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KANTON

NATIONAL POLICY

A Speech delivered at Chesterfield
December 16, 1901

By LORD ROSEBERY

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NOTE.

I PUBLISH this with much reluctance, for it is not a speech but a skeleton. The ordinary limits of such an occasion, even though in this instance shamelessly exceeded, allowed no time to expand or to clothe, so that it is only a bare colloquial statement. Such as it is, however, I must issue it myself, or it would be printed by others without even the mild supervision that I can afford.

Let me say another word of the policy of the speech as apart from its form. That policy appears to have received a large meed of general approval. But political opinion, to be effective, must be organized; political energy must work and entrench. I want some of this spadework on behalf of this policy, or else the wave of popular adhesion will be lost in space.

R.

Christmas, 1901.

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NATIONAL POLICY

MR. CHAIRMAN, Ladies, and Gentlemen,—I will ask you to do me a favour at the further end of the hall. There must be great difficulty in hearing. The hall was not built, I think, for speaking, and I cannot hope that my voice will be able to extend to the end of the hall through all that I have to say. I hope, therefore, that you will remain passive and patient even if you do not hear, and still more if you disagree with what I say, for I have come here to-night not to tickle your ears with any eloquence or rhetoric or wit, but to speak my mind. Therefore I may be tedious, but, as you have asked me here, I am sure you will be patient.

Gentlemen, I think there has been some little misunderstanding about this meeting. There has been a great fuss made about it. We have been led to expect that this meeting was to effect all sorts of wonderful things. Well, I am not responsible for that fuss. You may be, to some extent, because you have arranged this magnificent hall, and because you have deferred the date of meeting in order to make your arrangements. But I protest against the idea that there is anything celestial or inspired about this meeting. You asked me to come here to make you a speech, and I agreed, and that is all that is to be said about it.

Gentlemen, there is one other misunderstanding about this meeting, and to that, perhaps, I am a party. You and I have played at a case of cross questions and crooked answers. You asked me to come and give you advice for the Liberal party, and my reply was that, in a grave crisis of the country, I would endeavour to add my ideas to the common stock. You will perceive, therefore, that there is some discrepancy between the invitation and the reply; but, lest you should think that I have come here under false pretences, I will offer some advice to the Liberal party. I will offer some advice to the Liberal party which will, at any rate, have the advantage of being dispassionate and impartial.

Now, gentlemen, there are four preliminary facts which you have to remember with regard to the Liberal party if you wish to look the situation squarely in the face. In the first place, you have gone through a long and painful malady—a long period of sickness, and you are only now approaching convalescence, if, indeed, you are quite sure that you are approaching convalescence. In the next place, you are free altogether from the Irish alliance and its consequences. The Irish party have repeatedly repudiated any alliance with you in terms almost insulting, and as they have now ranged themselves openly with the enemies that we are fighting in the field, I do not suppose that there is much embarrassment likely to arise from any too intimate alliance between the Irish and the Liberal party. Thirdly, you have, as your chairman reminded you, to gain, or regain, unity. How that is to be done I do not pretend to say. That is a piece of advice which I do not pretend to give, and I am not sure that my impressions are very clear on the subject. In the month of July I stated with singular frankness my views as to the situation of the Liberal party; and every day, every hour that has gone by since that time has only emphasised the truth of what I said. Lastly, the most important of all, you have to gain, or regain, the confidence of the country. At two successive elections, at one of which I was in a foremost place, the country repudiated the Liberal party. The fact that you all have to face is that you, in some way or another, have to regain that confidence.

Now, having shown those facts, what is the advice I have to offer you? The first piece is this, that you have to clean your slate. It is six years now since you were in office. It is sixteen years since you were in anything like power. During that time the world has not stood still. It does seem to me that under these circumstances the primary duty of the Liberal party is to wipe its slate clean and consider very carefully what it is going to

