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Would Independence bring
Unity and Strength to
South Africa ?

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Thoughts for South Africans on the Questions of the Day.

WOULD INDEPENDENCE BRING UNITY AND STRENGTH TO SOUTH AFRICA?

In a previous paper the question has been discussed of the possibility of South Africa becoming an independent republic from the point of view of its relation with the great Powers of the world. In this paper the question will be asked whether such a change would bring internal peace to South Africa and whether it would enable her citizens to deal better with the great domestic problems which are sorely needing attention.

I.—Would it bring internal peace?

Unfortunately in South Africa the racial division exercises so deep and powerful an influence on the minds of many people as to make it difficult for them to look at anything from a non-racial point of view. The Englishman when he speaks of loyalty too often thinks only of the loyalty which he feels to his own race and its political institutions and expects the same of others whose racial ties and national traditions may be quite different. The Afrikaner of Dutch race when he speaks of "the people" or "our people" is equally apt to forget that the "people" of South Africa can rightly have any national ideals or aspirations beyond or different from those of his own race.

It is sometimes said that just as in the United States of America all sections of the people support a republican form of government so there is no reason in the nature of things why the same should not be possible also in South Africa. No doubt this is true. There is no reason in the nature of things why all sections of the people in South Africa should not be united under an independent republic as well as under any other form of government and there might come a time when the conditions of the country were such as to make this the most desirable form of government for the majority of the people. But what serious men in South Africa have to consider at present is not an academic argu-

ment as to what is best in itself or might be best under some different state of things, but what is best for us as we are now, what is that form of government which divides us least and affords to the whole people a settled government and freedom to manage the affairs of their country.

Now, can anyone who looks at the present condition of South Africa doubt that any attempt to destroy its connection with the British Empire, more especially at a time when the Empire is engaged in a struggle for its existence in Europe, would set aflame again a racial war? A people naturally of a peace-loving habit does not rise to overthrow its form of government without some strong feelings uniting them against it to which appeal can be made. If they were threatened with political oppression or if their connection with the Empire were greatly detrimental to their moral or material interests there would be a motive which would unite men of both races against it. At present, however, there is no such common motive and in consequence, as one only too clearly sees in the recent rebellion, the appeals of the leaders for support against the Constitution were addressed to the bitterest feelings of racial hatred. Can anyone who reads, for example, the words of De Wet or Fourie think that a movement for independence based on such appeals, whether successful or not, could lead to anything but a racial war?

Now the present Constitution, whatever its imperfections, is based on the principle of racial equality and the removal of points of racial conflict. The process may be slow and the settlement may not at first be completely acceptable to either race. That would be too much to expect of any settlement devised by human hands. But at any rate the principle is there. The foundation is laid in unity and not on something which necessarily divides.

2.—Would such a change enable South Africans to solve more effectively or more in accordance with national ideals the internal problems which lie before them?

Let us look briefly at three of the most important of these and apply the test to them, e.g., the Native question, the question of Asiatic immigration and the question of indigence among the European population.

In regard to the Native question, whatever may have been the case in the past it cannot truly be said that any policy has been imposed on South Africa by the British Government or that the people of South Africa have been hindered from giving effect to any policy on which they could agree. People in the Free State complain that there are not such strict pass laws against natives and coloured persons as there used to be in the days of the old republic. But what is the reason? Not the interference of the British Government, but the fact that the Union Government and Parliament will not introduce or pass such laws. When the Union Parliament passed a Native Land Act to which a large body of native opinion was strongly averse, the British Government did not interfere even though a deputation of natives went to England to protest against it. It may well be that a policy which is bitterly opposed to the feelings of a section of the European people in one Province is nevertheless substantially in accordance with the general wish of the European people of the whole Union, or at any rate may be the policy on which the larger number is willing to agree. The grievance of the minority is against the majority, not against the Constitution. Neither a new Constitution nor the establishment of an Independent Republic would alter the fact that among the European people of South Africa opinion is strongly divided on this question and that if there is to be a Union of South Africa at all, whatever its form of government may be, its policy will be that which most nearly satisfies the majority of the people. By the people, as was stated before, we must be careful to include the whole people who enjoy citizen rights and not only that section of it with whose opinions and traditions we may be more closely connected.

