

Author : Richard Rive and Tim Couzens

# **SEME**

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## **Discovering Seme - Tim Couzens**

There are two good reasons for the publication of this book. Firstly, the name of Pixley kaIsaka Seme is today almost completely unknown. Yet it was largely because of his ideas and inspiration that the African National Congress was founded on an overcast but calm day (8 January) in 1912 (the subsequent days of the conference were fine and calm!). There is no full biography of Seme. Indeed, very little is known about his life. This book, then, aims to make available hitherto unknown material connected with his early years and to give insight into a character who was one of South Africa's most important historical figures.

Secondly, the book is intended to honour the memory of Dr Richard Rive, scholar and writer (as well as friend). Richard Rive was brutally killed in 1989; his death was a shock to all those who

remembered his affability; the aetiology of his death lies in the complexity of the society in which he lived most of his life. But he left behind him an uncompleted manuscript which contained the story of an important discovery.

Northfield Mount Hermon School (situated in north-western Massachusetts) has, in recent years, established scholarships to bring black South African students to the school for a year's free board and tuition. The school then tries to find money and placings for successful students at universities. Some years ago it broadened the scope of its programme to include several other schools and Counsellor C. Yvonne Jones, organiser of the programme, visited South Africa in 1986 to publicize the scholarship among prospective candidates. In Cape Town she met Richard Rive who had been appointed to Harvard University as Visiting Professor in the Department of English and American Literature for Spring, 1987. She mentioned to him that Pixley Seme had been a pupil at Mount Hermon around the turn of the century.

In February, 1987, Rive visited Mount Hermon as Mrs. Jones's guest. He was shown a file of documents relating to Seme's time at the School. The archivist of the school library, Mrs. Linda Batty, had discovered the file after it had lain undetected for over eighty years. Rive was allowed to have copies of these papers and was thus able to reconstruct details of Seme's early life. He was full of gratitude to Mrs. Batty, Mrs. Jones and Northfield Mount Hermon School and the book which follows has that file as its nucleus.

The originals of the letters, documents and newspaper cuttings are in the school library. The collection contains nine documents (five application forms, one list of Seme's measurements for a suit, one

receipt for a catalogue received by him, and two unidentified, undated press cuttings) as well as twenty-seven letters, most of them to Professor Henry Cutler (ten from Seme himself.) Rive appears to have added two further newspaper cuttings to this collection. In March, 1987, he wrote an introduction to the documents but does not seem to have edited them or properly arranged them before his death two years later. In order to complete the whole tale two further important pieces have been added: the first is Seme's prize winning speech 'The Regeneration of Africa', a seminal piece of political thinking for those years just prior to the founding of the ANC; the second is an article published in the July, 1953 edition of *Drum* magazine in its celebrated series 'Masterpieces in Bronze'. It is something of an historic piece in its own right, written as it was by the recently retired editor of *Bantu World* and doyen of black journalism, R. V. Selope Thema.

Although the documents relating to Seme are few in number and brief in scope they give a fascinating insight into the early struggles of the man. For students and scholars who might want to follow his footsteps there are several addresses to visit. There are minute details as to his waist measurements and smallness of size: more importantly, there is a clear indication as to how Seme grows in stature, improving his language skills, growing in confidence, becoming a world traveller with expanding knowledge, experience and vision.

Seme was not the first black South African to study overseas (Tiyo Soga was ordained into the Presbyterian Church in Scotland in the 1850s, for instance) but he was one of the earliest. These letters give a hint as to the difficulties, particularly financial, which he and his contemporaries had to face in their pursuit of higher education. They

also hint at the kind of networking that was beginning to develop as a particular class of people began to grow (Seme tried to help the Makanya family place at least one of its sons in a school overseas). Above all, the letters provide some understanding of the determination of Seme to succeed.

Black South Africans have been better served by autobiography than biography. An exception is Brian Willan's wonderful biography of Solomon Plaatje. If one reads Seme's letters in the light of Willan's book and with the help of a somewhat different study, Andre Odendaal's *Vukani Bantu!* one can begin to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of a remarkable group of people at the turn of the century - there were the four lawyers (Seme, Alfred Mangena, G. D. Montsioa and R. W. Msimang) who studied overseas and made large contributions to the early ANC; there were the Sogas, the Jabavus, the Rubusanas, the Jordans and many more.<sup>1</sup> They often combined many talents - their professions, politics, journalism. Three of them started newspapers. Seme was to be instrumental in the founding of the ANC's newspaper Abantu-Batho in 1912 but one of the tragedies of South African history is that no complete run of this paper survives even though it lasted into the early 1930s.

Seme's activities in 1912 were not only political and journalistic. He saw the need for organisation and unity in the economic sphere, too. Consequently he was the driving force in the founding of the Native Farmer's Association of Africa Limited. The directors of the company met for the first time in the Realty Trust Building in Johannesburg on 25 October 1912 and Seme was made chairman.<sup>2</sup> The main purpose of the company was to buy land for blacks to settle on, and in the Wakkerstroom District of the Eastern Transvaal the farms of Daggakraal and Driefontein were bought; the land

remains in the hands of the original owners to this day, witnessing the martyrdom a few years ago of the community's leader, Saul Mkize, and the defying of the attempts by the South African government at removal. Not only do we have Seme's political legacy still, in the form of the ANC, but we also have remnants of an economic legacy in these farm communities.

But politicians must never be made into total heroes. Both Rive and Selope Thema implicitly warn us against this. As a lawyer, Seme faced the great odds of racial prejudice initially; later he became more established. But in 1932, the Supreme Court removed his name from the Roll of Attorneys.<sup>3</sup> The circumstances are not a credit to Seme.

A number of blacks had lived on the white-owned farm of Waverley in the Pretoria district prior to the passing of the Natives Land Act of 1913. In the 1920s they came under the threat of eviction. They engaged Seme's services but the case was lost both in the magistrate's court and in the appellate division. The lawyer then failed to lodge a further appeal to the Supreme Court within the prescribed three weeks and failed to notify his clients that this was a possibility. The Waverley residents then complained that Seme had not used properly the considerable sum of money they had paid him. Seme defended himself by saying that some of the money had been paid not as legal fees but to defray expenses which Seme claimed had been incurred trying to 'fight the case politically' by using 'influence to reach the authorities politically.' His clients retorted that they had never paid him anything other than for legal services. The Incorporated Law Society of the Transvaal decided that it must apply to the Transvaal Supreme Court for Seme's removal from the register on the grounds of neglect of his duties to his clients and of

`excessive, unreasonable and unconscionable` fees. Some failed to appear or defend himself when the case came before the Supreme Court. There is some doubt as to whether this removal from the register had any practical effect because a curious note in a miscellaneous fees book records that he `never ceased practising`. On 14 April, 1942, he was reinstated as a lawyer.

Sadly, too, the man who launched the ANC ship in 1912, nearly sank it when he was its president in the 1930s. A combination of lethargy and corruption nearly destroyed the organisation then. But in 1943 he made one last important contribution - however inadvertently - to South African history. He took a young man called Anton Lembede on as a law clerk. In that way, it could be argued, Some became the father of black attorneys in the country. Lembede took the legal profession by such a storm that he kindled the idea of law as a profession amongst many blacks. Lembede was also a key figure in the founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944 and became its first president. He coined the term `Africanism` and helped define the concept. On 3 August, 1946, Some informed the Transvaal Lawyers Association that he had sold his law firm to Lembede. Lembede died the following year, however, at the age of thirty-three.<sup>4</sup>

In the preparation of the documents which follow, idiosyncrasies of spelling, usage and style have largely been retained. Only occasionally have these been changed (e.g. certain abbreviations) in order to make the text or its meaning clearer. The reader should be warned that certain parts of the original documents are unclear or may be missing and that some faults (e.g. in addresses or initials of names) may have crept into the text presented here. No doubt, too,

Richard Rive would have acknowledged the help or thanked certain people. That is no longer possible.

They will no doubt content themselves with being the anonymous contributors to the preservation of the reputations of both Pixley Seme and Richard Rive. They must be thanked on Rive`s behalf.

I, too, have several people to thank. Firstly, George Seme and D. Seme whom I interviewed many years ago in Ladysmith and Swaziland respectively. Then, Celeste Emmanuel who typed what was sometimes a very difficult text. Most of all, Professor Charles van Onselen and the African Studies Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand who gave me the time and encouragement to undertake this task. There is obviously a great deal more to be done on Seme`s life. It is hoped that this small book will encourage a full-scale biography and help whoever embarks on such a worthy undertaking.

A number of addresses in America, England and South Africa are given in the letters and witnessed, for shorter or larger periods, the presence of Pixley Seme. It would be nice to think that, one day, Monuments commissions round the world might commemorate them with plaques or street names. In the meantime we must content ourselves with the memorial of a modest book. In it the voice of Seme, the pioneer newspaperman, the guardian of land tenure, the father of black attorneys, the founder of the ANC, speaks to us after nearly a century and his hand reaches out (with the help of Richard Rive) to nudge our memories lest we forget again.

