

good social work, as well. It may require changes in our approach and in our traditional organization. But we can remember what Pope Saint Pius X said about traditional ways: 'I have a great respect for traditions', he said, 'so great a respect that I have no hesitation about starting a new one'. The process may be a slow one, and it will certainly have to be developed gradually, but it is imperative that, with faith in God, we should make a start. As Father Godin, the apostle of proletarian Paris, liked to say, it is not possible to have pat solutions and precise blueprints in the complex sphere of social life. And it does not seem to be our Lord's way either—He tells us to ask for our daily bread, not for six months' rations. If we have light enough to set out on the right road, need we ask to have the whole road floodlit?

Afghanistan

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A first visit to the quarter of a million odd, landlocked square miles of Afghanistan should act on any but a finished, finite clod rather in the same way as Samuel Johnson's tour of the Hebrides did on him. The analogy is not entirely inapposite for, like the Hebrides, Afghanistan is a land of rock; and where one is lashed by the cleansing sea, the other is bathed in the cleansing light of brilliant sunshine out of clear skies, so that both (and one has St Patrick's Breastplate in mind) may be considered similarly to uplift the susceptible spirit.

Afghanistan's rocks, however, are threaded through the valleys down which, in sharp contrast to mauve and grey stone and biscuit-coloured sand, stretch strips of green (from the air, black) cultivation, the fields of corn and millet turning yellow, lush vineyards, apple trees and screens of poplar and willow, the more lacy and delicate for the harsh contrast of the major portions of a country clustered round the south-western spurs of the majestic Hindu Kush.

What a formidable thing and an evocative word the Hindu Kush is! No wonder the Afghan people, ethnographically varied though they

be, are all brave and bright eyed, tending to tallness and litheness of limb—men capable of leaping from rock to rock with the long muskets of independence in a land where everyone is his own Khan. Here might be recalled the answer to a question. In a garden of the Kabul Valley, a garden of gaily coloured flowers, high in the hills with a stream rushing down over the rocks, when some peasants appeared an Afghan host was asked: 'Do they belong here?'—meaning 'Are they the men who look after this garden?' The reply was: 'No. "Here" belongs to them'.

Before one goes to Afghanistan, a misconception and an ignorance need to be dispelled. The misconception is that this country is somehow under the influence of Russia. What is ignored is the fact that in its relatively small area it partakes of three of the greatest river systems of the world: the Oxus in the north, the Kabul river in the east and the Helmand in the south west. It comes as a thrilling surprise to the orientalist to discover that in the course of one day's journey he moves into each of these three systems as he crosses passes of an average of 11,000 feet which make the lofty, snow-level watersheds between them. The journey from Kabul to Bamiyan and back, for instance, takes the traveller into all three of these great river basins in turn. The sense of history that awaits him at Bamiyan, if he is capable of realizing it, may briefly be indicated by remembering two statues of Buddha 170 and 100 feet high, and the hundreds of Buddhist monk's cells that are carved out of the conglomerate of the great escarpment which forms the northern fringe of the Bamiyan Valley. This was the resting place for caravans from China and India; situated between a pass in the north called 'The Tooth Breaker' and a selection of three great passes to the south which must be crossed before the Kabul Valley and the road to India is attained. It is here that Chinese travellers in the first century A.D. found a prosperous religious centre, and, of course, commercial city. Now the great Buddhas stare down into a beautiful valley: beautiful but almost empty, the ruins of the last city there still as they were left by Chingiz Khan in 1221, the memorial to his ire over a city in whose siege his grandson had been slain.

In addition to Bamiyan there is Ghazni, whence the first Muslim conquerors of India sprang down as far as Delhi; and Herat, where possibly the great Iranic civilization began and Zoroaster preached in the wide valley of the Hari Rud. There is also a Greek sub-stratum; those Buddhas at Bamiyan have been clothed by their sculptors in Greek drapery and coiffed with Greek head-dresses. The soil reveals Bactrian coins with their Euthydemian heads.

The misconception about the Russians can be corrected by the realization that the Afghans are making a very satisfactory performance of being the Switzerland of Asia. As one of them said, 'they' build roads in the north, and 'they' build roads in the south, and 'thus we maintain the balance'. 'They' refers to the Russians and the Americans respectively; what is significant is that there is very little sign of either of them, for they are kept very much to the tasks for which they are admitted to the country. The Afghans are particular about the extent to which they associate with foreigners and allow foreigners to interpenetrate their lives. Afghanistan is one of the last unspoilt and reasonably easily accessible pieces of Asia. The shrewdness and good sense of its people make them filter material progress on modern lines through a strainer of caution, so that imbalance in the basic patterns of a traditional society and serious tensions are avoided. The country's spiritual heritage is carefully preserved; but new motorways are, nevertheless, inevitably gradually driving out the caravans. Yet there are still enough mountain passes left impassable to lorries for strings of camels to be seen in plenty and for the camel drovers' strange cries to their beasts to remain an unforgettable sound in the traveller's ears.

The orientalist must find Afghanistan a veritable treasure trove, not only of objects, but, which is perhaps more important, of the atmosphere of the ancient lores and literatures with which he is concerned. Medieval Asiatic history is illuminated by what French and Italian archaeologists have uncovered; and simply by the sight of old caravan routes still in operation, and possibility of study on the ground of the exigencies of life in the Hindu Kush. Fortunately for the serious student, in Afghanistan he can find, not only a superb hospitality, but also hosts who appreciate the value of what they guard in their almost impenetrable and ineffably beautiful valleys, and their wide plains.

Russia's Mexico an Englishman over a dinner table called it; it is encouraging to think that Russia has no designs which might lead to the cutting off of this Mexico from the well intentioned student who might wish to visit the still carefully revered tombs of great Persian poets and mystics there, or who goes to work on the excavations being conducted by Professors Schlumberger and Tucci. The tombs of saints in Afghanistan are places so spiritually alive that one has the feeling that their denizens left their groups of disciples and adepts only yesterday; although those which come to mind were graves dug eight and nine hundred years ago. As one lecturer said at the recently held congress in honour of Khwaja Abdulla Ansari of Herat in Kabul, men like this

poet and mystic of nine centuries ago, and others who have flourished in the gardens of Afghanistan, are among those who come to express the presence of a grace such men visit the world to remind us of and exemplify in their acts. Afghanistan not only provides material for the scholar; it also confers a larger sense of the history of human achievement on anyone who is ready to remove himself for a spell from the clamorous egotism of the West.

Two Roseveare Incidents

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A visitor from South Africa to England is naturally asked many questions, and is equally naturally interested in any comments or reports of African and South African matters in the British press. Two incidents connected with the name of Bishop Roseveare of Ghana last August appear to me very significant.

The first of these is that the *Daily Mail* front page comment, discussing the expulsion of Bishop Roseveare from Ghana, went on to suggest that it is a pity there were not Ghanaian clergy trained and in positions of sufficient responsibility to make the statement needed. In other words, while someone had to point out to the Ghanaians that some of them were giving quasi-religious cultus to a human being, Dr Nkrumah, it would be far easier for the Ghana administration to hear this from a Ghanaian Bishop. It might indeed be almost impossible for them to accept it from a white man, a member of the colonial power from whose unjust domination (as they see it), they have just been liberated. We ought to hear truth and justice from anybody, and to fail to do so is flatly wrong. But there is the more excuse for the sin or failure, or whatever one is to call it, if the person who tells us the truth appears in some way himself identified with injustice. Not so very long ago a Pan-African Congress in West Africa passed a resolution to the effect that the white-organized Churches had been identified with the powers of exploitation. To expect Africans wholly to dissociate an