

The Friend

with which is incorporated
THE FRIEND OF THE FREE STATE

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Professor Matthews

PROFESSOR Z. K. Matthews, who died in America on Saturday, was South Africa's first African university graduate, her first African lawyer, one of her leading educationists and a man of outstanding qualities of leadership. But, because of the nature of the racial struggle in this country, he came into inevitable conflict with the Government; he was arrested for high treason, was jailed under the emergency regulations, and his passport was withdrawn. Finally he became Botswana's first representative at the United Nations and — such is the turn of fate — spoke up in that organisation for the new outward-looking policy towards Africa of his own former jailers.

Professor Matthews's life was characterised by the pursuit of moderation and tolerance and of an ability to see both sides of the question. He bore no ill-will towards the men who had hounded him out of his vice-principalship of Fort Hare and into jail; when they were ready to seek a new approach to their neighbouring African states he was the first to praise them. Indeed, he even laid down the lines that policy should follow: "I have always felt South Africa should play a more positive role in Africa. Obviously, the most developed state in Africa ought to be able, and ought to be willing, to make a great contribution to the development of the whole continent, or at least to put itself in the position to make a contribution," he said before he took up his appointment in New York — words which are today being echoed by leading Nationalists.

Even on racial matters he has common ground with today's "verligte" Nationalists. He never advocated the abolition of differences between races or groups but that, he said, did not mean that such differences should be the basis for discrimination between peoples.

His arrest and incarceration made little sense at the time and in retrospect can be seen to have been damaging. He was a major figure in the African National Congress, it is true, but his was the voice of moderation, tolerance and negotiation. Indeed, but for his profound influence, the A.N.C. might have had a very different influence upon South African affairs. It was when such as he and Albert Luthuli were silenced and their restraining influence removed that others heeded the voices of the revolutionaries who claimed that after that only violence was left.

It was a tragedy for South Africa that the qualities Professor Matthews possessed were not only rejected but regarded as downright dangerous. It was fortunate that his spirit was such that, though a citizen of a foreign country, he remained a South African at heart, and pleaded this country's cause in a place where it was neither easy nor popular. There will be no firm peace in South Africa unless men like Matthews can fulfil their aspirations inside her borders.