**Notes**

1. For further information on Seme and the founding of the ANC, see T. Karis and G. Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Stanford University, 1977, particularly Volumes One and Four; Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!* Cape Town, 1984; P. Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, London, 1970; and T. Couzens, C. Seme: `Lawyer and Leader`, in *African Law Review*, Volume 1, No.1 January, 1987, pp 4-5.
2. Minute Book of the Native Farmers Association of Africa Limited (rescued from a garbage heap and now housed in the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand).
3. Most of the following information comes from the Supreme Court trial record and from the Transvaal Lawyers Association Register.
4. For slightly fuller information on Lembede, see T. Couzens, *The New African*, Johannesburg, 1985, particularly pages 258-261.

## **The Early Years - Richard Rive**

During 1911, a thirty-year-old black lawyer with a growing practice in Johannesburg, South Africa, took the major initiative in organising a nation-wide congress of black representatives. This was an idea that had already germinated in his mind eight years before while he was still an undergraduate student in New York. His name was Pixley kaIsaka Seme. He was a Zulu barrister-at-law, practising in the Transvaal as an attorney of the Supreme Court of the Union of South Africa.

In this historic call, he emphasized the necessity for black unity.

The demon of racialism, the aberration of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other native must be buried and forgotten... We

are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today.<sup>1</sup>

On January 8, 1912, his hope seemed to be realised when personalities from black communities all over Southern Africa converged on Bloemfontein. Appropriately Pixley Seme, as the initiator, gave the keynote address.

Chiefs of royal blood and gentleman of our race, we have gathered here to consider and discuss a theme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discussed that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa - a union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in their administration. We have called you therefore to this conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges.<sup>2</sup>

The assembled delegates then sang Tiyo Soga`s hymn, `Lizalise Dingalako Tixo We Nyaniso` (Fulfill Thy Promise, God of Truth) and Seme formally proposed that

...The delegates and representatives of the great native houses from every part of South Africa here assembled should form and establish the South African Native National Congress.<sup>3</sup>

His motion was seconded by Alfred Mangena, a fellow lawyer, who had been called to the bar two years earlier at Lincoln`s Inn, London. The African National Congress was born.

Seme was elected Treasurer, Mangena one of the four Vice-Presidents and, in absentia, Seme's cousin, Reverend John Dube of Inanda, Natal, the President. Two months later, on February 2, Dube made his first official call to the leaders, chiefs and gentlemen of the South African Native National Congress.

Booker Washington is to be my guiding star (would that he were nigh to give us the help of his wise counsel!). I have chosen this great man, firstly because he is perhaps the most famous and the best living example of our Africa's sons; and, secondly, because like him, I, too, have my heart centred mainly in the education of my race. Therein, methinks, lies the shortest and best way to their mental, moral, material and political betterment.<sup>4</sup>

John Langalibalele Dube was the son of a minor Zulu chief of the Ngcobo line. He was first educated at the American Board Mission at Amanzimtoti, Natal. Then in 1887, as a sixteen-year-old boy, he managed to reach Oberlin College, Ohio, where he trained as a teacher. He travelled widely in the United States lecturing on self-help for Africans. In 1892 he returned to South Africa and two years later was appointed superintendent of a Christian industrial school. He returned to America in 1897 to study theology at a seminary in Brooklyn, where he was later ordained as a minister of the Congregational Church. In 1900 he returned to Natal.

While in the United States he had been strongly influenced by the work of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee and was desirous of setting up a similar institution in South Africa. In 1901 he founded the Ohlange Institution in Natal based roughly on Washington's principles of self-help. Later, in 1903, he also founded and edited the Zulu newspaper, *Ilanga Lase Natal*.

There is a fair amount of information available about John Dube but almost nothing about his younger cousin Pixley Seme. The bare facts about Seme's earlier years are that he graduated from Columbia and Oxford and was called to the bar at the Middle Temple, London. Material is also sparse about his years after the establishment of the African National Congress. This might be because his conservative influence, after the militant promise he had shown initially, almost spelt the demise of that organisation. So lacklustre and turgid was his Presidency between 1930 and 1937, that Seme was at one stage accused of 'culpable inertia'. By the time he was ousted from office the Congress was all but dead.

Recently some important documents connected with his school career in the United States were unearthed by Mrs Linda Batty in the library archives of Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts.

Today this is a prestigious education institution of over 1100 pupils. It is situated on two campuses. But the school had humble beginnings. In 1881 Dwight L Moody, evangelist and educator of East Northfield, Massachusetts, founded the Mount Hermon School for Boys on the west side of the Connecticut River on high sloping ground which commanded an extensive view of river, valley and mountain. The site he selected was the Old Purple Farm which he procured after much effort. Once he had done so, he got down on his knees on the vacant site, and beseeched:

O Lord we pray that no teacher may ever come within these walls except they have been taught by the Holy Spirit; that no scholars may ever come here except as the Spirit of God shall touch their hearts.<sup>5</sup>

These words proved prophetic when amongst others it later touched the heart of a quiet, humble, Zulu herdboyc who would years after come from faraway Inanda in Natal.

A few months after Mount Hermon School was established, Isaac Seme was born on October 1, 1881, on the other side of the world, at a rural mission station in South Africa.

Seme later claimed to be a nephew of Umqawe, one of the most powerful chiefs of Zululand, but a conflicting opinion seemed to suggest that he came from a humble, Tonga family which for a long time identified itself with the Zulus.<sup>6</sup> What is known is that his parents were farmers, that he was called Isaac after his father, and that both parents were Christians. They died while he was still a young boy. Seme had brothers and sisters but there is no certainty about the numbers. Two of his sisters were married to preachers.<sup>7</sup>

He initially attended a school at a missionary institution in Natal run by a white American priest attached to the Congregational Board Mission in Natal. Reverend S.C. Pixley was later to play a dominant role in Seme`s American education, both as mentor and financial provider. In 1895, at the age of fourteen, Seme entered the Amanzimtoti Institution, which had by then changed its name to Adams Training School for Boys. Here he was under the principalship of Mr. George B. Cowles. Seme also helped out on the local farm which made Reverend Pixley later describe him as `... caring for cattle. He is a cowboy`. <sup>8</sup>

The young boy was given the opportunity of training as a teacher at Adams School, but he desisted. He seemed bent on emulating the achievement of his cousin, John Dube, and continuing his education

in the United States. John Dube was at the time in his second year at the theological seminary in Brooklyn. Reverend Pixley was also temporarily back in the United States staying at the Congregational House in Boston.

Isaac Seme, at the age of sixteen, with a bare smattering of English to assist him, travelled second and third class for over 10 000 miles in 1898 until he eventually reached his cousin in Brooklyn. For a few months he remained there to improve his English. He then travelled to Reverend Pixley at Boston and eventually found work as a bellboy at `The Northfield` hotel in north-western Massachusetts.

The manager was Ambert C Moody, a nephew of Dwight Moody, the founder of the nearby Mount Hermon School. Ambert had himself graduated from there in 1888. He was now, in addition to running the hotel, the general advisor in all business problems that confronted the school.<sup>9</sup> Ambert might have influenced Seme to seek admission or been instrumental in his gaining admission. The principal was Henry F. Cutler, a B.A. graduate of Amherst University, to whom Reverend Pixley applied for admission for Seme, ... `that he may be fitted to be a teacher of a high type of piety - and ultimately a missionary to the Zulu people <sup>10</sup>

Seme`s academic attainment to date was sparse. This was a major obstacle, but the more serious one was how to obtain annually the \$100 required for tuition and boarding. Reverend Pixley was prepared to find the money for the first year, but since he would be returning to his mission station in South Africa, he could not give any further guarantees. Seme would have to learn to rely on his own efforts by working during the Summer vacations.

His case is a very interesting one. He has worked his way to America and wishes to do all he can towards self-support... Try him for one year. Have faith that his bills will be paid.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Cutler was prepared to accept the challenge and permission to enter Mount Hermon was granted. Reverend Pixley sent two cheques for \$25 mentioning that:

He (Seme) has been at work at the hotel, `The Northfield` but will put in an appearance at Mt Hermon on September 6th (1898). I hope to send him also some clothing and an outfit in a day or two as soon as I can get to some place where I can purchase the necessary articles... Hoping he will prove himself a boy thoroughly in earnest to do good work and in due time if the Lord will be prepared, to return to South Africa to aid in the elevation and Christianization of the Zulus. Commending him to your Christian watch and care.<sup>12</sup>

John Dube, himself still a student at Brooklyn Seminary, managed to send a money order for \$38 and a cheque for \$2. He promised to send the remaining \$10 as soon as he could, and did so four days later.

In a beautiful, cursive hand, possibly to impress his penmanship on his prospective principal, Seme wrote to Professor Cutler from `The Northfield` hotel requesting a copy of the school catalogue. He signed the letter `Pixley Seme, the Zulu Boy`. <sup>13</sup> The new first name is interesting. He must have decided to adopt it as a tribute to his guide and sponsor. He retained it for the rest of his life.

