

Tribune

MARCH 20, 1906.

S. THE NATAL TRIBES.

“THE SENSE OF JUSTICE
OUTRAGED.”

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE TRIBUNE.”

Sir,—The views expressed in your leading article of this morning upon the subject of the alleged treasonable designs of the Natal tribes will find strong support in the Colony.

On the question of the assumed complicity of Mveli and his tribe in designs of which the Richmond riot was a premature development, the “Natal Witness” points out that “the regrettable tragedy at Byrne was nothing more than a brief and deadly scuffle between the police and a body of insignificant natives.” “The action of the latter,” adds the editor, “was not even taken with the cognizance of their chiefs and indunas, and the fact appears to be overlooked that the big native tribes under powerful chiefs are submitting to the law and paying their taxes in an exemplary and orderly manner.” And, again, a correspondent of that paper, writing from the scene of the disturbance, says: “There are only 27 Kaffirs concerned in the row here, and they are Makolwas (*i.e.*, professed converts) tainted with Ethiopian doctrines. Mveli, the chief, is perfectly loyal, and those people who have created the disturbance were forced on his father, the late chief”; this correspondent adding that Mveli’s predecessor had been fined by the Government for attempting to turn these Makolwas out of his tribe, which accordingly bore them a strong grudge.

It will be a very serious thing indeed for some people if the sedition theory which inspired the resort to martial law cannot be established as well founded. It will not be the tribes that will be on their trial, but the employers of “methods of barbarism,” carried out, not against an enemy in the field, but as a means of securing the persons of accused young men. The Government’s case will therefore need and will receive in the colony the severest scrutiny.

Up to last Friday, according to the Natal Minister of Defence, the colonial troops had “encountered no resistance.” The behaviour of the native population generally during this

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Up to last Friday, according to the Natal Minister of Defence, the colonial troops had "encountered no resistance." The behaviour of the native population generally during this reign of terror serves strongly to negative the above theory.

It is not perhaps generally understood in this country that no default in payment of the Poll Tax has as yet arisen, for the simple reason that the natives have been given grace till May to pay it. Without the theory of general sedition there would have been no martial law and none of the floggings for seditious language, reports of which now abound in the Natal papers.

There are, of course, not a few people in South Africa ready to approve of "short methods" with natives. Thus, under the head of "Rand Opinion," I read: "The kraals and crops of the natives who participated in the outbreak have also been destroyed. Summary chastisement on these lines may be adversely criticized by negrophiles in England, and possibly even in South Africa; but those who know anything of the native mode of thought will endorse the commandant's action." The writer is clearly not in accord with one of the Natal Ministers—Mr. Maydon—who had just been arousing the applause of a Durban audience by saying that "self-command" on our part "would have the effect of imposing the white man's will upon the natives, because that will was backed up by right and justice, both of which were exercised with scrupulous fairness." For, according to the rule of British justice, with which we have made the natives very familiar, and which accords exactly with their own primitive code, "chastisement," however "summary," and even when it does not extend to the innocent women and children—robbed of homes, food, and property, and "sent to adjoining kraals to await their disposal according to native law"—never precedes trial and conviction. Leading Colonists of Natal, both permanent officials and others, who "know the native mode of thought," will be found unreservedly to condemn a policy that assuredly has outraged and disturbed throughout all the locations of Natal that sense of justice and of security under the King's laws, by fostering which Natal heretofore has so well managed a multitude of rival tribes.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

LEX BRITANNICA.

London, March 17th.