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Loss to South Africa

THIS week Professor Zachariah Matthews leaves South Africa to take up an appointment overseas, and thus joins the steadily lengthening list of first-rate African scholars of South African origin forced to seek fulfilment for their talents overseas. What makes the case of Professor Matthews particularly significant is that he is one of the most distinguished academicians yet to be produced either by this country or this continent. He achieved the position of Vice-Principal of Fort Hare, when that institution was still a free university college. In a happier and saner South Africa he would have carried on to gain, both for himself and his country, the distinction of being the first African head of a university South of the Sahara—a distinction which has since gone to the Nigerian, Dr. Dike, head of Ibadan University. Instead of his mature guidance being used to increase the extent and quality of education among all our peoples in South Africa, Professor Matthews's energies were frittered away in the Treason Trial, from which he was discharged, and he had finally to quit his post at Fort Hare, when it became a Bantu college, to preserve his integrity both as a scholar and as a human being. Now, with his departure to Geneva to become the World Council of Churches Area Secretary for Africa, the services of this eminent Christian scholar are lost altogether to the South African educational field.

The departure overseas of so many White university teachers is a disturbing enough depletion of the reserves of civilization in this country, but erosion among the small elite of non-White scholars is even more alarming. This is a time when South Africa should be bending every effort to maintain her educational lead on the African continent by vastly expanding, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the educational facilities for non-Whites in the country. The smallest part of this effort is providing simple literacy. The major part of it is to continue expanding the African intellectual horizons and increasing the elite of highly trained educationalists. We cannot do this while the opportunity is denied to first-rate non-White scholars and teachers to reach full stature locally both as men and in their professions, as we see in the case of Professor Matthews, Dr. A. C. Jordan, Mr. Joshua Engcobo, Mr. Ezekiel Mphahlele and many other African intellectual exiles. If attention is directed to the Coloured community it will also be seen that there, too, South Africa is suffering a loss of much-needed talent — one outstanding example is Dr. J. P. de Villiers Hendrickse, an obstetrician and specialist in children's diseases, who is now lecturing at Ibadan University. All these men and many others are refugees from the stifling human climate brought about by the *apartheid* philosophy and practice. Their absence is an index of how our present policies are steadily leading to both the spiritual and cultural impoverishment of all South African society.