

## *Book Reviews and Notices*

### **OPENING MEN'S EYES: PETER BROWN AND THE LIBERAL STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

by MICHAEL CARDO

Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2010

368 pp. illus. ISBN: 978-1-86842-392-7

PETER Brown, who was born in 1924 and died in 2004, was a remarkable South African, an unsung hero if ever there was one. Even at the height of his political career as the vigorous and wise chairman of the Liberal Party of South Africa, in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, he was not very widely known: almost all of his fellow whites were unable to understand and to foresee what he understood and foresaw, and most of the members of other ethnic groups who shared some or all of his vision were, or had been before they were banned or had gone into exile, committed to their own separate ethnic organisations. But Brown and the non-racial Liberal Party, in their actions as well as in their policy statements, stood firmly for the abolition of all discrimination, for the rule of law, universal franchise, an independent judiciary, social and economic justice,

and equality of opportunity. After the banning of the ANC and the PAC the Liberal Party had begun to make a tangible impact, and the Nationalist government recognised that ideas and activities of this kind were in danger of destroying the very fabric of apartheid. So it silenced Brown and many other liberals with banning orders. In his case it was for 10 years. Four years after he was banned the government forced the Liberal Party out of existence. When Brown became a free man again, in 1974, the political situation was a distinctly different one. He threw himself into, and was influential within, a number of creative and important socio-political activities, but he never again became in any sense a national figure.

What, then, are we to say of his life's work, his constant striving towards a just and humane society? Was he little more than a voice crying in the

wilderness, or did the views that he represented and embodied play a significant, largely hidden role within the turmoil of ideas that erupted in South Africa in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s? Perhaps questions of this kind will only begin to get finally authoritative answers when we have moved further into our new and somewhat fragile democracy. But it is well worth noting that the Constitution which South Africa now has is in many respects almost a carbon copy of the old Liberal Party constitution and that, as Michael Cardo points out in this biography, in one of the first speeches that Nelson Mandela made after his release from jail in early 1990, he mentioned Peter Brown as a South African who had made a significant contribution towards the great complex movement which led towards liberation.

Those who knew Brown well knew him to be a quietly strong and confident man, who was at the same time warm and unassuming, with a dry sense of humour. Cardo, who never met his protagonist, captures him perfectly. He also gives a full and absorbing account of his life and of the development of his thinking about society and politics, within the unfolding political drama of his time. All this is offered in the context of our current situation: the book opens with a prologue which sketches the kind of liberalism represented by Brown and the Liberal Party and the various ways in which it was often misunderstood or maligned in the apartheid period and has been largely sidelined since.

Brown came from an affluent background, was well-off himself and was drawn to farming. What made a white South African of his sort

move in a liberal direction? We are shown various crucial events which set him thinking: one while he was a Michaelhouse schoolboy, others while he was in the army during the Second World War, another while he was a Cambridge student. Was he activated by guilt, the guilt of the rich? Not really, but he did come to feel that his position of economic privilege carried with it special responsibilities.

He was convinced from early on that the only possible future for South Africa, if a racial conflagration was to be avoided, was a society in which all citizens were equally valued. With the white Nationalist Party entrenched in power, liberally-minded people felt the need to offer it some real opposition. Brown was one of the founder members of the Liberal Party in 1953. This brought him into contact with some notable people of all races, but above all Alan Paton, who became a close friend and came to admire him deeply. The new party had to sort out various internal tensions and to negotiate with other opponents of the regime, especially the ANC and the communists. In all this Brown's attitude was consistent: he had firm principles of his own, but he was open-minded towards all people who were genuinely opposed to the apartheid regime. His liberalism, as Cardo points out, was practical and pragmatic rather than ideologically rigid.

Mixing on a basis of equality with people of other races radicalised him. The Liberal Party functioned on two different levels: it put up a few candidates in (of course whites-only) elections, and they almost always lost their deposits. It also engaged in various extra-parliamentary activities, such as protests of various kinds

and organising people to resist the removal of so-called black spots. This last activity was particularly close to Brown's heart, with his deep concern about rural people and about the land. Working with the dedicated Elliot Mngadi, he put a great deal of energy into this campaigning. He realised as early as 1960 that apartheid would never be defeated by the processes of the white parliament. In this he was a quarter of a century ahead of Van Zyl Slabbert, who resigned from parliament in 1986 – not that one would want to undervalue, nor did Brown undervalue, the part the Progressives played in the intervening period. His prescience was remarkable. In 1961 he wrote to a friend:

“We won't get rid of the Nats through the ballot box. The implication is, then, that things will either get worse economically, or get worse politically between the races, or both, until there is such a deterioration that white voters won't stand for apartheid any longer. I very much doubt if, even at that stage, the Nats will be voted out of power. It seems to me to be more likely that they will prefer to negotiate. They will have to get together with people opposed to them and bargain. The bargaining will be tough but the balance of power is such that there will have to be an accommodation. The blacks have the numbers and the labour. The whites have the armed power, the skills and they have been clever to ensure that it is only they who know how to run the apparatus of state” (page 163).

Brown was imprisoned for several months during the State of Emergency of early 1960. As soon as he was released from jail he got back to work, and the next four years were busy and dramatic ones. Brown and

the Liberal Party were involved in a variety of activities and campaigns, all of which Cardo describes fully and carefully. But the skies were darkening, the government was becoming increasingly repressive. More and more members of the Party were banned, and in due course Brown, too, was silenced and restricted, made a prisoner in his own home and in his own town, or in the parts of it that he was allowed to visit. Looking back 47 years to this event, one can sense, with Cardo's help, how tragic it was for the cause of humanity in our society. But then everything about apartheid was tragic.

