

L
/

Dr. W. J. LEYDS
Frankenslag 337
GRAVENHAGE.

EX-PRESIDENT HARRISON
ON
The Boer War.

*Reprinted by permission from THE NORTH AMERICAN
REVIEW of March 15, 1901.*

EX-PRESIDENT

HARRISON

ON

The Boer War.

[REPRINTED BY PERMISSION FROM THE "NORTH
AMERICAN REVIEW," MARCH 15, 1901.]

LONDON :

THE "NEW AGE" PRESS, 1 & 2 TOOK'S COURT,
FURNIVAL STREET, E.C.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

EX-PRESIDENT

HARRISON

THE BOOK

OF

The Book War

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR LENOX TILDEN FOUNDATION
125 WEST 47TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

EX-PRESIDENT HARRISON

ON

THE BOER WAR.

(Reprinted by permission from the "NORTH AMERICAN
REVIEW," March 15, 1901.)

It is quite possible that the government of a State may so flagrantly abuse its internal powers, may so cruelly treat its subjects, or a class of them, that the intervention of other States will be justified. It is an extreme case that will justify an armed intervention, and the intervention must always be benevolent, both in spirit and purpose. The police must not appropriate the property they recover from the highwayman. The judgment whether the case is one that justifies intervention must not be influenced, or seem to be influenced, by motives of advantage. If the land delivered is taken over, those who reject altogether the idea of an international benevolence or altruism will have another citation.

The insistence of many individuals and of a very large section of the newspaper press that, as matter of "reciprocity," we must give our sympathy to Great Britain in the Boer war, and the frequent refer-

ences to certain crude and illiberal things in the Dutch administration of the Transvaal as matters justifying an armed intervention by Great Britain, have very naturally turned my vagrant thoughts to the consideration of the question, whether these alleged faults in the internal administration of the Boers furnished a justification for the war made by Great Britain upon the Boers. I put it that way, though I am not ignorant of the fact that the official view in Great Britain is that the Boers began the war, and that this view is adopted by the "reciprocity" school of Americans. Is it not possible, however, that the Texas view of the matter is more nearly the right one? In Texas, when one of the parties to an acrimonious oral discussion announces that the discussion is ended and that he will now take such measures as seem to him to be more effective, and accompanies this declaration by a movement of his right hand in the direction of his hip pocket, he is accounted to have begun the war. If the other gets out his weapon first and kills the gentleman whose hand is moving toward his hip pocket, it is, not only in the popular judgment, but in law, self-defence.

The Boers did not seek war with Great Britain. They retreated to the wall. Like the Pilgrims of Plymouth Rock, they did not seek, in the great trek of 1835, an Eldorado, but barrenness and remoteness—a region which, as Mr. Prentiss said, "would

hold out no temptation to cupidity, no inducement to persecution."

The Pilgrims found, but the Boers missed, their quest. What seemed a barren veldt, on which freemen might live unmolested, was but the lid of a vast treasure-box. Riches are the destruction of the weak. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." But strong is in the positive; and this scripture tells us what happens when a stronger shall "come upon him."

Taking the case there, however, as one of British armed intervention for the correction of certain alleged evils and oppressions of Transvaal internal administration, what has international law to say about it? But is there an international law? The nations have never subscribed any codification. There are commentators, but no statute book. There are conventions between two or more States, which, in a few specified particulars, regulate rights and conduct. There are the moral law, the Decalogue, the law of nature; but does the "thou" of these address itself to States? There are precedents, but is the nation that made them bound by them, if her interest has shifted? Does the admiral of the strongest fleet write the law of the sea, not only for his antagonist, but for all neutrals? Is there a standard of personal cleanliness and domestic sanitation that is determinative of the right of self-government? Has a strong power the

right to appoint itself a "trustee for humanity," and in that character to take over the lands of such weak nations as fail to make the best use of them? Is the rule that the trustee cannot take a profit inapplicable to "trustees for humanity?" Does a well-grounded fear that another nation is about to appropriate territory to which neither it nor we have any rightful claim justify us in grabbing it first, or in making an equivalent seizure in some other part of the world? Have we come, in practice, to the view which Phillimore puts into the mouth of those who say there is no international law?—

"The proposition that in their mutual intercourse States are bound to recognise the eternal obligations of justice, apart from considerations of immediate expediency, they deem stupid and ridiculous pedantry. They point triumphantly to the instances in which the law has been broken, in which might has been substituted for right, and ask if Providence is not always on the side of the strongest battalions. Let our strength, they say, be the law of justice, for that which is feeble is found to be nothing worth."

That choleric Virginia statesman, John Randolph, in 1800, when the subject of Great Britain's infractions of our neutral rights upon the sea was under discussion, gave voice to the same thought. "What is national law," he said, "but national power guided by national interest?" And a recent Chinese writer says: "International law is a set of precepts laid down by strong Powers to be enforced on weak ones."

Many questions relating to natural

rights are now regarded as outside the domain of practical statesmanship. Has the American view changed? When we were feeble, questions that are now rather sneeringly called "academic" were very practical, and the aspirations and sympathies that are now called "sentimental" were the breath of American life. Our diplomacy was sentimental; it had a regard for weakness, for we had not forgotten our own. Never did we fail to let it be known that our people sympathized with every effort, every aspiration, of any civilized people to set up or to defend republican institutions.

