

# DR. ABDURRAHMAN ON DEMOCRACY

DR. A. Abdurrahman, M.P.C., who arrived in Durban last week as a member of the Coloured Fact-Finding Commission was accorded a public welcome last Sunday morning at the Muslim Institute, Queen Street, under the auspices of the Young Muslim Debating Society. In introducing the speaker, the chairman, Mr. E. H. Ismail, said that the doctor needed no introduction and described him as the father of non Europeans. Most of them were aware, said the chairman, that the doctor was a member of the Provincial Council and also occupied an important position on the Capetown City Council. He acted as leader to the South African Indian deputation that went to India in 1929. As a leader of the non-Europeans in South Africa he was second to none.

Dr. Abdurrahman who chose as his subject "Democratic Institutions in South Africa," said that it was a most interesting as well as a most difficult subject. "Democracy," said the learned speaker, "is an ideal which arises from ideas and wishes of the people. As to what was meant by democracy no two people would give the same answer. Democracy can be described as something in one's mind. The highest aim of any human being was to be happy. There were different conceptions of happiness. For instance, the drunkard regarded it as the height of happiness to get drunk, the religious man spent his time in prayers so that his soul may be saved and he found happiness there, then there was the individual that found happiness in pursuing his vocation.

## The Aim of Democracy

It was the aim of democracy that every man in this world should have equal right to pursue happiness, and provided a man did not seek happiness in such a manner as to disturb or injure others no obstacles should be placed in his way. If a lover of music enjoyed himself by playing music in his own home there should be nothing to prevent him doing so, but if he went out in the street disturbing others with his music he should be prevented. The greatest gift that God had given to man was skill. It required skill to follow a trade or profession and it was the greatest sin in the world to prevent a man from exercising his skill by following his trade or vocation.

## The Vote And The Franchise

"Democracy had nothing to do with the vote or the franchise," said the doctor. "This was something that you can use to put your ideas into practice. The vote was merely an instrument to put your ideals into operation. A man, however, cannot follow all the ideas

that pass through his mind. If he did so he would find himself in a lunatic asylum. Democracy meant that we were all equal and this leads us to our religion, Islam, which also teaches us that we are all equal. God has given us the power of reasoning which must be developed to its fullest extent. The Prophet of Islam had said that reasoning lighted the torch to heaven. If God made no distinction between man and man we had no right to do so and until we are regarded as equal in this country there is no such thing as a democratic institution. If we study the history of the world we find that there were no democratic institutions until a few hundred years ago. In a democratic institution a man is free, equal before God and man, and no restrictions are placed on him. It was stated in the American declaration of rights that



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every man was born free. If you admit this doctrine of everyone being equal you cannot treat a class of people differentially. Though God had made us all equal it was also true that he had made us different. There were different races and different colours but this did not imply that we were not equal. There must be a purpose of God in creating the difference.

## Custom and Tradition

While it is true that man is born free in this world it is also true that there was such a thing as custom and tradition. From its birth a child's character is moulded by its parents, and custom and tradition mould his ideas for him. The tradition we have in South Africa is that the white man inherits certain rights immediately he comes in this world. Not because he has any more intelligence than any one of us, but because of his birth. Immediately you begin to treat a man in a privileged manner irrespective of his intelligence

or character you are departing from the ideals of democracy and that is what we have in South Africa. Man here, is judged by something for which he is not responsible. Because he belongs to a different race, and is of a different colour, he is differentiated against.

## The Two Groups

We can divide the population of South Africa into two groups. The privileged classes or the Europeans who are in a minority and the vast majority of unprivileged classes known as the non-Europeans. While the former inherit all the privileges of free citizenship the latter inherit the restrictions and poverty of their parents. We must not expect the Europeans in this country to be a democrat because he comes out of a mould where the character is moulded for him. It is impressed upon the white child to regard himself superior than those of a different colour. It will be years before the democratic ideals are impressed upon the Europeans of South Africa and as long as we have different groups we shall have no democratic institutions.

## Our Present System

The system of government in South Africa to-day can be compared with the system which prevailed 400 years B.C. They had then a democratic institution but only for the privileged classes. There are already a number of Europeans who realised that the system is wrong and unjust. We have the white labour or the civilised labour policy which reserves skilled labour for the privileged classes. If there was a democratic institution in South Africa this would not be the case. The privileged classes cannot continue to oppress the different classes for ever. The Native is now aspiring for something higher and the pressure of the privileged classes was becoming greater. As the oppressed classes consolidate themselves and show a united front they will compel the Europeans to accede to at least some of their demands. We have seen that the group system leads to destruction. By consolidating the Native, the Coloured and the Indian, we can gain much. The fear of physical force is driving the Boer and the Briton into one people. Why should we not consolidate our forces. We cannot achieve anything by remaining in different groups. Only by co-operation can we compel the white man to see the true spirit of democracy. We cannot achieve our ideal of democratic institution in a day or a week. We may not see it in our time but come it must," concluded the doctor.

At the conclusion of the speech, questions were invited and satisfactorily answered by the speaker. Mr. A. I. Kajej thanked the doctor for the very interesting lecture and said that he agreed that there should be co-operation between the different groups. Mr. M. S. Badat proposed a vote of thanks which was carried.

class passengers are Europeans, only English records are played. By means of gramophones, this music is relayed to the second class music-saloon. But as most of the second class passengers are Indians, they would prefer to have more Indian records. I feel that the second class saloon should be provided with its own gramophone with English and Indian records and arrangements made to relay the music to the deck passengers.

