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## THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY AFRIKANDER.

*[The writer of this article is a loyal Churchman holding an important official position in South Africa.]*

THE position of affairs in the Church of England may be critical. The reaction towards the pagan excrescences, foisted on Christianity by Rome in the thirteenth century, may be gathering in volume. In England, however, the essentially Protestant character of the democracy will ever be a bulwark against that "reconciliation" of which we hear so much these days.

In South Africa it is different. The English Church had from the beginning a very difficult task to essay. The Dutch inhabitants were always Calvinist, and are so to-day. The Reformation settlement of the Tudor and Stuart periods seemed, and seems to them, to extend too much to what Continental peoples call the extreme right. It was very unlikely that the English Church would gain a footing in their ranks. It is—unless a great change occurs—absolutely impossible now.

Amongst the English settlers a different state of affairs prevails. The older families are what are called Churchgoers, and while their influence prevailed the ultramontane trend made no progress. With the rise of democracy, the growth of towns, and the emergence from the cities of a new class of rural adventurer, these families are slowly disappearing. It may be frankly stated that the democracy of South Africa is irreligious. It is rare to find an English boy with a knowledge of the Bible. Few, very few artisans in Johannesburg go to church. The greater part of the shopkeepers and civil servants of Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria go on excursions, or play golf or tennis on Sunday mornings. The attitude of the average man is that the Church is a place where his wife and children may resort on Sundays. He ignores it, and justifies his indifference by the very low intellectual standard of the bulk of the clergy. In this he is, alas! justified. I do not know one—and I know many—who got a good degree at Oxford or Cambridge, and the majority could not get a B.A. at any of the South African Universities.

So far from the Church deliberately attempting to do mission work among the rude settlers—this is, of course, a new civilization—so far from attempting to secure a powerful influence among the miners and "nouveaux riches" of Johannesburg, such as the Dutch Predicants have over their own race, it started on a definite pro-Roman crusade, under pressure from the Anglo-Catholic section, who had no stern Churchwardens to hold them in check. This Anglo-Catholic crusade will never bring the English democracy to church. A very modern country such as this instinctively shrinks from the mummery of the Middle Ages, just as it revolts from the

customs of the Kaffirs. These things may have done for twelfth century Europe. They repel South Africa of to-day. As a missionary force amongst a race struggling hard with nature and terrible economic problems, the English Church here has failed. On Sunday the bells ring. The women and children, with an occasional Anglo-Catholic, adjourn to some side street church. The English world goes elsewhere, and the Dutch churches are thronged with men and women listening to the Bible being read and expounded.

The following facts will show I am not exaggerating. One of these clergymen told me that a proof of the decline in the number of English in the Free State was that the number of communicants had dropped. An official in the Administrator's office told me that, on the contrary, the number of English had considerably increased. This new population either abstains from church, or resorts to the Presbyterians and the Wesleyans, and the English communicants decline. The service in the Cathedral at Bloemfontein is an exact replica of the Roman Mass. The clergy of Bloemfontein call it "a Mass." The Bishop of Bloemfontein, the Right Rev. Dr. Carey, informed his Synod last year that he hoped for a Millennium when "the Pope would be the Primate" of all Christianity. Is it any wonder the number of communicants drops?

What is yet more serious is that the country cannot produce English clergymen. The Church has subsidized schools to impress on the young the doctrines of the Mediterranean. It has paid the fees of boys on a pledge that they will enter the Church. It keeps a theological school in the Cape to provide clergymen. South African born clergymen are rare—very rare. When the youth comes to years of discretion he revolts. On the contrary, we have a constant immigration of Anglo-Catholic curates. They arrive absolutely out of touch with the country, and are, I fear, weaker brethren who were not a success in England. At the Transvaal University College and at Potchefstroom College the Dutch have Divinity Schools. Of the culture and knowledge of their lecturers I speak with the greatest respect. Contrasted with the lecturers at Grahamstown they are giants. They turn out every year about half a dozen men, who must know Greek, Latin and Hebrew, who must reach a much higher standard than the Oxford B.A., who, born and bred in the country, have a great influence in their parishes, and who have a wonderful influence among their parishioners.

The English Church has become the handmaid of Anglo-Catholicism. It is dominated by the sacerdotal curate and his ritual. Parish after parish has fallen beneath their sway, and in another generation the Church of South Africa will "reconciliate." Up till now the sole obstacle is that Rome will not recognize their orders. Given that sop to their vanity, there will be no English Church in South Africa. This may seem a wild statement. I am now in one of the largest towns in South Africa, and there is not a Church I can go to. At every one we have candles, copes, vestments, and processions. Time was when I bore these things, but how can one keep a peaceful frame of mind when the Bible is sneered at as

being an unsafe guide, when confession is urged from the pulpit, when glorifications of Rome are the underlying theme of every sermon? Last year a Dutch Predicant had to protest in the Press against a speech of the Bishop of Pretoria, in which the Bible was attacked with cheap references to Jonah and the whale. When I was in another city a friend desired to be married. We had to search it from end to end for a clergyman who would not inflict on us "a nuptial mass," and at last we got one. He was an Irishman who had no time for these things. In my personal circle I know three families who have within the last five years been compelled to join the Presbyterians.