The British intervention in South Africa was not a response to any appeal from so much as a fragment of the Boer people. They were not only content with the government they had instituted, but passionately devoted to it—with a readiness to die in its defence that took no account of age or sex. No Boer in the Transvaal desired to become a British subject; but very many British subjects in the Cape Colony were so unappreciative of the advantages of their condition as such that they passionately desired to throw it off for a citizenship in a Dutch Republic. In other words, the men who were discontented and rebellious were not the citizens of the Transvaal or of the Orange Free State, but those men of Dutch descent whose grandfathers had by conquest become British subjects.

The political conditions in Cuba, when we intervened, were the very opposite of those in the Transvaal. Our intervention was in behalf of the Cubans. We co-operated to free them from the power of a Government whose oppressions and cruelties had many times before driven them into rebellion.

Great Britain's intervention in South Africa was against a united people, living in content—an ignorant content, if you please—under a government of their own construction; and the ground of the intervention was ostensibly the interests of British subjects sojourning there.

Many defects, incongruities and crudities in the Boer government and administration have been pointed out by the newspapers and other writers of Great Britain, and these have been faithfully echoed by not a few Americans, and by not a few American newspapers. Now, these faults in Boer administration, in the main, were such as affected only the Boers themselves, and were not infractions of the international rights of aliens. The use made of them was not, openly, as a justification of the war, but rather as a check upon the sympathy of the American people, which, it was feared, might, as it has been in the habit of doing, go over-strongly to the side of a republic fighting for its existence. It was to say: "Don't make too much fuss over the death of the man, or too strict an inquiry into the cause of the quarrel; he

was not in all respects an exemplary citizen." The Boers were said to have been favourable to slavery as an institution, and to bear a grudge against the British because they abolished it. Now, the American, whose country, until very recently, was the great slave-holding nation of the world, and the Briton, who gave his sympathy, and much material help besides, to the States that sought by the destruction of the American Union to make slavery perpetual—surely these cannot be expected to respect the autonomy or mourn the demise of a republic that is suspected of having had in the past a desire to hold slaves!

These Boers are not our kind of people; they are not polished; they neglect the bath; they are rude and primitive; their government is patriarchal and, in some things, arbitrary. To be sure, they like these habits and these institutions; they abandoned old homes, and made new homes in the wilderness, that they might enjoy them; but the homes are not such as we would have made; the Anglo-Saxon model has not been nicely followed. You have the "consent of the governed"—yes; but Great Britain does not approve of you, and she stood by us in the Spanish war.

That any self-respecting government, which was strong enough to make its diplomatic notes express its true emotions, would have answered Great Britain's complaints by a flat refusal to discuss them, on

CARNEGIE BIBLIOTHEK

U.S.

the ground that they related to matters of internal administration. That such would have been the answer of the United States, if we had stood in the place of the Transvaal Republic, cannot be doubted—and there is no more room for doubt that the answer would have terminated the discussion.

If the subject of naturalization is not a matter to be determined by a nation for itself, and solely upon a consideration of its own interests and safety, there is no subject that is free from the meddlesome intervention of other States.

And as to the Government monopoly of the dynamite trade, the practice of European Governments has certainly placed that question in the schedule of internal affairs, resting, in the judgment of each nation, upon a view of its own interests, unless it has by treaty limited its control of the matter.

The idea of a war waged to enforce, as an international right, the privilege of British subjects to renounce their allegiance to the Queen, and to assume a condition in which they might be obliged to take up arms against her, would be a taking theme for a comic opera. And the interest and amusement would be greatly promoted if the composer should, in the opening act, introduce the "Ruler of the Queen's Navy" overhauling an American merchantman in 1812, and dragging from her decks men who had renounced their al-

legiance to Great Britain to become American citizens, to man the guns of British warships!

"If he produced naturalization papers," says McMaster, "from the country under whose flag he sailed, he was told that England did not admit the right of expatriation."

But, in those days, the "renunciation" was sincere and final. The men who made it meant it—meant to fight the King of Great Britain, if war came. Did these Transvaal Britons, who were seeking Boer naturalization, mean that? Did Mr. Chamberlain suppose that he was turning over to Mr. Kruger a body of Englishmen skilled in engineering and the use of explosives, upon whose loyalty to the Boer cause Mr. Kruger could rely? The climax of the fun will be reached when the opera composer offers this situation. Most of these men whose naturalization was to be forced upon the Boers were actively and aggressively hostile to the Boer Government. No safe occasion to show this hostility was missed.

