

GOD AND THE UNDERDOG

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THOUGHTS ON THE RISE OF AFRICA

There must be many people like me who first turn to the cartoon quip page of the newspaper, but like me also, they must be afflicted by a poor memory and forget the jokes the moment they have read them. Highly enshrined in the memory then are the one or two jokes one is destined never to forget. One of them goes like this: Two members of the Ku Klux Klan, named Clem and Jeff, were killed in a car at a railway crossing. Clem's soul reached heaven first, to be followed half an hour later by Jeff's. As Jeff reached the heavenly gates he saw Clem standing outside, looking white and shaken. Clem said to Jeff: "Better watch your step, Jeff. I've just seen God and she's a Nigra."

There were a few details left out. The "Nigra" Goddess had looked at Clem with red eyes out of which poured all the fire and thunder and damnation of the Revelation and Clem had shuddered to the depths of his soul, not knowing what to expect next. Poor Clem. His civilisation had only prepared him for a salivating Jesus Christ with wishy-washy blue eyes whom he could make a walk-over on with the same cocksure bastardry as he had done on earth. For, in his heart of hearts, he deeply despised the King of the Jews. If he had not there would have been something to stop him from taking the body of living human beings, drenching them in hot tar, decorating them with feathers and setting them alight from the branch of a poplar tree. And he had done this laughing. And after he had roared away in his high-powered car there was only the charred body swaying and swaying in the star-bound broeze. And there was only the God of All Men observing this in silence. This is always his major trump card, this silence. It seems as though only the mystics and prophets have ever approached near enough to observe the nature of this terrible God. And how often have they given a description of the terror they saw to the unheeding human race...

... "That which is double-edged, that which is made of fire, that which is eternally alive. And he sendeth forth his word, straight and unswervingly, throughout all things..." And what is this word? ... "I have forbidden that men should commit iniquity, but their hearts have undone what my word decreed..."

Since in some part of my heart I bow down to the King of the Jews, it is impossible for me to blame the iniquity of the Ku Klux Klan on him, even though they painted him with blue eyes like one of their members. I set him apart from all this and accept him only as That which is double-edged, That which is made of fire. To me the white man is just the white man. And God is God. Perhaps I am only sorry that of all civilisations which have dominated this earth his has been the one most separated from God. For a long while I puzzled about this until one day I was accidentally given the clue by a British volunteer.

This volunteer and I had been having an amiable discussion about the establishment of the State of Israel and during the discussion I happened to remark: "There is nothing that moves me more deeply than the History of the Jews. They of all people have experienced most deeply and profoundly that God is the

real Owner of the Universe..."

Being caught up in this thought, I was quite taken aback when the volunteer turned on me irritably and said: "I don't like the way you say God is the Owner of the Universe."

The first thing that occurred to me after this remark was only to walk away as quickly as possible. Because I was enraged. Because I wanted to say something like this: "Do you think your bloody motor-car is the Owner of the Universe? Do you think a pip-squeak jiggling little white man like you is God? Why, you could drop dead this very minute."

But I did not say this because I seemed to be labouring in some awful nightmare. I thought I hated the white man enough and I thought, through some queer logic, that I ought to love him through the volunteer because he is a better type of white man and also because he is in Africa helping with African development. The truth for me, at any rate, is that some of the volunteers brought me around to accepting the fact that the white man is human and perhaps one of them I admired without reserve because I sat with him in a hut of an old Batswana man. This volunteer was a Cambridge graduate and the old Batswana man said to him: "I think the Good God does not like all the bad things in the world." This had a profoundly moving effect on the Cambridge graduate. He even absent-mindedly drank a cup of tea into which several flies had fallen. It was really this volunteer, who was so deeply moved by a vision of God through an old Batswana man, that for some time made me extremely enthusiastic about voluntary help quite out of touch with reality. It's there. Some of it is good. But Africa is going to rise to a great height of civilisation and this is going to be done, in the last resort with African brains and my "Nigra" Goddess.