The immigration of Asiatics supplies one of the arguments most frequently used by those who hold that membership of the Empire is detrimental to the interests of South Africa. No doubt that argument is strengthened by the fact that the British Government was in frequent conflict with the Government of the South African Republics in regard to the treatment of British Indians in the Transvaal. But while bound to see that ordinary justice was observed in the treatment of its Indian subjects by a foreign

government it cannot be said that the British Government has ever tried to force the South African people to open their doors to Indian immigration. In the Free State before the war the law absolutely prohibited the settlement of Indian immigrants in that country. The British Government did not then bring any pressure on the people to alter that law, and even after the war, when the country was governed as a Crown Colony, the law remained in force. If the British Government had wanted to open the country to Indian immigration, surely it would have done it then.

In the Transvaal, as has been said, there was trouble between the Republic and the British Government over the treatment of British Indians who were lawfully settled in the country. Indians were allowed to enter the country under the Conventions made between the Republic and the British Government, but it was not till the years immediately preceding the war that their numbers began to alarm public opinion. After the war no Asiatics were allowed to come into the Transvaal unless they could shew that they had been settled in the country before the war, and in the last year of Crown Colony Government an Ordinance was passed making it compulsory for Asiatics, living in the Transvaal, to be registered so that newcomers might be detected and sent back. This Ordinance was not assented to by the Imperial Government in view of the near approach of Responsible Government, but the first act of the new Parliament under Responsible Government was to re-enact it and it was then duly assented to by the Imperial Government. It is clear, therefore, that during the time when the British Government was ruling the Transvaal no attempt was made to open the country to Asiatic immigration. Now, under Union, a law has been made with the full assent of the Imperial Government, which gives the Government of South Africa complete control of immigration. How then can it be said that the Imperial Government has forced Asiatic immigration on South Africa? The Asiatic question for South Africa is not now the question of how to prevent Asiatics from coming into the country, but how to deal with the large Asiatic population now in the Union, the vast majority of whom are here not because the Imperial Government forced us to let them in, but because certain industries in Natal brought them over in order to have cheap labour.

But what would the position be if South Africa were independent of the Empire? In attempting to prohibit the immigration of British Indians she would then have to deal with the British Government, not by way of friendly consultation as now, but at arm's length. There are also other Asiatic powers which would have to be reckoned with if we attempted to keep out Asiatics. The Government of Japan would speak to us in a very different tone if our coasts were not protected by the British Fleet and our interests were not supported by the influence and power of the Empire.

Does our membership in the Empire hinder us from improving the social and economic conditions of the people? Everyone who knows the country knows how serious is the condition of what is called the poor or indigent white families who are living in the country districts in ignorance and poverty or drifting into towns to sink to even worse conditions there. To improve the condition of these people and to open for them prospects which will enable them to become useful and efficient citizens is a work of truly national importance, whatever may be the form of Constitution under which the country is governed. But the fact that South Africa is a member of the British Empire is of considerable help in the matter of finding the means necessary for this purpose and for other internal developments, because if South Africa were an independent State its resources would be much more heavily taxed than they are now to defend itself against aggression from outside. South Africa, as has been shewn in a former paper, is so situated as to be an object of desire to any great Power which wishes to be strong at sea. Our population is small and our oversea trade large and valuable. In 1913 the value of South African exports oversea was £64,500,000. Surely it is a great help to us in dealing with our many internal questions that in providing for the development of our resources we have not to bear ourselves the whole cost of a great navy to defend our coasts and oversea trade, but that in our young days as a nation we have the power of the British Empire between us and any aggressive enemies.

South Africans sometimes speak as if the danger of attack from outside was much exaggerated and they point to the history of the past as shewing that the conquest of South Africa would be

too difficult a task for any power to undertake. In saying this, however, it will generally be found that they are thinking only of the inland provinces. They forget that the coast is open to attack by any power that is strong at sea, and that it has been protected for the last hundred years, almost without their knowing it, by the British Fleet. Independence would not be of much advantage to us if a foreign Power occupied our coasts and controlled our trade. The Empire relieves us to a large extent of what for a small country would be a heavy charge for self-defence, and thus enables us to make use of what resources we have to improve the condition of the people.

Prosperity and internal peace are sorely needed in South Africa at present. They are not, however, in themselves all that is needed. Just as man does not live by bread alone, so a people cannot live, however prosperous, without a national spirit and national ideals. Unfortunately, the national ideals which at present make the strongest appeal are inadequate and may even be harmful, because on either side they appeal to one section of the people only. Independence will not cure this, least of all an independence based on the ascendancy of one of the two sectional ideals over the other, but only the growth of a national life and outlook wide enough to include both.

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