In spite of all the restrictions, and the loss of social contacts, Brown managed to keep politically engaged while he was banned. But still these were largely lost years for him. By the time that he emerged from the semi-death that had been imposed upon him, he was well aware of how the political arena had changed. The new dynamism of the black consciousness movement – with its emphasis on black self-reliance, which at first confused the government – meant that there was no question of launching another non-racial political party; in any case, such an action would have been illegal. But while militant blacks were flexing their muscles and preparing for the big push which would eventually come in the late 1980s, there were many significant supportive roles that whites could play. Brown gave of himself – and no doubt often of his money (though his donations were almost always anonymous) – to a number of such initiatives. He chaired the editorial committee of *Reality*, the journal of “liberal and radical opinion”; he was actively involved with the Dependants'

Conference, which assisted the families of political prisoners; he worked with Neil Alcock and others on the Church Agricultural Project, which aimed to promote rural agriculture; he was for years the chairperson of the council of Afra, the Association for Rural Advancement, which allowed him, among other things, to continue some of the work that the Liberal Party had done on forced removals. In all of these roles he was confronted with serious challenges, which he faced, Cardo shows, with his usual calmness and wisdom. There were other bodies that he played a part in: the Five Freedoms Forum, the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives at the local University, the Liberal Democratic Association, and King's School at Nottingham Road.

He welcomed, of course, the main events of 1990 and 1994, and was gratified that liberal notions came to be generally accepted during the negotiations for a new constitution. He was given some minor recognition, but on the whole he remained a fairly silent figure, continuing various kinds of creative work. Like many other people who had dedicated much of their lives to the quest for human liberation in South Africa, he was deeply disappointed by a number of developments under the ANC government; but he remained cautiously optimistic. Particularly important in the last years of his life was the assistance and advice that he gave to emerging African farmers.

If things had worked out differently, might Brown have become not only (as he was) one of the wisest of South Africa's political thinkers and actors but also one of its great leaders? Maybe. "What if?" questions of this sort are not very useful. The facts are

that, for many different reasons, on the whole neither whites nor blacks were ready to listen to what he had to say, and after 10 years of silence he emerged into a world where a new kind of change was in the air. It was not a time when a white leader could have emerged. Besides, as Cardo notes, for all his great qualities, Brown hadn't really the personality to be a mighty political figure. He wasn't a powerful speaker, and his natural diffidence would have made it difficult for him to project himself in the way successful political leaders tend to do. Having said that, one must add that perhaps he had another kind of triumph. He was not one of the participants in the crucial negotiations, though some of his friends were; but he had the pleasure of seeing that the negotiators had been wise enough and open-minded enough (subject as they also were to various contemporary pressures) to opt in the end for the kind of future that he had long ago predicted.

Peter Brown deserved a sensitive, thoughtful, well-researched biography, and that is what Michael Cardo has given him, and us.

Brown's story is a rich, interesting and important one. Like all human stories, it depends a good deal on the cast of characters, and Cardo sketches for us, among others, Margaret Ballinger, Selby Msimang, Albert Luthuli, Edgar Brookes, Alan Paton, Archie Gumede, Elliot Mngadi, Patrick Duncan, Jordan Ngubane, Leo Marquard, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Neil Alcock, Jack Unterhalter, Ernie Wentzel and Helen Suzman. Cardo tells Brown's story in vivid and gripping detail; in order to do this he had to do a great deal of research, and this is scrupulously documented in the

end-notes. He was also assisted a good deal by three people: Randolph Vigne, whose *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* offers a clear framework for anyone working in this area; Norman Bromberger, who conducted a series of taped interviews with Brown in the 1990s; and Wolf Hamm, who kept the many letters that Brown wrote to him over a period of 40 years.

I have said that Cardo captures Brown perfectly. Those who knew him pretty well, as I did, recognise him entirely in these pages. I have wondered whether Cardo might perhaps have attempted to offer us a little more of his very private self. This is a biography of Brown the social man and the socio-political thinker and activist, and no doubt that is what it was intended to be, and maybe we should be content with Cardo's very considerable achievement. But nowadays biographers usually try to probe into their subject's intimate lives in an attempt to give "the full picture." On the whole I respect Cardo's decision. I know that Brown himself did not much like the tendency of contemporary biographers to probe into private lives unless, of course, the private lives were obviously significant and therefore an essential part of the story. He was rather critical for these reasons of Peter Alexander's biography of Paton. In that sense, then, Cardo's biography is what Brown would have wanted. But I must say,

too, that it seems to me highly unlikely that, if Cardo had attempted some quiet detective work, he would have found anything of any significance. Peter Brown was surely an honest and faithful citizen, transparent in the best sense of the word.

Cardo does tell us a little about Brown's family, his parents and grandparents, and he mentions his children. Above all, in a brief section devoted to her, he tells us a good deal about Phoebe, his wife. Like Peter, except more so, she came from a moneyed background, and like Peter she had (and has) a social conscience. She supported her husband firmly and kindly throughout his career. She has a calmness, grace and modesty that admirably complement his similar qualities.

On one point I must criticise the book: its title. "Opening Men's Eyes" is a reference to a striking aphorism by the Russian liberal thinker Aleksandr Herzen: "We have to open men's eyes, not tear them out". When Herzen wrote those words in the nineteenth century, "men" was understood by everyone to mean "people". Nowadays, when "men" no longer has that inevitable sense, it would have been more correct, in my view, to translate accordingly and to say "Opening People's Eyes".

Peter Brown did open the eyes of many of the people who were prepared to listen to him. And this book continues the process. It is indeed an eye-opener.

