

RESPECT FOR THE FLAG

ANNA came to see me the other afternoon bearing in her hand a cutting from an influential Nationalist newspaper. It had much to say about the necessity for teaching our children a proper respect for our South African Flag, and suggested a simple daily ceremony in our schools, of raising it and lowering it, and saying or singing our National Anthem. It implied that this was, of course, bound to be rejected by the Opposition and all un-South African elements!

Anna's blue eyes sparkled as they always do when she is excited. She felt deeply that all true South Africans should seriously consider this suggestion—anything that would help to heal the breach between our children should be examined with earnest care. "For consider my case," said Anna. "I, and my people of this generation have a deep and lasting attachment to our Vierkleur, which nothing will alter, for this was my nation's flag in my youth. The Free Staters must have the same warm attachment to their old Republican Flag, and Natal an equally deep feeling for the Union Jack. But our children have had their own Flag since the Act of 1927 and all of us have failed, because of older loyalties, to give them the same sense of devotion and loyalty to their emblem as we learned to give to our own!"

I looked through the book-case and took out "Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1927-1928," opened it at Flags of the Union of South Africa and read:

7. (1) The flags of the Union shall be:—
- (a) The Union Jack to denote the association of the Union with other members of the groups of Nations constituting the British Commonwealth of Nations; and
 - (b) The National Flag of which the design is set out in Section 8.
8. (2) The design of the National Flag of the Union shall be—

Three horizontal stripes of equal width from top to bottom, orange, white, blue; in the centre of the white stripe the old Orange Free State Flag hanging vertically, spread in full, with the Union Jack adjoining horizontally spread in full towards the pole, and the old Transvaal Vierkleur adjoining horizontally spread in full away from the pole, equidistant from the margins of the white stripe. The flags shall all be of the same size and their shape shall be proportionally the same as the National Flag, and the width of each equal to one-third of the width of the white stripe.

Anna and I, both Transvaalers, both with forebears who could not lightly give up old loyalties even for such immense benefits as were envisaged at Union, know that the 1927 Flag Act was passed with great bitterness and much heartburning. But what has that to do with our children? Must we always pass on old hatreds, old resentments, old quarrels? Do we always intend to give our children stones instead of bread?

The next time I stood outside Jan Smuts Airport on a Black Sash assignment, I looked with great earnestness at our National Flag flaunting itself bravely in the cold south wind. There was the Vierkleur, emblem of Courage, Piety and Strength—there the Free State Flag—emblem of Wisdom, Individualism and Judgement—there the Union Jack—emblem of Justice and Compassion—what an inheritance for this small Nation—three jewels set in the centre of our national consciousness!

Could there be any harm?—surely there must be good—in all our schools, once a term, taking part in a simple ceremony in which the National Flag is raised, and where all the children say, with sincerity and quietness:—

"We salute this Flag as the national flag of South Africa, as the symbol of the undivided loyalty to our country expressed in our national anthem; as a token of a common patriotism transcending language or race,"—or "Ons saluer hierdie vlag as die nasionale vlag van Suid-Afrika, as die simbool van die onverdeelde trou aan ons vaderland waaraan ons Volkslied uiting gee; as die teken van 'n gemeenskaplike patriotisme verhewe bo taal en ras."

This is not flag-wagging—this is doing our duty by our children! America took a polyglot assembly of nationalities into her lands, and by as simple a ceremony built up a nation of Americans with a thousand diverse ways of living, but one undivided loyalty to one homeland. We should be able to do the same—we are not less able than they—or we have perhaps not the will?

The subject of flags having been broached, I began to wonder how the fusion of the flags of three nations—Scotland, Ireland and England, which we all know as the Union Jack, was taken by the people of those three countries at first! In 1801 the Union Jack became by law the National Flag of England, but I don't doubt, although all the history books I've looked into, are absolutely silent on the subject, that at least two generations of Scots and Irish would see no good at all in the "new flag" and remain loyal and loving to the flag of St. Andrew or St. Patrick as the case might be. Their children's children, however, thanks to thousands of forward thinking citizens, knew loyalty and love to one flag and one nation—I like to believe that the joining of our three flags will lead to as much greatness and glory as the union of St. George, St. Patrick and St. Andrew!

D.R.

I'M ARMED WITH MORE THAN
COMPLETE STEEL—
THE JUSTICE OF MY QUARREL.

(CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, 1565-93)