News from June 1911: Schreiner on the ‘black peril’ investigations

Olive Schreiner felt strongly about prostitution as a central aspect of women’s inequality - no woman could be truly free until, as she put it, the last key had been turned in the lock of the last brothel and no woman could be ‘bought for hire’ ever again. In the South African context, she felt particularly strongly about white men’s sexual exploitation of black women. When a ‘black peril’ moral panic was whipped up about the dangers of black men attacking white women, she was outraged. There was very little evidence of this, but lots that showed that black women were at risk to white men. The General Missionary Commission set up an inquiry into ‘the so-called black peril’, which had almost equal numbers of black and white informants. Schreiner was among them, she was also on its organising committee for the inquiry, and distributed many of the questionnaires used for collecting information. Her letter of 28 June 1911 to James Henderson, secretary to the Commission, comments on her own completed questionnaire - presumably Henderson did indeed return it as requested, as it is absent from the Commission collection of these.

Letter Reference General Missionary Commission, Folder 25: Letters to Mr. J. Henderson MS 14, 847/1
Archive Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown
Epistolary Type Letter
Letter Date 28 June 1911
Address From De Aar, Northern Cape
Who To James Henderson
Other Versions

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1: De Aar
2: June ?28th 1911
3:
4: Dear Mr Henderson
5:
6: I am sending you my paper. I hope you will be able to read it. If it
7: is too late to be of use to you will you do me a great favour & return
8: it to me at once. I am too ill to write out again the substance of
9: what I have written there & I much need it to send to one of my
10: friends who is sitting on the Government Commission, & who wishes to
11: know my views on the matter. If you feel it is still in time to be of
12: use to you will you return it to me as soon as you can.
13:
14: Yours very sincerely,
15: Olive Schreiner