

morally obligated to voice their dissent. The only way this is possible is through protest and protest and more protest. Opposition is an essential ingredient of democracy, opposition is dissent, dissent is protest. Protest is a perfectly legitimate activity, an instrument of good government which it is imperative that all who object should use. It is something which any democratic government

should appreciate for it is part of the voice of the people. That is its deepest motivation, that is its justification, and on that the case for protest rests.

The Black Sash was born out of protest, it has survived through protest, and it will continue to protest until it no longer sees cause to protest.

## WHAT OLIVE SCHREINER MEANS TO ME

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TO EACH ONE OF US, I suppose, who has read anything of Olive Schreiner's writings and has any acquaintance with her life and ideas, she stands for something different. I, therefore, can only say what she stands for to me — and why.

FIRSTLY, to me, she represents all that was best in the sunny days of Cape Liberalism — by which I mean the spirit pervading Cape Colonial Society during a comparatively brief period of its life. That spirit is wellnigh extinct today. Olive Schreiner witnessed the beginning of its end.

Secondly, her writings catch the spirit — or so it seems to me — emanating from the physical surroundings of my own childhood — the illimitable plains, the stony koppies, the blue distances and the matchless sunrises and sunsets of the Great Karroo.

Thirdly, she represents to me a type of human being rare indeed among the sons and daughters of Man, a personality of a kind that appears on Earth probably only occasionally in the course of many generations. For did she not possess spiritual perceptions that equipped her with a far deeper insight into Man and Nature, a more ample glimpse of ultimate Truth, than we can ever understand, but yet are impelled instinctively to recognise? I sometimes think that Ghandi, possibly Lincoln also, were among such spiritual company as this.

And finally — and more personally — Olive Schreiner was an old friend of the large, but closely knit, family wherein I was brought up: she was an intimate of my own kith and kin of the past generation, who in boyhood were near and dear to me.

It is Olive Schreiner's work and views in the specific field of public affairs that have most deeply influenced me. No writer that

I know of has revealed more vividly the ideal of a truly multi-racial South Africa; has expressed more appreciatively the qualities of the several racial communities that inhabit our land; has warned more compellingly against the perils of inter-racial conflict.

In illustrating her appreciations for, and services to, her fellow South Africans, let me start with the Whites, and, more specifically, the Afrikaners. Passionately did she defend the integrity and independence of the Boer Republics against the threats of violence directed against them, from the Jameson Raid to the outbreak of War. During the War itself she remained their outspoken and courageous champion.

"I learnt," she wrote (*"Thoughts on South Africa"*) "to love the Boer; but more I learnt to admire him . . . There is a certain quiet but high-spirited indomitableness and an unlimited power of self-control which is characteristic of the average Boer man and above all of the average Boer woman which I have not met in an equal degree in any other race . . ."

Indeed Olive Schreiner's role in the darkest days of the history of the Afrikaner people has led one of her biographers, Vera Buchanan Gould, to comment:

"It is strange that Olive Schreiner was not regarded as their heroic champion by the Afrikaners. All that she sacrificed by championing their cause does not seem to have been realised . . ."

I think that the answer is obvious. Afri-

kaner nationalism, having received the gift of liberty bestowed by British liberalism — largely through the influence of such as Olive Schreiner — has become a noisy self-seeking cult of those Afrikaners who are intent on the dominance over all other racial communities, abjuring all liberals, from whose ideals they benefitted in the past, but which from their very nature, present obstacles to their perpetrating on others the similar — though far worse — outrages of which they made such clamorous and lachrymose complaint when perpetrated against themselves.

Also Olive Schreiner's spirit, comprehending in its sympathetic embrace the whole human family, is surely essentially alien to the spiritual isolationism, and consequent aridity, of Afrikaner nationalism. As Sir James Rose-Innes wrote in his Memoirs.

"I should call myself an Afrikaner, were it not for the tendency to confine that term to those whose ancestors landed here before the British occupation, and to such newer arrivals as are animated by 'the South African Spirit'. I have neither Voortrekker nor Huguenot blood in my veins, and 'the South African Spirit' as understood by those who extol it, implies a view on the Native question which I cannot share . . ."

Olive Schreiner lived most of her life in the heyday of British imperialism; her own country was a victim of that imperialism, in its most aggressive phase: she witnessed that country overrun by British troops, to the strains of "We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do", "Soldiers of the Queen", and "Goodbye, Dollie Gray"; she heard her own brother, Cape Colonial Prime Minister at the outbreak of War, traduced as a rebel against his Sovereign. Yet, despite all this, and her own unswerving advocacy of the Boer cause, and her denunciation of Kitchener's concentration camps, and generally of the excesses of his soldiery, she remained, at heart, loyal to the true England, the genuine national character whereof she so deeply valued, and to whose people she essentially belonged, culturally and spiritually as well as by descent.