9. The Company having placed the 'Kenya' and the 'Karanja' on the South African line, a large number of cabin passengers take advantage of travelling by these ships, but the space on the upper deck for promenade, games, etc., is very limited. Some arrangement should

be made to increase this space, as much as possible.

10. I suggest that the charge of 2½ annas for Sodawater and 3½ annas for Lemonade is very high, considering the quantity of mineral waters consumed during the voyage. A reduction in the price will be appreciated, particularly by the deck passengers who are very poor and not able to bear such heavy charges.

11. The Company is requested to consider whether an arrangement is not possible, whereby the duration of the present 20 days' voyage from Durban to Bombay, or at least the 11 days voyage between East Africa and Bombay and vice versa cannot be shortened to 18 and 9 days respectively.

12. For sometime past, the Company

has introduced a concession rate which is very suitable to European passengers only, who can take advantage of it by travelling first class on paying second class fare plus an extra nominal sum of about £2. There is no intention to grumble about this facility afforded to Europeans, but it is earnestly urged that a similar concession may be granted to Indian passengers also. At first, concession may be given to deck and second class passengers travelling with their families.

I trust the Company will sympathetically consider the suggestions contained herein and take them in the helpful spirit in which they have been afforded. I shall be glad to give you any further information that you may require on the points submitted for your consideration.

## THE MOSLEMS OF TO-DAY

LOOKING round me I can't help but be struck by the appalling amount of humbug that exists in modern life—wherever one turns one encounters blathers and dithers about nothing at all." The above is from a letter that appeared in one of the Durban Dailies some time ago. It was true then, and to-day it is more so.

When we survey the present condition of the Moslems the world over, we find that every word of the above quotation applies entirely to that class of ungenerous persons among them who, while they themselves are incapable of achieving anything, are resenting the success of others, and are day in and day out engaged in unprofitable controversies. The imagination of the world's greatest thinkers have been stirred by the Prophet of Islam, and traces of his teachings are found in everything that is considered best in modern civilisation and progress. Yet the Moslems who profess his religion, are drifting away fast from his teachings. The present conditions of the Moslems are due to their own doings. They profess but do not believe in Islam. Islam is the name of a great brotherhood, yet one Moslem looks upon another with suspicion and distrust. And while prayer, the Koran says, "restrains a man from that which is evil and blamable," to-day many of the Moslems go to the mosques and make their prayers in a most elaborate and pompous manner reducing it to a mere form and ceremony, a mere mockery and hypocrisy, and making it only as a means to seek worldly advantages.

Today Islam is only the name of a register for recording the deaths and births and marriages of persons in reputed Moslem houses and families; or it is a guide for the Census Officer to enumerate and distinguish the different denominations in a town or country. Apparently the so-called Moslems are the followers of the Prophet of Islam,

but examined minutely they would be found quite outlandish. They profess Islam but do not act as true Moslems. And if they ever act, they do not out of any belief but do so either as a matter of form, habit, convenience or policy. And it is for such people that the Koran says, "O ye Believers, why say that which ye do not perform. Unto God it is a great sin and an act of displeasure to speak and not act accordingly."

There are thousands who call themselves Moslems, but Islam has nothing in common with them. Tempted with a few pence they would be found ready and willing to give false testimony and commit perjury. They have no faith in their religion.

Men with saintly features, pious appearances and long flowing beards going regularly to the Mosques, if their

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minds were to be dissected one would be surprised to know that all the time their foreheads were on the ground they were busy planning devilish devices.

Old men, expecting death every moment, with long rosaries in their hands and counting the beads with ever increasing speed and making sports with the name of God, are found every where secretly meditating some crime, injuries, bribes, or the downfall of an innocent girl.

No doubt we have gatherings and meetings, and assemblies where the Koran is recited, the birthday of the Prophet of Islam is celebrated, and Hadith and Kitab preached by Sheiks and Moulanas. But what are these? Are they any better than concert or dance or card parties? Those who assemble at such gatherings usually laugh, joke, smoke, scandalise, abuse, and use every kind of filthy language. The women

folk come to these assemblies dressed in their most attractive styles, with the gait of Mae West in their Louis XIV heels. They draw the attention of all the assembled people, and while every one, including the preachers, are engaged in this form gazing, nodding, winking and shaking, the pious work before the assembly is forgotten. The whole affair or function usually ends with an applause, or shaking and kissing of hands, and the eating of various kinds of cakes and a multitude of sweets and confectionery.

Daily the Koran is read, and Hadith and Kitab preached from the pulpits, every Friday, yet if an opportunity came many of these Sheiks and Moulanas would hardly refuse to take interest, usurp and swallow unlawful property, or defraud the orphans of their rights, and give up creating troubles in the land.

On particular occasions and nights many learned Moulanas and Sheiks preach on Islam and exhort the people to pray and give alms regularly for the salvation of their souls, and for special merits recite the stories of the Birth of the Prophet in the most sweet poetry, full of rhythm music and eloquence, (yet the whole thing is no better than ordinary fiction), and most of these stories are not founded on Koran and the true Traditions. And yet, in private life, these same preachers are the worst offenders and themselves much in need of the medicine they prescribe for their congregation.

Wine and gambling is forbidden in Islam. Yet those very persons, who denounce these most vehemently in the open, are the victims of these vices in secret.

Prayers and Mosques seldom occupy the minds of the Moslems today. God is only a superstition, or has no existence at all to them. His place has been taken by Karamats, Dargahs, Awlias, Pirs,