COLIN GARDNER

**ALBERT LUTHULI: BOUND BY FAITH**

by SCOTT COUPER

Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010

291 pages, illustrations. ISBN: 978-1-86914-192-9

ONE of the objectives of the South African liberation struggle was to establish a democracy solidly based on recovery of the truth about the past. But the hegemonic nature of South African politics, dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), now essentially a party of racial nationalism, has meant that a great deal of inconvenient detail about the country's history has been jettisoned to suit the dominant narrative.

The end of apartheid seems to have left the arts and social sciences in confusion. Undoubtedly there is real fear about challenging the ANC party line, with sufficient examples of sanction to validate that anxiety. The rainbow nation of Nelson Mandela's presidency now appears even more a figment of Desmond Tutu's humane and fertile mind. The security state is on the way back, although the methods are often subtle. Criticism is increasingly linked to treachery.

Jonathan Jansen has frequently made the point that there are very few of the powerful public intellectuals essential to democracy left in South African universities, most of which are taking on the characteristics of degree factories.<sup>1</sup> Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale agree: "deep thinking about the social world, even within the academy, is not encouraged . . . . When apartheid ended, critical thinking ended – and abruptly too".<sup>2</sup>

This makes the publication of Scott Couper's superb biography of Chief Albert Luthuli all the more important. It is a reassessment of a crucial figure

from South Africa's past; and an example of an alternative historiography that challenges the ANC's hegemonic aspirations. Couper, who is based at Inanda Seminary, has produced a meticulously researched and well-written book on Luthuli: first and foremost as a man of Christian faith and principle out of which, together with hereditary obligations, his political role developed organically. His politics were grounded in moral conviction, a sense of civic responsibility, and a belief in social justice, reconciliation and racial integration. As a Christian activist he was frustrated by the Church and its ambivalence about life on Earth.

At Adam's College near Amanzimtoti he was the first African teacher trainer in South Africa, his world view already rooted in the *kholwa* society of the Christian convert. In 1936 he became the chief of his home community at Groutville, which represented a political, cultural and economic bridge between the traditional and modern worlds. This was indeed the very same milieu from which the ANC grew – Christian, literate, socially conservative but politically aware.

A highlight of Luthuli's life was an extended visit to the United States in the 1930s. He returned home to an increasingly racist South Africa depressed at leaving behind what he saw as a country of non-violent conduct and progressive social movements. His fear was that draconian white politics would encourage aggressive African nationalism in South Africa. In 1952, shortly after his dismissal as chief by

the government for taking part in the Defiance Campaign, he was elected president-general of the ANC. From 1953 until his death 14 years later Luthuli was constantly under some form of government harassment.

In spite of this pressure he led the movement during the 1950s, which included the protracted trauma of the Treason Trial, with great distinction and without wavering from his basic beliefs. The massacre at Sharpeville and the banning of the ANC, leading to the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) in 1961, effectively meant the beginning of the end of his political career.

Couper diligently documents Luthuli's faith and religious conviction, but also examines two of the myths that surround his life. The first is that having travelled to Norway in 1961 to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, almost immediately after his return he launched the armed struggle. The second is that in 1967 he died, not as a result of an accident, but at the hands of government agents.

Luthuli knew about the formation of MK before he flew to Oslo. He neither changed his principled opposition to violence, nor disciplined or condemned those in the ANC who saw it as inevitable and necessary. To show this, Couper goes to great lengths to record correspondence, meetings and visits. Luthuli remained loyal to Church and ANC, although he had reservations about both. Couper explains that this was possible because Luthuli's faith made him sure of eventual liberation: its inevitability allowed him to remain steadfastly loyal to his non-violent principles. Couper compares Luthuli with Martin Luther King, whose theology was similar; and with Gandhi who

also believed that non-violent struggle alongside the constant possibility of death was the ultimate test of principled courage. Couper makes a further comparison with Moses as a moral and political leader, Luthuli having entitled his autobiography *Let My People Go*. Yet, Couper writes, tragically "Luthuli's people . . . let *him* go".

He remained ANC president-general in name until his death, but he was increasingly marginalised because of his implacable stance on violence, his friendships with whites and his reconciliatory inclinations. Cynically, in the month of his death, the ANC named its unit participating in the disastrous Wankie Campaign the Luthuli Detachment. His final years were spent in obscurity with banning orders and declining health restricting him to Groutville where he farmed sugar and ran a trading store.

While walking along a railway bridge over the Umvoti River between his fields and the store he was struck by a locomotive and killed. He was nearly 70 years old, with poor sight and hearing, tired and unwell from a succession of mild strokes, and negotiating a narrow walkway with clearance of less than a foot. It was the proverbial accident waiting to happen.

Yet persistent rumour has suggested, and new post-liberation orthodoxy demands, a plot engineered by the apartheid regime. Nearly 45 years later no shred of solid evidence has been produced to back a conspiracy theory. Even in apartheid South Africa there were genuine accidents. Apart from this, the regime had no reason to eliminate Luthuli. This would only have created a new martyr out of an internationally recognised individual thoroughly sidelined not only by the gov-





*Former President Thabo Mbeki with the sculpture by Gert Swart of Chief Luthuli*

ernment's draconian restrictions, but by the ANC itself. His death removed the most important (although not only) dissenting voice in the ANC on the issue of armed struggle. In damping that dissent and unifying the organisation, Luthuli's death benefited the ANC more than the government.

Couper looks at the hard evidence and comes to the inevitable conclusion – an unfortunate accident. Yet after his book was published there was a frenzy of criticism from ANC heavyweights from President Jacob Zuma himself downwards. One of the predictable complaints was that only insiders from the ANC movement or members of Luthuli's family could possibly know his history. Despite the agenda of a politically-motivated new elite, assist-

ed by trendy relativist theories in the modern academy that promote multiple truths, Couper has demonstrated the power of history to demolish dangerous myth-making. History is not a script and it has its own integrity. It is, of course, subject to variable interpretation, but this never subordinates truth to opinion.