There was also uncertainty about his ultimate profession. He gave these variously as photographer, missionary and medical doctor. Only years later at Columbia University did he add lawyer.<sup>14</sup>

In a questionnaire he was required to complete he was asked, `Do you believe that you were a Christian before you came to Mount Hermon?` He replied in the affirmative. The next question was `Do you believe you have become a Christian since coming here?` He replied, `Much clearer.`<sup>15</sup> Such was the influence of his new school.

On September 6, 1898, Pixley Isaac Seme entered Mount Hermon School for boys as a full-time pupil.

His tuition and board were paid up for that year and he had the promise of clothes from Reverend Pixley. Either that missionary or John Dube contacted Mrs Doubleday of New Jersey who in turn wrote to Professor Cutler to have Seme measured up for clothes and the statistics sent to her. As a result the suit was forwarded express to Seme by H.R. Jackson, tailors of Rutherford, New Jersey.<sup>16</sup>

By April, 1899, Reverend Pixley was about to return to South Africa. He was worried because he had not heard from Seme for two months and feared that the boy was ill. He was also concerned about the fees for the next academic year, and suggested to Professor Cutler that Seme should try and procure work for the Summer vacation. Seme did indeed do so and returned to his job at `The Northfield`. There he was able to save \$45.

John Dube in New York was also actively trying to raise extra money. He approached Mrs Francis L. Stimson of Brooklyn, who in turn sought assistance from Dr H.B. Silliman, a trustee of Mount

Hermon, who three years later was to donate a science laboratory to the school. She requested that Dr Silliman contact Seme and suggest to the boy that he work for a year in order to raise money. `He is an exceptional case- for which there may be some provision for he has no home or friends this side the water.<sup>17</sup>

Nothing, however, came of this. Dr Silliman sent on that letter to Professor Cutler for his consideration. Reverend Pixley in the meantime had found an extra \$50 towards the second year`s fees and was trying to interest what he referred to as `some unnamed party to have a change of mind and help him (Seme) on his course.<sup>18</sup>

Help indeed came albeit for the following year. Mrs Eliza Smith of Holyoke, Massachusetts, sent a cheque for \$100 directly to the founder of the school, Dwight Moody<sup>19</sup> (who died two months later). Reverend Pixley requested that Seme not be informed about this windfall, to ensure that he would continue to work during his Summer vacations and thus `depend mainly on himself`.<sup>20</sup>

Still more help came. Mr. A.J. Breinig, Secretary and Treasurer of the Allentown Manufacturing Company in Pennsylvania, offered financial support. `The Lord has put it into our hearts to provide the means for his next term at the seminary.<sup>21</sup>

By this time John Dube had qualified as a Congregational minister in Brooklyn and returned to Natal in order to found his Ohlange Industrial School.

Seme, unaware of how healthy his financial position was, spent the Summer vacation working at Hotel American-Adelphi at Saratoga

Springs, New York, where he managed to save \$50 which he promptly forwarded to his school principal.<sup>22</sup>

August 1901 was the beginning of Seme`s final year at Mount Hermon. It also saw the start of Seme asserting his rights as an individual. His views on racial attitudes seemed to have crystallised from passive acceptance to an aggressive assertiveness. This had nothing to do with his stay at Mount Hermon where he was treated like anyone else. He did fall foul of Mr. Charles Dickerson, Vice-Principal and teacher of Natural Science and Mathematics. There seemed to have been some dispute about room distributions for the coming year and Seme wrote a strong reply to Mr. Dickerson who was in charge of room allocations.

I suppose it makes no difference with you where I sleep anyway - I don`t believe it so I guess I better write anyway. I thought it best for me to send my room allocation now because I will come in late in the afternoon 29th. I will be very well pleased if you will fill my place as best you can in the following order.

C. Hall (Cressley Hall)

1st choice 96 or 98

2nd choice 53 or 51

3rd choice South East Corner. 2nd Floor

I don`t want the 4th at all so don`t try it. 4th Choice South West Corner. 2nd Floor.

Then followed this peculiar request. `For my room mate put the best new coloured fellow.<sup>23</sup>

Could it be that Seme's racial attitude was now manifesting itself and that he was seeking sanctuary within the safety of a black identity? This latent awareness of his colour situation was to play an increasing role in his later development which would culminate, just over a decade later, in the African National Congress.

In April, 1902, Pixley Seme graduated from Mount Hermon School for Boys. He spent the vacation working on a farm for Mr. Breinig of the Allentown Manufacturing Company, who had assisted him financially two years before.<sup>24</sup>

A new problem arose, that of finding a university place and money for tuition and board. At his request Professor Cutler applied to Yale University. The application was processed by Alfred K. Merritt who might have had some former connections with Mount Hermon.<sup>25</sup> Seme was to write the entrance examination at his old school. Once he had gained admission, there would be scholarships available.

Seme also applied for admission to Columbia University in New York. He was deeply disappointed when he was unsuccessful in his bid for a Yale entry. Instead, at the age of twenty-one, he entered Columbia University in September, 1902.

He still received assistance from diverse quarters. A niece of Reverend Pixley, Mrs. Beale, sent \$5 and a letter to Professor Cutler to forward to Seme, with the promise of more to come later.<sup>26</sup>

In New York he was now a jaunty, talkative young man full of self-confidence. In the big city he was in his element and the disappointment of Yale faded into oblivion.

This is a very fine College. I am sure I could not have made a better choice. The students as well as professors make it very pleasant for me.<sup>27</sup>

For his first vacation he had the romantic idea of becoming a gentleman's gentleman aboard a pleasure yacht. The newspapers played up the story and headlined the item, 'Royal Zulu Willing to Become a Valet'.<sup>28</sup> His alleged royal image could have been deliberately cultivated or mere newspaper sensationalism. The article also stated his intention of qualifying as a medical doctor rather than a lawyer. A further paragraph in the same article stated that Seme was embarrassed by the attention he was receiving. Seme might have been more cautious about certain inexactitudes reaching his cousin, John Dube, who was running *Ilanga Lase Natal*. Nevertheless he was enjoying the publicity and attention he was receiving and taking it all in his stride. He did not get the position as a valet but instead procured the less romantic and more menial position, at Kent House, Greenwich, Connecticut, of a storeman and a general handyman. He earned \$30 per month with board.

Seme graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University, in April, 1906, and at the same time won the University's highest oratorical honour, the George William Curtis medal. His subject was 'The Regeneration of Africa'.

By this time he had adopted the more resounding and impressive name of Pixley ka (son of) Isaka Seme. The newspaper article about his oratorical success added that he was going to read law at Oxford for four years and then return to South Africa to become 'Attorney General for his people'.

Seme was engaged by the New York Board of Education Public Lecture Bureau to deliver a series of free public lectures on `Life in Zululand`. This was a far cry from working as a bellboy or storeman. His confidence was now such that he told the reporter, `It is easy for me to learn and I can do anything I make up my mind to do.<sup>29</sup>

In September, 1906, he entered Jesus College, Oxford, to read law. Because of his interest in debate and current affairs he soon joined the Oxford Union. He wrote to Professor Cutler in 1908 that that was going to be his last year of undergraduate life in colleges.<sup>30</sup> After all he had lived in dormitories and institutions for eleven years and had never been back to South Africa during all that time. He cut short his Summer vacation to complete his course as soon as possible, and in June, 1909, gained the degree of Bachelor of Civil Law and passed his first bar examinations. He went down to London and afterwards was called to the bar at Middle Temple. In 1910 he finally returned to South Africa.

Seme had left as a quiet but ambitious herdboyer twelve years before and now returned as a sophisticated, highly qualified professional and a man of the world.

While in London in 1909, he had made contact with the W.P. Schreiner delegation which attempted to plead against discriminatory articles contained in the proposed Act of Union. Seme met with Reverend W. Rubusana, John Tengo Jabavu and his later legal and political colleague, Alfred Mangena. With them he discussed the possibility of a permanent nation-wide congress of black leaders.

When he returned in 1910, his first brief was the defence of an African charged with the assault of a white man. His mind was now concentrating on a congress of black people, and the following year his purpose was realised with the establishment of the South African Native National Congress.

Seme built up a large legal practice and his clients included the Swazi Royal Family. Later he married the daughter of Dinizulu, paramount chief of the Zulus. In 1928 his former university, Columbia, conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

The leadership of the African National Congress was held by J.T. Gumede in 1928. He set the organisation on a course of alliance with the Communist Party of South Africa which alarmed the conservative faction in the movement, who rallied around Seme. In 1930 Seme captured the Presidency from Gumede by 39 votes to 14.

Seme's leadership was conservative, lack-lustre and autocratic. He had grand designs of making the African National Congress an engine of economic self-help. He also tried to revive the now defunct House of Chiefs with which the Congress had been burdened at its inception. In 1937 he was replaced as leader by Z.R. Mahabane in spite of his packing annual conferences with his own delegates. Seme retired into the political wilderness and spent the rest of his life concentrating on his lucrative legal practice. In June, 1951, he died in Johannesburg.

