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The Twenty-first Anniversary
of the foundation of
The Union of South Africa
- A retrospect and a prospect -

Essay for
The
Royal Empire
Society
1933

THE TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY
OF THE
FOUNDATION OF THE
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA:
A RETROSPECT AND A PROSPECT.

ESSAY FOR THE
ROYAL EMPIRE SOCIETY.

-1933-

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THE TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA: A RETROSPECT AND A PROSPECT.

INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

While we were all celebrating the advent of the year 1931 and were looking forth brightly into the future, as people will on New Year's, the youngest of the British Dominions, the Union of South Africa, was celebrating her coming of age. Her twenty-first birthday was not hailed throughout the Empire as a portentous event, nor was it widely advertised; nevertheless it marked an important stage in her short history. At birth, she fell heir to some very great problems which, as she reached maturity, became increasingly important. By her twenty-first birthday these problems began to call for some definite and decisive action, and it is well to analyze them in an effort to establish the possibilities and future prospects of this important part of the Empire.

The Union is a very attractive country. It is largely a high plateau, with dry exhilarating atmosphere and temperate climate. Starting at the east coast, there is a narrow plain which rises sharply to a central plateau. This plateau slopes gradually toward the west, and rainfall decreases until, on the west coast, we find an arid plain. On the east coast there are dense jungles with all the flora and fauna of the tropics, while on the plateau or veldt, as it is called, there is the same grand scenery that is found in the plains and foothills of the Canadian West. There are no great rivers in the Union - an important fact in its development. Mountain and plain are so intermingled that, until the recent construction of roads and the advent of the automobile, rural districts were entirely isolated. And finally, the broken nature of the country had the amazing effect of changing the Dutch - a race of intrepid seamen, into a decidedly non-seafaring race.

2 The people of the Union are a mixture of English, Dutch, natives and Asiatics. The English and Dutch form the ruling and industrial classes; the natives supply most of the unskilled labour, and the Asiatics - Hindu and Chinese coolies, - are, for the most part, an important element in the commercial life of at least two of the provinces, Natal and Transvaal.

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The very diversity of the population, and their former division, suggests the presence of strife, bitterness and jealousy, and, indeed, it is the heterogenous nature of the population, and its distribution and antecedents that has produced most of the problems that the Union has to face today.

Just what are these antecedents and the nature of the various quarrels, it is our intention of explaining. We further wish to establish possible lines of development and improvement and predict what the future may hold for this splendid Dominion.

THE ECONOMIC ASPECT

CHAPTER II

The basis of the Union's economic structure is considered by some as very unsound. It is built chiefly around the gold mining industry - a fact which has proved to be both a boon and a curse to the country. It is this industry that has made possible its rapid development, its network of railroads, its roads, its telegraphs and harbours; and more than this, it supplies the Government with a large part of its annual revenue. On the other hand, the gold mining industry is built on low-paid native labour with highly-paid white supervision' and the supply of gold, at least in the present fields, is threatening to run out.

The evils of the first feature of gold mining can easily be imagined. The high wages paid to the white workers makes the Union a very much more expensive country to live in than it should be; while the comparatively small wages paid for unskilled labour make the standard of living of the European labourer very low. This condition led to trouble, as the price of gold went down and the cost of production (on account of deeper mines) went up. The 1922 disturbances on the Rand were a direct result of this. But, even after that cut of white men's wages, they were still too high, as attested to by the Wage Commission Report of 1925. impl -

But even if these high wages do come down considerably in this time of economic stress, they will still be a great deal higher than native wages; and, for this reason, most of the natives live on 'Reserves', coming off them to work only when they are forced by necessity to do so. Therefore, if employers were to give the natives higher wages, it would serve only to keep them longer on the reserves and would create a serious shortage in labour. But this native labour, of course, is inefficient and really does not merit a very substantial increase in wages.

Here, then, we have an impasse - a deadlock between native worker and white employer. The employer is forced to keep wages low to ensure a steady supply of labour, and cannot offer any inducement to the native to make his work more efficient. On the other hand, the native being naturally disinclined to labour, works only when he is forced to and does not care about the quality of his work. He does not care to improve himself and nobody else thinks it his business to help him to do so.

The only possible way out of this difficulty is to help the native to make himself more efficient. But, will it pay? In the long run - yes. But does the employer of today care whether, by stinting now, future generations will benefit by his altruism?

