom, in the relations between the sexes, on filial duty, etc. Throughout it all the family and the tribe had a firm control over the Boy.

3. The life of the Girl was, if anything even more circumscribed. Quite early she had to learn to help her mother with minding the babies, cooking the frugal meals to be found in the Bantu home, drawing water from spuntains and streams not infrequently quite a long distance away from her home. The parents looked forward to the time when her hand would be sought in marriage, and trained her in such a way that her chances of making a good match were enhanced. Her feelings about things were not entirely disregarded, but there was a tremendous emphasis on the superior wisdom of the elders which tended to stifle the self-expression of the young girl. The girl in the Bantu could not look forward to ever being sui juris; whether as a married woman or a widow or a divorced woman or an unmarried woman, she was always under the perpetual guardianship of some one.

4. Modern Conditions. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new And God fulfils Himself in many ways Lest one good custom should corrupt the world".

Ingo the (to the tribal and the parental mind) placid conditions above described came Christianity and the white man's civilisation which taken together have a dissolving power possessed by nothing else. Wherever that Son of Man comes with His quietness and His humility, He illumines the dark places and changing the principles dominating and guiding men's lives; He introduces a new way of living. Western civilisation on the other hand has so stirred the current of Bantu life and thought that it has changed them, at least in some places, almost beyond recognition. A new social order has set in, and everywhere the old tribesman finds himself, like Tennyson's Bedivere, "among strange faces, new men, other minds".
What are the some of the factors which have led to this disintegration of the old tribal life? Only a few may be noted here.

(a) The easy means of travelling that have come with the white man have made possible a greater exchange of ideas than could have taken place under previous conditions. "Travel in the younger sort is a kind of education," says Bacon. But this is also true of adults, although not to the same extent. The trains daily carry numbers of Bantu men and women away from their homes to foreign climes where they imbibe new ways of doing and thinking about things, and when they return to their homes, they start to disseminate the knowledge thus gained with disastrous results to the old order of things. It is probably true to say that even in the remotest parts of South Africa the Bantu are no longer so simple-minded and "unspoilt" as our white politicians would like them to remain.

(b) With regard to the young people it must be remembered that a large number of them attend educational institutions of one kind or another, and consequently away from their parents for long periods of time; in the meantime the school authorities act in loco parentis, and rightly or wrongly, give the Bantu an opportunity of knowing things which are not found in his home environment. He becomes accustomed to the ease and comfort of western life, to enlightened methods of treating the young, assimilates European ideas of majority and minority, and becomes in effect, much to the disappointment of shortsighted students of the Native Question, a new Native.

(c) With school over, the young people join the multitude of those who are earning their living. This is a new thing for Bantu youth. In the past they have assisted in the duties of the home and in that way have earned the right to live in the home and enjoy all its privileges, including for the young man the right to have his lobola paid by his father. But now they leave their homes and go and live an independent life away from parental control, sending a few
pounds home occasionally to help to support the family. In this way they de
dlop a strong sense of individuality and lose to a greater or less extent that
corporate sense which is such a vital element in the solidarity of the Bantu
family. Lobola still passes in the majority of Bantu marriages, with this diff-
ference that in the old days it was paid by the father of the bridegroom as he
was securing thereby an addition to his family and had to make good the loss
of the other family concerned. But today the young man must go to the Gold-
fields to find the lobola which his father merely hands over on his behalf.
The result is that the young married couple feel that they belong more to each
other than they do to the family of either. They set up their own home apart
from that of their parents and so become independent. Even those who do not
marry and are not called upon to live away from their parents soon learn that
according to European ideas the year 21 is the "great divide" to cross which will
set them free from the trammels of parental control. In the Transkeian Territo-
ries proclamation No. 140 of 1885 states "that all persons, male or female, when
they shall attain, or who shall have attained, the full age of twenty-years, shall
be deemed to have attained the legal age of majority". This has complicated the
problem of family discipline for the Bantu parent.

Now what are the problems arising out of these conditions?

1. The first difficulty that emerges is that of the clash of interests between
Youth and Age. Youth clamours for freedom and greater opportunities for self-
expression. Filled with the vigour and the idealism of those who are on the
threshold of life, the young people want to be allowed to do things, and they
will brook no interference and no suggestion from adults that their inexperi-
ence and immaturity might lead to failure. Now it is absolutely necessary for
people to have freedom if they are to develop. No proper development of person-
ality can take place in an atmosphere of compulsion and servitude. To the ex-
tent that the old life did not allow sufficient room for self-realisation, and
overestimated the virtue of self-negation it erred against youth, and has consequently to pay the penalty for doing so now that a reaction has set in. But freedom without is far worse than ruling with a rod of iron. This "UNCHARTERED freedom" not only tires, as Wordsworth teaches us, but throws a tremendous responsibility on our Youth. Many of them are not equal to the task of living by their lights and so directing their lives safely through the changes and chances of modern life. Hence there is apparent among the young people a lack of balance, a state of indecision and hesitancy about the great problems of modern civilisation which is fatal in these days. Hence they are subject to every wind of doctrine and circumstance, much to the despair of their parents who would fain see them develop into fine young men and women. Let me illustrate.