The African National Congress was now under the militant leadership of Chief Albert Luthuli, and was taking a more dynamic direction. The Leaders gathered in Johannesburg for the funeral of Seme and used the occasion for the discussion of a closer political

liaison with the South African Indian Congress. This was to be initiated by jointly launching the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign the following year with Nelson Mandela as the Volunteer-in-Chief. It can thus correctly be said that the old, conservative, passive African National Congress was buried on June 17, 1951, in the grave with Pixley kaIsaka Seme.

## References

1. Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p.33.
2. *Ibid.*, p.34.
3. *Ibid.*, p.35.
4. *Ibid.*, p.37.
5. Thomas Coyle (ed.), *The Storm of Mount Hermon* (Mount Hermon, Mass: Mount Hermon Alumni Association, 1906), p.8.
6. The statement that Seme was of Tonga background was made by Jordan Ngubane, writer and politician. See Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn Carter (ed.), *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa (1882-1964)*. Vol. 4. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p.137. For references to Dube see p.24.
7. In his application for admission to Mount Hermon it is stated that both Seme`s sisters were married to preachers. (Library, Northfield Mount Hermon, August, 1898.) A newspaper cutting, `Royal Zulu Willing to Become Valet`, mentions that Seme had a younger brother studying for the ministry at Benedict College, South Carolina. (Library, 1903.)
8. Application to Mount Hermon, August 1898.
9. Coyle, *Op. Cit.*, p.75.
10. Application to Mount Hermon, *Op. Cit.*
11. Pixley to Cutler, August 13, 1898.
12. Pixley to Cutler, September 5, 1898.
13. Seme to Cutler, August 26, 1898. This is the first known document in Seme`s hand.
14. Application to Mount Hermon, *Op. Cit.* His wishing to become a lawyer is first mentioned in the newspaper article, `Royal Zulu Willing to Become Valet`, *Op. Cit.*

15. Application to Mount Hermon, *Op. Cit.*
16. Doubleday to Cutler, February 2, 1899.
17. Stimson to Silliman, August 26, 1899.
18. Pixley to Cutler, September 18, 1899.
19. Smith to Moody, October 24, 1899.
20. Pixley to Cutler, September 18, 1899.
21. Breinig to Cutler, December 26, 1899.
22. Seme to Cutler, August 30, 1900.
23. Seme to Dickerson, August 22, 1901.
24. Seme to Cutler, May 14, 1902. See also Breinig to Cutler, December 26, 1899.
25. Merritt to Cutler, May 31, 1902. At the funeral of Mrs. Cutler in 1902, a prayer was said by Reverend George Power Merritt, who had graduated from Mount Hermon in 1895. He could have been a relation. See Harriet Louise Ford Cutler. (The Living Recollections of Pupils and Friends) (East Northfield, Mass.: the Book store, n.d. 1902).
26. Beale to Cutler, January 1, 1903.
27. Seme to Cutler, January 17, 1903.
28. `Royal Zulu Willing to Become Valet`, *Op. Cit.*
29. `Zulu of King`s Race a Prize Orator`, unnamed, undated press cutting, Library, 1906).
30. Seme to Cutler, September 5, 1908.

## **The Mount Hermon School File**

### **Application for admission Mount Hermon School**

Applicants will understand that filling out this blank does not imply the acceptance of the candidate.

Every application will be considered on its own merits, and its relation to other applications, existing vacancies, and the purpose of the school. Meritorious cases may be refused because they do not fall in line with the special design of the school or because others have made prior claims.

Applicants are requested to answer every question with equal care and candor. Flattering or misleading statements regarding the mental and moral character of a candidate may bring about his admission to the school, but will only act against him when he is here seen and known.

Among the indispensable conditions of admission are a sound mind and a sound body. Feeble minds with no aptitude for study, and feeble bodies with no power of endurance, are excluded, not because they need no help, but because the school is adapted to this class of pupils. Lazy boys are not desired.

Every candidate accepted is received upon the understanding that he will prove himself worthy of the advantages offered him or consent to forfeit them.

The parent, guardian, or some responsible person will fill out this blank and return to the Principal of the school.

Please send photograph of applicant and also letter of own composition and writing, stating what studies he has pursued, what his purpose in life is, and which of the courses he wishes to take here.

Name of candidate Pixley I. Seme

Address

Date of birth October 1, 1881

Inanda Mission Station

Date of filling out this blank August 12, 1898

When do you wish to enter? This fall, 1898

What class do you hope to enter?

Do you apply for the full course? Yes

If not, how long do you intend to remain?

Name and address of parent Louis Stoiben

Esq.

722 Broadway

N.Y City

1. Full name of candidate for admission.

Pixley I. Seme

2. Birthplace.

Inanda, Natal, South Africa.

3. Send a physician`s certificate as to health, specifying any weakness. Has good health.

4. Has candidate done anything toward self-support? Yes. In what occupation? Taking care of cattle. `Cowboy`.

5. What schools attended and how long? Mission School in South Africa.

6. Amount of work done in the following studies, give rank if possible:

Arithmetic: Square root

Grammar and analysis: Analysis of complex sentences

Geography: Longman`s Geography

U.S. History: He studied British History

7. If higher branches have been studied, state amount of work done in each.

8. Any marked preferences in study, reading and occupation? No preference.

9. Has candidate shown ambition to excel in anything?

10 Has he formed any purpose in life?

11. What prominent traits of character? A good boy.
12. Has he had any bad companionships? No.
13. Does he use tobacco? No. Has he any bad habits? No.
14. Is he a member of any church? He is a member of the Inanda Congregational Church in Natal, South Africa.
15. In what religious belief educated? Congregationalism.
16. If not a member of a church, has he shown any interest in religion?
17. Why do you wish to send him to this school? I regard this school as being an ideal for the purpose the young man has to be of service in his country.
18. Does the candidate himself wish to come here? Yes.
19. Full names and addresses of father, mother, guardian, or nearest friend.

His parents are dead and I, John L. Dube are willing to sign my name here.

John L. Dube, Incwadi, Natal, South Africa.

20. Are they in church membership? Both his parents were Xians
21. Their occupation and means? Farmers.
22. Who will be responsible for the pupil's board and tuition? Mr. Louis Stoiben of N.Y. City, 722 Broadway.
23. Who will be responsible for other expenses? Himself.
24. Send address of pastor and some business man.

1. Name: Pixley I. Seme
2. Do you intend to go to college? Yes.
3. What profession or occupation do you hope to enter? Missionary
4. Have you a trade?--What?--
5. Are you a communicant member of any church? Yes.
6. If so, of what denomination? Congregational.
7. Do you believe you were a Christian before you came to Mt.

Hermon? Yes.

8. Do you believe you have become a Christian since coming here?

1. Name: Pixley I. Seme

2. Do you intend to go to college? Yes, if nothing will prevent.

3. What profession or trade do you hope to enter? Not decided.

4. Have you a trade? Yes. What? Photographer.

5. Are you a communicant member of any church? Yes.

6. If so, of what denomination? Congregationalist.

7. Do you believe you were a Christian before you came to Mt.

Hermon? Yes.

8. Do you believe you have become a Christian since coming here?

Yes.

1. Name: Pixley I. Seme

2. Do you intend going to college? Yes.

3. What profession or occupation do you hope to enter? Medicine.

4. Have you a trade? Yes. What? Photographer.

5. Are you a communicant member of any church? Yes.

6. If so, of what denomination? Congregational.

7. Do you believe you were a Christian before you came to Mt.

Hermon? Yes.

8. Do you believe you have become a Christian since coming here?

1. Full name of candidate for admission: Seme, Isaac

2. Birthplace: Inanda Mission Station, Natal, South Africa.

3. Send a physician's certificate as to health, specifying any weakness.

Never has been sick. Born of healthy parents.

4. Has candidate done anything toward self support? Yes. In what occupation? As labourer on farms and Assistant Photographer at

Adams.

5. What schools attended and how long? Mission Station School and Adams High School - three years.

6. Amount of work done in the following studies, give rank if possible:

Arithmetic

Grammar and Analysis. Geography

History

7. If higher branches have been studied, state amount of work done in each.

8. Any marked preferences in study, reading and occupation?

Photography.

9. Has candidate shown an ambition to excel in anything?

10 Has he found any purpose in life? Hope to fit himself as a teacher.

11. What prominent traits of character? Patience, perseverance.

12. Has he had any bad companionships?

It is hardly possible to travel 10,000 miles as a second or third class passenger and not meet with evil men but his intimate companions have been good and religious.

13. Does he use tobacco? No. Has he any bad habits? His missionary teacher does not know of any.

14. Is he a member of any church? Is a member of the Lindley Mission Church, at Inanda, Natal, South Africa.

15. In what religious belief educated? Protestant, Evangelical Congregationalist.

16. If not a member of a church has he shown any interest in religion?

See reply to question 14.

