

First African graduate, first headmaster of a high school, first to take a law degree — Z. K. Matthews specialised in being first. He once worked as a waiter; he died an ambassador. JUBY MAYET pays tribute to a great South African.

**P**ROFESSOR ZACHARIAH KEODIRELANG MATTHEWS, M.A. (Yale), LL.B. (S.A.), is dead. He died of a heart ailment in a Washington hospital on May 11.

The professor, Botswana's Ambassador to the United States and permanent representative to the United Nations, was the first African graduate of any university in South Africa. An undergrad at the South African Native College which later became Fort Hare, Z.K. took the B.A. degree of the University of South Africa at Fort Hare in 1923.

Two years later, having obtained his diploma in education, he scored another first when he was appointed headmaster of the High School Department of Adams College in Natal — the first African to become headmaster of a high school.

His hunger for more knowledge still far from satisfied, Z.K. continued studying while teaching at Adams College, and in 1930 he scored yet another first by being the first African to take a law degree. In 1932 he was admitted as an attorney of the Transvaal Supreme Court and shortly afterwards was awarded a scholarship which enabled him to go to study at Yale University in the United States. There he obtained his M.A. degree in education. The subject of his thesis was "Bantu Law and Western Civilisation".

From Yale, Z.K. went to England for post-graduate study in anthropology at the London School of Economics. In 1934, before he returned to South Africa to take up a post at Fort Hare he travelled extensively on the Continent, visiting Italy, Germany and other parts of Europe.

Z.K. was appointed a research fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in 1936, and as such he did anthropological research in Bechuanaland. In the same

# Z.K.—the man who showed the way



EA. 59

over the college to turn it into a tribal college. By resigning, he lost about R14,000 he would have received as a gratuity in lieu of pension rights on retirement. If he had served just two more years he would have enjoyed all the benefits of his years of hard work.

But the professor felt he could not toe the government line. Of humble parentage, Z.K. even worked as a waiter at Lovedale College to earn extra money. His father was a labourer on the diamond mines, and later a cafe proprietor in the Kimberley location.

Much of the money for Z.K.'s secondary education came from bursaries, yet he went on to become probably the highest-educated Non-White in South Africa. He was an outstanding man of letters, but he was also deeply interested in the church, and from 1925 to 1935 he served as a member of the Missionary Council in Natal. Later, while at Fort Hare, he was also a member of the Ciskei Missionary Council.

In the 1920s Professor Matthews was president of the African Teachers' Association in Natal, and had as his secretary Albert John Luthuli, later to become the National President of the ANC. Arrested during the mass round-up of politicians in December, 1956, Z.K. was an accused in the celebrated treason trial.

He left South Africa in 1962 to take up a post as Secretary for Africa on the World Council in Geneva and in March, 1967, he attended the conference of the World Council of Churches in Kitwe, Zambia.

In June, 1967, he received an honorary doctor of laws degree from Franklin and Marshall College, Pennsylvania. The citation was a fitting tribute to a great man. It read:

"As Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Zachariah Keodirelang Matthews has plied the diplomatic corridor from Washington to New York with the gentle grace and sure touch of one who has written new definitions for those two often ill-applied words — wisdom and courage.

"He has brought to the practice of diplomacy the understanding of an educator who became the head of the University College in South Africa which earlier had made him its first African graduate; the perspective of an anthropologist who learned first-hand about the problems and paradoxes facing his people; the clear reason of a pioneering lawyer of the South African Supreme Court; and the compassion of an internationally-known churchman.

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Z.K. was appointed a research fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in 1936, and as such he did anthropological research in Bechuanaland. In the same year he was appointed a member of a commission on Higher Education for Africans in East Africa and the Sudan. In 1945, while lecturing at the University College of Fort Hare in social anthropology, native law and administration, he was made head of the department of African studies.

Although he had been an active member of the ANC from 1940, it was only in 1952 that he had his first brush with the South African government. This was when he went to the U.S. as visiting professor to the Union Theological Seminary in New York. A suggestion was made by a member nation of the United Nations that Professor Matthews should give evidence before the UN on apartheid.

The S.A. government was greatly perturbed and Dr. Malan sent Z.K. a cable asking him to give a written promise that he would refuse any invitation by the United Nations. The professor refused to do this and replied that if the United Nations called on him, he would speak.

As a result of his action, Z.K. lost his passport facilities. Because of this he could not go when he was invited at the end of his stay at Union to attend a conference held in Geneva by the World Council of Churches.

Again in 1954 Z.K. had to turn down an invitation by the University of Chicago to attend a conference on race relations because he was refused a passport.

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"This courage has qualified Ambassador Matthews as a complete diplomat, one who Isaac Walton might have had in mind three centuries ago when he wrote in *The Compleat Angler* of a man 'whose foreign employments in the service of this nation and whose experience, learning, wit and cheerfulness made his company to be esteemed one of the delights of mankind.'"

In his address to the graduating class at Franklin and Marshall, Professor Matthews said: "The choice of the right road is a matter which is exercising the minds of the leaders of newly-independent countries such as ours. It is our hope that together with the more developed countries we may work together to make the world in which we live a place in which freedom and the pursuit of happiness can be realised for all."



Happy family man Matthews