This business of "the validity of orders" has led to a situation which would be comical if it were not so humiliating. The Church of Rome recognizes the Greek Church. Unable to get a recognition from Rome, the clergy here are making desperate efforts to get an introduction to Rome by means of the Greek priests. The overwhelming majority of the Johannesburg clergy will not take part in a joint service with a Presbyterian or Wesleyan minister. If one of them does so, he is treated as a vulgar fellow. Armistice Day celebrations and similar festivals are always marred by this wrangle. They will come if they are allowed to take the whole service. Committees have to search the highways for the one or two clergy who are more human. At a Boy Scout ceremony the Church of England boys were kept away from the opening service, and trooped in when over, lest they should be contaminated by the Wesleyan parson. If the Greek Church, however, holds any ceremony of blessing ikons or processing with pictures, they all arrive in a body. At the Church of England schools a Wesleyan is anathema. A boy who will not go to confession is regarded with suspicion. A Greek boy, however, is welcomed with open arms, and that in a country where Greeks are not popular. This coterie of clergy have definitely turned the Church away from Englishmen and English traditions, and turned it into a Mediterranean institution to which all are welcome if they bring in Mediterranean ideas, about which the less said the better. The steady exclusion of the Englishman is accompanied by something worse. Faced with a declining English congregation, these clergy have been trying to fill their places with Kaffirs. Of that I make no complaint, except that I would say that the prospects of Christianity would be safer if every Englishman were a Christian, than if the fickle Kaffirs were Christians and all the Englishmen sceptics. The Kaffir is very easily attracted by ritual. As a congregation they never criticize. To the Anglo-Catholic mind it is much better to have a Kaffir than a white congregation. It is easier to "reconciliate" a Kaffir Church than an English congregation. Accordingly, the clergy of the English Church here have been trying to substitute for the influence they have lost with the whites a kind of popular control of the Kaffir.

Few people in England know what a terrible problem is this colour one. We are surrounded and threatened by a predominant majority of human beings whose brains and morals are those of

primitive man. No woman can go out after sunset. No woman can be left in a house alone with a native servant. We have to adopt the most rigid social rules to prevent a copper-coloured civilization arising, a civilization that would perish in a decade. The great difficulty is how to rule this race with absolute justice and at the same time protect ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

Into this very delicate question these clergymen have rushed, posing as champions of the blacks against white oppression, delivering speeches in public which cause the greatest unrest amongst this excitable population. Where every expert on the question maintains the most careful reticence and works by visiting the Native Affairs Department to remedy a grievance, these clergy of the Anglo-Catholic school have stormed the platforms. The Free State Synod in a public debate created a committee to supervise magistrates, and agitate where they thought the magistrate was wrong, thus impeaching the administration of the law before the eyes of a very lawless people. In one wild outburst one of the leaders of Anglo-Catholicism stated that the tyranny of the white was so great that "native children ran off the roads when they saw one coming!" At a terrible drinking riot in the Bloemfontein Location, the police had to order the Bishop to withdraw, as he had come forward as a native protector, urging the police not to enter the Location and arrest the offenders. To protect the native against white exploitation is one of the first duties of a Christian, but the sudden appearance in the last decade of sacerdotal agitators, harping on the tyranny of white government, is fraught with the gravest danger. The best friends of the natives are paralysed when one of these curates puts himself at their head. In Protestant countries one of the greatest difficulties is the broils created by Roman Catholic priests in order to shake the Government. In this country the Anglo-Catholic priests, who are allowed no influence in affairs of State, have been playing with native sedition for their own ends. One thing should be noted. At the Bloemfontein riot not a single native of the Dutch Churches took part.

If as a result of clerical agitation among the natives an outbreak occurs—and a native outbreak means unspeakable horrors—and this is attributed to the Church of England, what effect will it have on the minds of the rising generation in South Africa? We all know that Christianity is at a low ebb in South Africa. This will be its final blow and the inevitable triumph of materialism, because, wherever Romanism gets the upper hand in a Church or a country, it so crushes Christianity that on the day of the inevitable collapse of the sacerdotal autocracy there is no alternative for the private person but materialism.

[<sup>1</sup> *The Race Problem in S. Africa* (2s. 6d. net), by the Rev. W. A. Cotton (Community of the Resurrection), shows how one Anglo-Catholic views the question of the relation of the races.—EDITOR.]