THE ECONOMIC ASPECT (Continued)

CHAPTER III

Our second difficulty, that of the shrinkage of gold supply, requires a solution even more quickly than the first. As we have already pointed out, the Union's economic structure is built around the gold mining industry. If this industry collapses, is the whole structure going to collapse? And this shrinkage is not merely speculation, - it is a fact. The Government's Mining Engineer has estimated that by 1935 there will be a ten per cent shrinkage; by 1940 a forty-one and a half per cent shrinkage, and by 1945 a sixty-four and a quarter per cent shrinkage - that is, from peak production. That means that thousands of men will be thrown out of work, and will have to be absorbed by other industries. It has been suggested that a development of copper and tin deposits would absorb these workers, but the market in these metals is not good enough to warrant any greater activity in this field. However, even if there are a great number of new mines developed, the revenue derived from these base metals would not equal that derived from gold mining.

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Any extension of diamond mining activity would be equally futile. The supply of diamonds seems to be unlimited - for besides rock deposits, there are alluvial deposits all over the Union. But the difficulty here is in regulating the supply to the demand. Cecil Rhodes was able to control the market through his great amalgamation of mines, and his controlling organization has lasted to this day. Therefore we find that agricultural and manufacturing development offers the Union her only hope of salvation from a period of serious economic stress.

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The economic future of the Union, then, will be a race - a two-fold race - against time. Firstly, the gold mining industry will have to be fostered (and nursed along) and operating costs cut to a minimum in an effort to keep up production; and secondly, there will have to be a broadening out and strengthening of other industries against the day of the final collapse of the gold mining industry.

In agriculture, the prospects for development are at once good and bad. As there is a great diversity of climate and soil in the union, one would naturally expect a great diversity of crops. Such is the case; but, although the average precipitation is high, rain does not come at the right time, and then is not steady enough. Irrigation has been found to be prohibitatively expensive on account of the lack of adequate supplies of water. The only kind of agriculture that is thriving is ranching. Wells have been dug in many places in the Union and pasturing herds of sheep and cattle is a highly developed industry, but the land used for pasture in many parts is fertile enough for mixed farming. Perhaps some day a scheme will be devised whereby the great water supplies of Central Africa can be used to irrigate the fertile fields of the Union.

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Thus nature to a certain extent hampers the development of agriculture, but unfortunately man also checks its advance. Dutch farmers, in isolated communities, have not the ambition to apply modern methods to their agricultural problems. They prefer to work on as their fathers and grandfathers did, with incompetent native farm hands and antiquated machinery. This kind of farming is wasteful and extravagant, and must be done away with before agriculture can be called one of the Union's thriving industries. Further, on the native reserves, only the most primitive implements and methods of farming are used, and thus much of the best land in the Union is actually failing to support the people living in it. 2

7 In manufacturing, more cheerful conditions prevail. During the war, when shipping became scarce and most of the shipping was being used to carry food to the War Zone, the Union found itself under the painful necessity of providing for itself many of the manufactured articles it had formerly imported. This, of course, was a great stimulus, and as this industry does not depend upon native labour, it is thriving and faces no great problem at the present time. Its prospects for development in the future are good, and it is about the only really sound industry of the Union.

The Union in this respect is following the lead of the rest of the world in building up her domestic manufactures - the manufacturing of necessities at home for home consumption. 2

IS THERE A REAL UNION?

CHAPTER IV

The year 1902 saw the establishment of British political hegemony in South Africa, and the discontented Dutch felt very much hurt and injured. In 1910, however, this situation was reversed and the numerically superior Dutch took over the reins of Government; and it was the Englishman's turn to feel "put out". So, in the forming of a national political unity, English and Dutch alike harboured bitter memories, and their jealousies and hatreds found vent in such petty quarrels as the dispute over a 'Flag' for the Union. Separate schools and a common language also cause bitter strife and now we find that there are two official languages; there are separate schools - English in English schools; Dutch in Dutch schools.

Bilingualism seems to be more an ideal than a possibility. However, with the coming of the radio and the motorcar and the rapid growth of the cities, this condition will certainly right itself and bilingualism will become an accomplished fact. That it is desirable is self-evident, for the lack of understanding between English and Dutch has been one of the Union's great stumbling-blocks. However, it is a comparatively simple matter of education to right this deplorable condition, and, indeed, steps have already been taken to do so. It is up to the younger generation of the Union to admit that wrongs were done on both sides, to bury the past and forge ahead until they realize the ideals of union within the Union.