write on it in future. Now, there will be some who will not agree with that advice, for I will tell you a secret. There are a great many Tory Liberals in the Liberal party. There is a Toryism in Liberalism as great and as deep, unconscious though it be, as any in the Carlton Club. There are men who sit still with the fly-blown phylacteries of obsolete policies bound round their foreheads, who do not remember that, while they have been mumbling their incantations to themselves, the world has been marching and revolving, and that if they have any hope of leading or guiding it they must march and move with it too. I, therefore, hope that when you have to write on your clean slate you will write on it a policy adapted to 1901 or 1902, and not a policy adapted to 1892 or 1885. Again, I would strongly urge you, and I may add that this advice applies to all parties—I would strongly urge you not to promise more than you can perform, to profess an honest Liberalism, to cut your coat according to your cloth, and not to hold out visions before the constituencies of the country which it is impossible for you to realise. Now, I speak under some reproach on that matter. I speak in the garb of a penitent, for I was a member of the Government which drew up the Queen's Speech of 1893. I looked over that document the other day. It promised for the one Session, as a beginning, a new Statutory Parliament for Ireland. It went on to promise the disestablishment of two State Churches. It proceeded with six first-class measures, any one of which would have been sufficient to tax the endurance of an entire Session, and it ended by promising some other measures as well. I remember why we did that, though it now sounds so absurd and so futile. It was to prove, it was that the Government wished to prove in the most emphatic way that it could, that on entering office it did not mean to forget or to falsify the promises which, I think somewhat rashly, it had made in Opposition; but as a practical Queen's Speech laying down a diet for the Parliamentary consumer of one Session, that Queen's Speech is a model to be avoided. Remember one other point which is a valuable truth. Every reform that you propose alienates the men who, even if they support you on other occasions, are hostile to that particular reform, besides those who are altogether opposed to you; but if you promise a reform and do not carry it out—as must be the case if you promise more than you can perform—why, then you alienate not merely those who are opposed to it, but also those who are in favour of it.

Well, my third piece of advice would be this—that you should not move very much faster than the great mass of the nation is prepared to move too. If you move out of relation with it, if you move far in front of the nation to which you look for support, you find yourself isolated, as so many of our troops have been in South Africa, cut off, and become a prey to the enemy. Now, if the Liberal party has not learned that in the many years of its affliction it has learned nothing, and if it has learned nothing from its years of adversity, I venture to say that its prospects of power and influence in this country are indefinitely more gloomy than the darkest I could prognosticate. And this particular point of not separating yourself in mind and in aspiration from the general mass of the country has been so much better put by a better authority than myself that I will venture to read a sentence in which he has embodied it. He says:—'We hope to keep going on by steps, not by bounds. We must keep our eyes on the stars, but we must also remember that our feet are on the ground.' I might add we must also take care to keep them there. Well, these are not the words of a fossil or of a retrograde politician or of an eminent Whig. They are the words recently written by the head of the greatest democratic community in the world. I mean Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States. Of course, I know that there are many idealists, honest fanatics, honest thinkers, who are far in advance both of the Liberal party and of their times, and they will reprobate any such advice as that which I offer. All I can say

is, I am sorry for it. But let them blow their trumpets till they crack their cheeks. The walls of Jericho will not fall. The last piece of advice I shall venture to offer the Liberal party is this, that they shall not dissociate themselves, even indirectly or unconsciously, or by any careless words, from the new sentiment of Empire which occupies the nation. To many the word 'Empire' is suspect as indicating aggression and greed and violence and the characteristics of other empires that the world has known; but the sentiment that is represented now by Empire in these islands has nothing of that in it. It is a passion of affection and family feeling, of pride and hope and helpfulness: and the statesman, however great he may be, who dissociates himself from that feeling must not be surprised if the nation dissociates itself from him.

You may ask me what is the line of policy and what are the measures to which I should apply the axioms which I have laid down, and which I am happy to see have received the meed of your approval. Well, it is a little difficult to put oneself in the place of proposing measures. One can only do that by imagining oneself responsible Minister at this moment, and any so wild a flight of imagination I can scarcely conceive. But my watchword if I were in office at this moment would be summed up in one single word—the word 'efficiency.' If we have not learned from this war that we have greatly lagged behind in efficiency we have learned nothing, and our treasure and our lives are thrown away unless we learn the lessons which the war has given us. The first thing you have to look to is the efficiency of your machine—your Parliamentary machine and your legislative machine. They say that Parliament is on its trial. In my judgment it has long been on its trial, and I am not at all sure that the jury have not left the box and are not now beginning to consider their verdict. I will give you only one instance. The great prerogative and usefulness of the House of Commons lie in its control over the national purse. During the last Session of Parliament, for reasons which I dare say were perfectly good—I am not attacking the procedure; I am only noting the result—I believe that no less than 76 per cent., or more than three-fourths of all the sums voted by Parliament, were closed. Can you have any better argument? If I were to speak for an hour I could not show more utterly and more absolutely the impotence, the ridiculous impotence, to which Parliament has been reduced than by the single instance which I have ventured to give you.