Apart from unsettling some powerfully-connected politicians, this book reminds the reader of the relevance of Luthuli's beliefs and conduct to present day South Africa as it veers towards centralism and elite enrichment. Perhaps this is why there are few public reminders of this remarkable and admirable man. Like Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko and even Walter Sisulu, Luthuli is an embarrassing reminder to



the post-1999 ANC as it rewrites the past. In this narrow view there is no space for the real Luthuli.

But Couper has made an invaluable contribution to the depth and width of our understanding of the past as it relates to a democratic future of inclusivity, non-racialism and reconciliation. Without the world view of Albert Luthuli, South Africa faces an uncertain future.

**NOTES**

- 1 See, for example, Jonathan Jansen, *When Does a University Cease to Exist?* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2005 – 40<sup>th</sup> Alfred and Winifred Hoernlé Memorial Lecture).
- 2 Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale, *Re-Imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-Apartheid Society* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009): 1.

CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

**“KWABAKA”: A SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE IN CARING: THE STORY OF A MISSION HOSPITAL IN ZULULAND 1930 – 2006**

by JON V. LARSEN

Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2010, 274 pp., illustrations, glossary, index. ISBN: 978 1875053 834

THIS is an account of the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital at Nqutu in Zululand and the pioneering work there of Drs Anthony and Margaret Barker. Hence the title, “Kwabaka” – in Zulu terms “the place of Barker”. The hospital became known world-wide for its clinical excellence. Patients flocked there from the surrounding area and medical students and colleagues from South Africa and the wider world came to experience the hospitality and teaching expertise of the Barkers. Equally valuable to them was their experience of the mission community itself which, during the 1960s and 70s, took a bold stand against the apartheid government. The hospital was nationalised in 1975, answering first to Pretoria then to the KwaZulu and KwaZulu-Natal authorities in 1981 and 1994 respectively.

The author does not pretend to enter the academic debate surrounding Christian missionaries working among indigenous peoples in colonial societies. He tells the story of the

development of this rural health service as it was. The chapters are short, not necessarily linked or chronological, but packed with real-life information. There is a large amount of medical detail with fascinating case studies and descriptions of how the staff adapted to the privations of having no proper water supply or electricity in the early years and of improvised equipment, limited supplies of medicines, primitive telephone services and transport difficulties. The gradual growth of the hospital from the original disused stone store into a complex of maternity, children’s, geriatric and tuberculosis wards, nurses’ training facilities, staff housing, physiotherapy and recreation facilities and a chapel is nothing short of inspiring. Interspersed in the factual detail are anecdotes, personal stories and reminiscences, photographs, vivid descriptions of the countryside and, for readers who have experienced life in remote parts of Natal and Zululand, a most nostalgia-invoking chapter on the role of the rural trading store and

the magistrate in the functioning of the community.

There are four broad sections to the book: beginnings; persevering 1945-59; flowering 1960-74; as a state hospital from 1975 onwards. A few highlights will give something of the ethos of this missionary project.

There was Revd Charles Johnson, later Archdeacon, who established his St Augustine's Anglican Mission at Masotsheni near Isandlwana soon after the famous battle, a site chosen as a sign of penitence and reconciliation. With his wife, Margaret, the daughter of Canon Jenkinson of Springvale Mission in Natal, Johnson would hold a clinic after services and respond to simple medical needs. He pulled many a tooth, sometimes being rewarded by gaining a Christian convert. He died in 1927 aged 77 after being at Masotsheni for 48 years. He was succeeded by William Lee, later Bishop of Zululand. It was he who concluded that a health service was necessary based upon the pressure of the "continuing and never-ceasing dribble of sick folk" coming to the mission for help. With no money, Mrs Lee placed two beds in an outside building, she found and recruited Sanna Mbatha, a Zulu nurse who had trained at St Mary's KwaMagwaza Anglican mission hospital near Melmoth, and called the little clinic St Augustine's Hospital. She also recruited the help of Dr Bessarabia the District Surgeon at Nqutu. It became clear that if the hospital was to grow it should be moved to the nearby village of Nqutu. In 1935 Bishop Lee bought a stone building in Nqutu and grandly called it the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital.

It was with similar spirit that the Barkers took over the infant hospital.

From a devout Congregational family, Anthony met Margaret, an Anglican, while both were studying medicine at Birmingham University. They married in 1943 and spent their honeymoon exploring the English Lake District on bicycles. But Anthony had a fascination with Africa and by 1945 they were at Nqutu. This book is not a biography of Barker, but so great was his "enthusiasm, Christian faith, love of natural history and irrepressible indulgence in fun" that his history there and that of the hospital became synonymous. Nothing daunted him. He crossed flooded rivers and rocky crags to deliver babies, as District Surgeon at Nqutu he did post mortems at odd hours and odd places, he improvised in critical surgical procedures, he socialised with the local Afrikaans storekeeper, he engaged the help of the magistrate in matters of finding a water supply and intervened in the interests of his black patients, not least in the critical period of forced removals and the dumping of people at Nondweni "tin town", all of which had repercussions for the hospital. He gave visitors vivid tours of the Isandlwana battlefield and was much sought after for public speaking. He aligned himself with liberal thinkers and was a firm friend of Alan Paton.

The Barkers lived simply, earned little and gave back much of their salaries to the hospital. The open, non-racial environment there led to threats and accusations from the apartheid government and when it was clear that there would be a take-over of mission hospitals, the Barkers made way, not least because they would not be able to tolerate the government policy of unequal salary scales for black and white staff. They returned to England

in 1974, worked at St George's Hospital in Tooting, London, and, in retirement, made a return visit to the Lake District on their tandem bicycle in 1993 and were sadly killed in a collision with a truck near Kendal.

