

NAUGHT FOR YOUR COMFORT

Fr. Huddleston's Book on White and Black South Africa

FR. TREVOR HUDDLESTON, CR, has been known throughout South Africa, and in countries far removed from South Africa, as a man who has raised his voice for the African people. He will now be known for a book*, a cry, an indictment.

This volume comes from heart and soul and bitter experience. It is a personal book. It goes into generalizations when it must: but it is chiefly concerned with the Africans whom Fr. Huddleston himself has loved and served in the townships, slums and locations round Johannesburg, that "fabulous city of gold," where there is "so much wealth and so much wickedness."

Fr. Huddleston has been for over twelve years in South Africa: lately he has been the Provincial of the Community of the Resurrection there. Now he has been recalled by the community in which, fifteen years ago, he made his vow of obedience.

"Look thy last on all things lovely every hour," he quotes, and continues: "It is that vow of obedience which alone gives a man strength, when he most needs it, to die by parting from what he loves. Nothing else could have torn me away from Africa at this moment. And no other motive but a supernatural one could be sufficient or strong enough to make sense of such a parting."

All that the author writes is a particular judgment on the Government of South Africa and its policy of *apartheid*—the pass laws, the education for inferiority, the bullying, the suppression of a people, with not a few camouflaged murders thrown in. As each example is given, simply, with few but piercing words, the reader finds a righteous anger rising thick in his throat, and he begins to understand what a man must have felt walking day by day in streets of crime, poverty and frustration.

Wantonly Torn Up

Take a straightforward example. It describes without emotion the boarding-school boy, Jonas, arrested one day during the holidays and charged with being a "vagrant." Fr. Huddleston found him in a cell, and asked where was his precious, inevitable, most-important-of-all "pass," which no African must ever be without. (If a man goes out for five minutes to a shop round the corner, he must have a pass on him, or he may be arrested, fined or imprisoned.)

"They tore it up," said the boy. And there, in a wastepaper basket nearby, Fr. Huddleston found the pass in four pieces. He retrieved it, and refused to surrender it to the sergeant-in-charge, and was arrested himself. In this case, he had the satisfaction of a cap-in-hand apology from the commandant next morning. "Yet for every boy like Jonas, whose arrest was reported to me, there are a thousand who have no one to care, a thousand for whom a torn-up pass might mean ten days in prison, the loss of a job, the beginning of that swift and terrible journey into crime."

For beside the story of Jonas is the description of the *isotsis*, whom he has seen. *Tsotsis* are delinquent youths, of terrifying violence. They are, in fact, youth rotting away from frustration, idleness, lack of work, lack of justice, lack of education, lack of any sense in life. (Only one child in three among urban Africans can go to school, because of overcrowding.) *Tsotsis* are bred among a people who live under a social religion of *Baasskap*—White boss-ship as an immutable law of nature. They are in revolt against a frustration which, apparently, cannot be cured or relieved. They turn on their own people with knives and sharpened bicycle spokes. They kill, and they slip silently away into the night and back "home."

"Home"

It is perhaps the description of "home" that is one of the most poignant parts of Fr. Huddleston's book, and must be read in detail to be understood. He speaks primarily of Sophiatown, because it has been his love. This African slum was planned as a European suburb: but when it became apparent that the sewage disposal of Johannesburg must be in the neighbourhood, Sophiatown ceased to be of interest to the Whites, and the Blacks moved in. They were even allowed to buy their bits and pieces of land freehold, to put their houses on.

But as the labour problem grew, and more Africans crowded into Johannesburg, Sophiatown became overcrowded to the limit. Tin or hessian huts were erected in the tiny spaces between the houses and huts. But worse. White Johannesburg was spreading west, round both sides of Sophiatown. An African island of land could not be tolerated. So instead of clearing up the slums decently, and bit by bit for the Africans, the Western Areas Act took at a stroke freehold, homes, land and people. The Africans were evicted bodily to a location where they had no freehold.

But the book also speaks of the old locations, where there never had been any freehold—and especially of Newclare. This shanty town was recently

terrorised by a band of thugs, whom (the author asserts) the police would take no proper steps to suppress. African families, afraid for life and limb, moved out of the area to the only place available, a vacant plot called Reno Square, about the size of a football field. Within a week, fifteen hundred people were living there, and later over two thousand. There they were stranded at the beginning of a high-welt winter, their only protection hessian sacks stretched across two sticks for some, for others flattened biscuit tins nailed together, and for a favoured few the shelter of one brick wall.

Insanitary conditions, cold, sickness and filth were the result. The authorities thought up no solution except the deportation of the whole group to a place beyond Pretoria, fifty miles away, where there was no work. Largely through the persistence and intervention of Fr. Huddleston, the squatters remained where they were for six months, in order that some kind of justice might be sought. The place became a sodden, muddy patch of ground with its mass of pitiful shelters. Finally the people were moved, by an eviction order, to an existing urban location at Moroka, to raise new shacks from the new mud.

Jobs Lost

Here, sixty-thousand others from a previous squatter movement resented the new intrusion. The families from Newclare were pushed anywhere where there was a scrap of room; they had lost their jobs; their children had lost their places at school, for they could not travel every day back to Newclare, and the Moroka schools were full twice over.

Fr. Huddleston tells the unsavoury story because it is, he says, an excellent example of the result of *apartheid* policy.

For if you really believe in *apartheid* as Dr. Verwoerd believes in it: if you really believe in White supremacy as Mr. Strijdom believes in it; then you are not concerned with persons as persons, and you cease to be concerned with justice as justice. These things become secondary. Persons become pawns in a political manoeuvre, and justice becomes a ludicrous parody of all that civilized countries understand by the term.

So the book proceeds. It tells about education and churchgoing; about taking the Most Blessed Sacrament to Africans in their tin-box houses; of hearing confessions; of starting a brass band; of obtaining (extraordinary triumph) an African swimming bath; of the power station at the gate of African Orlando, which supplies electricity to White Johannesburg, while Orlando itself is lit by candle or paraffin lamps; of the boy who won a scholarship to a good American school, so that he could have a decent education, and how he was refused a passport.

Church's Part

And what of religion? The writer lays the sin of *apartheid* largely at the door of the Calvinistic theology of the Dutch Reformed Church. But he speaks mostly about the Anglican Communion, for it is that to which he

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* *Naught for your Comfort.* By Trevor Huddleston, CR. (Collins, 12s. 6d.)