

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN LITERATURE XII: THE MOUNTING ANGUISH

DR. A. C. JORDAN

Lecturer in Bantu Languages, University of Cape Town

If "*Hadi Waseluhlangeni*" (The Harp of the Nation) was the outstanding writer of his period, he was not a Gulliver alone in Lilliput. There were several other writers of merit who were just as critical of the social derangement, just as outspoken as himself, if less erudite.

First there is "W.G.", who writes very bitterly about the mounting anguish of a subject people.

"Why should a pass be forced upon people who have demonstrated in every way that they are loyal British subjects, people who remained *sleepers* (i.e. neutral) when their compatriots were fighting, people who remained with the Government and bore patiently all sorts of ugly, humiliating experiences? It is these people who are to-day deprived of their guns and forced to carry passes. And yet other British subjects still possess their guns, and now and again shoot people dead—by mistake, as they usually plead . . .

"Let there be some difference, now that we are British subjects. We cannot be made to carry passes when the white man does not. We cannot be deprived of our guns when the white man is not deprived of his. Our demands cannot be ignored when those of the white man are not. Our cattle cannot be branded when those of the white man are not. For we are equal under Queen Victoria, Child of the Beautiful. At present, however, this oneness is remembered only when money is required of us. Ah! when it comes to money, even the most aged woman is drained of her very last possessions . . ."

There is evidence in '*ISIGIDIMI*' that the Xhosa reading public has become familiar with Soga's translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by this time. Characters and incidents in this book are frequently referred to analogously. The Slough of Despondency, Vanity Fair, Apolyon, etc., have become bywords. An outstanding example is the analogous use of the incident of Giant Despair in a controversy about impending parliamentary elections. The writer, who remains anonymous, says:—

"Readers of *UHambo lo Mhambi* (The Pilgrim's Progress)

will remember the story of Christian and Hopeful, the day they were found by Giant Despair. It is said that the giant put them into his castle, into a very dark dungeon, nasty and stinking to the spirits of these two men. Here, then, they lay from Wednesday morning till Saturday night without one bit of bread or drop of drink, or light, or any to ask them how they did . . .

“Now Giant Despair had a wife, and her name was Diffidence : who, when she heard about the prisoners, told her husband ‘to beat them without mercy’. True enough, on the following morning they were beaten fearfully. The next night she, understanding that they were still alive, *‘did advise him to counsel them to make away with themselves’*. Truly then, the giant did give them this advice, and again he beat them. But they, though tempted by this counsel, finally resolved not to accept it. *If they must die, it must not be by their own hands.*

“We are reminded of this story by a number of men who are at present scattered amongst us, black folk, counselling us how to get out of this slough, this dungeon of suffering into which our community has been cast these past years. We have complained of laws that oppress the black man alone: the branding of our cattle, pass laws, disarmament without even adequate compensation for our guns. We have complained of the imprisonment of our ministers of religion, their being arrested by the police while carrying out their duties to the Word of the Lord. We have been pushed around by so-called location regulations. These and other things have been heavy on our necks, and many of them still remain so, and we do not know what to do about them. And now the time has come to elect men to go to parliament. Among the men who are going to parliament there are those who are going there to add to the burdens we already have. These men make no secret of the fact that they still regard the black man as an enemy, a thing to be treated as an enemy, a thing to be deprived of education grants.

“To-day, it is those same men who have come to our people and expect that it must be we ourselves who send them to parliament. Hence, we say that they have come to counsel us to do away with our own selves. Giant Despair said, ‘I bring you counsel that will help you when I say that you had better kill yourselves’. In like manner these men come smiling up to us and say, ‘It is our ardent love for you that makes us say that you had better elect us, the people who will truly destroy you’. Diffidence was enthusiastic about her counsel.

In like manner these men are enthusiastic about the counsel they bring to us.

“It will be well for us to confer on this matter. The two men we have used as an example conferred before they resolved what to do. The day is very near when we must resolve what to do, hence our suggestion that there must be unanimity among those who have the right to vote. For our part, we say we must not accept the counsel to do away with our own selves. If we must die, it must not be with our own hands”.

