

I WANTED TO KNOW MORE

ZEERUST, Marico.—Some further information has been sent to me since I asked for it in a previous issue of this magazine.

Mrs. Hooper, wife of the Anglican clergyman who was banned from the Zeerust Reserves, writes:

"We broke no law nor by-law. What we actually did, beyond the usual missionary activities, was to put people in touch with legal advice, try to advise those in difficulties, render first-aid and supply bread to the injured, and latterly, help some of the refugees to leave. It was a time of violence and strain and hardship for us all, but we are now out-of-date by three months. We do know that many cases are proceeding and that the defence is very hard pressed for funds, time and ability to interview clients." (There is no place in Zeerust where white lawyers can properly meet with their clients—the Rectory was used for this purpose when the Rev. Hooper was still in Zeerust).

"The African assistant-priest, now in charge of the Reserve work, was not given a permit to go in and consequently about a thousand communicants did not get their Easter communion. Just before we left we had to recall a full-time catechist to Zeerust from a village in the Reserve because his life was threatened by the bodyguard of a pro-Government Chief.

"There are two points your readers ought to know. The first is the terrible destruction of law, order and morality brought about by the Native Affairs Department, the Mobile Column, and such Chiefs and their conscripted bodyguards and informers as could be coaxed or threatened into conformity.

"The second is the **appalling effect of the violent enforcing of the passes for women on family life.** Let me tell you the story of one woman out of hundreds I knew of. Let us call her Emma.

"Emma lived in a Reserve village. She had four children, the eldest eleven years and the youngest unborn. Her husband had just died but she had a male relative working elsewhere. Before the Reference Books came, she had never heard of the A.N.C. or any other political movement. She hadn't been to town and was not sophisticated. She worked her bit of land and looked after the children. Before Chief Abram Moiloa was deposed, her local petty chief had agreed with the women of his village that they would not take the Reference Books until such time as the date was gazetted when not to have one would be illegal. After Chief Abram was deposed, Emma's local chief suddenly realised he was now a Native Affairs Department official, liable to get the sack. So he told his women to take the Books. Most of them, unwillingly, did so—Emma among them. They were afraid of the Books, mainly because they recognised that 'pass offences' could separate them from their children and from the land that feeds the children, so, when one day some sons of the village came home to plough and explained further the insecurity bred of having to carry a pass, the women were quite willing to burn them. Emma was among them. She was arrested and brought to

Zeerust, leaving the children behind and in ignorance. The gaol in Zeerust being more than overflowing, she and some others were sent to a Reef prison. From there she was bailed out to await trial and returned to her village and her children. . . . But the Chief was angry, and so were the occupying police. 'I have put these women in gaol,' said the Chief, backed up by the police, 'and here they are back. As if they were precious china vessels!' Emma was badly beaten and cut, and her relation was fined two cattle for 'flouting authority.' The Chief added that he wouldn't rest till 'these disobedient women ran naked from their homes like sheep.' They ran. Some went to the Reef to wait for their cases to come up. Emma knew nobody there, and came to me in great distress of mind and body. I took her into my employ. She had a miscarriage—the doctor said it wasn't possible to say positively that it had been caused by the assault, but he hadn't much doubt. Emma recovered very slowly. I was able to go to her village (this was before we were banned, of course) and arrange for her children to be taken in by neighbours. It seemed safest to get her another Reference Book, which I did. I want to stress here that Emma was **legally** out on bail and **legally** in my employ waiting for her case. Nevertheless seldom a day passed without the C.I.D. or the Chief's spies calling in to look for her. Her nerve broke. She used to hide in the far corner of the pantry when any strangers came to the Rectory, and lock herself up when I was away in the District. The last things I did before leaving Zeerust were to make another provision for her children and arrange for Emma to await her trial in a less conspicuous place than my home had become.

"And there the story breaks—neither priest nor catechist can go to that village and the children must be left to anyone who, in a village threatened with starvation, will accept them.

"Emma was safe when I left her, but I can't say what has become of her, nor what further punishments await her for allowing a 3s. 6d. pass to be burned.

"It is a typical story, horribly familiar to me. I have told it badly because I find it shocking in the extreme.

"You asked what was happening—the violation of law, the destruction of order, the rape of family life. I don't know what is happening now, but it seems pretty obvious that the fear and distrust of all the Emmas and their children were more than justified."

I certainly think so, too. Would official silence persist if all were well? Keep your eyes open for news of Sekhukhuniland too, now. Why is it that so often when the Government tries to impose the Bantu Authorities Act on Reserves trouble occurs? **Why are we not told what is happening?** For whose good are these measures intended?

I want to know more.

P.B.