2. If you were to ask a group of Bantu youth what they considered to be their duty to their parents, you would probably find that they had not given the subject any serious thought, and contented themselves all along with demanding rights from their parents but ignored altogether the matter of their reciprocal duties. This was not the case in the olden days, and Bantu parents feel that it will be a sorry day from them when their children lose entirely that traditional respect for parental authority and that filial piety once so marked and now becoming so rare among them. A determined effort will have to be made to maintain and strengthen this bond between parent and child.

3. In other fields of life, there is the same absence of settled opinions among the young Bantu. The evil of strong Drink is rapidly gaining ground among our people. In the olden days there were drinking bouts occasionally, but it is common knowledge that the Beer which was used then was a mild beverage compared with the concoctions of today; moreover young people were not admitted to those parties except as attendants. Still if one wants to know how bad things could be even in those days, let him read the classic account given of them by Thomas Mofolo, the well known Mosotho author in his "Moeti oa Bochabela". But even
those disagreeable orgies were not as despicable to some as the spectacle of father, mother and children drinking together. This situation is becoming more common than is healthy for the race in both town and country. Here again we are dealing with, it would appear, with a reaction against the restraint and the repression of a past generation.

4. Perhaps an even more serious question among the Bantu is that of the relationship of the sexes. The writer is not one of those who hold to the theory that the Native in his "raw" state is a paragon of virtue, a child of innocence to whom sexual indiscretions were entirely unknown. The vocabulary of the Bantu languages alone contradicts this view. In that condition the Bantu regarded these matters largely from a non-moral, not to say immoral, point of view. Today we have the Christian ideal which brought with it a higher standard of sexual morals. But many of our Bantu Christians still continue to view this matter from a non-moral standpoint. Something needs to be done to correct this attitude. Some people would suggest a return to the old system when each sex seemed to be taught to regard the other as consisting of monsters of iniquity which needed to avoided as much as the hind legs of an ass. That it is argued, would at least prevent the regrettable incidents which are becoming so common in these days of freedom and licence. But these problems have to be solved, as Dr Aggrey used to say, by the algebraic method of elimination by substitution, not by repression. It ought not to be impossible to raise the tone of the relationships of our youth by giving them reasonable opportunities for the exercise of that natural interest which they have in one another. Perhaps the older generation could help to give the social gatherings of the youth a healthier tone by taking a greater interest in them, not for the purpose of espionage but by way of showing a sympathetic interest in the activities of their children. The same may be said of the Church. Being an organisation which stands for the highest and noblest things in men's lives, it does not seem to hold the Youth as it ought to.
In many churches the young people take no part in the life of the church except as members of the Church choir, Sunday School pupils or teachers or candidates for church membership. To create a proper interest among them, they must be made to feel that the church belongs to THEM as well as to the adults. They need to be catered for specially by the holding of such things as Young People Sundays, Church picnics, sacred concerts in which they play a large part. Preachers in their sermons must bear in mind that they are preaching to the youth of the parish as well as to the older people—in fine, every effort must be made to appeal to the imagination and the idealism and the knowledge of Youth if their interest in these organisations which work for their welfare is to be maintained.

5. A matter which is receiving more attention today than it used to is that of thrift. In these days of economic stress, people cannot learn too early nor too well the habit of thrift. Many Bantu youths when they become wage-earners have the idea that they have now reached the heaven of spending as much on themselves as possible. This is a shortsighted policy. The experience of men everywhere teaches us that in the life of everyone there are apt to occur periods of want which call for reserve from the individual. Woe unto the man in such a situation who finds that he has not learnt to put away something for the rainy day. Bantu youth need to be taught that well as they look when dressed in the expensive clothing they wear today, they could be more judicious in their expenditure of their hard-earned wages. Hence the importance of the Savings Clubs which are being organised in Bantu schools all over the country by the National Thrift Committee. The Bantu as a rule receive very meagre earnings. That is exactly why they need to learn as early as possible the habit of making a little go a long way. These matters are hardly ever referred to in the ordinary school life of the Bantu child on account of a fear that to do so would direct the attention of these "children of nature" unnecessarily towards the
material side of life whereas we want him to learn the lesson that a sterling character is worth more than much fine gold. But in my opinion the use of money is or can be as great a test of character as most things that we have to deal with in ordinary life. Bantu youths need more instruction in the value and advantages of such things as Banks, Insurance, the importance of the prompt payment of debts, the dangers of the hire-purchase system, the necessity of keeping trust moneys separate from one's own money—to mention only a few matters of great practical interest and value.

