

THE SAYING THAT 'NOTHING COMES FROM NOTHING' IS ONE WHICH MOST SCIENTISTS WILL READILY ENDORSE, WHILE THE THEOLOGIAN MIGHT QUALIFY IT BY ADDING 'EXCEPT BY DIVINE POWER'. HUMANLY SPEAKING, HOWEVER, THERE IS ENOUGH OBVIOUS VALIDITY IN THAT SAYING TO MAKE US SEEK, AS WE LOOK AT THIS SCHOOL, FOR THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS THAT HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT ITS CONSTRUCTION. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT HAS LED TO THIS MOMENT OF FULFILMENT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT, A GENEROUS INSPIRATION, THAT GERMINATED AND GREW OVER THE YEARS TO BEAR ITS FRUIT TODAY.

OUR SEARCH FOR THAT ORIGINAL SPARK TAKES US BACK TO THE YEAR 1866 WHEN A BOY, ROBERT NIVEN, WAS BORN IN LIVERPOOL - THE SON OF MR AND MRS ANDREW NIVEN OF GLASGOW. HE CAME TO SOUTH AFRICA TOWARDS THE END OF THE LAST CENTURY REPRESENTING MESSRS. P W MACLELLAN AND COMPANY, WHO WERE ENGINEERING MANUFACTURERS AND MERCHANTS IN GLASGOW, AND WAS RESPONSIBLE TO THEM FOR WHAT WAS THEN THE WHOLE OF THE BRITISH, DUTCH AND PORTUGUESE TERRITORIES IN SOUTH AND EAST AFRICA.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HIS BROTHER, JOHN, HE ESTABLISHED A BUSINESS STYLED "MESSRS. J AND R NIVEN, ENGINEERING MERCHANTS", IN JOHANNESBURG, WHICH DID A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF PIONEERING WORK EQUIPPING COAL MINES IN NATAL AND TRANSVAAL.

IN 1910 WHEN HIS BROTHER DIED, HE RAN THE WHOLE BUSINESS HIMSELF AND IT BECAME, SO IT HAS BEEN SAID, "THE MOST PROSPEROUS ENGINEERING MERCHANTS IN BUSINESS IN ALL OF SOUTHERN AFRICA."

OWING TO ILL HEALTH, HE RETIRED FROM BUSINESS IN 1938 AND MOVED TO PIETERMARITZBURG. THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE BOBBY WAS A DISTINGUISHED BUSINESSMAN WITH A VERY STRONG SENSE OF WHAT WAS RIGHT, JUST AND PROPER AND, IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF HIS ATTITUDE AND ABILITY, HE WAS MADE A DIRECTOR AND GOVERNOR OF INNUMERABLE PUBLIC COMPANIES INCLUDING ESCOM AND THE RESERVE BANK. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SETTING UP OF DORMAN LONG IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, FOR INSTANCE, AND FOR MANY YEARS WAS THE COMPANY'S CHAIRMAN AT A TIME WHEN IT EMBARKED ON AN ENORMOUS EXPANSION PROGRAMME. AFTER DOING ALL THIS, AND IN HIS SO-CALLED RETIREMENT, HE PERSUADED LEYLAND AND THE BIRMINGHAM COMPANY TO START THE SOUTH AFRICAN RUBBER MANUFACTURING COMPANY AT HOWICK, WHICH WAS THEN, AND STILL IS, ONE OF THE BIGGEST RUBBER INDUSTRIES AND NOW FORMS A MAJOR PILLAR OF THE BTR GROUP.

HE SERVED ON THE COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND AND WAS A GOVERNOR OF ROEDEAN SCHOOL IN JOHANNESBURG.

A MAN OF GENIAL DISPOSITION, HE NEVER TURNED DOWN AN APPEAL TO WORK FOR INNUMERABLE CHARITABLE CAUSES, INCLUDING THE SALVATION ARMY, THE JOHANNESBURG CHILDREN'S HOME AND VARIOUS OTHER MISSIONS. HE WAS A PROMINENT MEMBER AND ELDER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA.

