

hardloop!" The boys pause from their work, laughing at the mimic. "Any chance of a job?" they ask. Only a year ago they swaggered with the shine of their city experience. "You wouldn't work on a farm!" "Wouldn't we? Times have changed. Why do you think we are making this garden. We are desperate. Sididigile."

Our farm adjoins Msinga and for the purpose of this article we attempted a census of a valley community with 70 homes — 1 000 people. Thirty householders had answered questions before doors were shut against us. "Questions are dangerous," somebody told somebody. "Whenever the government is going to throw people off the land it first asks questions. Who's the kraalhead? How many in the family? Who is away working? Answer questions like that and the next thing you know the lorries will be here to take us away."

Ten of the 30 kraals which answered our questions had unemployed men sitting at home. There were some odd discrepancies in the information they offered. "You say there has been no money since you were sacked last December but every month you go to the store to buy mieliemeal? How do you pay for it?"

"That's none of your business."

"I don't know."

"There are ways."

"We just had the money."

Which means dagga of course. Msinga is subsidized by dagga, a high-risk but high paying crop that thrives in the

nooks and crannies of the steep, hot slopes.

While we could not offer jobs to all the jobless, we made an offer instead to help them grow food. Were there any volunteers to dig communal water furrows? There could be no payment for the work. Now **that** is the way to assess the unemployment problem. Twenty men came from one community. Thirty from another. Forty . . . Young men, middle-aged men, and a few who had been forced to retire early. They were neatly dressed, with city skills, and looked oddly out of place now that they were home. Yet for weeks they have been wielding picks and spades chipping hollows in the rocky earth.

One man on a dig asked for help with his unemployment insurance. "When I left, my company told me I must take this letter to my Bantu Affairs Commissioner to get my insurance but although I have been every month there has been no money yet." Soon we had a book of similar complaints. It is a one rand busride to the Commissioner's office and men have run out of busfare money. We got on the telephone on their behalf to an official who assured us that all the men had to do was come in with the letter from their previous employers and the insurance would be paid out. "Have there been more claims than usual lately," we asked. "Well yes," said the official cautiously. "Why do you want to know? Anyway we can't give you any figures."

Nobody will ever have figures for rural areas like Msinga. You are easily forgotten when you live among the hills. □

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

A Review of *A SOUTH AFRICAN PILGRIMAGE*, by Edgar Brookes (Ravan Press)

by Colin Gardner

I

This is a fine autobiography by a very distinguished man. It is, in several senses of the word, a modest book: it is fairly short (150 pages); it is consciously limited in its scope and aims; and the author's attitude is throughout humble and self-questioning. But it contains a wealth of human truth and some profound and moving meditations on society and politics.

There are different sorts of autobiography. At the one extreme, there is the book which attempts to give a full account of an era, almost a work of history; at the other extreme, there is the one which attempts to analyse many of the complex workings of the subject's mind and heart, almost a work of psychology. Edgar Brookes's book is both historical and psychological, as well as theological and to some extent philosophical; but essentially it focusses upon the evolution of the author's political views and upon his not inconsiderable contributions (the judgment is mine) to the life of South African society. From first to last Edgar Brookes has been a dedicated searcher: the title — *A South African Pilgrimage* — is exactly right.

II

The journey begins just after the turn of the century (Brookes was born in 1897). The picture that is given of Edwardian white Natal is quietly devastating, and yet one can't help wondering whether the attitudes to be found in Pietermaritzburg today are always so very different from those that are evoked. Of his schooling, for example, we read this:

At no time can I remember any study of African or Indian languages or customs, or of our relationship to the African or Indian races, nor even our relationship to our fellow white man of Afrikaans speech. We were not particularly anti-Afrikaans, anti-Indian or anti-African. It was just that all this was irrelevant to Cicero, England and real life. (p. 5)

There are differences now, of course: Cicero and England have largely disappeared. But what has taken their place?

Brookes's criticism of the world of his childhood is not bitter or 'superior', however; he is too good an historian and too compassionate a man to indulge in the simpler

pleasures of hindsight. He records gently and accurately a view of things which was to be found at the time in many parts of the world:

When the First World War burst on us we were most of us uncritical of the world in which we lived. The strange structure of Africa in 1914 when there were only two independent states, Liberia and Ethiopia, each of which appeared to be something of a joke, was taken by us for granted. We could live among the humbled Zulus and the defeated Afrikaners, not indeed with prejudice against them, but with no ear to hear their heart-beats, with complacency and an unarticulated feeling that they were lucky to be in the British Empire.