6. Something needs to be said also about the place which pleasure holds in the hearts and minds of Bantu youth. Modern life is by reason of its complexity and the rate at which it is lived, extremely taxing, and unless a healthy outlet is found for the emotions of modern individuals, they soon tend to become neurotic. Pleasure in all sorts of forms is supposed to provide this outlet. Yet if we look at the matter squarely we shall find that there is a danger of regarding pleasure as an end in itself, and not what it ought to be, merely as means to an end. As William James puts it, relaxation exists for the sake of work, and not vice versa. Pleasure can never take the place of work, and no effort should be spared in making the Bantu realise that while all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, all play and no work makes him a spineless sort of person who cannot make any contribution to the serious business of life. There is no gospel the Bantu need to learn more than that of hard sustained effort not for a day, a week or a year, but for the whole span of life. It is true that recreation among the Bantu still leaves much to be desired. It is only recently that municipalities and other responsible authorities have wakened to the necessity of providing the Bantu in their midst with increased facilities for sport in the hope that that will keep them away from becoming "ama-layita" (gangsters) as well as save them from being the victims of Communism and other so-called nefarious doctrines. All this is to the good, but we must
be on our guard against sacrificing our careers for sport and pleasure. A form of pleasure which is agitating the minds of all those interested in Bantu youth is Dancing. Dancing is an old institution among the Bantu; it played a great part in the life of the primitive Bantu, being used to inculcate the virtues of social communion and social solidarity by means of the performance of the same actions at the same time by a large number of people, accompanied by suitable music. All this was done under proper social control. Today at any rate among the civilized Bantu these so-called heathen dances are fast disappearing and they are being superseded by European forms of dancing. There are few things which appeal so much to Bantu youth as dancing. Almost every large town in South Africa now has its Bantu dancing clubs where the youth foregather to enjoy themselves every night. To see them in action reminds one of Byron's famous lines:—

"On with the dance! let Joy be unconfined, No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet To chase the glowing hours with flying feet."

Now in some of these Night Clubs things sometimes happen the thought of which murders sleep. Consequently Bantu parents and missionaries and municipal officials condemn them indiscriminately and recommend that they should be prohibited altogether. As things are today these abolitionists seem to be doomed to fail. The only method that has a chance of producing any satisfactory results is that of elimination by substitution, substituting dancing not with anything else—for nothing can take the place of dancing—but with better dancing. It is a case of casting out devils MM by Beelzebub, if you like. Both in urban and in rural districts this matter deserves more sympathetic attention than it has hitherto received. There are hardly any Native Institutions where it is even tolerated, to say nothing of being allowed. A recent attempt by a progressive principal to do this was met with strenuous opposition that it had to be abandoned. Yet it is a matter of common knowledge that during holidays, or when they have left school altogether, the scholars from these Institutions haunt the Night Clubs just as much as anybody else. Could not
these scholars, some of whom have excellent qualities for leadership, be taught while at school some of the better types of dancing so that when they go out they might be able to set a better standard for their fellows to emulate? Educated or "school" natives have very few forms of entertainment; part of the price they have to pay for their education is to deny themselves legitimate forms of enjoyment because they are open to abuse, and that not often by themselves. If it were not for the social laziness which is found among all communities—prohibition being the only thing that ever occurs to some people as a method of dealing with any reform—the writer feels that Dancing could be divorced from the evils which are supposed to be connected with it. The South African Native College ought to give a lead to the country in this matter.

In conclusion may I set down a few of the things which it seems to me are urgently required among the Bantu:—

(a) Community Halls in all locations and Reserves. The tendency at the present time is to clamour for the erection or establishment of these in towns, but the need for them is just as great in the rural districts. A Hall such as the one erected by the people of Ntselamanzi, a village a few miles from Lovedale, is a great necessity in rural areas. The Bantu Youth League of Natal has also recently erected such a Community House at Imbumbulu and the use that is being made of it by all kinds of organisations justifies its existence. The Johannesburg Social Centre, the Bloemfontein Community Hall, the Kimberley Abantu-Batho Hall, the recently opened Durban Bantu Social Centre all fill a definite need. Connected with such community centres must be organised Reading Clubs, Night Schools, Debating Societies, Farmers' Associations, etc.

(b) Savings Clubs, People's Banks, Burial Societies which are a step in the direction of Insurance.
CULTURE TRANSFERS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

I. LANGUAGE.

(a) From European to Bantu

Kereke, inya lava, isonto,

From Bantu to European.
(c) Increased facilities for Recreation of all kinds. These should not only take the form of games like football, tennis, and cricket, but also athletic sports like running, jumping, walking. Sports meetings of this kind have been organised in Durban and Johannesburg with great success. The Annual Athletic Meeting held on Dingaan's Day in Johannesburg is beginning to attract the attention of Native Institutions which are co-operating by sending teams of athletes to compete in the games.

(d) The encouragement of movements like the Pathfinders, Wayfarers, the Bantu Youth League, the Pioneer Movement. In all these as much as possible, Bantu leadership should be encouraged. The Bantu cannot develop self-reliance and self respect when they are always being led by Europeans, however sympathetic and helpful they might be.

The problems dealt with above are only some of those the Bantu have to face with regard to their youth. It is the duty of all interested in the future of South Africa to search for ways and means in which they can help the men and women of tomorrow to make the proper adjustment to the situation which they are facing. Unless these questions are settled in the right way, we are running the risk of producing a race lacking the good qualities which the Bantu prided themselves in the "good old days".