In a recent book, Mrs. Lionel Phillips, the wife of one of the Englishmen condemned to death for their connection with the Jameson raid, tells of an incident that occurred at Pretoria before the raid. A British Commissioner, Sir Henry Loch, came to Pretoria to discuss with President Kruger some British grievances. Mr. Kruger drove in his carriage to receive the

Commissioner and take him to his hotel.
Mrs. Phillips says:

"There was a scene of the wildest enthusiasm thousands being there to welcome the Queen's representative, and when he and Kruger got into the carriage (which also contained Dr. Leyds) to proceed to the hotel some Englishmen took out the horses and dragged it, one irresponsible person jumping on the box-seat and waving a Union Jack over Kruger's head! When the carriage arrived at its destination, Sir Henry, accompanied by Dr. Leyds, entered the hotel, and the President was left sitting in the horseless carriage. The yelling crowd refused to drag the vehicle, and, after some difficulty, a few of his faithful burghers were got together to drag the irate President to his home."

Now, it was for these thousands of Englishmen, who practised this dastardly indignity upon President Kruger, and who, with others, a little later made or promoted the Jameson raid, that Boer naturalization was demanded.

But it has been stated, upon apparently excellent authority, that the British Commission expressly rejected a form of naturalization oath that contained, as our form does, a renunciation of allegiance to all other governments. If, upon the basis of a retained British allegiance, suffrage, whether in local or general affairs, was demanded for the Outlanders, the comic aspect of the situation disappears; the unreason is too great for comedy.

Great Britain cannot, we are told, safely give local government to the Boers when she shall have subjugated them, because she cannot trust their loyalty to the

Crown; but she is seeking to destroy the republics, because the Transvaal refused suffrage and local control to Englishmen who had attempted by arms to overthrow the Boer Government, and who sought suffrage for the same end. Suffrage was only another form of assault in the interest of British domination.

Not long ago, a distinguished Briton (Goldwin Smith) is reported to have said:

“Can history show a more memorable fight for independence than that which is being made by the Boer? Does it yield to that made by Switzerland against Austria and Burgundy; or to that made by the Tyrolese under Hofer? The Boer gets no pay; no comforts and luxuries are provided for him by fashionable society; he can look forward to no medals or pensions; he voluntarily endures the utmost hardships of war; his discipline, though unforced, seems never to fail. Boys of sixteen, a correspondent at the Cape tells me—even of fourteen—take the rifle from the hand of the mother who remains to pray for them in her lonely home, and stand by their grandsires to face the murderous artillery of modern war. . . . Rude, narrow-minded, fanatical in their religion, these men may be. So were the old Scotch Calvinists; so have been some of the noblest wildstocks of humanity—but surely they are not unworthy to guard a nation. . . . If a gold mine was found in the Boer’s territory, was it not his? The Transvaal franchise needed reform; so did that of England within living memory and in a still greater degree. But reform was not the object of Mr. Cecil Rhodes and his political allies. What they wanted was to give the ballot to people who, they knew, would use it to vote away the independence of the State.”

He went on to say that, even in monarchical Italy, where he had recently been, the “heart of the people is with the little

republic which is fighting for its independence."

There has been, I think, no suggestion that this great Englishman spoke under the stimulus of Transvaal gold. Have we come to a time when a citizen of the Great Republic may not express like views without becoming a "suspect?" Must we turn our pockets inside out to verify our disinterestedness, when we speak for a "little republic which is fighting for its independence?"

We have not long passed the time when the man who spoke against the "little republic" would have been the "suspect." A paper that I read recently head-lined a news despatch, announcing the return of a young American who went to South Africa to fight for Boer independence, thus: "The Return of a Mercenary." Yet the act and the motive of this adventurous young American would, a little while ago, have reminded us of La Fayette or Steuben.

Mr. James Bryce recently said:

"Indeed the struggles for liberty and nationality are almost beginning to be forgotten by the new generation, which has no such enthusiasm for these principles as men had forty years ago."

And, at the moment when two republics are in "articulo mortis," some of our journals congratulate us over the prospect of an increased trade with the "Crown Colonies" that are to be set up in their stead, and over the increased output of the Johannesburg mines. The Emperor of Ger-

many is reported to have forestalled President Kruger's personal appeal by the statement that Germany's interest would be promoted by the British conquest of the republics. And Bishop Thoburn asks: "Why should people lament the absorption of the small Powers by the large ones?"

Never before has American sympathy failed, or been divided, or failed to find its voice, when a people were fighting for independence. Can we now calculate commercial gains before the breath of a dying republic has quite failed, or the body has quite taken on the 'rigor mortis'? If international justice, government by the people, the parity of the nations, have ceased to be workable things, and have become impracticable, shall we part with them with a sneer, or simulate regret, even if we have lost the power to feel it? May not one be allowed to contemplate the heavens with suppressed aspirations, though there are no "consumers" there? Do we need to make a mock of the stars because we cannot appropriate them—because they do not take our produce? Have we disabled ourselves?

Mr. Hoar says that "by last winter's terrible blunder . . . we have lost the right to offer our sympathy to the Boer in his wonderful and gallant struggle against terrible odds for the republic in Africa." It is a terrible charge.

There was plainly no call for an armed

intervention by the United States in South Africa, and perhaps our diplomatic suggestions went as far as usage would justify. But has not public opinion here been somehow strongly perverted, or put under some unwonted repression? If we have lost either the right to denounce aggression, or the capacity to weep when a republic dies, it is a grievous loss.

BENJAMIN HARRISON.