ROBERT NIVEN DIED, AT THE AGE OF 82, IN 1948.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF A MAN FULLY COMMITTED TO PUBLIC SPIRITED GENEROSITY, THE ROBERT NIVEN TRUST WAS ESTABLISHED, IN FEBRUARY 1942, BY ROBERT NIVEN AND HIS SISTER LAURA, WHO REMAINED A TRUSTEE UNTIL HER DEATH. THE TRUST DEED WAS VERY WIDE IN ITS AIMS, BUT EDUCATION AND CHILDREN WERE HIGH IN ITS PRIORITIES, THUS PAVING THE WAY FOR THE ERECTION, 35 YEARS LATER, OF THIS FARM SCHOOL. BUT NO LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE PROVISION MADE BY THE ORIGINAL TRUSTEES, WERE THE POLICY DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE PRESENT DAY TRUSTEES, AND TO ILLUSTRATE THIS I AM GOING TO QUOTE AT SOME LENGTH FROM A REPORT BY THE PRESENT TRUSTEE, MR PATRICK NIVEN. I QUOTE: -

"SOON AFTER BEING APPOINTED A TRUSTEE OF THE ROBERT NILON TRUST, MY CO-TRUSTEES ASKED ME WHETHER I WOULD SEEK OUT SPECIFIC AREAS IN OUR SOCIETY WHERE THERE WAS A GREAT NEED FOR SUPPORT FROM THE TRUST AND THIS SCHOOL IDEA AROSE FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:-

(1) AS RESULT OF THE MAJOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT TOOK PLACE IN THIS COUNTRY AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, WE FOUND OURSELVES FACED WITH A VERY WEALTHY SOCIETY ON THE ONE HAND, AND AN EMERGENT URBAN PROBLEM ON THE OTHER. BECAUSE THE VARIOUS CORPORATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIETIES REALISED THE NEED FOR EDUCATION AMONGST THE POORER BLACK PEOPLE, VARIOUS PLANS WERE PUT INTO EFFECT INCLUDING THE TEACH SCHOOL PROJECT, WHICH HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR SOME RELIEF TO BE FOUND IN THE URBAN AREAS FROM THE HAZARDS OF POOR EDUCATION FACILITIES. NO SUCH SURGE OF CONSCIENCE OR GOVERNMENT ACTION WAS APPARENT IN THE FARMING COMMUNITY, AND HERE I REFER SPECIFICALLY TO THE WHITE FARMING COMMUNITY AND NOT THE HOMELANDS. BECAUSE OF A GOVERNMENT DEVOTED TO A POLICY OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT, THE HOMELANDS ARE BETTER OFF THAN THE FARMING COMMUNITY. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW ISOLATED CASES, THE SOUTH AFRICAN WHITE FARMERS DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE DONE MUCH FOR THE EDUCATION OF THEIR RURAL AFRICAN COMMUNITIES. A FEW BENEFACTORS HAVE EMERGED AND I WOULDN'T LIKE THEM TO THINK THAT THEY ARE BEING IGNORED. BUT THEY ARE LARGELY PEOPLE WHO "CARE" FOR THEIR STAFF IN TERMS OF HOUSING, WELFARE, HEALTH, EDUCATION ETC.



(2) AS A RESULT OF THE AFFLUENCE IN THE WHITE SOCIETY IN THE CITIES, MANY HOME-OWNERS HAVE TRADITIONALLY RELIED ON AFRICAN STAFF TO LOOK AFTER THEIR DOMESTIC SERVICES AND IT IS ALL TOO OBVIOUS THAT WHEN THEIR SERVANTS HAVE CHILDREN, THESE CHILDREN BECOME A 'NUISANCE' AND IT IS SUGGESTED TO THE SERVANT THAT THE CHILD SHOULD BE SENT 'AWAY TO THE FARM'. THE AVERAGE WHITE EMPLOYER SELDOM THINKS OF ASKING THE QUESTION AS TO WHOSE 'FARM' THESE BABIES ARE BEING SENT AND THE BABY INEVITABLY APPEARS EITHER IN A WHITE FARMING COMMUNITY OR ELSE IN THE HOMELANDS.

(3) HAVING DONE SOME RESEARCH, WE FOUND SOME SPECIFIC AREAS WHERE FARM SCHOOLS WERE IN VERY POOR SHAPE AND THESE AREAS ARE OFTEN PLACES OF NO PARTICULAR INTEREST TO CHURCHES, MISSIONS AND OTHER SUCH CHARITABLE BODIES.