The rejection of “Hadi’s” article by ‘*ISIGIDIMI*’ (see ‘*Africa South*’ Vol. 4 No. 2, Jan.-March, 1960) is not taken lying down by other contributors. A letter by “G.K.” reveals not only the readers’ high regard for “The Harp of the Nation”, but also a growing loss of confidence in ‘*ISIGIDIMI*’. “G.K.” writes as follows:

“We complain particularly because, while refusing to publish Hadi’s article, you, Mr. Editor, undertook to reply to it. This is unfair to Hadi as well as to your readers. If you felt that you must reply, then surely you should have published Hadi’s article, to enable intelligent readers to make their own judgement. This man Hadi never writes nonsense. I may tell you then that your comments (on the unpublished article) have only served to make our mouths water, and we so wish that we had read the article and drawn our own conclusions. Would that you had not made these petty comments of yours.”

Evidence that the readers were keeping a watchful eye on ‘*ISIGIDIMI*’ is to be found also in a contribution made by Daniel Zondiwe on behalf of a group of malcontents in Tembuland. A representative of ‘*ISIGIDIMI*’ had visited certain parts of the Transkei and, on his return home, written a series of articles. In one of these, he lavished praises on a magistrate by the name of Levey, a very efficient labour-recruiting agent who had been popular in the Transkei till after the Gun War. In his reply, Zondiwe makes very graphic analogies, one drawn from the hunting methods of the Thwa (‘Bushman’), and the other from the famous allegory of *Mother-Wasp and her Family* (found in a Xhosa Reader published at Lovedale). He writes as follows:—

“I want to say that the reason why you, Mr. Editor, think this magistrate is a good man is that you do not live close enough to him. If you were to live close to him just for one month, then you would know his spirit. Yes, he is good at handling court cases, but when it comes to political matters—never!

He is the type of man who comes to the people as one of them, when, in fact, he is the enemy.

“He is like a Thwa (‘Bushman’) hunting ostriches. They say that when a Thwa goes ostrich-hunting, he covers his body with an ostrich-skin to deceive the ostriches. Slowly he draws near them, now bending low and pecking the ground just as ostriches do, now ruffling his ostrich feathers. Then he goes this way and that drifting towards them, until he is so close that his arrow can reach them. Then he draws his poisoned arrow. Such a man is this *Livi* . . .

“We have also heard the story of *Gxidolo* (Sloven), son of *Nomeva* (Mother-Wasp). He died of poisoning. It is related that when a certain man warned him that it was poison that he was drinking, he retorted, ‘Get away! What do you know? Do you think poison would taste so sweet? Never! Poison would taste bitter, like medicine!’ But before he knew what was happening, his whole body was trembling, and his wings were paralyzed, and all he was able to do was to say in a hoarse voice, ‘Be kind enough to tell my mother how I met my death’.

“Such, then, is this man to those who think he is upright. ‘He is sweet, loving to our people, and would never betray them’. It seems to me that we on this side (of the Kei) will awake one day to find our bodies trembling and our wings stricken with paralysis; and when we try to speak, all we shall be able to do is to say in hoarse voices, ‘This magistrate is not an upright man’.”

The mounting dissatisfaction with the policy of ‘*ISIGIDIMI*’ gives occasion to a fairly regular contributor who styles himself *Silwangangubo* (Eared Vulture) to recall with a certain amount of nostalgia the short-lived predecessors and contemporaries of this journal. He mentions ‘*IKhwezi*’, ‘*Indaba*’, ‘*ISibutho Samavo*’ and ‘*UMwesile*’, which are all dead. Of the last, he says, “Alas! Even ‘*UMwesile*’ is dead, and he died with a big mouthful of people’s subscriptions”.

But another contributor, Booi Kwaza, has no illusions about any of the Xhosa papers that have existed hitherto. He knows that they were all controlled by “foreigners”. He is concerned about the young intellectuals who, after so much money has been spent on their education, are not encouraged by senior compatriots to make their contribution to the cultural progress of their people. “What are we educating them for?” he asks. “If you lay an egg and abandon it unhatched, who do you think will

hatch it for you?" He deplores the sorry spectacle of a whole people depending on milk from a "one-teated cow" ('*ISIGIDIMI*'), and all of them jostling and elbowing one another in order to get at this one teat. "You can see", he says, "that amongst the white people the war is not being fought by means of sticks and spears, but by means of the pen and the brain. Countrymen, the time has come when something must be done by us—and it must be something other than the usual mutual bespattering. The time has come to find our young men something to do. The first thing we must acquire is a printing press".

Diplomatically, he says, "I do not look down upon '*ISIGIDIMI*'. I admire it: I like it very much. All I am saying is that we must have a paper owned by the black ones, which it would not be a mistake to name '*ITemba*' (Hope). I refer this matter to every black African".

