The inner history of the National Convention of South Africa

Hofmeyr Gys R
THE INNER HISTORY
OF
THE NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

THE HON. SIR EDGAR H. WALTON, K.C.M.G., M.L.A.

Together with a Memorandum by Mr. Gys. R. Hofmeyr, One of the Secretaries to the Convention.

T. MASKEW MILLER:
CAPETOWN — & — PRETORIA.

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.
LONDON. NEW YORK. BOMBAY.

1912.
THE RUSTICA PRESS, Printers and Bookbinders,
Wynberg, C.P.
PREFACE.

The plan followed by the author before the publication of this record was suggested by a prominent member of the National Convention. The manuscript was sent to Mr. Gys. R. Hofmeyr, the Clerk to the House of Assembly of the Union and one of the Secretaries to the Convention, and he was requested to read and express an opinion as to the impartiality of the record. Mr. Hofmeyr’s report is printed as an appendix to the book and it has been thought better to adopt that course rather than to attempt to reconstruct those portions to which Mr. Hofmeyr alludes. So far as he himself is concerned, the author cannot go beyond his own notes and his own memory. It is fair to direct special attention to Mr. Hofmeyr’s recognition of the labours of the members who served on the several committees. It is not too much to say that the Act of Union owes its existence to the committee work, and obviously as the author only served on a share of these committees it is impossible for him to attempt to embody in his record any detailed account of the labours of the committees.

E. H. Walton.
CONTENTS.

Chapter i.—How the Convention was brought about . . 7 to 30
Chapter ii.—The Convention . . 31 to 41
Chapter iii.—Union or Federation . . 42 to 96
Chapter iv.—The Language Question and some Progress . . 97 to 116
Chapter v.—The Franchise and the Coloured Vote . . 117 to 157
Chapter vi.—Parliament and the Representation of the Provinces 158 to 198
Chapter vii.—The Judiciary . . 199 to 205
Chapter viii.—Local Self-Government . . 206 to 228
Chapter ix.—Finance, Railways and Trade 229 to 263
Chapter x.—The Divided Capital . . 264 to 283
Chapter xi.—The Public Service . . 284 to 292
Chapter xii.—Native Affairs and Native Territories . . 293 to 303
Chapter xiii.—Miscellaneous . . 304 to 328
Memorandum by Mr. Gys. R. Hofmeyr . . 329 to 346
Appendix.—South Africa Act of Union.
Chapter I.

HOW THE CONVENTION WAS BROUGHT ABOUT.

In 1859 Sir George Grey in his speech at the opening of the Cape Parliament said: “You would in my belief, confer a lasting benefit upon Great Britain, and upon the inhabitants of this Colony, if you could succeed in devising a form of federal union.” It was almost exactly half a century later that the National Union Convention met in Durban to attempt to give effect to the great pro-consul’s suggestion. In the interval the idea had germinated. It was a favourite topic for the after dinner speech, for the oration in Parliament and for the daily paper. It recommended itself for many reasons to practical statesmen and it survived the friction of clashing interests and of conflicting ideals, but though the idea survived it made no headway. It would come, was bound to come, but in the meantime it was not practical politics, and
the way was blocked. Attempts to hasten matters by promptings from London ended in failure and in South Africa we adopted the phrase that Union must come from within, it must come as the spontaneous will and effort of the people of South Africa and it was clear the spontaneous effort would be delayed.

In fact it is easy to see now that South Africa was not then ready. The North was not prepared to come in, indeed was ready to fight rather than come in and fought to keep out. There were ideals in the North which were incompatible with union, ideals which found a leader and a vigorous protagonist in Paul Kruger. To many the establishment of a great Dutch African Republic was an aspiration which moved them profoundly, it was the dominating passion of their lives and it could not be reconciled with the idea of a Union of British South Africa including the Transvaal.

This opposition was a rock against which the waves of appeal from the Cape or from London broke idly and well might the advocates of union despair of success. The Transvaal was not opposed to union if the Cape and Natal were free to enter the republican fold as independent states, free from all British control or Imperial responsibility. A South African Republic, and the Transvaal called itself The