TRADE

CHAPTER V

When the Dutch came to Africa, they lost their seafaring habits, and so we find that the trade of the Union is carried on, almost exclusively, in British ships. But, just recently, in an effort to extend her Mediterranean trade, the Union subsidized a line of Italian steamships. This is a very good sign, and presages an extension of trade that will be a natural adjunct to her increased activity in agriculture and manufacturing. Until this recent change, the Union's trade was almost entirely with the United Kingdom, - sixty per cent of her imports being British, and eighty-eight per cent of her exports going directly to Britain. des/

The Union also trades with the rest of South Africa, but this trade is naturally restricted by the sparse settlement and the undeveloped nature of these other countries. Indeed, the lines along which the trade of the Union is progressing present a very fascinating study. Her agriculture and manufacturing industries are being developed slowly. The diverse nature of her climate makes it possible to grow all sorts of crops; hence she will need to import very little besides raw materials, and the inevitable luxuries. Her exports, on the other hand, will be great. She will supply the rest of the world with diamonds and gold, if the supply holds out. Does not this trade speak of great future wealth and national prosperity? A A

THE UNION'S "COLOUR PROBLEM"

CHAPTER VI

We turn now to a serious question in the life of the Union: the "colour problem". It has caused, and probably will continue to cause, a good deal of concern among students of sociology, and there is no doubt that the question of the relationship between black man and white will be a major issue during the coming years. The European is obviously an "interloper"; but, if we are to urge historical claims, so is the Pantu. On this basis, then, the natives deserve to be treated arbitrarily as conquered peoples. But, our ideas on this matter have changed materially in the past few decades, and we have come to realize that it is to our advantage to incorporate into our own society, as far as possible, the so-called "conquered peoples". But is it possible to do this - does previous experience with the negro justify this incorporation?

Further, the natives outnumber the whites three to one. It is their very numbers that make them dangerous; and, when you add to this their greater rate of increase and realize that this three to one ratio is increasing annually, you wonder what can be the outcome - will the natives eventually get control of the central power of the Union, and will the Union become a prey to anarchy like the unfortunate island of Haiti?

Mr. J. H. Oldham calls this "the ultimate political problem of the world" - how the races of the world will live together in peace and harmony. So you can see that this native problem is of significance, both national and world-wide. Here is a statement indicative of the native's bewilderment on being told he is a "problem" and a "danger": "The white man came to us and told us that we must throw off our barbarism - we must be educated - we must advance; we have obeyed his words, and now, because we have advanced, he tells us that we are a menace and a danger".

Eventually, of course, this problem will solve itself, one way or another. At present, the Government is pursuing a policy of segregation which General Smuts justifies as follows: "A policy which will not force their institutions into an alien European mould, but which will preserve their unity with their own past, conserve what is precious in their past, and build their future on specifically African lines".

General Smuts further states that the African, thus left to himself, will probably build up a system of government and a social order that will be a definite contribution to the world. The inhumanity of this policy of leaving the African to develop his primitive mentality by himself without the help of European associations and education, is obvious. And another argument against this policy of segregation is that not all the natives are equally uncivilized. Some of the more educated ones make even better citizens than the masses of the people of Europe. Hence, to be really just and fair, segregation would have to be dual in its control. First, the untutored natives would have to be put on reserves and be given every opportunity to develop themselves, while the other more educated ones would have to be given a place in white society.

This seems to be the easiest, fairest and best solution of the situation, but some eminent authorities aver that the safest policy would be to import a great number of new white settlers to invigorate and increase the present white population. At any rate, the problem rests with future generations, and there is no doubt that any definite action the Union may take, will have immediate results on all other countries in the same position,

CONCLUSIONS.

CHAPTER VII

In this article we have traced the progress of the Union and discussed the possibilities of further progress. But we must realize that progress is a responsibility and not an endowment - it is the responsibility of intelligence, and that power which foresees, plans and constructs in advance. And this intelligence, this mysterious driving force behind civilization, is directly attributable to education. Education is the keynote of progress and advance, and offers the only real solution to the problems of the Union.

Her hopes for the future, then, are in speedy and universal education - both liberal and vocational. The native must be educated to efficiency in labour, the backward Dutch farmer must be taught modern agricultural methods, and all must be given a sufficient educational background to enable them to fulfil the duties of citizenship intelligently and purposefully.

The Union of South African can and will measure up to what is expected of her as an integral part of the great British Commonwealth of Nations. Her educational system is equal to the great task; there are great leaders and great traditional figures such as Rhodes and Botha to help and encourage; there is boundless natural wealth and a good basic development of it; there is no lack of courage or the power to accomplish great things. The Union is on the road to becoming a real national unity, with a good understanding between races, economic prosperity and the spiritual content that comes from 'the knowledge of a task well done'.

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