My contemporaries were not villains. They were of their time. I by the grace of God have been awakened and helped to move with the times, and I rejoice for this because it shows that others can be similarly helped. (p. 14)

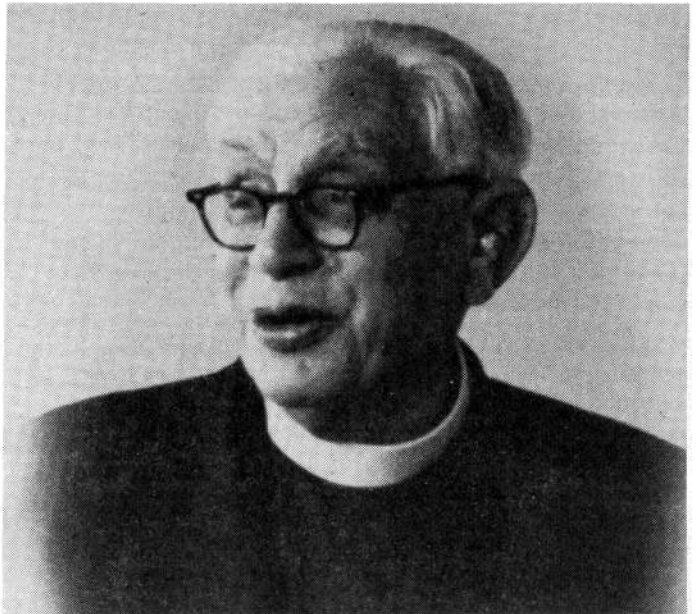
His parents being too poor to send him to the newly-formed Natal University College, Brookes worked in the Department of Customs and Excise for seven years, first in Durban, then in Pretoria. During these years, he spent a period in the army, and also studied as an external student at the University of South Africa. In 1920 he attained first an M.A. and then a lectureship at the Transvaal University College, later to become the University of Pretoria.

At the University he encountered for the first time what one might call the Afrikaner myth, and he fell under its spell. It is understandable that a sympathetic and imaginative young Natalian should have done so: the British record in the Transvaal, once one looked at it carefully, was not wholly impressive. He learned Afrikaans, became friendly with prominent Afrikaners, and began to be regarded by many of his English South African associates as a renegade. His PhD. thesis, **The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day**, worried his publishers, and was brought out with the aid of funds secured by General Hertzog; and this is hardly surprising, for it propounded an early version of the theory of separate development. Brookes writes of this period in his life with simple humility:

Thus it came to pass that in my thesis I came down too often on the side of policies which I have spent much of my mature life in opposing. I could have been more extreme than in fact I was, but it remains true that I was on the wrong side in matters of vital importance. (p. 20)

In 1926, not long after the publication of the book, Hertzog put before Parliament some bills which were the forerunners of the famous 1936 bills; and Brookes supported him:

Over this period I should like to draw a veil, were this an honest thing to do. As far as I can remember one of the motives which led me to support the Bills was the exhilarating feeling of being a kind of power behind the throne since the Land Bill embodied a 'solution' of the land question put forward in my **History of Native Policy**. I am sure, too, that at this time political ambition was very strong in me. How grateful I am that General Hertzog did nothing to encourage my desire to enter Parliament, for if I had done so I should almost certainly have become enmeshed in Nationalist politics, and though I hope and believe that I should ultimately have broken away from them the process would have been harder



Edgar Brookes

Joe Alfers

and more painful than my actual change of opinion was.

Apart from the desire to be honest, and to undergo the penitential discipline of acknowledging my wrong actions, I feel that this fairly artless account of what happened over forty years ago may serve to show the changes which can take place in one man's life. The pilgrimage from supporting the Hertzog Bills to being National Chairman of the Liberal Party is a pretty long one. (p. 23)

That, certainly, is one of the most revelatory moments in the book. The theme of political ambition is one that runs through the whole narrative; so is that of religious searching. Later they almost merge, however, as ambition modulates into a desire to do the best thing in the circumstances.

But for the time being Brookes appeared to be riding the crest of a wave. In 1923 he has been made professor; in 1927 he was one of the South African delegates at the League of Nations.

A representative in the world's highest Assembly of a still respected South Africa at the age of thirty, what could I not expect to be at forty or fifty? But life turned out otherwise. I have once or twice in my life been quite markedly a coming man. Then I became an elder statesman. The intermediate stage of having 'arrived' was missing. And this is the mercy of God who knew what successful ambition would mean to my real self and saved me from success. (p. 32)

The inner tide began to turn very soon, however — indeed in 1927 itself, with a visit to America. What he saw and learned on that trip, together with the influence of Christianity which had always been a living reality for him, made him begin to revise his views. Within a year or two the direction of his political thinking had become liberal. In 1929 he was one of the founder members of the Institute of Race Relations. It is at this stage in the book that we find the first of many comments on the forlorn optimism of people like himself:

We who founded the Institute leant too heavily — it was in the years before Hitler — on the reasonableness of the average human being. We believed in the liberal principle, endorsed by the Fabian Society, of 'measurement and publicity'. Collect all the facts and let them be known, and all will be well. Plato in his

view that knowledge is virtue fell into the same error.
(p. 43)

From this point onwards the tone of the narrative is often sad, in fact tragic: in what other spirit could a sensitive liberal respond to the history of the last fifty years?