17. Why do you wish to send him to this school? That he may be fitted to be a teacher of a high type of piety and ultimately a missionary to the Zulu people.

18. Does the candidate himself wish to come here? Yes, if he can do

something towards self support.

19. Full names and addresses of father, mother, guardian or nearest friend.

Parents both dead. Missionaries of the Zulu mission and John Dube are his nearest friends. Has one sister, married who expects to go to the Gaza land mission with her husband.

20. Are they in church membership?

His brothers and sisters are all in church membership.

21. Their occupation and means?

Two of his sisters have been wives of preachers among the Zulus.

22. Who will be responsible for the pupil's board and tuition? His missionary will assume responsibility for one year's support if no other friend can be found. His other expenses he must meet himself.

23. Who will be responsible for other expenses? S.C. Pixley

Postal Address Congregational House, Boston, Mass. John Dube 639 Herkerman Street, Brooklyn - at present visiting the Churches of New England and raising money for an Industrial School in Natal.

---

Northampton  
88 Vernon Street Mass.  
August 13, 1898

Principal of Mt Hermon School

Dear Sir

I have filled out the form of application for Seme Isaac so far as I am able. If you need other items they can be obtained from Seme himself who is at work in East Northfield at present. I hope his application may be successful. His case is a very interesting one. He has worked his way to America and wishes to do all he can toward self support.

I have known Seme all his life. He attended the station school at my station in Natal, where he was born, until he was fourteen when he went to Adams Training School for Boys, George B Cowles Principal, Miss Martha Pixley assistant, where he has gone through the regular course of study.

He could have found work as a teacher in one of our common schools, but he wished to be better prepared for the work of teaching and has come to this country that he may get the training for better work. He can speak English now fairly well and can write an intelligent letter in English.

He has given some attention to photography under Mr. Bunker our missionary at Adams Mission School in Natal, and has done such work on the farm and in the shop as has been required at that school.

He now makes a definite application to enter Mount Hermon. I trust you will receive him and he will be successful in fitting himself to be a Christian teacher for our Zulu people.

If you have met John Dube you will see what can be done in this country for a Zulu boy. John Dube`s wife was educated in our mission school at Inanda, but she has done well to come to this

country and will be better fitted for work by the training in music and experience while in America.

I believe Seme Isaac, if he can be trained at Mount Hermon will be a man who may do much for God, and the Zulu people in Natal. Try him for one year, have faith that his bills will be paid.

I am  
Dear sir,  
Yours for Africa  
S.C. Pixley  
Missionary of ABCFM

Address me here for the present  
88 Vernon Street, Northampton.  
After one month address  
Congregational House, Boston, Mass.

---

The Northfield  
East Northfield  
Mass.  
26 August, 1898

Prof. H.F. Cutler.

Dear Sir

Will you kindly send me the catalogue of the Mount Hermon school. I am Pixley I Seme, the Zulu boy for whom both Rev S.C. Pixley and Dube asked the prof. to receive as a student in the school.

Truly yours

Pixley I. Seme

Hotel

September 1, 1898  
Providence  
Rhode Island

Dear Sir

Have you not received the letter sent you and the application filled up by myself sent you two weeks ago. Yes, Seme Isaac, alias Pixley Seme, expects to enter Mount Hermon school the coming term. He is now working at the Northfield Hotel and will I think be on hand September sixth to commence the term and is preparing for the examination.

Yours truly

S.C. Pixley  
Missionary of ABCFM

No. 2488

Name Seme, Pixley I.  
Residence Lindley Missionary Station, Natal, South Africa

Date of Birth October 1, 1881  
Date of Application Aug 12, 1898  
Came  
Left

18 August, 1898 Will come  
25 August, 1898 Sent second notice  
1 September, 1898: Wrote S.C. Pixley again  
16 August, 1898 Sent card to P.S.

Photo Lit. Cert.

Elmira NY  
September 4, 1898

My dear Mr. Cutler

I am enclosing herewith \$38.00 in m.o. and \$2.00 in check toward the tuition of Pixley. I hope that in a few days I shall be able to send the remaining \$10.00 for this term.

My address for the month of September is in care of Rev Howard Connell, Seneca Castle, N.Y.

Pixley is now at the Hotel Northfield and I believe will come over to school with other boys when they come.

Truly yours

John L Dube

Pittsfield

September 5, 1898

Dear Mr. Cutler

Enclosed please find two cheques to your order, each \$25 (\$50) toward the support of `Pixley I Seme` alias Seme Isaac (the wishes to be called by the first name) for one half year. Kindly send me receipt of the same. P.O. address 88 Vernon Street, Northampton, Mass.

He has been at work at the hotel `The Northfield` but I trust will put in an appearance at Mount Hermon tomorrow September 6.

I hope to send him also some clothing and outfit in a day or two as soon as I can get to some place where I can purchase the necessary articles.

Please write me as soon as possible after his examination what studies you would advise him to take up first, taking into account the object he has in view, to fit himself for a teacher. Hoping he will prove himself a boy thoroughly in earnest to do good work and in due time, if the Lord will, be prepared to return to South Africa to aid in the elevation and Christianization of the Zulus.

Commending him to your Christian watch and care,

I am

Dear sir,

very truly yours

S.C. Pixley  
Missionary of ABCFM

Seneca Castle  
N.Y  
September 8, 1898

My dear Mr. Cutler

I received your receipt of \$40.00 I sent you for Pixley for the fall term.

I now send you ten dollars to make it \$50.00 all expenses for fall term.

Yours truly

John L Dube.

Hotel American-Adelphi,  
Saratoga Springs,  
New York.  
August 30,1900

Prof H.F. Cutler.

Dear Sir,

Enclosed please find \$50.00 (fifty) for next term.

I have been working very hard this summer and I feel good for another term.

Saratoga is a very fine place for it`s water and air, but I am sorry I missed the Northfield conference.

Yours truly

Pixley I. Seme

P.S. I will come in September 11 because I cannot leave here any earlier.

Farmington  
Conn.  
August 22 1901

Prof C.E. Dickerson.

Dear Sir,

Good morning, Sir! I suppose it makes no difference with you where I sleep anyway - I don`t believe it - so I guess I better write anyway.

I thought it best for me to send in my room application now, because I will come in late in the afternoon 29th. I will be very well pleased if you will fill my place as best you can, in the following order.

C Hall  
1st choice 96 or 98  
2nd choice 53 or 51  
3rd choice South East corner second floor

I don't want the fourth at all so don't try it.  
4th choice South West corner second floor.

For my room-mate put in the best new coloured fellow if there is one,  
or else please leave the place blank until 29th August, 6p.m.

I kindly ask you this favour for my last year at Hermon.

Yours very truly

Pixley I. Seme.

East Northfield,  
Mass.  
May 14, 1902

Prof. H.F. Cutler

Dear Sir

Will you please do your best about securing for me a scholarship in  
Yale. I have been very busy on the farm and I could not write the  
boys.

I am working here this summer for Mr. Breinig. The work is hard  
and very healthy. I enjoy it.

Yours truly

Pixley I. Seme

Yale College  
Registrar`s office  
135 Elm Street  
New Haven  
Conn.  
May 31,1902

Mr. H.F. Cutler  
Principal, Mt Hermon School  
Mount Hermon, Mass.

My dear sir,

Your letter of May 30th is received and I may say for the Committee that if Mr. Moody is willing to undertake the supervision of the examination at Mt. Hermon we shall be very glad to place the session in Mr. Moody`s hands. He was thought of but it was supposed that he had not returned from abroad understand from your letter that you will place the matter before Mr. Moody and at you convenience we shall be glad to know his decision.

What you write about Mr. Seme interests me very much and I hope that we may be able to offer Mr. Seme sufficient encouragement to lead him to decide upon Yale. I shall at once place your statement concerning him before the committee upon scholarships and will write you as soon as possible. It goes without saying that especial consideration will be given to the fact that he would be a pioneer at Yale, of his race, and I am sure we shall be glad to extend the influence of Yale in South Africa.

I am,  
Yours very truly, Alfred K. Merritt

Yale College,  
Registrar`s office.  
135 Elm Street,  
New Haven,  
Conn.  
June 12,

Mr. Henry F. Cutler,  
Principal, Mt Hermon School,  
Mt Hermon, Mass.

My dear sir,

Referring again to your letter of May 30, about the case of Mr. Pixley I. Seme, I beg to say that your letter has been submitted to the Committee on Scholarships. The Committee can assure Mr. Seme of the remission of a part of his tuition during the first term of his Freshman year, upon his filing with Mr. Kitchel the usual application. This aid will be continued so long as the young man needs it, provided he maintains a good standing in scholarship and is strictly regular in attendance; the amount of the remission would probably be about one half of the charge for the tuition for the term. But, providing he take a high standing in his studies, the amount could be increased; for example, a needy man who maintains a philosophical standing has frequently received the abatement of the entire charge. I would suggest that Mr. Seme write Mr. Kitchel for a blank application.