#### 'to Prefer Justice to Self-interest!'

"Without any national prejudice", she wrote in *Thoughts on South Africa*, "may one not say that no people in the world ever possessed a section more determined to see things nakedly as they really are, and whe-

ther personally or nationally, to prefer justice to self-interest, than a section of our English people. Have there ever been statesmen in any land who have more fearlessly denounced injustice and oppression, not merely when exercised towards their own nation, but by it, than Burke and Chatham . . . ? If no nation has more misrepresented, neglected and persecuted its sons of light, no nation has had more of them to persecute."

And she, who had seen and denounced imperialism at its worst, still retained the sense of fairness and the soundness of judgment to appreciate it at its best. Hence her dedication of "Trooper Peter Halkett:"

"To a great good man, Sir George Grey, once Governor of the Cape Colony, who during his rule in South Africa, bound to himself the Dutchmen, Englishmen and Natives he governed, by an uncorruptible justice and broad humanity; and who is remembered among us today as representing the noblest attributes of Imperial Rule."

Indeed Olive Schreiner's writings are replete with examples of her own deep attachment to those basic values — tolerance, justice, devotion to personal liberty, the search for truth wherever it may lead — which, though of course universal in character, are, nevertheless, recognised attributes specifically of the British character at its best. And it was, no doubt, the natural attraction of those values for her, as well as her precocious intellect, that inspired and enabled Olive Schreiner to read and absorb such English philosophers and historians as Spencer, Mill, Buckle, Gibbon, when as yet little more than a child.

In regard, specifically, to the characteristic of tolerance, Olive Schreiner's unerring instinct drew the line strictly between genuine tolerance, which respects the sincerely held opinions of others, however deeply they might differ from hers, and mere weakness, that shrinks from denunciation of designed evil. The distinction is brilliantly portrayed in a letter of 25.5.96, contrasting Rhodes and her brother, Will Schreiner, then Cape Prime Minister:

"Rhodes with all his gifts of genius and insight — and, below the fascinating surface, the worms of falsehood and corruption creeping . . . As he betrayed Sivewright and has betrayed all men who trusted and loved him, so he will one day betray Will . . . Poor, noble old Will; I am bitterly opposed to him

on the Native Question now, but, if ever his intellect is enlightened (as it seems to me) and he takes another view, he will hold it honestly and sincerely”.

Nor would it be fair to attribute the contrast thus drawn to family affection and loyalty. Indeed, W. P. Schreiner did, in time, “take another view” and “hold it honestly and sincerely”. Let Sir James Rose-Innes, writing of Schreiner in his Memoirs, tell the tale:

“For the early crudity of his Native views he lived to make magnificent amends. When exactly he took the road to Damascus it is difficult to say; but somewhere on that journey a sudden light fell upon him in the brightness of which he walked thereafter all his days.”

#### Warm and all-embracing love

Which brings me to Olive Schreiner's attitude to her non-White compatriots and her approach to race relations generally. That approach was based not only on her great intellectual powers, and her unique gifts of intuition and perception, but also, as always with her, on warm and all-embracing love for her kind, however, alien to herself in blood, cultural development or social background.

“The South African Bantu (a race probably with a large admixture of Arab blood!) as distinct from the West Coast negro . . . has never been subjected to the dissolving and desocialising ordeal of slavery. We find him in the land of his growth with all the instincts of the free man intact; . . . with his social instincts almost abnormally developed and fully active . . . Every man and woman who has studied the Bantu . . . knows that the proudest of us may envy many of the social virtues which the Bantu displays. In our small, permanent and largely South African born, Asiatic population we have a section of people sober, industrious and intelligent, rich with those deep staying powers which have made many Asiatic peoples so persistent, and often dominant, in the past and present. Even in the most disorganised element of our population, often without definite race and social traditions, I believe that careful study will show it to compare favourably, and often most favourably, with analogous classes in Europe . . .”

#### Her rare prescience

The quotation is from “*Closer Union*,” originally published in the form of a lengthy

letter, dated 30-10-1908, to the “*Transvaal Leader*”, which appeared in that journal on 22.12.1908. It was thereafter published in England as a booklet, and had long been out of print when it was republished in Cape Town by the Constitutional Reform Association in 1960, the year of the half-centenary of Union. It is largely a plea for the adoption by the National Convention, then in session, of a federal, as opposed to a unified, constitution for South Africa, but is quoted here because it summarises Olive Schreiner's views on the race question. Those views are remarkable not for the appreciation they reflect of the qualities of non-White South Africans, as appears from the extract just quoted, but for the rare prescience with which the author predicted the inevitability, under twentieth century conditions, of inter-racial integration, both on a world scale and in South Africa in particular, which would render impossible, and ultimately fatal, policies based on apartheid and White baasskap. Thus:

“The problem of the twentieth century will not be a repetition of that of the nineteenth . . . The walls dividing continents are breaking down; everywhere European, Asiatic and African will interlard. The world on which the twenty-first century will open its eyes will be one widely different from that which the twentieth sees at its awaking. And the problem which this century will have to solve is the accomplishment of this interaction of distinct human varieties on the largest and most beneficent lines, making for development of humanity as a whole, and carried out in a manner consonant with modern ideals and modern social wants.”