Throughout the book it becomes clear that many dedicated and able people, local and from overseas, black and white, served the hospital well. One such was the author himself who served two terms there, the second as medical superintendent just prior to government takeover. There he developed a passion for the delivery of excellent maternity care to rural Zulu women, a passion he followed for most of his 47-year career. In a final chapter he tries to assess the progress of the hospital up to 2006 and concludes thus:

There is still a sense of pride about the hospital these days. The vision of a health service at Nqutu fully managed by Zulu people has been fulfilled, and although in the nature of things, there will always be new challenges to address, this is a wonderful achievement for which all South Africans can give thanks. Has it still the empathetic spirit of its mission hospital days? The older nurses to whom I spoke when I visited did not think so.<sup>1</sup>

This is an important book. Medical history in South Africa is being avidly researched by academics and the author has provided rich source material. Similarly, missionary history has made a comeback in the last two decades. A recent volume of the *South African Historical Journal* was devoted to selected papers from a conference held on the subject at Rhodes University in July 2007. Six broad themes were identified for further research in the field: disciplinary boundaries; gender studies; nation and colonial power; interpretation of written texts; changing identities; faith and conversion.<sup>2</sup> For any of these Dr Larsen's account would provide source material. Some might find reason for criticism, some might discover signs of growing racial sensitivity, some might find signs of proselytisation, but few could deny that the essential theme of the Christian missionary endeavour which was the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital at Nqutu was "service to others".

SYLVIA VIETZEN

#### NOTES

- 1 Larsen, *Kwabaka*, p. 251.
- 2 Jeannerat, C., Kirkaldy, A., Ross, R. "Introduction: Christian Missions in Southern Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 61 (2), June 2009, pp. 213-5.

### **A FINE BAND OF FARMERS ARE WE! – A HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL STUDIES IN PIETERMARITZBURG 1934–2009**

by BILL GUEST

Pietermaritzburg: NSF Publications, 2010. 284 pp., illustrations, ISBN 978 0620 484220

THIS history of the Agricultural Faculty at the University of Natal (UN) ultimately the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), covers the pre-formation period of 1934 – 1949 and then the following 60 years which has three principal periods, each of about

20 years. These periods are (a) the establishment period of 1949–1966, (b) the changing of the "guard" and integration into the UN 1966–1988, and (c) the Rationalisation, Restructuring and the Merger period of 1988–2009.

Bill Guest has shown his skills as an historian in writing a factual yet interesting record of an institution universally known as the “Ag Fac”. With academic acumen he has captured and enumerated the facts about the struggle which was a precursor to the funding and the founding of the Ag Fac. Most of us were unaware of these interesting interplays between the visionaries Fischer and Malherbe and the state leaders, who at the time were really bent on entrenching the Afrikaans language. Interestingly, it was the efforts of an academic with political contacts (Malherbe) that finally led to the establishment of the Ag Fac with 12 departments and 25 posts in 1949. It is recorded that a grant from the Pietermaritzburg City Council, the Public Works Department and donations raised by the University Development Fund all resulted in the establishment of the building, on the “outspan land” near Epworth School, to become known as the Rabie Saunders Building.

This record traces the significant contributions of the staff and postgraduate students towards overcoming a variety of farming challenges “mostly relating to the eastern sub-tropical region of the sub continent”. Subsequent changes in the 1950s and 1960s broadened the curriculum and although originally intended to be a bilingual (English and Afrikaans) institution it became predominantly English and attracted students from all over South Africa and further afield. The interesting developments of the air-conditioning and the faculty computer (a machine of 5m × 3m × 1.5 m), the Phytotron and [the research farm] Ukulinga during the 1970s stretched the finances as the Faculty assumed full

financial responsibility for itself after the “divorce” from the Department of Agricultural Technical Services.

The “conservatism” and the innovations (such as semesterisation, staff evaluation, course credit rating and new structures of Schools and trans-disciplinary Centres) are interestingly juxtaposed as the new guard replaced the founding academics and were recognised internationally for their research. New synergies are recorded as the Agricultural Faculty merged with the Science Faculty and agriculture-related disciplines merged with science and three Centres were established – which although attracting international recognition at the turn of the century, has diluted the internationally recognised hard core agricultural focus of the 1970s and 1980s. Piet Booyesen’s speech at the Ag Fac 50th Anniversary dinner is recalled. He called for a balance between science and its application, between the “specialist” and the “general practitioners”. The next 20 years will show how the challenges and balance amongst (a) the training of professionals, (b) undertaking of large-scale community service and extension work and (c) academic publishing will be met.

Missing in this chronology is something about the graduates – the farmers who benefited from their further education at the Ag Fac and as a result contributed to the agricultural industry in KZN – and further afield. Maybe another “follow up” will be appropriate with input gathered through the Alumni Relations Office which sends requests to graduates to submit information about their post-degree experiences and successes in “Class Notes” for publication in the

University of KwaZulu-Natal's alumni publication: *UKZNTouch*.

J.E. PETER GREEN

**Publisher's Note**

*A Fine Band of Farmers Are We!—A history of agricultural studies in Pietermaritzburg 1934-2009* by Bill Guest (2010) was published as an Occasional Publications imprint by the Natal Society Foundation. The author is Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Associate in Historical Studies on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He has authored, co-authored

and co-edited 10 books on South African history, focusing primarily on the Natal-Zululand region.

Bill Guest's history of agricultural studies in KwaZulu Natal over a period of 75 years gives a detailed overview of the establishment of formal agricultural studies in the province and focuses on the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Alumni of "Ag Fac", as it was affectionately known, have made their mark in agricultural research not only in South Africa but also internationally.

