

The Star

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Moral Re-Armament stories—III

A FARMER USED TO EXPLOIT HIS LABOURERS

TO THE UTMOST BUT NOW—

Natives flock to his farm at Ermelo

MR. N. is a potato farmer in the Ermelo district. The story of his changed life, since he came into contact with M.R.A., is so well known, among those who are friends or neighbours as well as among hundreds of Natives, that actually there is no necessity for my discreet anonymity in referring to him.

Some years ago Mr. N. took to court a bitter feud he had been waging for some time with his neighbour, over a right of way through his lands. He won the case, but it was a Pyrrhic victory since his conscience told him that he was not entitled to it.

Self torments of this nature explain a lot. They probably explain why Mr. N. exploited his Natives to the utmost, not paying them when he could avoid doing so, and beating them on the slightest provocation.

They explain, too, no doubt, his unconcern about the welfare of his land, for under his careless, antiquated methods of quick-profit-seeking farming the earth virtually cried out.

Flock for jobs

ALL things considered, then, it was a happy day for a number of people concerned when Mr. N. came into contact with M.R.A. and completely succumbed

by

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to their ideological reasonings with him. To-day the Natives in that district flock for jobs to this Ermelo farm, while neighbouring farmers still find the labour shortage acute.

The earth under proper care is flourishing and Mr. N.'s neighbour has access again to the road that rightfully belonged to both of them.

M.R.A. annals are full of this type of individual story. Another tells about a Rand brickmaker who almost came to blows with a Witwatersrand Town Council official when the latter expressed his candid opinion that the brickmaker was turning out inferior bricks. So too, he now admits, he was. More than that, he was also turning out inferior Native workers by reason of his complete dis-

regard of the elementary rights of the human person.

To-day as a result of his change of heart under M.R.A. influence, this brickmaker is bringing about great improvements in his industry as well as for his Natives, and their new living quarters are open for anyone's inspection.

Stories on record

AS I say, these stories are on record, and they are the type of story best known to people only superficially interested in M.R.A. What is not so widely known is the story of the deeper repercussions of incidents like these on the Native population in many parts of the Union.

In Durban for example: When M.R.A. paid that city a visit, they were approached by a well-known Native agitator, C., of the Kadalie school. He was not interested in what they had to sell spiritually. His quest was strictly based on doing some profitable business with them.

Imbued with a virulent hatred of the Afrikaans farmer, C. had learnt that many of the M.R.A. overseas team were Americans, and somewhat naively he sought them out to ask whether they would help him buy and import firearms from America into the Union.

THAT a farmer of Mr. N.'s (of Ermelo) spiritual calibre could exist at all was beyond this African's wildest conceptions of the White man. Nonetheless, he was brought face to face with Mr. N., and in due course his ideas began to change.

A few weeks ago Mr. N. received a letter from the one-time agitator in which he asked — again that pathetically naive tone—“is there any chance of an old African like me to get converted.”

“Upper class”

THE criticism has arisen that M.R.A. is directed mainly to the “upper classes,”—an impression that is aggravated by the

emphasis given to the V.I.P.s that attend their gatherings.

When I pointed this out to M.R.A. spokesmen they set about returning it with evidence of the tremendous impact M.R.A. has had with Natives throughout South Africa.

Old tribal feuds are said to have melted away under the new influence. The personal stories here, again, are too numerous to detail, but it is a fact that when M.R.A. presented its play “The Forgotten Factor” in Durban last year, on the night before “Freedom Day” and within a few yards of where it was anticipated riots would break out, the Police reported that the play was one of the main factors in quelling the trouble.

The Gandhi Hall on that occasion was packed with an audience of such conflicting faiths and interests, that it is a wonder a riot did not break out in its premises. Africans of assorted tribes—Communists among them—Muslims, Hindus sat shoulder to shoulder and M.R.A. consider that they comprised the most responsive audience yet experienced in this country.

Industrial

PERFORMANCES of the play have been held for Native audiences in industrial centres and in their educational institutions. “One reason why we Bantus do not get farther is that we do not agree among ourselves,” one Native spokesman remarked. “If a Zulu is chairman of a council, the Basutos will not co-operate, and if a Basuto is chairman, the Zulus walk out. Since we saw “The Forgotten Factor” we have had the best meeting of our township council.”

An Indian spokesman has described M.R.A. as “a light in this dark and stormy world of ours, and it will guide us the right way. We feel that the darkness that surrounded our hearts has been lifted.”

The authorities at Payneville too report greatly improved relationships with the Advisory Council since M.R.A. influence has made itself felt.