

IN THIS ARTICLE R. V. SELOPE THEM A TRACES THE STORY OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL ANTHEM FROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO WORLD-WIDE FAME WHEN IT WAS SUNG AT A GREAT CONGRESS IN SWITZERLAND.

Africa Brings Its Gifts

WHEN I read in the European Press the other day that the African national anthem, "Nkosi Sikelel i-

Afrika," was sung by men and women representing ten nations at the Moral Re-Armament Assembly at Caux in Switzerland, my heart was deeply touched and a vision of mankind rose before me. I realised as never before the significance of the saying that "God works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." Africa, I said to myself, is no longer dark, at least not as dark as when David Livingstone discovered its interior regions over a century ago.

It has been called out of the darkness of its ancient life and has responded remarkably well. Together with its sons and daughters it has struck its tents and is on march on the road to civilisation. Indeed it has joined the illustrious procession of progressive mankind that has been going on since civilisation took roots on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea thousands of years ago.

It is the last of the continents to join this procession, but it has been said that "the first shall be the last and the last shall be the first." Will this be true of Africa which is now in the making? This is the question which I asked in my mind as I read the report that the representatives of the ten nations who sang our national anthem — a humble and not a pompous prayer for the salvation of Africa — were deeply moved and inspired. For in it they found no racialism or imperialism. They found the humble voice of Africa's sons and daughters asking God for His blessings on Africa.

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To the men and women who sang it, no doubt, the spirit of the anthem was in accord with the spirit of the ideology of Moral Re-Armament whose leaders are busy rebuilding the world on the basis of moral standards and the guidance of God. At Caux where Moral Re-Armament assem-

bled is held every year, many people have discovered that the greatest problem confronting the world to-day is neither capitalism nor communism but "selfishness in the heart of everybody which makes social injustice, class war and world war possible". And I may add to this quotation that it is selfishness that is responsible for race and colour hatred which, if not checked in time might inevitably lead to world conflict on racial and colour line.

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The spirit of our national anthem — "God Bless Africa" — has caught the imagination of the men and women of the Moral Re-Armament because it is the simple prayer of men and women in whose society there are no class barriers, no colour bars and no imperialistic ideas. In old Africa all men were equal and equally entitled to the good things of life and it is my conviction that to a certain extent this principle still holds good even in these days of materialism and individualism. Although Africa is fast becoming Europeanised, its soul is not altogether destroyed. In the hearts of the millions of its sons and daughters there is still room for kindness, generosity, hospitality and humanity, and these are the human qualities which Africa is bringing as gifts to this bewildered and peaceless world.

It was not by mistake or chance that "God Bless Africa" was sung at Caux by an assembly of men and women whose sole object is to change the world into Paradise by changing the hearts of men in every walk of life. It was by the guidance of God, Who "works in mysterious way, His Wonders to perform."

Having commented on the singing of our national anthem at Caux, let me now, for the benefit of the men and women of Caux, tell the story of the origin of this Anthem. When the African National Congress was established in 1912, white politicians were going up and down the country preaching the gospel of segregation and of limiting the rights of Africans to purchase and own land wherever they liked in South Africa. In 1913, Parliament passed the Natives Land Act which while not creating territorial segregation, made provision for the setting aside of areas where Africans could buy and own land. The Act did not provide the land, and the result was that when it was put into operation thousands of Africans were rendered landless and homeless. Some of these unfortunate victims of this Draconian law perished with their stock by the road side in their search for refuge.

The leaders of the African National Congress launched a strong campaign against this iniquitous law, and in his campaign kindled the fire of the spirit of nationalism in the hearts of the African people. The eviction of thousands of families from their homes was a heart-rending story but marvelous in that it gave impetus to race-consciousness among Africans. Everywhere in the country Africans were up and doing. The cry became no longer that of the families that were rendered landless and homeless but that of a landless and homeless race.

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Into this cry our young and old poets and musicians brought their poems, songs and praises. That is to say, in their search for a suitable plea to God, the leaders of Congress remembered even the departed spirits of our race such as Tiyo Soga and Knox Bokwe, and appealed to God through

their hymns. It was Tiyo Soga's "Lizalise dinga lak'o Tixo we nyano" (Fulfill thy promise, God of truth) which was sung at the opening of every meeting of Congress, and Knox Bokwe's "Give a thought to Africa" which closed every meeting.

Then later on young Africans came on the scene. First it was R. T. Caluza M.A. who intensified the cry for land by his "Sikalel' izwe la Kiti", (we cry for our country). And while the spirit of nationalism was being inflamed by Caluza's songs of patriotism, an angel of hope descended upon us. It was Sothonga, a Pimville young man whose initials unfortunately I have forgotten, with his composition "God Bless Africa" which was unanimously adopted as a national anthem by the African National Congress.

No one dreamed at the time not even Sothonga himself, that this hymn would one day be sung by men and women of other races and at a place situated in the heart of Europe. Sothonga is gone to the Great Beyond but his soul is marching on with Africa's gifts to the world, and the Moral Re-Armament has discovered in the anthem he composed a spirit which stirs and changes the hearts of men, because it is a plea not for any particular racial group in Africa but for the blessings of the continent as a whole.