

Albert John Luthuli

A PERSONAL TRIBUTE BY PROFESSOR Z. K. MATTHEWS

I HAVE known Albert John Luthuli for 35 years and have been in touch with him in various capacities from time to time during this period, and have thus had ample opportunity to form a judgment about him as a man and as a leader of thought both among the African people and in South Africa generally.

I first got to know him in 1925 when he and I were together on the staff of Adams College in Natal. Although we were working in different Departments, he being in the Teacher Training Department while I was in the High School Department, we were in daily contact with one another on the campus and lived together in the same Hostel. We were together on the staff of Adams College for ten years before we parted, he to take up an appointment as Chief of the AmaKolwa tribe in the district of Lower Tugela, Natal, and I to join the staff of the University College of Fort Hare in the Cape. During my stay in Natal we also worked together in the African Teachers' Association of which he was Secretary when I was President. Later we met from time to time in conferences, were associated together as members of the Native Representative Council and as fellow office-bearers of the African National Congress.

Those of us who have had the honour of coming into intimate contact with him soon learnt to respect Luthuli as a man of sound principle and high ideals for his people and his country. As a teacher in all his dealings with his students and with his colleagues on the staff he was at all times thoroughly dependable. His yes was always yes and his nay, nay. He was always meticulous in his work, never satisfied with partially correct answers to questions or with indifferently prepared lessons.

As a devoted Christian he has always taken an active part in Church affairs both in his own church of the American Board of Missions and in missionary circles generally. He has been a Vice-President of the Christian Council of South Africa. He is a firm believer in the idea that the Christian principle of the value, and the dignity of every individual ought to pervade all our social, economic and political policies.

Luthuli is a man of great humility with a keen sense of social service. He never regards any form of service as beneath his dignity. On the contrary he always adds honour and dignity to any activity in which he takes part. His selflessness was amply demonstrated when he gave up good prospects in the teaching profession to take up the poorly paid job of Chief of the AmaKolwa tribe. Despite the poor remuneration associated with

it, he looked upon this new responsibility as an opportunity to serve his people in the field of public administration as he had already served them in the field of education. He was of course later forced by the Government to give up his post as Chief, because he regarded his duty to the African people as a whole as much larger and much more important than being a muzzled paid servant of the Government.

Luthuli is a member of the Zulu nation, a people who are justly proud of their history and traditions. But he has no trace of narrow tribalism about him. As a leader he has consistently and persistently worked for harmonious relations not only between the different African tribes but also between the different non-white groups represented in South Africa, and between the white and non-white members of multi-racial South Africa. His greatest contribution to public life in South Africa has been his passionate advocacy among the non-whites of a policy of non-violence in their struggle for those human rights and fundamental freedoms which they have been denied for so long in their own country. He has carried on a ceaseless fight for co-operation between the different racial groups in South Africa on a basis of justice and equality, a crusade which has earned him the unjustifiable odium of being regarded in Government circles as a "hireling" of non-Africans.

In a situation which all competent observers agree contains the seeds of tension and dissension, Luthuli has thrown the whole weight of his great personality and his influence among the African people in particular and the people of South Africa generally on the side of peaceful co-existence on the basis of justice and equality. His stand on public affairs has cost him preferment and his own personal liberty, but characteristically he remains a man with bitterness towards none and with nothing petty or aggressive in his attitude towards those at whose hands he has already suffered so much.

In all his trials and tribulations he has had the loyal support and devotion of Mrs. Luthuli and their children for whom they have built up such a lovely Christian home.

Mr. Luthuli was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize at a great gathering of distinguished people at Oslo on 10th December, and on Monday, 11th, gave an address in which he sought to lay bare South African life and conditions. The address should be read in full.
