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Two

TWO OPEN LETTERS TO LORD SALISBURY,

On the Iniquity of a War against the Transvaal.

I.—By FREDERIC HARRISON.

Dr W. G. LEADS
Transvaal 337
GRAVESEND

To the Marquis of Salisbury—

Prime Minister, Chief Secretary
of State for Foreign Affairs.

MY LORD,

In a crisis of our history, those who fear that England may be dragged into an unjust and ominous war turn all their hopes of peace on you and your known principles of action. You are the Chief of the Government and the accepted head of the most powerful party known to recent times. No other living statesman can pretend to such experience as yours in all international affairs, nor does any other possess in so eminent a degree the confidence of the nation. To many of us it seems an unnatural thing that our country should be on the verge of a formidable war, the ulterior complications of which no man can predict, whilst you are more or less in the back-ground, at most a consenting party to protracted negotiations wherein you are not known to take any personal share.

It is a mere accident, or, rather, a detail of official arrangement, that the moving power in this crisis rests with the Colonial and not with the Foreign Office. It is not the business of the Colonial Office to embark this Empire in a foreign war. It is no duty of the Minister for the Colonies to make war, nor to make war inevitable. It is idle to tell us that this crisis is a purely Colonial difficulty, to be settled in the Colonial Office and decided by Colonial interests. A war which (we are told) may open with the bringing into the field of sixty thousand British troops in a distant continent, which will inevitably lead (we are told) to prolonged military occupation of a vast tract, which must shake the whole Empire to its base, and may lead to international complications yet unperceived—such a war is an Imperial question (if any can be); a question for the head of the Government to decide, and for the head of the Foreign Office to take under his immediate eye and responsibility. It would be monstrous if a mere administrative arrangement should enable a department, pressed as it is by local ambitions, to drag these kingdoms into a tremendous international struggle, wherein the entire Empire is certain to be strained, if not brought to extreme peril, by opening its vulnerable sides at once to all its enemies and its rivals.

No legal quibbling about suzerainty can persuade us that the South African Republic is a part of the Empire. If it is not part of the Empire it must be a foreign State, even though it be one over which by agreement Great Britain has some control. But this control is solely concerned with

* The substance of a letter published in the *Daily Chronicle* on August 30th, 1899.

the external, not with the internal, relations of the Republic. The point in dispute solely relates to the internal relations of the Transvaal. No one pretends that the dispute concerns the dealing of the Republic with foreign nations. Therefore, the cause of war, if war there is to be, arises from matters between Great Britain and the home affairs of a Republic which is not within the Empire, not within the dominions of the Queen. . . .

My Lord, it is *you* whom history will hold responsible for this war, and for all its ulterior results. It is Louis Napoleon whom France holds answerable for Sedan; and not Eugénie, Ollivier, or the Marshals It is you, My Lord, whom our Queen will hold to be that one of her servants on whose head lies the weight of a war clouding the end of her long and glorious reign—a war which the majority of Englishmen know to be mean and unjust, which many men of great experience look on as charged with permanent trouble and possible disaster to our vast and scattered Empire.

A majority of Englishmen, I assert, know in their hearts that this war would be unjust, even if too many of them, knowing that, desire it to go on, notwithstanding its injustice. It is not true, however loudly it be repeated, that the great majority of Englishmen do seek to push the war to the end. Noisy, arrogant, and trading groups of men, organised and intriguing for their own ends, are doing this. But they are not the nation. On all sides there are quiet protests being raised against it, by men of all parties and of all interests, outside those interests which are playing their own game. The same quiet, but convinced reluctance is to be heard from sensible and honest Conservatives. They, as we all do, put their trust in you. In Africa, whether amongst subjects of the Queen or those outside her dominions, it is a universal feeling that, if you took this matter into your own hands, it could be settled in a week

We have had evidence quite lately of the follies and crimes which those who seek to crush the independence of the Transvaal are able to commit. And within a few years these very men are striving to plunge the Empire into a scandalous and perilous adventure where they may find the profit, whilst we bear the shame and the cost. It may well be that the Colonial Office is not strong enough to resist the pressure of men who not long ago swaggered about "cutting the painter." Neither in Africa nor at home is Mr. Chamberlain held to be sufficiently master of the whole situation to meet President Kruger as calmly as you, My Lord, have met the President of the United States and the President of the French Republic. If Mr. Chamberlain is felt to be not strong enough or not cool enough for friendly compromise, much less is his deputy and mouthpiece in Cape Town. . . .

