

Erosion is a geological process that has gone on for untold millions of years and will still go on; but in so far as erosion is caused by man, it can be halted by man where it has not yet reached the irremediable stage. Farmers accentuate the speed of processes of land decay by burning vegetation and even animal manures, by ploughing up and down slopes, by neglect of rotation of crops. Probably 90 per cent. of the agricultural land of the Union is suffering from such maltreatment. Wherever this state of affairs occurs it is for the State to intervene vigorously and decisively. In Basutoland up-and-down ploughing is now a punishable offence. But legislation is not enough. People must be shown how to treat the land properly. Dr. Bennett, on the basis of his wide experience in U.S.A. (where things were as bad as they are now in South Africa but where energetic remedial measures are in operation), sets out a programme and urges an expeditious and efficient execution thereof.

A passage from the writings of Father Callaway, to be reviewed in our next number, may well be quoted in this connexion: it relates to the Transkei territory.

‘How strange it is that sometimes our best blessings turn against us’, he writes. ‘The first plough to find its way into African use opened out a new era. I should like to find some figures giving the yearly sale of ploughs to Africans since that day more than 100 years ago. It is difficult to-day to find any considerable area of unploughed arable land in these parts. Everywhere the plough has been at work. Everywhere you see patches of red, brown, and black soil. “How splendid”, says the progressive friend of the African. Yes, it is splendid. The soil is lending itself to man to provide for his needs. But, like many another friend of man, the soil needs infinite care, and will surely avenge herself if she is not jealously guarded. Man acquires great responsibilities when he marries a wife, and he also acquires great responsibilities when he ploughs open the soil. Mother earth is a jealous spouse. Unfortunately we, in these parts, have been blind to our responsibilities, and the soil has sought refuge from our tyranny in the bed of the ocean. Fierce storms have beaten year by year upon that soil uncovered by the plough, and it has been swept off into torrents and rivers until it reached the sea. We failed to see the writing upon the wall, and fissures in the soil began to abound. Year by year they grew larger and larger, until large areas were useless. The day of small beginnings was indeed fateful. Who would have thought fifty years ago that when the good old wagon, the one universal means of transport, deserted some track which had become a danger to self-respecting wheels and plunged off to find a new way on the veld, it was committing a crime against posterity? It was a rape of the virgin soil and the soil would surely be avenged. The population increased, the live-stock increased, but the veld decreased, and the soil was carried away into captivity from which it can never return. Much can still be done, and is now being done by scientific labour, and at heavy cost, to repair the evil, but in many places the day of opportunity has gone and it is too late.’ This was written in 1942.

The Union's Reclamation Plans

DR. BENNETT'S report has confirmed the decision of the Union Government to recast its reclamation plans for the Reserves in a much bolder form and on a much larger scale. It is recognized that the Reserves are congested and in danger of becoming sterile deserts. The Act of 1936 allowed for the acquisition of over 15 million acres of additional land and about one-half of this amount has been added to the Native areas. The Government intend to resume purchase of land as soon as conditions become favourable; but they hold out no promise that it will ever be possible to provide sufficient land to enable every African in the reserves to become a full-time peasant farmer. The best possible use must be made of what land is available. After the Native Economic Commission, 1930-2, drew attention to the deterioration that had set in much was done to reclaim the land until the outbreak of war and consequent shortage of staff and materials checked operations. Now a Twelve Year Plan,

with a scope wider than anything previously conceived, is being put into operation. Not only is existing erosion to be checked, but the system of farming is to be reorganized to protect the land against further damage and to procure the best return from it; grazing will be fenced into paddocks, water-supplies for drinking and irrigation will be preserved and developed, and afforestation will be carried out on a larger scale. Limitation of stock—an idea which conflicts with traditional customs—seems to be the crux of the whole matter: Africans have still to be persuaded that one first-class beast is worth ten scrubs. Experiments at Thaba Nchu and elsewhere have demonstrated that in a relatively short period the carrying capacity of the veld can be almost doubled by limitation of stock and proper control of grazing. The Government appeals for voluntary restriction by the people themselves, but if this fails will take whatever steps may be necessary to save the land while there is still time. For the landless Africans who depend entirely upon wage-earning for their livelihood, a village settlement is to be erected on a Trust farm adjoining Kingwilliamstown; and if this experiment succeeds similar villages will be built elsewhere. These will differ materially from the old 'locations'. The land will be laid out in plots of about one-quarter acre and on each one a house to cost about £100 will be built by Government. Occupants will be selected, will pay a moderate rent, and have the option of purchasing house and plot either for cash or in instalments spread over twenty years.

The Review of the Activities of the Department of Native Affairs for the year 1944-5 from which we have culled these facts covers a wide field and affords an impressive summary of what the Union Government is doing for the seven million Africans for whose well-being it is responsible. Until 31 March last their education was financed by proceeds of the poll-tax plus a block grant of £340,000 from the general exchequer. The Union Parliament has now approved of the whole cost of native education (amounting to 2½ million pounds a year) being provided from national funds; and the four-fifths of the native tax hitherto ear-marked for the education of Africans will revert to general revenue. Last year the Union Parliament made upwards of 353,000 Africans eligible for Old Age Pensions, and also made statutory provision for pensions under certain conditions to blind Africans who have attained the age of nineteen: there are 27,000 blind Africans on the register. Another 117,000 Africans are to benefit from an invalidity scheme by which every African sixteen years old or over, who is totally and permanently incapable of working, will receive an allowance equal to that given to Old Age pensioners. The Review describes the training given to the students in agricultural institutions; tells of the School that is being erected for the training of female Home Welfare officers; and sets out a scheme for training Veterinary Assistants. The action that the Government has taken to promote the training of Africans as physicians seems not to fall within the purview of the Native Department; but we may note here that bursaries of the value of £225 a year are being provided for African students at the Witwatersrand university, and a hostel is being built for them at a cost of £33,000.

RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE

International Contacts

WITH the cessation of hostilities in Europe the Institute has been able to renew its contacts with many former members in France and Belgium. We are happy to be in correspondence again with several members of the Executive Council, including Professor P. Rivet, Père Dubois and Professor N. de Cleene. We have also received publications from the Société des Africanistes, and the Société d'Ethnologie de Paris.

In addition to the governments of British territories in Africa and of the Union of South Africa, most of which have resumed or increased their annual donations, the Governments of French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, the French Cameroons and Madagascar, as well as the Belgian Colonial Ministry, have signified their interest in the work of the