It is passages such as this in her writings that sometimes give me the feeling that there is, in truth, a type of human being, however rarely found, that possesses gifts of insight into the unfolding future that cannot be accounted for merely by the power of the intellect. Of such, according to ancient tradition, were the *Old Testament* prophets. Of such, likewise, according to the belief of millions, were the founders of world religions. And, if such there be, Olive Schreiner was surely of their company.

#### A vision of things to be

One must remember she was writing in 1908 — from which a lesser span of time separated the emancipation of American Negro slaves than separates the time she was

writing from the present day. In 1908, moreover, vast tracts of the Continent of Africa had been comparatively recently discovered; and, save for the extreme north and south, and various strips of coastline, that Continent was as yet unawakened from primordial primitiveness. White domination of the Far East, moreover, appeared impregnable. Britain, especially, "held the glittering East in fee". It is almost as though Olive Schreiner had experienced a vision of "things to be" — national independence of Black, Brown and Yellow peoples; large scale non-White movement into formerly exclusive White territories, such as West Indian migration to Britain, or negro migration from the "Old South" of the U.S.A. to the industrial North; an incipient "Parliament of Man" in the form of the vast multi-racial U.N. Assembly.

"We in South Africa," she continued, "are one of the first peoples in the modern world, and under the new moral and material conditions of civilisation, to be brought face to face with this problem in its acutest form. On our power to solve it regally and heroically depends our greatness.

If it be possible for us out of our great complex body of humanity (its parts possibly remaining racially distinct for centuries) to raise up a free, intelligent, harmonious nation, each part acting with and for the benefit of the others, then we shall have played a part as great as that of any nation in the world's record. And as we today turn our eyes towards Greece or Rome or England for models in those things wherein they have excelled, nations in the future . . . will be compelled to turn their eyes towards us and follow our lead, saying 'Hers was the first and true solution of the problem'."

After more in this strain comes the terrible warning:

"But if we fail in this? — if, blinded by the gain of the moment, we see nothing in our dark man but a vast engine of labour; if to us he is not a man, but only a tool; . . . if, uninstructed in the highest forms of labour, without rights of citizenship, his own social organisation broken up, without our having guided him to participate in our own; if, unbound to us by gratitude and sympathy, and alien to us in blood and colour, we reduce this vast mass to the condition of a great seething, ignorant proletariat — then I would rather draw a veil over the future of this land."

While Olive Schreiner thus perceived so clearly the essential conditions for the ultimate viability of South African society — she was probably one of the first White South Africans to perceive them — she was far from being a facile optimist — and this despite her love for, and faith in, many of the qualities of the various peoples of the land of her birth. On the contrary, it is probably the truer estimate that her keen intellect and sensitive intuition induced in her a sad but realistic pessimism. More than a decade before she penned the lines I have just quoted, we find her writing to Merriman:

#### The far future of Africa

"It is the far future of Africa . . . which depresses me. I believe we are standing on the top of a long downward slope. We shall reach the bottom at last, probably amid the horrors of a war with our native races, then not the poor, savage but generous races whom we might have bound to ourselves by a little generosity and sympathy . . . but a fierce, half-educated much brutalized race, who will have their own. I see always that day . . . and it is with reference to it that I judge of many things in the present."

It was not for two generations that that unfortunate, but dread, social type, the *tsotsi* — product of urban areas laws, pass laws, "influx control", tax raids, liquor raids, neglect of civilized educational facilities and recreational amenities, calculated destruction of African family life, and denial by law of all hope and opportunity—was destined to make his appearance on the South African scene. But back in 1897, it is evident, Olive Schreiner perceived his outlines taking shape amidst the storm clouds of the future.

Perhaps I may be permitted to conclude by quoting my own tribute to Olive Schreiner in my Foreword to the 1960 edition of "Closer Union":

"The writings of Olive Schreiner have gained international celebrity, on account, I believe, not only of their matchless language but of the content of the message which they convey. That message, though addressed specifically to the peoples of South Africa, is based on values of universal validity. To her, the plural society of South Africa was a microcosm of a wider world society, and it is evident that this truth accounts for the world-wide interest in, and concern for, South African inter-racial affairs, which we are witnessing today."