

PROFESSOR D.D.T. JABAVU OF FORT HARE

Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, formerly of Fort Hare, died in the Frere Hospital, East London, on Monday, August 3, 1959, at the age of 74, after an illness which had lasted some months. His passing removes from the South African scene one of the best known African leaders both in this country and abroad.

DON DAVIDSON TENGO JABAVU was the eldest son of John Tengo Jabavu, the founder of the Xhosa newspaper, Imvo Zabantsundu, which has been published without intermission since 1884. In his day one of the most highly educated Africans in the Eastern Cape, his father gave all his sons the benefits of the best education available for Africans in their day and generation. He received his early education at Lovedale and at Morija in Basutoland. Being unable to get him into any of the South African institutions for higher education, his father next sent him to the United Kingdom where he obtained the B.A. honours degree of London University and a Teachers' Certificate from Birmingham University. Before he returned to South Africa he visited the Southern States of America where he saw something of Negro higher education, especially at Tuskegee, the famous Negro institution founded by Booker T. Washington.

On his return to South Africa he joined the staff of the new South African Native College in 1916 and for the next 30 years he was associated with that institution first as Lecturer and later as Professor of Bantu Languages. A gifted teacher of languages - he

taught Latin and the Bantu languages - Jabavu threw himself wholeheartedly into all aspects of the life of the College and made his full contribution to the administrative, the social and the cultural life of the College, an accomplished pianist, violinist and skilled choir conductor, he did much to make Fort Hare known in the twenties with his well known Fort Hare Choir which sang in various centres in the Eastern Cape and beyond.

But Jabavu was not satisfied with the cloistered life of a university teacher living in a sheltered community. He entered fully into the public life of the country and served the African people in many directions. With a keen interest in agricultural development, he preached the gospel of better farming methods in the Reserves and founded African farmers Associations long before our modern rehabilitation schemes were heard of. In the educational field he founded the Cape African Teachers' Association - a professional body for the protection and promotion of the rights of African teachers and worked for the coming together of African teachers all over the Union until they had established the Federation of African Teachers' Associations of which he was first President. In public affairs Jabavu appeared before many Government Commissions to give evidence on behalf of the African people. He was a staunch believer in inter-tribal and inter-racial co-operation. Together with Dr. Abdurahman he convened in the late twenties the Non-European Conference which endeavoured to bring together Coloureds and Africans for a joint struggle against the Hertzog Bills and the

policy they adumbrated in 1925. In the thirties together with Dr. I. ka P. Seme, then President-General of the African National Congress, he convened the All-African Convention of which he later became President for an all-out defence of the franchise rights of Africans in the Union. He identified himself from their inception with bodies which worked for harmonious co-operation between black and white such as the Joint Council Movement and the South African Institute of Race Relations of which he was a life member and a Vice-President until his death.

As a journalist he contributed numerous articles on public affairs to the "Imvo Zabantsundu" and to the leading newspapers of South Africa. He was always on the look-out for any attack by anyone on the rights of the African people to whose defence he devoted his masterly command of language and his intimate knowledge of their position in South Africa. By his books such as the "Black Problem", "the Segregation Fallacy", he endeavoured to warn the country against the evils of racial discrimination. Much of his writing especially in Xhosa was devoted to his travels in different parts of South Africa and to countries overseas like Palestine, India, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Students and staff of his time at Fort Hare will always remember the inimitable accounts he used to give of his travels, of the personalities he encountered, the conferences he attended and the speeches he delivered at such gatherings.

He was a loyal and faithful member of the Methodist Church, having been a member of the Methodist Conference at various times.

He was also a strong supporter of the I.O.T.T., an organisation which fights against the evils of intoxicating liquor which ruins so many families and individuals.

When he retired from Fort Hare his contribution to the public life of this country was accorded various forms of recognition - the establishment of a Scholarship Fund in his name by the students of Fort Hare, the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Honoris Causa) by Rhodes University, the award of a coronation medal by H.M. Queen Elizabeth, his election as Professor Emeritus of the University College of Fort Hare and the award of the Bronze Medal of the Royal ^{African} ~~Empire~~ Society of London for outstanding service to Africa.

As a man Jabavu was essentially a man of peace. He impressed all who came into contact with him with his essential humanity, his cheerful disposition and genial personality and his readiness to appreciate the other man's point of view. There was no rancour in his advocacy of the rights of his people and he always took up a common-sense point of view on public affairs.

Although for a generation he was probably the most outstanding African leader, he never lost the common touch. He was equally at home by a fireside in the humblest kraal and in any academic or professional circle. With no inferiority complex in any company he was yet the humblest of men. In short of him it could be said that he always endeavoured to sweeten rather than to embitter any human relationships into which he entered. The result was that his

enemies thought he was never forthright enough in anything he said and that he was essentially a compromiser, but it is of course essentially unfair to expect an individual to take up attitudes which go against his grain. As indicated above, Jabavu was essentially a man of peace and he always strove to achieve his ends in the manner that would do the least damage to the cause of harmonious co-operation between groups and individuals.

His level-headed leadership in many a conference facing controversial issues more likely to divide than to unite, his unfailing sense of humour and his kindness to young and old, educated and uneducated alike, will long be remembered by those who came into contact with him. Hundreds of his students up and down the country will treasure the happy hours spent in his stimulating lectures, interspersed with amusing anecdotes concerning himself or others.

His devotion to duty at Fort Hare and to the many causes he espoused knew no bounds. He never missed a class or a conference to which he was committed, and he always gave of his best to everything he did. He was blessed with good health all his life and led an active life until just before the end.

He leaves behind him a host of friends, both black and white, who will always remember affectionately Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, B.A.(Lond.), African educationist, patriot and statesman.

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