We are glad to encourage Mr. Seme to come to Yale in the hope that he can earn his own way through. A young man can make his own way here at Yale if he can anywhere, and all are ready and anxious to assist such a man in every possible way. While the College cannot promise any work to Mr. Seme, Mr. Kitchel of the `Bureau of Self Help` will try to find work for him. Enclosed herewith is a leaflet, the statements in which may be thoroughly relied upon, and which I think Mr. Seme will find suggestive. I shall be glad to bear him in mind and I trust that he will not fail to come and see me when he arrives in New Haven.

Yours very truly,

Alfred K. Merritt

East Northfield,  
Mass.  
June 23, 1902

Prof. H.F. Cutler.

Dear Sir,

I sincerely thank you for your goodness to me and for your kind interest in me.

I just now send for the application blank. I have not heard from Columbia since. If Yale give me more encouragement I will go there.

I will come and see you as soon as I hear from Columbia so that you will help me to decide. I have just written them again.

Yours truly

P.I. Seme

East Northfield,  
Mass.  
July 29, 1902

Dear Sir,

My trial in June was unsuccessful. I received a letter from Mr. Merritt encouraging me to review my subjects a little better and to come forward again in September for another trial. He says that my work was almost passed. I am now doing the best I can.

Yours truly

P.I. Seme

P.S. If I come over there in September, and attend some of the classes and board for three weeks, how much will it cost me?

To the Principal of Mount Hermon School, Northfield, Mass.

Dear Sir,

There is a young man at Northfield, named Pixley I. Seme who is, I understand, in need of funds. Does he also need clothes? If he does, please have him measured by a tailor, and send me the figures, and for what season these clothes are wanted.

It is not certain that his need can be met, but a gentleman in this town will look over his stock and see if he can provide him with some garments.

If he is well provided for in this direction, I will see if I can get something towards the unpaid tuition.

Do you think he is a promising character?

Yours very truly

(Mrs C.A.) Harriet Doubleday  
Rutherford  
N.J.

GARL W. KETTLER (tailor)

35.5 chest  
stomach

7.5 20-30 back, elbow length 27 long

vest 24 long

trousers  
(waist 32) (7...)

42.25 outside length 32 inside length

This will just fit.

Hastings Clothing Company  
San Francisco, Cal.  
24 & 26 West Fourth Street,  
New York  
February 25, 1899

Mr. H.F. Cutler  
Mount Hermon  
Mass.

Dear Sir

In accordance with an arrangement with Mrs C.A. Doubleday of Rutherford, and by measures furnished us I have made a suit for the young student in your institution - Mr. Pixley I Seme, and same will be forwarded this day by Express.

I am a little curious to know the result as to fit, for while we have done our best with the measures there was a little doubt on some points. Please report in acknowledgment to Mrs Doubleday.

Yours truly

H.R. Jackson  
Rutherford  
N.J.

Box 68 Southern Pines N.C.  
April 28th, 1899

Dear Sir

We have heard nothing from our Zulu boy Pixley Seme for some time fear he is sick or in trouble so I have taken the liberty to write and ask if you would send me just a line so that we may know how he is.

We came here to spend the winter but we are planning to return to Mass soon. We wish to be among our friends in New England during the Summer. If God permit we hope to return to Natal this year and resume our work there. I should like to know about Seme whether it is wise for him to go on another year at Mount Hermon or whether it is possible for him to do any work during the Summer toward self support. I am afraid that I shall not be able do much for him.

Hoping to hear that he is getting on well. With kind regards to yourself.

I remain

Dear sir,  
Yours truly

S.C. Pixley

The Northfield  
East Northfield  
Mass.  
August 22, 1899

Prof H.F. Cutler

Dear Sir

My going back to school next fall is not yet settled. have been able to make only \$45.00 this summer and I do not know where the other will come from.

The Rev. Mr. Pixley said in his last letter he does not know yet how my school fee is going to be paid this year. But the Lord has done so much for me that it is impossible for to loose faith in him, and so because I believe I hope.

I am sorry I couldn`t see you when you were at....

Yours very truly

Pixley I. Seme

August 31, 1899

My dear Mr. Cutler

I have received report for last year at Mt H. School for which accept thanks. It is very interesting. Shall I return it?

I have received the enclosed letter from a friend in Brooklyn which will explain itself. She is a very estimable lady - but I know nothing about the boy to whom she refers. I shall tell her I have sent the letter to you.

Hope you will have a good opening of the school and a prosperous year.

Most truly yours

H.B. Silliman

### 3.4 The Mount Hermon School File continued

Brantingham Lake

August 26th

My dear Mr. Silliman

Did I or did I not write to you when we first came up here in June? I really cannot tell - for we talked so much about doing so in case you should come up to Lyons Falls that we might hope to see you, that I have the impression that I did write. We came June 23rd and shall be here until the middle or perhaps later in Sept. My feet have given me so much trouble since my typhoid that this summer I was ordered to come away and sit still - which I have done, first at the Hotel, then at Brantingham Lake, then back here at Mr. Nicol's cottage college and later again at the Hotel. If you yet come to Lyons Falls do let us know and drive over and see us.

I saw your name in the Tribune as participating in the general-services at Northfield and as I had a letter from there the same day giving me a problem for solution I thought I would write and ask you if you are still at the `Northfield`, to make inquiries about and talk with a Zulu boy Pixley Seme (pronounced Sammy). I have been interested in him and he writes me that he has only been able to make \$45.00 this year (at the Northfield) and he don't know what he is going to do about entering Mount Hermon another year. I think it would be well for him to work for a year and lay up his wages for

school - if work could be found for him - but I am not [sure] when I could find it nor able to do so when in the city. I would like it if you would talk with and advise him - he is a Christian boy and a `stranger` and also if you would talk with the principal or some teacher at Mount Hermon and find out how he stands and if there is any way of his working the balance of his tuition if he should stay there. His is an exceptional case - for which there be some provision - for he has no home or friends this side the water.

Of course if you have left Northfield you cannot do these things for me but you might enclose my letter with a line from you to someone at Mount Hermon. I hope you do not mind my thanking you - I am so disappointed in not getting to the Conference this summer. I wanted to beyond measure. I shall wait with interest the `Echoes`.

I do hope you are coming up this way - we looked out at the Lyons Falls Station - rather expecting to see Mrs Silliman or you. Give my best love to dear Mrs Silliman and believe me

Most sincerely yours

Frances L. Stimson

Box 22

Merrick

September 18th 1899

Dear Sir

Enclosed please find cheques towards support of Pixley Seme \$50. hope in some way to make up the \$100 for the year before I return to

Natal. After that I do not know how he will get on - but I still hope to interest some party to have charge of him and help him on his course, thou I have always assured Pixley that he must depend mainly on himself.

[S.C. Pixley]

October 24 399

D. L. Moody

Sir I send you my check for 100,00 to pay the tuition of Pixley I. Seme, a Zulu boy in Mount Hermon School for the school year of 1900-1901. Mr. Pixley the Missionary requests that the boy shall not know about this gift.

Mrs Eliza Smith  
207 Pine Street  
Holyoke  
Mass.

The Allentown Manufacturing Co.  
Allentown Penn`a  
December 26, 1899

Prof. H.F. Cutler  
Principal, Mount Hermon Seminary

My dear Sir,

Understanding that P.I. Seme has no means with which to continue his studies, and no one to look to for the same, the Lord has put it into our hearts to provide the means for his next term at the Seminary. You will therefore when necessary send the bill for his next term to me and I will remit the amounts.

Of course I'll provide for S. Cunningham same as before.

Our hearts and prayers are with the bereaved friends at Northfield in sympathy and condolence. We feel that we have lost a dear friend in the departure of Mr. Moody. With the compliments of the season.

Yours sincerely

A.J. Breinig

Williston Md.

January 1st, 1903

Principal of Mount Hermon

Dear Sir,

Will you be so kind as to forward the enclosed \$5 and letter to Pixley I. Seme.

My uncle Rev. S.C. Pixley, Inanda, South Africa, could not give his address, but I was told anything sent to your care would be forwarded to him. As soon as I can send to Denton, Md., the nearest Money Order Office - I will get an order for 5.15 that you may be able to renew and put in the enclosed letter.

Thanking you for your trouble.

I am your

S.A. Beals

19 West 135th Street  
New York City  
June 17, 1903

Professor H.F. Cutler

Dear Sir

I have received your letter and also the money enclosed. Thank you always for your kind services.

This is a very fine college. I am sure I could not have made a better choice. The students as well as the professors make it very pleasant for me.

I meet Mr. Harris very often in the dining hall also Mr. Bachelor. We are all working hard.

Yours truly

P.I. Seme

Kent House  
Greenwich

Conneticut  
August 20,1903

Dear Sir,

I read in `The Presbyterian` last Sunday about the departure of the lady-mother whom we all had learned to love.