And yet that is not the whole of the picture. Interwoven with the main thread of the story are many strands of personal fulfilment: a happy marriage, five children, many friendships. At one point, indeed, the author declares that he is 'fundamentally a happy man' (p. 56).

With his new allegiances, life at the University became awkward. In 1933 he resigned, and, after a year and a half collecting funds for the Institute of Race Relations, he plunged — a little hesitantly — into a wholly new way-of-life by becoming Principal of Adams College at Amanzimtoti. Brookes describes his eleven years at this institution (a combined high school, teachers' training college and industrial school for Africans) as the happiest of his life; and the pages that are devoted to these years make it easy for the reader to believe this. They are full of vivid evocations, lively character-sketches and touching or amusing anecdotes. Even this, however, becomes in the end a part of the general desolation:

All these happy things have passed. Butchered to make an ideologist's holiday, the old missionary schools and colleges have, with a very few exceptions, gone. Adams celebrated its centenary in 1953: it was closed in 1956. (p. 56)

In 1937 Brookes became one of the new representatives of Africans in the Senate. It was an interesting, taxing, often frustrating job; and he describes it clearly and soberly. Some things the African representatives managed to achieve, unobtrusively; the author served on a number of important commissions; but he has come to realize that they were attempting the impossible:

I do not think that we can acquit ourselves of the charge of being too optimistic, nor can we be found innocent of the accusation of not knowing our own countrymen well enough. We did not fully realise the strength and extent of fear, prejudice, and the desire for self-preservation at all costs. (p. 91)

Like so many liberal whites at the time, they were kept going by the leadership and example of Jan Hofmeyr; but 1948 brought the victory of Malan and the death of Hofmeyr. After that, life in the Senate became steadily less tolerable. In 1952 Brookes suffered a coronary thrombosis, and resigned his seat.

The last part of the story I shall summarize briefly, as it is probably fairly well known to many readers of **Reality**. In 1954 Brookes became senior lecturer in History and Political Science at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and in 1959 professor and head of the department; he discusses some of the problems of the universities in South Africa. In 1961 he was the chairman of the Natal Convention. In 1962 he joined the Liberal Party, and in 1964 (with the banning of Peter Brown) he became its National Chairman. Meanwhile he had been co-author of the **History of Natal** (one of his many books), and had also travelled, as visiting professor, to New Zealand, England and North America. After his retirement he taught divinity at St John's Girls' High School. Last (or most recently) but not least, at the age of 76 he was ordained as a priest of the Church of the Province.

The most striking pages in the final chapters are those devoted to an honest, patient, often pained analysis of the dilemma and the achievements of liberals. Were they right? Did they employ the right approach? What else could they have done in the circumstances? Was it all worthwhile? And what does one do now? What does the future hold? Should one leave the country? These questions are not posed in the abstract, as mere topics for some politics seminar: they have all the urgency and the poignancy of personal self-assessment. A scrupulous and wholly serious man, in old age, questions the very direction that his life has taken.

To most of the questions there are and can be no simple answers, and Edgar Brookes does not allow himself easy consolations. But two general conclusions stand out firmly for him and (I think) for the involved or sympathetic reader. One is that, for a Christian, what appears to be a personal defeat may nevertheless be in some sense a victory:

I am very grateful to William Temple for making it clear that Calvary was not a failure to be reversed by the victory of the Resurrection, but that Calvary was itself the victory, with the Resurrection as the lovely and sacramental confirming of it.

So I turn away as far as I myself am concerned from the Emperor Joseph II's description of himself as 'a prince who was full of good intentions but who failed in everything that he undertook'. This description has often, too often, seemed to me to be true of myself, but it is not God's word for me.

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove:
As He pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed.
(pp. 118-9)

The other conclusion is that one simply has to carry on struggling and fighting for what one believes to be right. In the first page of the book we are told that the author's father had been a soldier. One of the anecdotes from his days at Adams College shows Brookes on a long walk with his seven-year-old daughter, after they had lost their way:

She was sturdy and courageous, but it was a long walk for a child. I had to invent ways of amusing her, so I made up a song which we sang together as we tramped:

Keep on keeping on,
Don't go weeping on,
Don't go sleeping on,
Keep on keeping on.

