

In Face of Fear

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MICHAEL SCOTT'S CHALLENGE
TO SOUTH AFRICA

by

FREDA TROUP

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Dedicated to all 'displaced persons', and
those dispossessed of their lands, all
fugitives from injustice and bad faith, all
who are made trespassers and vagabonds
by unjust laws

Gammans Valley,
South-West Africa
1950

My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,
As the channel of brooks that pass away;
Which are black by reason of the ice,
And wherein the snow hideth itself:
What time they wax warm, they vanish:
When it is hot they are consumed out of their place.
The caravans that travel by the way of them turn aside:
They go up into the waste, and perish.
The caravans of Tema looked,
The companies of Sheba waited for them.
They were ashamed because they had hoped;
They came thither, and were confounded.
For now ye are nothing;
Ye see a terror, and are afraid.
Did I say, 'Give unto me'?
Or, 'Offer a present for me of your substance'?
Or, 'Deliver me from the adversary's hand'?
Or, 'Redeem me from the hand of the oppressors'?
Teach me, and I will hold my peace:
And cause me to understand wherein I have erred.

THE BOOK OF JOB

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Preface

We challenge any statements either now or hereafter made by the Union Government in the General Assembly at U.N. to the effect that the Native people of South-West Africa concur in the transfer of that country to the Union free of any Mandate.' This statement is made by Chief Tshekedi Khama of Bechuanaland, in a letter of 24th September 1946 to the High Commissioner, on behalf of Frederick Maharero, Paramount Chief of the Hereros.

The Union of South Africa has administered South-West Africa under a League of Nations' Mandate since 1919. At the end of the Second World War the Union Government resolved to incorporate the Mandated Territory within itself. The white population of South-West Africa, through its Legislative Assembly, expressed itself anxious for the incorporation, and a referendum held among the natives was claimed by the authorities to have revealed a similar desire.

The news of the result of the referendum set up a great disturbance of submarine currents and cross-currents in the black deeps of South Africa's population, of which the foam of white people, floating gently on the surface, were entirely unaware. The sturdiest opponents of the incorporation suggestion were the chiefs of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, neighbour of South-West Africa, and the Herero people within South-West Africa. Practically no mention of this opposition, of the meetings, of the protests, the cables, the memoranda to Britain and U.N. that it produced, appeared in the South African press which hailed the firm statesmanship of Field-Marshal Smuts when he put his proposals before the United Nations in 1945 and 1946. In all prob-

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ability nothing more would have been heard had not a European clergyman, with an instinct for discovering injustice and for winning the confidence of the oppressed, come upon the distress of the people involved and taken up their cause; whereupon it became news and has remained so.

For over three years in and out of South Africa the Rev. Michael Scott has played his variations on the theme: 'The African people who have made their appeal to the United Nations have done so not in any spirit of malice or hatred towards South Africa, much less towards the white race. But when a self-respecting and independent people loses its identity and organization, when that people is deprived of its lands, its social structure and all that it most cherishes, when that people is denied all opportunity for development, whether in the old ways or along new paths, and when that people is forced into unwilling service of those who have inherited their lands, then something more vital and precious than physical health, something more indispensable than material wealth is destroyed. It is for this reason that the chiefs and elders of the people are appealing now to the United Nations. As Africans, not merely as members of one or another tribe, the danger is sensed of the growth of an oppressive form of racial oligarchy in South Africa, bringing the African people into a permanent condition of servitude in the southern half of that continent; and that at a time when Africans elsewhere are looking eagerly forward to playing a fuller part in the development of their territories, and in the building up of a more co-operative civilization than Africa has yet known.'

And yet, despite his devoted labours, despite the growing awareness in the world of human rights, despite the United Nations' thrice repeated request for a Trusteeship Agreement, the Bill on the incorporation of South-West Africa has been passed by a substantial majority in the Union Parliament. It is therefore imperative that the sordid story of this episode in the advancement of 'civilization' should be made known as widely as possible.

Michael Scott left Johannesburg at a moment's notice, early in November 1948, to attend the United Nations' sessions in Paris.

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He left me heir to all his papers—a large cardboard carton full and a 'Roneo'd' volume of material on South-West Africa—and to the duty of preparing the story for publication. I was glad to do it, though fully aware of my inadequacy for the task, especially when each mail brought the message 'Time is short', and each friend air-borne from Europe repeated it.

It would in most ways have been far, far better if Scott could have found time to do this himself, but, if he had, the reader, though his sympathies would have been entirely won for the Hereros, would have known little of Michael Scott who persistently effaces himself.

I have spent a good deal of time reading the available matter on South-West Africa, partly, let me confess, because I was not altogether sure that Scott had not perhaps taken a chance with his facts here and there; partly because I cherished a small ambition that possibly I might find a fact that he had overlooked. I wasted my time; I found neither sin of commission nor sin of omission; I found no aspect of moment which he had not already embodied in his papers on the subject.

There has been no attempt to put the case of the Government of the Union of South Africa. That its spokesmen have fully done.

This is the history of 'a landless, voiceless people threatened with moral and physical disintegration by a force over which they have no control, whose appeal is the appeal of all the African people against the oppression and bad faith of a State whose present standards are a menace to Western or Christian Civilization'.

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