This was the first time for me to know it - God`s will be done - Who would have believed it when only a few months ago she shook hands and wished that a blessing of God might follow me even through college.

Mount Hermon, through her teachings and the lives of some of her teachers has left in my life an impression which never shall pass away.

Mr. Cutler, I thank you for all you have done for me. I never can think about Mount Hermon without thinking about you.

Mr. Kent is one of the finest men I have ever worked for. This house opens up to November, but I must go by September 9. I have told Mr. Kent that I would try to get a Hermon man to fill my place. In fact, for many reasons which I cannot explain here I would be very glad if I could get him a Hermon man. He said he would pay him \$30 per month with board.

The work is :- Make coffee in the morning, drive for the mail, attend to the general flood supplies of the house such as meats and groceries, freeze ice cream and keep my store room tidy. I get three hours off every afternoon.

I wrote Mr. McWilliam but he has not answered me. I now have only ten days in which to get someone. Can you do anything for me?

Yours truly,

P.I. Seme

PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE BY RETURN MAIL

Sept 26 1903

To the Principal of Mount Hermon School:

I acknowledge the receipt of the Catalogue of Mount Hermon School 1903.

Always wishing the highest things for Mount Hermon I remain P. ka`I. Seme, Columbia NY.

Class of `02 Hermon,  
`06 Columbia

Please give above your name, title if any, and address as it should be printed in the annual address list.

Degrees and titles have been inserted, so far as known. Please notify us of any errors or omissions.

Columbia University,  
New York City,  
December 21st, 1904

Professor H.F. Cutler,  
Mount Hermon School,  
Mass.

Dear Sir,

Mount Hermon will always have a dear spot, in my heart. She told me how to build my life on the rock. I pray that her blessed influence may still be possible for poor boys like me.

I wish to subscribe for the Record of Christian Work, beginning with the January number. Please hand this subscription to one of the students who is in the scholarship contest. Enclosed please find one dollar (\$1.00) for the same.

Accept congratulations for yourself and for your colleagues for the success you have made in teaching Hermon principles.

Yours very truly

P. kaIsaka Seme.

### **Product of Moody School**

(Undated and unidentified newspaper cutting, 1903)

#### **ROYAL ZULU WILLING TO BECOME VALET**

*Oka Isaka Seme, Student at Columbia, Looks for Work.*

Wishes to Return and Treat His Fellow Countrymen After Modern Medical Methods.

Special to *The Boston Journal*.

New York, May 10 - Any one wishing a useful man on his yacht this summer, or a valet, has a chance of obtaining a full blooded Zulu of royal lineage. He is Oka Isaka Seme, and next month he will complete his freshman year at Columbia College, where he has distinguished himself as an unusually bright scholar.

Seme is one of the few Zulus in this country and is the only one that has ever been a student at Columbia. He is trying to realize his ambition to become a physician and to go back and practice in his native land. Seme, although a member of the nobility of Zululand, isn't afraid of work, and in order to get something to do during the summer has advertised for a place on a yacht or as a `useful man to a gentleman.`

#### WANTS TO DOCTOR ZULUS

Seme is a nephew of Umqawe, one of the most powerful chiefs of Zululand. He is a cousin of the Rev. Mr. Dube, one of the first of his race to come here.

It was through his cousin that Seme came to this country five years ago and became a student at Mr. Moody's school at Northfield. He entered Columbia last fall and attracted a lot of attention, which he didn't like. Seme says that what is written about him here gets in the papers which the English have established in Zululand and makes his people think he is a great man when he isn't.

‘I really know very little compared to Americans yet,’ said Seme yesterday, but I want to know a lot more, so that I can go back to Zululand and divide my time between teaching in the school my cousin has started and practising medicine. There are no native doctors who understand medicine; and as the Zulus are distrustful of foreigners, it is only one of their own race who can teach them the value of medicine and surgery.

#### HAS WORKED IN MASSACHUSETTS.

‘My brother is studying for the ministry at Benedict College, and to keep us both here is very hard for our family. It is by getting something to do in the summer that I have been able to defray expenses. One summer I worked as a gardener in Massachusetts and another summer I worked as a bellboy.’ ‘If I hollowed my personal tastes I would become a lawyer, but there is not the need for lawyers in Zululand that there is for doctors. It is only when the disputes are taken to the English court that a lawyer is wanted, and those cases are few, because the natives prefer to have the chief settle their disputes under the native law. The chiefs and his council are supposed to know everything and the presence of a native lawyer would be construed as a reflection on their wisdom and intelligence.’

Seme is 21 years old. He came here when he was 16, and speaks English fluently and with only a slight accent. He is very black in colour and closely resembles the American Negro in all but his speech. Like his brother, he has become Christianized.

(Undated and unidentified newspaper cutting, 1906)

#### **ZULU OF KING’S RACE A PRIZE ORATOR**

*Pixley ka Isaka Seme Wins George William Curtis Medal at Columbia.*

A Zulu, full-blooded and of the race of Cetsewayo and Lobengula who gave England the hardest fighting John Bull ever had in South Africa, not excepting the Boers, yesterday won the George William Curtis gold medal, the highest oratorical award conferred by Columbia University.

Pixley ka Isaka Seme entered Columbia in 1902 and will be graduated this year.

Mr. Seme, as he is called, is not the typical Zulu in appearance. He is only five feet six inches tall and doesn't weigh more than 140 pounds, but his face bears the characteristics of the African of the higher order. He is the son of a chieftain in Zululand, and when he returns to his home expects to become Attorney-General for his people. To prepare himself for the post he will go to Oxford University, England, and take a four years' course in British law.

Mr. Seme was brought here by a Zulu named John Dube who was educated at Oberlin, Ohio, and returning to his native land established an institute of learning modelled on the plans of Booker T. Washington's schools at Tuskegee, Ala. The young Zulu lived in Brooklyn for several months studying English, then went to Dwight L. Moody's school at Northfield, Vt., to prepare for college. His first intention was to become a missionary, then he decided to be a physician and finally a lawyer.

Soon after entering Colombia he began to show an interest in the debates and finally entered into the oratorical contests with a view to winning the Curtis medal.

‘It’s easy for me learn,’ he said, ‘and I can do anything I make up my mind to do.’

Mr. Seme’s subject in the contest was ‘The Regeneration of Africa.’ He predicted a higher civilization for the ‘Dark Continent’. His opponents were Horace A. Rozenblatt, Harold K. Bill and Maurice G. Ellenbogen. The judges were Dean J. Howard Van Amringe, Prof. George W. Kirchwey, Prof. Franklin H. Giddings and Prof Brander Matthews.

(Undated and unidentified newspaper cutting, 1906)

## **ZULU WINS COLUMBIA PRIZE**

*Gets Highest Oratorical Honours with ‘The Regeneration of Africa.’*

Columbia University’s highest oratorical honours went this year to a full-blooded Zulu, who won the annual contest yesterday for the George William Curtis medal. ka Isaka Seme is the name of the winner. He is a mission student and a member of the class of 1906. His subject was ‘The Regeneration of Africa.’

The second prize, a silver medal, was won by M.K. Ellenbogen.

(Unidentified newspaper cutting)

April 16, 1906

Pha Isaka Seme, the Zulu, who recently won the George William Curtis gold medal, the highest oratorical honour conferred by Columbia University, has been engaged by the New York board of education public lecture bureau to deliver a series of free public lectures on `Life in Zululand.`

Thursday evening Mr. Seme spoke at public school 135, and on Wednesday evening he will repeat his talk at St. Bartholomew`s lyceum hall. Both of the talks will be illustrated with stereopticon views of actual scenes from life among the Zulus.

Pha Isaka Seme is the son of Isaka ka Knawana of Royal Zulu blood, and comes from Natal, South Africa. Eight years ago he could not speak a word of English. He was born and reared as a Zulu in the town of Inanda, and attended the mission school, where he learned to read and write English well, but until he came to America, eight years ago, he did not speak it. From Dwight L. Moody school at Mount Hermon he entered Columbia, where he expects this year to finish his course.

## **THE REGENERATION OF AFRICA**

Ladies and gentlemen

I have chosen to speak to you on this occasion upon `The Regeneration of Africa.` I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion. Men have tried to compare races on the basis of some equality. In all the works of nature, equality, if by it we mean identity, is an impossible dream! Search the Universe! You will find no two units alike. The Scientists tell us there are no two cells, no two atoms, identical. Nature has

bestowed upon each a peculiar individuality, an exclusive patent - from the great giants of the forest to the tenderest blade. Catch in your hand, if you please, the gentle flakes of snow. Each is a perfect gem, a new creation it shines in its own glory - a work of art different from all its aerial companions. Man, the crowning achievement of nature, defies analysis. He is a mystery through all ages and for all time. The races of mankind are composed of free and unique individuals. An attempt to compare them on the basis of equality can never be finally satisfactory. Each is himself. My thesis stands on this truth; time has proven it. In all races, genius is like a spark, which, concealed in the blossom of flint, bursts forth at the summoning stroke. It may arise anywhere and in any race.