**LUCK'S FAVOURS. Two South African Second World War Memoirs**

by CYRIL CROMPTON and PETER JOHNSON

Fish Hoek, Echoing Green Press, 2010. 310pp. illus. ISBN: 978-0-9802501-9-0. R185

MANY South Africans were prisoners-of-war in Italy and Germany during the Second World War, and some have written about their experiences. One thinks, for example, of Uys Krige's *The Way Out*, which describes his adventures as an escaped prisoner in Italy. Though there are common elements, former POWs' stories are bound to differ from each other, reflecting different personalities and experiences.

*Luck's Favours* could easily have been "a book that never was", being published only when its authors were 94 and 89 years old. The publisher, who is Cyril Crompton's nephew, includes a note explaining the fortunate combination of circumstances and events that led to its publication. Without those, one story would have remained virtually unrecorded, and the other a forgotten manuscript among family papers. The two men were in different regiments (artillery and

signals) and did not know each other until recently. One was captured at Sidi Rezegh and the other at Tobruk. Cyril Crompton was born and bred in Pietermaritzburg, and it is he who gives the book its strong Natal connection.

Crompton's part of the book, "For the Adventure of It", tells how for him at the beginning of the war being a gunner in the Bluff Battery in Durban seemed too boring and too far from the action. He and a friend, youthfully unaware of possible dire consequences, deserted from their unit (swimming across the harbour entrance at night) and joined the Royal Durban Light Infantry (RDLI), which accepted them without question. After they had been ten days in training at Zonderwater near Pretoria the military police caught up with them, and they were taken back to Durban to face a court martial. Because they had deserted from their regiment in order to get closer to the fighting rather than further from it, and

had enlisted with the RDLI within 24 hours of absconding from the Bluff Battery, the court took a less serious view of their offence, which could have carried a thirty-year sentence, or even the death penalty. They were sent back to the Bluff, confined to barracks, stripped of their corporals' stripes and docked a month's pay. As they were now trained gunners and still hankering for more action, their CO later arranged for their transfer to the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Anti-Aircraft Regiment. So began the main part of Crompton's wartime "adventure" which took him to East and North Africa, Italy, Poland and Germany. At the beginning of his captivity he survived when the Italian ship taking POWs from North Africa to Italy was torpedoed by a British submarine. At the end of it he survived a horrific 900-kilometre march, lasting from January to April 1945, when the Germans moved POWs westwards away from the advancing Russians. This last episode is perhaps the most graphically described, and certainly the most painful to read.

Peter Johnson's part of the book is entitled "On the run in wartime Italy", and reveals the author as an inveterate escaper, who got away from his captors several times, only to be recaptured. Once, when a trainload of POWs was being moved further north,

allied aircraft bombed the marshalling yard and a German soldier, almost certainly against orders, ran along the train and opened the cattle-truck doors to let them out. Had it not been for that brave and humane action, hundreds of the prisoners would probably have been trapped in the trucks and burnt to death. After Italy had capitulated and the Germans were retreating up the Italian peninsula Johnson made his final escape and eventually linked up with Allied forces in L'Aquila. During the long periods he was on the run, he was helped by partisans in the mountains, by Italian peasant families, by a group of woodcutters, by an aristocratic lady who spoke flawless English and lived in a large villa, and various others. Once he suffered a serious back injury after a fall in the mountains, and was cared for while he recovered. With some families he spent quite long periods, forming very strong bonds of affection, and was very aware of how much they were risking by harbouring an escaped POW.

Crompton's and Johnson's accounts are well written, and both make compelling reading. The book has been well edited and produced, and is a worthy addition to South African war memoirs.

JOHN DEANE

## **ZULU RISING: THE EPIC STORY OF iSANDLWANA AND RORKES'S DRIFT**

by IAN KNIGHT

London: Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978-1-405-0915-5. R269

THIS book may be the culmination of Anglo-Zulu War historian Ian Knight's literary career. His first love has always been the battle of Isandlwana or iSandlwana, as it is spelt in Zulu, whose mys-

terious and compelling story he has returned to time and again in several books. As a journalist who writes popular histories of the war, he presents us with a well-written narrative with nice



literary turns to sustain the reader's interest through a long tale. As an "epic" the book will invite comparison with Donald Morris's *Washing of the Spears* (1965) which, with the movie *Zulu*, launched the Anglo-Zulu War industry in the popular history genre. It is superior to Morris's book, but it is not quite the same epic, because the story of the war is greatly abbreviated after the battle of Rorke's Drift, whereas Morris covered the entire war. What the Zulu "rising" is about is not clear, but it makes for a catchy title.

The book comprises 29 chapters and a prologue, plus the usual apparatus. The basic story is well known to Anglo-Zulu War buffs. The challenge is to tell the story afresh for them and quite clearly for others, who may be reading about the war for the first time. Knight does a good job, but then he has had plenty of experience. Well-known characters (save Wolseley) appear on cue, and all are treated sympathetically, which may come as a surprise to readers who are used to having Chelmsford, Frere, Chard, and Durnford more or less maligned; however, Knight's Durnford is something of a borderline psychopath, and occasionally Knight puts ideas of his own into both Chelmsford's and Durnford's heads. In the first two chapters we are introduced to Captain Henry Harford and Mehlokazulu ka Sihayo, informed young men of middle rank, who reappear at intervals thereafter to provide an interesting continuity, rather like familiar guides along the way. There follow eight chapters (3-9) on the rise of the Zulu kingdom and its entanglement in the British plan for confederation which led to the war. Then we get to the military heart of the book: the mustering of forces (10-12), the

British invasion of Zululand (13-18), the battles at iSandlwana (19-22) and Rorke's Drift (25), and the British retreat (23-26). The last three chapters (27-29) wrap up the war and describe the consequences. There are ample illustrations, although the provenance of the cover illustration is in doubt, and sufficient maps, except for the one of iSandlwana, which is small and lacking in detail.