I just accept it that my "Nigra" Goddess is alive and real because I have nowhere else to turn for my salvation. I am one African who needs and wants my God Black, preferably "Nigra" as Clem said she was and preferably of the feminine gender. There's something wrong with God, expressed as masculine. You don't see the fire and thunder in him the way you do in his feminine counterpart.

And if I say -- My God, she's a "Nigra" it is because I slightly confuse in my mind That which is double-edged, That which is made of fire. That which is eternally alive, with the personality of a certain Afro-American woman who was my friend and comrade for a period of almost two years in Botswana. It seems to me that I shall never forget her big, flashing, black eyes and her universal compassion for the Sudras or underdogs of the world. It seems to me that it is only the Afro-American, because of what they have suffered, who is capable of this deep compassion. Because when I compare her against us I really see the African continent as if filled with a lot of squabbling, petty-minded, vicious little tribalists who are likely, as in the case of Nigeria to repeat the petty little bigotry of the tribal wars all over again, until the Gods, being fed up with this nonsense, sends in some other colonial power to divide the continent of Africa up again for their own ends.

It has often amazed me how people substitute slushy emotions for such great words like friendship, compassion. You might feel soft and mushy about a little doggie. But between two living human beings there is always Truth and Truth is like that double-edged thing and is constantly expressing itself as Fireworks. Because when I look back on that friendship with the Afro-American woman I am often filled with hot resentment at the battering and bashing she gave me. I always seemed to have my mouth open and she always seemed to be bashing something down it. After all, I am one of the Sudras and she was a One-Eyed Jack with her fiery eye directed not only at the white man but the caste-ridden upper classes of India, or for that matter any oppressor of man. And they were all tabbed for the horrific

judgment day. But in the meanwhile, I the Sudra, for whom she was supposed to feel compassion was treated in the most rough

Perhaps what made the friendship so painful and quarrelsome was the time I'd met her I was going through some sufferings of my own. I had also just been relieved of the burden of the Afrikaner Boer and was correspondingly anxious to fill the great, empty, peaceful chambers of my heart with something beautiful like a God who was just quiet and full of common sense. Since these longings dominated my mind just then I'd often mention them wistfully during the brief pauses when my mouth wasn't open and something being bashed down it. I think that's why she said all those things to me -- that I wasn't a genuine African, that I only longed to eat good food and that I might accidentally find myself with the damned on the judgment day. Because who was going to feed the poor while I communicated peacefully with my God? But after a time I began to take it because I thought I had the edge on her. I might not be a genuine African as she said. But I am most certainly a genuine Sudra because for the greater part of my life I only lived in the slums of South Africa where I was born. And from the way my friend walked and talked, she was like some upper-class American. She never swore. She never drank. While I did all this and worse in my life time. I also saw that we differed on the idea of violence. It's a small matter to me, when instantly enraged, to instantly kill someone stone dead, on the spot. And then all hell and heaven could kill me and I'd just laugh. Because that's my environment. It happened every day in front of my eyes when I was a child. On the other hand, my friend only saw violence in theory, as a vast social instrument for the judgment day. I don't think she knew what tricky material I really am. There's nothing neat and tidy about me, like a nice social revolution. With me goes a mad, passionate, insane, screaming world of ten thousand devils and the man or God who lifts the lid off this suppressed world, does so at his peril.

It has already happened in all sorts of places in the world where my fellow brethren and Sudras were oppressed. It happened when the Czars and Chinese landlords were torn to pieces. And it's still going to happen in India and Southern Africa. It seems as though the white man in Southern Africa is actually driving us towards it because his laws become harsher and harsher every day. And he won't pull out before it's too late.