I would ask you not to compare Africa to Europe or to any other continent. I make this request, not from any fear that such comparison might bring humiliation upon Africa. The reason I have stated, - a common standard is impossible! Come with me to the ancient capital of Egypt, Thebes, the city of one hundred gates. The grandeur of its venerable ruins, and the gigantic proportions of its architecture reduce to insignificance the boasted monuments of other nations. The pyramids of Egypt are structures to which the world presents nothing comparable. The mighty monuments seem to look with disdain on every work of human art and to vie with Nature herself. All the glory of Egypt belongs to Africa and her people. These monuments are the indestructible memorials of their great and original genius. It is not through Egypt alone Africa claims such unrivaled historic achievements. I could have spoken of the pyramids of Ethiopia which, though inferior in size to those of Egypt, far surpass them in architectural beauty; their sepulchres which evince the highest purity of taste, and of many prehistoric ruins in other parts of Africa. In such ruins Africa is like the golden sun, that,

having sunk beneath the western horizon, still plays upon the world which he sustained and enlightened in his career.

Justly the world now demands -

"Whither is fled the visionary gleam,  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

Oh, for the historian who, with the open pen of truth, will bring to Africa's claim the strength of written proof. He will tell of a race whose onward tide was often swelled with tears, but in whose heart bondage has not quenched the fire of former years. He will write that in these later days when Earth's noble ones are named, she has a roll of honor too, of whom she is not ashamed. The giant is awakening! From the four comers of the earth Africa's sons, who have been proved through fire and sword, are marching to the future's golden door bearing the records of deeds of valor done.

Mr. Calhoun I believe, was the most philosophical of all the slaveholders. He said once that if he could find a black man who could understand the Greek syntax, he would consider their race human, and his attitude towards enslaving them would therefore change. What might have been the sensation kindled by the Greek syntax in the mind of the famous Southerner I have so far been unable to discover, but oh, I envy the moment that was lost! And woe to tongues that refuse to tell the truth! If any such were among the now living, I could show him among black men of pure African blood those who could repeat the Koran from memory, skilled in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, - Arabic and Chaldaic - men great in wisdom and profound knowledge - one professor of philosophy in a celebrated German university; one corresponding member of the

French Academy of Sciences, who regularly transmitted to that society meteorological observations, and hydrographical journals, and papers on botany, and geology; another whom many ages call `The Wise,` whose authority Mahomet himself frequently appealed to in the Koran in support of his own opinion men of wealth and active benevolence, those whose distinguished talents and reputation have made them famous in the cabinet and in the field, officers of artillery in the great armies of Europe, generals and lieutenant generals in the armies of Peter the Great in Russia and Napoleon in France, presidents of free republics, kings of independent nations which have burst their way to liberty by their own vigor. There are many other Africans who have shown marks of genius and high character sufficient to redeem their race from the charges which I am now considering.

Ladies and gentleman, the day of great exploring expeditions in Africa is over!

Man knows his home now in a sense never known before. Many great and holy men have evinced a passion for the day you are now witnessing - their prophetic vision shot through many unborn centuries to this very hour. `Men shall run to and fro,` said Daniel, `and knowledge shall increase upon the earth.` Oh, how true! See the triumph of human genius to-day! Science has searched out the deep things of nature, surprised the secrets of the most distant stars, disintombed the memorials of the everlasting hills, taught the lightning to speak, the vapours to toil, and the winds to worship, spanned the sweeping rivers, tunnelled the longest mountain range - made the world a vast whispering gallery, and has brought foreign nations into one civilized family. This all-powerful contact says even to the most backward race, you cannot remain where you are, you

cannot fall back, you must advance! A great century has come upon us! No race possessing the inherent capacity to survive can resist and remain unaffected by this influence of contact and intercourse, the backward with the advanced. This influence constitutes the very essence of efficient progress and of civilization.

From these heights of the twentieth century I again ask you to cast your eyes south of the Desert of Sahara. If you would go with me to the oppressed Congos and ask, What does it mean, that now, for liberty, they fight like men and die like martyrs; if you would go with me to Bechuanaland, face their council of Headmen, and ask what motives caused them recently to decree so emphatically that alcoholic drinks shall not enter their country - visit their King, Khama, ask for what reason he leaves the gold and ivory palace of his ancestors, its mountain strong-holds and all its august ceremony, to wander daily from village to village through all his kingdom, without a guard or any decoration of his rank - a preacher of industry and education, and an apostle of the new order of things. If you would ask Menelik what means this that Abyssinia is now looking across the ocean. Oh, if you could read the letters that come to us from Zululand - you too would be convinced that the elevation of the African race is evidently a part of the new order of things that belong to this new and powerful period.

The African already recognizes his anomalous position and desires a change. The brighter day is rising upon Africa. Already I seem to see her chains dissolved, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science and of religion, reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities. Her Congo and her Gambia whitened with commerce, her crowded cities sending forth the hum of business,

and all her sons employed in advancing the victories of peace - greater and more abiding than the spoils of war.

Yes, the regeneration of Africa belongs to this new and powerful period! By this term, regeneration, I wish to be understood to mean the entrance into a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence. The basic factor, which assures their regeneration, resides in the awakened race-consciousness. This gives them a clear perception of their elemental needs and of their undeveloped powers. It therefore must lead them to the attainment of that higher and advanced standard of life.

The African people, although not a strictly homogeneous race, possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallizing itself into one common controlling idea. Conflicts and strife are rapidly disappearing before the fusing force of this enlightened perception of the true intertribal relation, which relation should subsist among people with a common destiny. Agencies of a social, economic and religious advance tell of a new spirit which, acting as a leavening ferment, shall raise the anxious and aspiring mass to the level of their ancient glory. The ancestral greatness, the unimpaired genius, and the recuperative power of the race, its irrepressibility, which assures its permanence, constitute the African's greatest source of inspiration. He has refused to camp for ever on the borders of the industrial world; having learnt that knowledge is power, he is educating his children. You find them in Edinburgh, Cambridge, and in the great schools of Germany. These return to their country like arrows, to drive darkness from the land. I hold that his industrial and educational initiative and his untiring devotion to these activities must be regarded as positive evidences of this process of his regeneration.

The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine, plaited willow-ware, and weapons of superior workmanship. Civilization resembles an organic being in its development - it is born, it perishes, and it can propagate itself. More particularly it resembles a plant, it takes root in the teeming earth, and when the seeds fall in other soils, new varieties sprout up. The most thoroughly spiritual and humanistic - indeed a regeneration moral and eternal!

Africa!

Like some great century-plant, that shall but bloom  
In ages hence, we watch thee; in our dream  
See in thy swamps the Prospero of our stream;  
Thy doors unlocked, where knowledge in her tomb  
Hath lain innumerable years in gloom.  
Then shalt thou, waking with that morning gleam,  
Shine as thy sister lands with equal beam.

\* Reprinted from the *Journal of Royal African Society*, Vol. 5, 1905-1906, pp404-408. A similar subject with identical title was dealt with in 1908 by Bandele Omoniyi, author of *A Defence of the Ethiopian Movement*, and a medical student at Edinburgh, in chapter IX of the book. That chapter, 'Regeneration of Africa,' he said, was based on an article he published in August 1907 in some leading African newspapers.

Dear sir

I have just received your kind reply to my letter and I most gratefully accept the kind expression of your continued interest in my welfare. I must confess that this is the genuine Mount Hermon spirit which in you never seems to abate.

I believe that you will hear in due course from Mr. Makanya re the proposed coming of his son to Mount Hermon.

As to myself hardly any fresh news - except that this is my last Year of undergraduate life and perhaps of student life in colleges. And for this reason I have decided to cut short my summer holidays for I was persuaded that the best thing I could do would be to reside continuously here at Oxford and devote myself altogether to the study of law and literature until next June when I shall sit for my B.C.L. and the final Bar examinations.

I hope to visit the U.S.A. before I sail for my native land. In that case I would visit Mount Hermon.

Please accept for yourself and your devoted colleagues my very highest respects.

Yours truly

P ka I. Seme

Jesus College

September 5th, 1908

P. Ka Isaka Seme, B.A.,

Attorney (Bar-at-Law)

Cnr of Joubert and Anderson Str. Johannesburg, 30 January 1911

Sir,

Please accept my compliments of the season and my highest respects. As you see I have already started in my small capacity to serve my people. This is a land of great opportunities, seeing that the greatest part of our resources remains unexplored still. I hope that Mount Hermon will send many of her sons to the field so rich and so promising. What Africa needs most are christian whitemen and these among us are very few.

This morning I was talking with a young man named Franklin Makanya who wishes to go to America to study. I am advising him to apply to Mount Hermon. When he does, I hope you will be in a position to consider his application favourably.

I pray to be remembered by all my teachers and also I hope you will favour me by sending me a catalogue of the school.

With highest respects I beg to remain,

Yours faithfully

P.I. Seme

Professor H. Cutler.

School Mount Hermon

Mass.