Popular history books are meant to entertain first and enlighten second, and no one expects much in the way of scholarly apparatus in them. (The publishers probably would not allow it, anyway.) In a fairly crowded field, such as the Anglo-Zulu War, authors try to write better than each other, not outclass each other by finding new sources (which would be very hard to do in the case of iSandlwana) and by presenting new interpretations of events. Most of the authors are not professional historians, and therefore they are usually ignorant of historical methods and unaware of historiography, even as it applies to their subjects. Knight is certainly better than the average popular historian in this respect, but he is firmly in the school of David Jackson, a gifted amateur who in 1965 did reinterpret the battle of iSandlwana and set the standard to which all but a few writers have adhered since. Knight has no truck with the flights of fancy of avant-gardists like Ron Lock and Mike Snook. Yet he has his weaknesses, too, notably a penchant for colourful but doubtful later recollections, and a tendency to leave out page numbers in footnotes. The bibliography of this book is disappointing, omitting the basic *Narrative of Field Operations* and Durnford's *A Soldier's Life*, even though they are cited in the text. More



disconcerting is Knight's failure to list any articles except Jackson's in 1965. He makes tantalising references to the televised archaeological dig at iSandlwana battlefield in 2000, but never says what it accomplished.

Knight is descriptive rather than analytical of strategy and tactics. After all, the Duke of Cambridge's assessment of Lord Chelmsford's faulty operational strategy still stands. British tactics in both battles were defensive, and there is little to fault in the improvised defence of Rorke's Drift. There is much to fault in the fatal alignment at iSandlwana, but a lot of guesswork is involved because of the lack of information, and Knight looks carefully at the camp commander's dispositions, and concludes, as most writers do, that Colonel Pulleine was fighting the wrong kind of battle from the start, mainly through want of intelligence about the enemy's whereabouts and movements. Pulleine formed a line to oppose the Zulu on the heights north of the camp. He saw that the Zulu were in great numbers and enveloping his flanks, which he extended and may have tried to refuse. Knight guesses like all the other writers as to which units were where and when, but it is not easy. He is especially muddled on the identification and placement of the Natal Native Contingent. It is not

surprising, then, that his description of the battle becomes confused, and not just because of the noise, smoke and dust. It is not clear whether the British front collapsed because it was outflanked or breached or simply overrun; or maybe a bit of all three. As for the Zulu, Knight is willing to give the Zulu commander Ntshingwayo a good puff, but he resists making him out to be a military genius (as Ron Lock did). Indeed, Ntshingwayo seems to have lost control of his army at the very outset, and to have made little input in what became a soldiers' battle on the Zulu side.

Knight is less kind about Rorke's Drift: the Zulu lacked strategic purpose in crossing the Mzinyathi and tactical co-ordination in attacking the British post at the mission station. A strong and clever Zulu commander would have kept his *impi* in hand, manoeuvred to avoid bloody frontal assaults, and destroyed Chelmsford's vulnerable column as well as Pulleine's force at the camp.

*Zulu Rising* will entertain all its readers. It will enlighten those who are unfamiliar with the Anglo-Zulu War, but not so much its aficionados, who, as this review indicates, will find much that pleases but also some significant faults in the details.

P. S. THOMPSON

## **THE CLASSICS AND SOUTH AFRICAN IDENTITIES**

by MICHAEL LAMBERT

London & New York: Bristol Classical Press, 2011

160pp. ISBN 978-0-7156-3796-8

MICHAEL Lambert has done a valuable service for those interested in the history of classical scholarship. With *The Classics and South African*

*Identities*, he has produced the first-ever monograph on the history of the teaching of Ancient Greek and Latin (as well as Classical Civilization)

in South Africa. Instead of simply providing a dry chronological study of this history, Lambert has used the “creation of identities as the theoretical lens through which to guide [his] peep into the past” (p. 8). He is clearly aware, though, that while the creation of these disparate identities is a useful tool through which to examine the role of Classics in South Africa, the actual lived experience of individuals is not so clearly defined (pp. 8-10). In order to fully explore this question of identity, as well the relationships between power, language and subjectivity, Lambert provides in his Introduction a “South African” reading of a Greek tragedy, Aeschylus’s *Suppliants*, one supported and informed by a dramatic performance of the play in 2002 at the University of the Witwatersrand by South African playwright Tamartha Hammerschlag (p. 17).

Chapter 1, “The Classics and Afrikaner Identities” (pp. 21-59), begins by providing a survey of early education at the Cape, particularly amongst Dutch colonials, which laid the foundation for the development of Afrikaner identity. Lambert then narrows his focus onto the cultural and educational debates surrounding the development of Afrikaner nationalism that provided the background and context for the formation of the Classical Association of South Africa (Casa) in 1956. Also, with the establishment of Afrikaans as a language (used in schools officially for the first time in 1914, p.45), came the need to establish it as an academic language – which at the time, as Lambert rightly points out, was synonymous with being “a language into which the admired classics of Greece and Rome had to be translated” (p. 45). The scholarship

of T.J. Haarhoff, professor of Classics at the University of the Witwatersrand and one of South Africa’s greatest classicists, is a clear example of this fusion between Afrikaner and Classical culture (pp. 46-49).

