

## AFRICAN SURVEY

### The Native 'Intellectual' in South Africa

**I**N the traditional pattern of African society, the wisdom of the tribe resided in the innumerable customs and laws of the people. Their interpreters were the chiefs and their counsellors; to a lesser extent the witch-doctors and song makers. As contact with the white man progressed, particularly through education, the situation changed. The man who could read and write and, more especially, he who could pass on his knowledge to others, became the intellectual leader. Today, it is to a great extent the African teacher who is the intellectual amongst the African people.

In South Africa, with its population of nine million Africans, it is estimated that about half of the African children receive some form of education. This is a greater proportion than anywhere else in Africa. As in the rest of Africa, only a tiny proportion persevere to the end of secondary education. Even the average African teacher receives about four years less education than does his white counterpart.

There are just over twenty-six thousand African teachers in South Africa today. Their status varies from that of a poorly qualified village teacher to the isolated graduate teaching in a city secondary school. It is from the ranks of the best teachers that the majority of African intellectuals are drawn.

To them must be added certain elements amongst the some fifteen thousand clerical workers and ten thousand workers in shops. Apart from them, the number of professional men, such as doctors, lawyers, etc., is practically negligible. There are several reasons for this—educational, financial, as also the many restrictions imposed on Africans entering most professions.

Since teachers form the bulk of African intellectuals, it is pertinent to consider their position in society. In the first place, the African teacher is fundamentally the person who teaches the less educated to read and to write. He does so within a restricted framework of a school syllabus. Usually the African teacher is almost entirely occupied in his school. There is little time and, very often, little inclination, to do anything else but teach. The African teacher does, however, occupy an important position in his community. He is respected, often consulted and looked upon as being one of the most important persons, especially in small communities. This importance is due to the fact that the teacher stands between the past and the future. Tribal customs and ways of life have been broken down and the African is moving into a yet unknown world of values, customs and destiny. The teacher is an instrument of this change.

There are many difficulties warring against the African intellectual developing a genuine intellectual life. The major problem is a lack of

creative thought. As yet, generally speaking, the African has not taken the tools of learning and fashioned for himself a new medium of thought, expression and life. Perhaps it is too soon; perhaps the white man has placed only the non-essentials into the hands of the African.

Another difficulty is the lack of reading material—whether African, Western or international. By far the most popular reading at present is *Drum*, a highly sensational weekly with a circulation of a quarter of a million.

A third difficulty facing the African intellectual is his isolation—both from his own community and from the white man. This latter isolation is of particular significance. The African intellectual of South Africa rarely meets white men with similar interests or training. In the past, a few have done so through the two 'open' universities. And even this has now to cease. Due particularly to State restrictions, Africans rarely go overseas. Hence the African intellectual of South Africa usually does not possess that wide-ness and depth of understanding which is found, for instance, in West Africa where more than half of its university students still go to Europe for their studies. For this reason, the rise of a genuine African intelligentsia in South Africa is extremely remote. Another difficulty facing the African intellectual is in his living conditions. Frequently the African intellectual is obstructed through poverty and the need to support his many relatives. Finally, the African intellectual is frustrated—frustrated in himself because he is living in a period of transition, and by the lack of opportunity to do anything else but teach. To teach or to starve are for him common alternatives.

Because of this frustration, new leaders are emerging from among African intellectuals. They are the religious leaders and the politicians. The religious leaders have brought more than two thousand sects into existence. Politicians have established seven different African political movements in this country. Sometimes not well educated, these men are often nevertheless shrewd and intelligent.

What has been said of the African intellectual in general could also be said of the Catholic African sphere. The Church has taken its rightful place in the education of the Africans of this country. Before 1953, there were about seven hundred and fifty Catholic schools, almost forty of them being secondary. The Church ran six training colleges. Catholic university education is provided at Pius XII University College in Roma, Basutoland. Catholic African teachers, numbering well over two thousand, had their own organization—the Catholic African Teachers' Federation.

The contribution of the Church was impressive. Much of this contribution is now being whittled away. Nevertheless, the question may well be asked what the Church has effectively done to build up a Catholic African intelligentsia. There have been only a few Catholics who have made their name in the professions, in writing or in any form of creative activity. The Church has, perhaps, not adapted itself sufficiently; it has not catered adequately for the more intelligent. This is particularly true in the present situation, with the emergence of religious and political leaders. The Catholic African has frequently even been encouraged to form a Catholic

ghetto. His faith has isolated him from the things and people about him. Even that rich exchange with white people that should be a characteristic of the Church in such a country as South Africa has been denied to him.

The remedies for this situation are obvious. Catholic African intellectuals must be fostered, trained, encouraged and inspired. The Church, in its religious aspects as well as in its contact with society at large, must be placed in their hands. Intelligence is born of an integrated responsibility.

C. COLLINS

## POLISH OPINION

### And Quiet Flows the Vistula

FOND of potatoes and strong liquor, inefficient and optimistic, extremely good company but always late for appointments, oppressed through the centuries and Catholic almost to a man—the Polish people inevitably remind the casual Western observer of the Irish. But of course today their predicaments are very different. The presence (and that, in some respects, is about all it amounts to) of a Communist government confronts the Poles in general and Polish Catholicism in particular with an extraordinarily delicate situation. For the Poles have sought freedom for two centuries and tasted it for twenty years; and Poland, as any visitor will tell you, is the most Catholic country in Europe. Whether you go to Mass in the mountain village of Dcmbno (where five hundred years ago a captive artist was compelled, for his ransom, to paint the bandit's church, which task he performed by juxtaposing on the plain wooden roof the styles of half the world, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Persian, Jewish, Japanese—a rare synthesis indeed), where you watch the Gouralski (mountain-men) stand so close that you sweat and cannot move, and kneel around the doorways, while their singing almost deafens you; or whether you are in Warsaw, and find that you can never sight-see the churches because they are always inhabited by people at prayer—you will be overwhelmed by the devotion of the Poles to their religion. The peasants are traditionally Catholic; the new industrial workers and the various classes of town-dwellers take Catholicism into the life of the urban quarters. It is said that more people go to church than before the war. The story is told of a pre-war atheist who now attends church, and, when asked by his atheist friends for the reason, replies, 'I too am against the régime'.

The unpopularity of the régime does in some ways help the Church. Atheist social reform has not the intellectual and moral appeal that it has in the West. Of the many people we met and worked with in Poland, only one was a Marxist; and he behaved rather like an Old Etonian, being the only person I remember who, when asked what he studied and where, said politely 'Why do you want to know?' One meets several people who sympathize with some of the policies of the Government; and what sane person would not admire its achievement in, for instance, education? But