

A MESSAGE TO THE TRANSVAAL AFRICAN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

by

R.F. Alfred Hoernlé.

At the request of the editor of "The Good Shepherd", I am writing this brief message to the members of the T.A.T.A., who have done me the honour of ~~approaching~~ appointing me as their representative on the Transvaal Advisory Board of Native Education.

Illness unfortunately prevented ~~my~~ attending the first meeting of the Board after my appointment, in September of last year. Thus, the meeting, ^{recent} early in May, was my first experience of the work of the Board. Without betraying any confidential discussions, I can honestly put on record two impressions which I carried away from that meeting.

The first is that of the genuine interest of all the members of the Board in Native education; of their genuine sympathy with the needs and aspirations of the Native peoples; of their wide and thorough knowledge of the facts. Considering the variety of the group - the Chief Inspector of Native Education and other officials; members of Missionary bodies, Protestant and Roman Catholic; free-lance workers for the Native cause, like Senator J.D. Rheinallt Jones and myself - the spirit of co-operation and harmony was most impressive, and would have heartened any Africans, had they been able to listen in. Of course, the Board is "advisory" only, and much of its advice involves spending money which, the Government may say, is not there. Still, advice unanimously tendered makes an impression, even if it cannot be followed immediately. Steady and re-iterated pressure will ^{sooner or later} ultimately win a larger place on the estimates for the improvement of Native teachers' salaries; for the better ~~equip~~ equipment of existing Native schools; for the starting or recognition of additional schools.

My second impression is that, for the time being, the interests of the African Teaching Profession will be most effectively served by "free-lances", like Senator Jones and myself. By ~~that~~ word, "free-lances", I mean that we are both in a position of personal independence which enables us to plead for the interests of African teachers with a freedom and outspokenness, such as are impossible to one who is obliged all the time to consider, e.g., the discretion imposed upon him by his official

position as a Government servant, or the possibly adverse effects of his advocacy upon his personal prospects or on the interests of the institution to which he is attached. At one time, I believe, African teachers were themselves members of the Board. But, I feel quite sure that no African teacher, in the presence of his official superiors and employers, could have spoken as openly and insistently as Senator Jones and I felt able to speak. In the far-off future it may be otherwise; in the present state of race relations in South Africa, it still remains true that Native interests can be more effectively urged on a White Government by White spokesmen for the Native peoples, than by Africans themselves. The new Native Representative Council may, however, alter this even sooner than we think.

My next point is this: whether the representatives of Africans be Whites or Africans, in either case they must be adequately supported by the Africans for whom they plead. And, by "adequate support" I mean two things. First, a representative carries more weight when the body which he represents is known to be a large and active body, rather than a small and dissipated group. I shall speak more effectively on behalf, or in the name, of the African teachers when their Association is itself a strong and powerful body - a body to which at least the great majority of African teachers are proud to belong. So long as the membership of the Association is small and fluctuating, its expressions of opinion can always be countered by the question: What right has it to speak for the whole profession, including that majority of teachers who have too little interest, or too little faith, in it to join it? Hence, I hope that the membership of the Association will grow as large as possible: ^{this} ~~it~~ will ^{strengthen} ~~strengthen~~ my hands or the hands of anyone else whom it may invite to be its spokesman. I would, therefore, appeal to all African teachers to join their Association and make it the organ through which their opinions and aspirations can be authoritatively voiced.

Secondly, "adequate support" means that no one can represent unless he is instructed what representations to make. I am grateful to the Association for sending a deputation to meet me and explain to me the case which they wished me to argue. I trust that we shall develop and make further use of this method of co-operation.

One last thought, to conclude with! I think I can assure the African teachers that my arguments on their behalf, and the response which these arguments evoked from members of the Board, promise better things in the future for members of the African Teaching profession. But, on their side, African teachers must help us by remembering always that theirs is a "profession", and that to be a member of a profession lays responsibilities and duties on a man, the shirking of which not only means his personal failure, but also drags down the status and good name of the profession. There are three such duties which I would stress.

First, let no teacher think that, because he has got a Certificate and a job, he can therefore stand still. The world of knowledge is boundless: he can never ~~cease~~ come to an end in learning. The art of teaching is difficult: he must ever strive to master it more fully.

Secondly, every teacher owes it to his profession and to the community in which he exercises that profession, to maintain its high standards of personal conduct - ~~in~~ uprightness and cleanness of living; ~~in~~ loyalty to high ideals; ~~in~~ devoted service to his people through service to the children of that people.

Thirdly, ~~The~~ ^{remember} acquirement of what the White world has to offer to Africans in knowledge, in literature, in religion, means a growth in African teachers are, in a special sense, the growing points of their people.

the things of the mind. No one is by his training, his position, his work better qualified to foster this growth in himself and to be the cause of such growth in others, than the African teacher. His opportunity is great: may he ever strive to be equal to it!

Suggest reading "Teaching".

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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