The second chapter, “The Classics and English-speaking South African Identities” (pp. 61-90), will, perhaps, be of most interest to the readers of *Natalia*. Building on British colonial attitudes to the Classics – which for Lambert are exemplified by Cecil John Rhodes – as well as establishing the connection between the study of Classics at Oxford and the role this played in the development of the identities of English-speaking classicists at the so-called English universities in South Africa (Cape Town, Natal, Witwatersrand, and Rhodes), Lambert, who is currently Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal on the Pietermaritzburg campus, and thus well-placed to do so, narrows his focus onto the inaugural addresses of three professors of Classics from the University of Natal in the 1970s and 80s. These are the addresses of David Raven (1973), Magnus Henderson (1978), and Geoffrey Chapman (1984). After providing a brief biography of each, along with a close and critical reading of their speeches, Lambert situates them in this particularly turbulent period of South Africa’s history, which in Lambert’s words was a period “when the Oxford connection was particularly strong and opposition on the campus to the atrocities of the Nationalist regime especially vociferous” (p. 68). The remainder of the chapter is taken up with a digression on Mariannhill Monastery (pp. 83-90), and particularly on

A. T. Bryant's research on the Zulu people. Bryant's work, typical of Victorian comparative studies and demonstrating a sound knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology, was the influence of much of Lambert's own comparative research between the Ancient Greeks and the Zulus (see the bibliography for more details).

With Chapter 3, "The Classics and Black South African Identities" (pp. 91-123), after providing a survey of Classical education at tertiary level in the 1980s at the so-called "homeland" universities which were created as a result of the Extension of University Education Act (no. 45 of 1959), Lambert casts his focus further backwards in time to the pre-apartheid days of education at the various mission schools across the country: institutions like Lovedale (Wesleyan), Zonnebloem (Anglican), and the already mentioned Mariannhill (Roman Catholic). Many influential black politicians and intellectuals were trained at these institutions, and the Classics proved influential in shaping their "struggle identities". One famous anecdote that has been shamelessly exploited by classicists in South Africa and abroad working in the field of Classical Reception Studies is told in Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, where, while he was a prisoner on Robben Island, a version of Sophocles' *Antigone* was performed, with Madiba in the role of Creon (p. 112ff.).

Ultimately, Lambert concludes that the discipline itself has a protean identity, one which can easily adapt

itself to the diverse political and cultural landscape of South Africa (p. 90). In the Conclusion, Lambert questions the future of Classics as a discipline in South Africa. Here he provides a sensitive reading of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* which reflects on the position of the humanities in Africa. Lambert concludes that if "the study of the Classics remains mired in the various -isms (e.g. colonialism and nationalism) attendant upon the history of the reception and transmission of the discipline in this country, then the discipline will continue to be the preserve of a 'white enclave' and the *studia humanitatis*, in particular the study of the Classics, will be truly on their deathbed." (p. 132).

Classical Diaspora, the series of which this book is a part, is described in the following way on the book's back cover: "A exciting [sic] new series, Classical Diaspora addresses issues of national and ethnic identity within classical studies, reflecting the complex variety of the classical world's legacy in fields as various as education, government, technology, literature, painting, cinema, philosophy and empire building."

*The Classics and South African Identities* clearly fits the aims of this series, and should attract a broader readership than just within the confines of the classical community; it will be of use also to those interested in the history of education in this country as well as in African (particularly South African) studies in general.

JEFFREY MURRAY

**A MAN OF HIS TIME: BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR DUNCAN MCKENZIE**

compiled by JOHN MCKENZIE

Dargle: Triple Creek Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-0-620-48230-1. R153

EVIDENTLY the purpose of this book is to retrieve and to refurbish the reputation of the compiler's grandfather, recently tarnished during the political street renaming in the province's capital. It was then that Duncan McKenzie Drive was renamed Peter Brown Drive. Contrary to the local renaming committee's policy not to change the names of streets or roads named after people, the then premier of the province, Sbu Ndebele, intervened personally to make the change, ostensibly because of the villainy of McKenzie in crushing the so-called Zulu Rebellion of 1906.

John McKenzie's obvious response is that his grandfather was a "man of his time", i.e. he typified the values of contemporary European settlers and exemplified their virtues of honour, duty and industry in his career as a transport rider, farmer, soldier, and director of an ill-fated cold storage company. He is particularly distinguished by his military career, rising to command the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Militia, and finally the Central Column in German South West Africa during the First World War.

The book comprises five chapters. The first chapter, "How it all began" by Nancy Gardiner, is a family history, and the fifth, "After German South West Africa and into the final chapter" is largely a transcription of an earlier biography, *Delayed Action*, by his son Gordon McKenzie. These effectively deal with McKenzie the man, whereas the three central chapters deal with him as a soldier, and will probably be of more interest to general readers and military

history buffs. The book is attractively printed, but cries out for a good editor. There too many illustrations, some of which are much more interesting and relevant than others, and the cover illustration is ironic. There are too few good, clear maps. There is no scholarly apparatus beyond the citations in the fourth chapter.

In the absence of a proper editor, the compiler should have taken the task firmly in hand, instead of letting the various writers do pretty much as they pleased, so long as they kept to the main purpose. This is especially the case with the military chapters. The chapters on McKenzie in the second Anglo-Boer War by Maureen Richards and in the First World War by Mark Coghlan are long, detailed, and narrowly focused on Ladysmith and Aus-to-Gibeon, respectively. The chapter on the Zulu Rebellion is simply irrelevant, and thus detracts from the book, given that McKenzie's public reputation today hangs on his conduct of field operations in that campaign. It is surprising that there is no chapter on McKenzie as commandant of militia when it was being transformed between 1906 and 1910.

Thus the book falls short of what the compiler intends, and is in danger of being pigeonholed as another ramshackle piece in the dwindling genre of settler hagiography.

P. S. THOMPSON