Because what is not too late is the firm and established conviction that the underdog is already outside that closed door in which he was locked up. It is the most peculiar sensation and I can only express it in a personal way, restricted to the feelings of my own life. It was as though up to my generation we were all locked up together in a dark air-tight room. We even seemed to excrete together there and the stench was awful. Then some mysterious hand opened one of the windows and we received our first breath of fresh air which contrasted strongly with the stench in which we lived. At the same time this mysterious hand opened the door. And we ran out we kept on saying: "I'm not going back in there. I'm not going back in there." A few of our oppressors who had been so accustomed to seeing us locked up, ran after us to put us back and we turned around and rent them to pieces. But we still have this sensation of running because of the horror out of which we have come. We don't know where we are running to except that we must run. Once I began to feel this sensation of running, running, it was at this point that I wanted a haven to run towards. Something that made sense. Something worthy of all the anguish of my life. Because I can't have it mucked up by the politicians, by the tom-tom drum-beaters and crooks of our so-called liberatory organisations.

It's the way I feel about the revolutions of the world. When George Padmore told us to abhor Communism and choose the road of Pan Africanism, he only meant that the politicians in

Russia were mucking up the show. He did not mean that his fellow brethren there were not right in ridding themselves of the Czars but that their anguish and suffering were being undermined by crooks. And there was such a passionate and torrential confusion in this revolution because no one seems to understand the underdog as he really is -- that he is a passionate person without any nice, fancy manners. He is even more. He can be revolting. Perhaps he and I are only this way because of the conditions in which we have lived for centuries and centuries. But we have to come out now. And perhaps we alone know how we will usher in this new age of universal brotherly love. For while we have as intense a capacity to destroy, so do we have as intense a capacity to build up, to create. Perhaps we won't be as selfish as the former rulers of the world. But our code has still to be written. Just as a side thought to this. It is interesting to note, that with the rise of the underdog has come out of it these philosophies of non-violence. Perhaps the creators of these philosophies unconsciously sense the damage and havoc we can really create, at any given moment.

Although I have said that there was this vast environmental difference between my American friend and I, it was really from her that I absorbed a capacity as an underdog to identify myself with all people's in the world living under such conditions. It was her fiery eye fixed on Clem and Co. that made me see after all that God is not so silent as he is made out to be. The trouble is I don't know where my Goddess is just right now but there's certain things I'd like her to know about Clem and Co. and the conclusions I've drawn about him. I feel he's too mediocre for the gaze of her beautiful eyes and that she should just let him be and get the hell out of there back to Africa, some day.

Over and above us all is "That which is double-edged, That which is made of fire, That which is eternally alive. And he sendeth forth his word, straight and unswervingly, throughout all things ..." It is this thing which the white man is mocking, not the skin of the black man, for it is this thing, this terrific power which also created the black man. It's up to that power to do something about it. Clem didn't know what was coming next when he came face to face with his maker whom he had strung up, tarred and feathered and burnt to death on the poplar tree. But one thing I do know, that all this suffering has made Afro-American people catch a little of this fire from heaven and bring it down to earth to us. I wish, with all my heart that they bring it to Africa because there are too few of us here, capable of catching this fire. It may be that all the ancient pharaohs and queens of our ancient civilisations have been born there and if they don't come back we will only be left with our petty tribal wars and petty tribal customs. It seems as though we don't really have those large hearts and large eyes of the Gods. For largeness of heart is what we need for a civilisation and big, big eyes, wide enough to drink in all the knowledge of the heavens and earth. Why should people like this, like my Goddess beg the white man for the crumbs that fall from his table? For that's what civil rights amount to. And they are so cynical about it, the giving of these crumbs.

The white man is not going to dominate us for many more years in Southern Africa. In the days of Egypt, before Joseph took his ten tribes there, there lived a pharaoh of whom it was written: "The waters nourished him. All the birds of the air made their nests in his boughs, and all the beasts of the field brought forth their young under his branches. Beneath his shadow dwelt all the great nations. He was most beautiful in his greatness, because of the length of his roots, for his roots bathed in great waters..."

I feel in my heart that our Pharaoh has already been born. It may be that I shall not live to see Pharaoh's day but I want all those who now live in anguish to see Pharaoh's day, due to the length of his roots and the length of his wisdom, all nations shall dwell under his shadow.

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