Measured by the compromises with foreign nations which you may justly claim to have brought to a successful issue, the concessions already accepted by the Republic are indeed decisive. From nine years to seven years, from seven to five years, from one demand of the Outlanders to another, the Boers have given way. They have already conceded the whole of the original demand made on them, and have even added more. And at every fresh concession Sir Alfred Milner is instructed to make

further demands, until throughout the Transvaal, and we may well add at home, the impression prevails that it is not concession of claims which is sought from the Republic, but submission, humiliation, and loss of independence. Is this how negotiations have been carried on when you, My Lord, as head of the Foreign Office, have dealt with Russia, Turkey, France, or the United States? This is not negotiation. It is war—war of naked aggression—war wherein the Boers will not yield without a desperate struggle and after bloody combats—a war which cannot be closed by a few victories nor the traces of it wiped out by a few promises or proclamations—a war wherein many true and patriotic Englishmen devoutly trust that the Boers may not be ultimately crushed. “*Bella geri placuit, nullos habitura triumphos.*”

The “negotiations,” as the new diplomacy calls its efforts to goad the Boers into dogged resistance, are things unknown to the real diplomacy of our Foreign Office as understood by yourself and your predecessors. If the Transvaal is not part of the Empire, within the colonial dominions of her Majesty, it must be an alien Power. To force an alien Power by threats of war to take over British subjects to its own allegiance, to convert loyal subjects of the Queen into alien republicans, this is a grotesque perversion of all public law, as understood between nations. As the sole object of forcing on an alien Power a large body of new citizens is to enable them to betray their acquired allegiance, and to master the State in the interest of their confederates—to be, in fact, the Wooden Horse admitted into the Boer Troy—it is obvious that this irreducible *minimum* of the new diplomacy in a transparent trick. To play it upon any European power would arouse ridicule and contempt. It may seem fine policy to the Colonial Office, which is largely engaged with savages and their white masters; but it is unworthy of the Foreign office and of the traditions which you uphold in its dealings with civilised Powers.

All the talk about “suzerainty” and “paramount Power” which fills the Rhodesian Press is mere darkening of the case, as irrelevant as the gossip and scandal rehearsed to the Court at Rennes. Whatever “suzerainty” means, or does not mean, it cannot empower Great Britain to force her own citizens on the Boer Republic. The burgher franchise is an absolutely domestic matter; and it is not claimed that “suzerainty” covers domestic legislation. If “suzerainty” gives no good title to the Queen to require that her own discarded subjects shall be taken over as alien republicans, still less can this right be due to the fact that she has the “paramount power” in South Africa. For “paramount power” is a phrase more vague and arbitrary than “suzerainty”; and in the absence of specific treaties and conventions, it can mean nothing more than a claim to be the strongest, the most peremptory, the readiest to put might before right.

These are claims and pretensions which the best part of your public life, My Lord, has been occupied in resisting. The United States have claimed to be the paramount Power in the Transatlantic Continents, as

France has on the Niger, as Russia has in the Balkans and Northern Asia. Our constant policy, our honourable traditions—they are very largely, My Lord, your policy, your traditions—have been to require that the paramount Power shall submit to international engagements, to public law, and to justice as between the weak and the strong. We as a nation, you as Minister, have steadily resisted the claim of any Power calling itself paramount to seize what it can and to coerce those who refuse to be despoiled. If the Colonial Office defies these honourable traditions, if the new diplomacy is to develop also a new morality, a new public law, whether moved by timidity or by pique, it remains for the Chief Minister of the Crown and the head of the Foreign Office to maintain our record of freedom and of justice, before we are dragged into a war the wickedness of which is certain, but the end of which no man can foresee.

FREDERIC HARRISON.

Newton Hall, 25th August.

II.—By the HON. AUBERON HERBERT.

MY LORD MARQUIS,

We feel it our duty to place before you our strongest possible protest against the idea of war with the Transvaal. That the Outlanders suffer great wrongs, and that it is the duty of the British Government to exercise steady pressure on their behalf, we are most ready to admit; but we deny our moral right as a nation to remedy these wrongs by war or by threat of war. It is a case, in our judgment, that demands great patience. Our own mistakes in the past are sufficient in themselves to constrain us to exercise patience. Grievous as are the disabilities placed upon the Outlanders, it cannot with truth be pretended that they are of so violent and acute a nature that they can supply a justification for the terrible alternative of war. The danger of war seems rather to arise from the apprehension of certain politicians that the prestige of the British Empire is at stake, and will be fatally injured, unless we at once proceed to crown all our past dealings with the Transvaal with a final act of violence and impatience. We can only reply that it is revealed to very few persons what will increase and what will lessen the prestige of the British Empire; and we are convinced that there is no man living who can foresee the results of a war with the Transvaal. For ourselves we know of only one rule that possesses any value for our guidance—the simple rule of cultivating love of peace, tolerance, impartiality, and scrupulousness, carried to the very furthest point, in the use of force, so that we may direct this great Empire, not in a spirit of restlessness and vain-gloriousness and passion for extended dominion, but as one of the gravest and most arduous duties that a nation has ever been called upon to discharge.

We are, My Lord Marquis, most respectfully,

Mudford, Christchurch.
Heaton Moor, Stockport.

AUBERON HERBERT.
W. SIMPSON.