This Shakespearean lyric, which I think is not a bad motto for life, got us to the beach . . . (p. 53)

Just before the end of the book Brookes offers us his own epitaph. It is taken from Matthew Arnold, and the military image is surely significant:

They out-talked thee, hissed thee, tore thee.
Better men fared thus before thee,
Fired their ringing shot and passed,
Hotly charged — and broke at last.

Charge once more, then, and be dumb.
Let the victors, when they come,
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body by the wall. (pp. 151-2)

So Edgar Brookes is to be seen — and I think richly deserves to be seen — not simply as a South African pilgrim but as a Christian soldier too.

I have concentrated on what might be called the main story-line, but of course the book isn't all about Edgar Brookes. It contains, for example, numerous sketches of the people he knew and worked with. Sometimes one is disappointed by the brevity of these sketches; but this brevity seems to have been dictated partly by the author's clear sense of his main theme, partly by the modesty of the whole enterprise. Still, one must be grateful for the number and the variety of the portraits: C. T. Loram, Rheinallt Jones, Jabavu, Z. K. Matthews, Luthuli, Mrs Ballinger, Smuts, Hofmeyr, E. G. Malherbe, Peter Brown, Alan Paton, to name only those who are well-known.

It is a most valuable book.

III

What is the final impact of the book — of the life (so far) and the views of Edgar Brookes — on a person a generation or two younger than the protagonist? I ask this question because **A South African Pilgrimage** is no mere passive record: like all good books, it constitutes a challenge. What questions does it set in motion within the mind? Obviously the ones that it poses itself — but are there not others too? Hasn't the whole liberal (or liberal-radical) discussion moved on in some ways since the legalised murder of the Liberal Party nearly ten years ago?

Each person has his own way of looking. I can only offer my own — though at the same time I claim no originality for what I say.

It seems to me that all that Edgar Brookes has stood for is completely valid; one must desire a society that is non-racial, just and harmonious. But one must take cognizance of new analyses of our present problems and of new strategies to meet these problems. Certainly we must keep on keeping on; but — however profound the spiritual victories that lie behind worldly failures — we must find ways of achieving success in this world, in this country. The human suffering brought about by the present South African situation simply cannot be tolerated. Edgar Brookes would wholly agree with that.

But what analyses? What strategies? The proponents of black consciousness and various socialist thinkers have put forward the view that the liberation of South Africa's oppressed people can only really come from the oppressed themselves. The whites are so thoroughly the beneficiaries of the present socio-politico-economic system that it is

unthinkable that they should change through a simple act of self-conversion. Only a small minority is likely to be wise enough or honest enough to recognize the true needs of society. A 'change of heart' — that great event that liberals have worked and hoped and prayed for — is likely to come (if it comes at all) only as a result of pressure, and that pressure can be exerted only by those who have a deep communal desire to generate pressure. Black consciousness puts its main emphasis upon psychological self-realization among blacks; socialism stresses the importance of trade unions. The white regime has enormous unfair power: it can only be combated by those groups who have, potentially, an equal or greater power. And of course pressure from the outside (which the Government is experiencing deeply and justly at the moment) is distinctly helpful too.

This picture of one mighty force pressing against another mighty force is disturbing to a liberal. In the conflict violent emotions are produced and traditional liberal values are likely to be brushed aside. The danger is very real. But then the violent emotions and the brushings-aside exist already; no completely new situation is created by the application of the power of the oppressed. And besides, as I said earlier, something has to be done. What the liberal or the radical must do, it seems to me, is to accept the necessity of this conflict of powers, and try in whatever ways he can to keep it sane, civilized, rational, and to bring it to its proper, just conclusion. Confrontation can lead to understanding and reconciliation, or it can lead to chaos and bloodshed. It isn't likely that bloodshed will be wholly avoided in South Africa; indeed it is going on every day, in Soweto and in other places. But it may be possible to avoid the worst disasters of revolution and civil war. The role of the liberal or radical is surely to make the conflict as humane and as creative as possible.

White liberals and radicals find themselves to some extent on the sidelines; but they have a task. It is, as ever, to persuade their fellow-whites to change their attitudes, to keep on keeping on, then. But now they find that they are not so much inviting people to consult their consciences in a vacuum as attempting to show them the essential justification and reasonableness of the pressures that are being exerted upon them.

What I suggest sounds coherent, I hope. And I believe it to be truly liberal, and (if that is one's belief) truly Christian. But will it work? Is there any real hope that the white liberal or radical will be able to make a valuable contribution? It is my turn to follow the way of Edgar Brookes, and to be humble: I do not know. □