(4) WE LOOKED AT THE REGULATIONS CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FARM SCHOOL AND FOUND THAT THERE WAS NOTHING TO PREVENT US ERECTING SUCH SCHOOLS PROVIDING THAT WE STUCK TO CERTAIN LIMITED SPECIFICATIONS. HAVING LOOKED AT THESE LIMITED SPECIFICATIONS, WE DECIDED TO IMPROVE UPON THEM.

TO SUM UP, THEREFORE, IT IS OUR INTENTION BY BUILDING A SCHOOL SUCH AS THE ONE AT AMANZI ESTATE (PTY) LIMITED, TO SHOW BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION WHAT CAN BE DONE ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL. WE WANT TO SHOW ALSO THAT THE MINIMUM SPECIFICATIONS ARE NOT NECESSARILY GOOD ENOUGH AND THAT THEY CAN BE IMPROVED UPON. WE WISH TO SHOW BY EXAMPLE THAT EDUCATION AMONGST THE BLACK PEOPLE IN THE FARMING COMMUNITY IS, IN OUR CONSIDERED OPINION, JUST AS IMPORTANT AS EDUCATION IN THE URBAN AREAS OR HOMELANDS FOR THAT MATTER.

FINALLY, HAVING BUILT THE SCHOOL AT AMANZI, IT IS OUR INTENTION TO BUILD 4 MORE SIMILAR SCHOOLS IN OTHER FARMING AREAS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THESE SCHOOLS WILL BE GEOGRAPHICALLY SPACED SO THAT THE EXAMPLE CAN BE GIVEN TO FARMING COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY."

THE REPORT FROM WHICH I EXTRACTED THAT ENLIGHTENING PASSAGE, MUST HAVE RUNG THE BELLS OF HEAVEN BECAUSE SOMEBODY HAD AT LAST NOTICED THE PLIGHT OF THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN IN OUR RURAL AREAS AND WAS STRETCHING FORTH A HAND TO HELP THEM - TO PROVIDE THE MEANS OF EQUIPPING THEM FOR A RICHER, FULLER LIFE IN THE COUNTRY OF THEIR BIRTH. AS WE SEE THEIR MAGNIFICENT INSPIRATION TAKING SHAPE BEFORE OUR EYES, WE CAN BUT EXPRESS OUR HUMBLE GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION TO THE FAR-SIGHTED TRUSTEES WHO INITIATED THIS VENTURE.

BUT I WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE WITH A SPECIAL WORD TO THE CHILDREN, TO THOSE WHO WILL BENEFIT IN THE FUTURE FROM THE EDUCATION TO BE PROVIDED IN THIS SCHOOL. HOWEVER NOBLE THE AIMS OF YOUR BENEFACTORS, AND HOWEVER IMAGINATIVE THEIR PROVISION FOR YOUR EDUCATION, YOU, AND ONLY YOU CAN MAKE A COMPLETE SUCCESS OF THEIR VENTURE, BY GRASPING YOUR NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH BOTH HANDS AND EXTRACTING THE MOST FROM EVERY HOUR YOU SPEND IN THIS SCHOOL. THE TRUSTEES WILL SEE THE COMPLETION OF THE SCHOOL AS MERELY THE PROVISION OF THE MEANS TO THE DESIRED END THAT THEY HAD IN MIND, AND ONLY YOUR EMERGENCE AS SOUNDLY EDUCATED PUPILS, READY TO ATTAIN GREATER HEIGHTS, WILL SIGNAL THE FULFILMENT OF THEIR DREAM. IF, LIKE US, YOU OWE THEM ANY GRATITUDE - AND INDEED YOU DO - YOUR UNFLAGGING APPLICATION AND HIGH ENDEAVOUR MUST SHOW IT, AS I AM SURE IT WILL.

HOW FORTUNATE THAT THIS SCHOOL SHOULD STAND ON THE FARM 'AMANZI', WHICH WAS ONCE OWNED BY SIR PERCY FITZPATRICK, AUTHOR OF 'JOCK OF THE BUSHVELD'. MAY THE SPIRIT OF PIONEERING ADVENTURE EVER REMAIN A MOVING AND INSPIRING ELEMENT IN THIS ENVIRONMENT.

IT IS WITH PROFOUND ADMIRATION FOR THE ROBERT NIVEN TRUST, ITS ORIGINAL FOUNDERS TO ITS PRESENT TRUSTEES, THAT I DECLARE THIS SCHOOL DULY OPENED.