Well, then, as to the administrative machine. There is one office that will spring to all our lips in accents, not of joy, but of sorrow, when I speak of the administrative machine. I am not blaming the present incumbent, or the late incumbent, or any incumbent of that office—I mean the War Office, of course—for the state at which it has arrived. But the complaints of it are unanimous. I believe them to be just. A massive Blue-book indicates that they are just; and I think it would not be too much to say that the very first duty of an energetic and patriotic Minister would be to employ his best strength to examine into the administration of the War Office. Not by any means would I limit my inquiries to the War Office. Then, again, I should look to the efficiency of our Army and our Navy. As to the Navy I say nothing. I believe myself that it is in a high state of efficiency, but it is a matter in which we cannot afford to relax for a moment, in which no vigilance could be excessive; and therefore, even with regard to the Navy, I should be glad to see a new Government exploring into its secrets and into its efficiency, and more particularly into the location of the various fleets and squadrons of which it is composed. But, as regards the Army, we have a much greater problem before us. I cannot dwell upon it to-night; but I do think that the Government have gone a wrong way, and the worst way, to solve it. Without real consideration, in a violent hurry to do something—just as they seized Wei-hai-wei in a Whitsuntide recess in order to satisfy the House of Commons on its return—in a violent hurry, without

really and seriously considering what our wants and requirements in respect of an Army may be, they introduce a hurried scheme, the only result of which is that four or five generals are at the heads of *corps d'armées* looking hungrily about to find where their armies may happen to be. I think the Germans, who are our masters in the art of elaborate and careful and business-like organization, would have adopted a very different system. They would have got the best minds of the country and of the army to inquire carefully into what was required and what was wanted, at the end of the war, not before. They would have satisfied themselves in the mean time with meeting the immediate requirements of the war, and at the end of the war they would have framed and propounded their scheme with the knowledge that the whole war had evolved.

Well, there is another branch of national efficiency with regard to which I think an energetic Government might take a great part, in the way of stimulation and inquiry—I mean our commerce and our industry. There I am one of those who are alarmed at our future. Mr. Balfour, I see, the other day said he was quite at ease on that subject. I wish he had told us the facts, the pillows on which his ease is based; but, in the meantime, I believe that in that branch of our national efficiency there is much to be done by an energetic Government. But last, and, perhaps, greatest of all, there comes a question that underlies the efficiency of our nation—not of our services, not of any particular branch of our nation, but of the nation as a whole—I mean education, in which we are lagging sadly, and in respect of which we shall have, in the peaceful competition of countries, to fight with weapons like the bow and arrow if we do not progress. For we have nothing like a national system, but a great chaos of almost haphazard arrangement. Then there is another question closely allied to it, though not in appearance, perhaps, the question of the housing of the people. Well, you will, I think, get nothing from the present Government on that subject, and you will get nothing from any Government that does not throw its heart and soul into the work. And, last of all, but by no means least, there comes that question of temperance, which means so much to us all in the extravagance, in the degradation, in the physical degeneracy of our race. That is a question which a firm and energetic Government could, I will not say settle, but make a great advance towards settling, if it grasped the nettle firmly, and refused to listen to the fanatics on either side; a Government that made up its mind that, come well or ill, even if it sacrificed for a moment its majority or its power, it would not leave office without having made an effort in the direction I have indicated. I have now finished what I had to say to the Liberal party.

I have thus got over your part of the invitation, and now I come to my part, which was the reply, in which I said that we were at a great crisis of the nation's history, and a crisis that might increase in gravity. Now where, you may ask, do I see the elements of this crisis? To my mind there are three. They lie in our foreign relations, they are in the Ministry, and they are, of course, in the war. Now, I shall not detain you long about our foreign relations. The other day the Minister who is mainly responsible for them said that he had a well-founded confidence—he did not doubt—that when the King met Parliament he would be able to announce in his Speech that his relations with foreign Governments were satisfactory. I do not doubt it either. I doubt it the less because, in the thirty-three years that I have been a member of Parliament, I never, or scarcely ever, remember that paragraph being absent. Ah! it is true enough, I dare say, of foreign Governments, but how is it with foreign peoples? I venture to say in the whole history of England, so far as I can recollect, there is no parallel to the hatred and the ill-will with which we are regarded, almost unanimously, by the peoples of Europe. I do not say to what cause that is due, but I will at least say this—

that that was not the state in which the present Government found our foreign relations. When they came into office in 1895 we left them, to use an old phrase, 'Peace with honour,' and as much good will as can reasonably be expected in the competition of nations. You know where we are now. You know that we are engaged in anything but peace, and that we have incurred the ill-will of every nation, or almost every nation, on the face of the globe. Now, that in itself is a very dangerous state of affairs. I dare say the Governments of all countries are anxious to remain on good terms with Great Britain, and a great smouldering, and even sometimes a flaming, ill-will, such as prevails all over Europe against us, is an element in the political situation full of contingent peril, if not of immediate danger.

Well, you may ask, 'Are the Government responsible for this?' In my judgment, to a large extent they are. Put yourselves in the place of the peoples of Europe. That is the only way of understanding foreign opinion, and it is one which, so far as I can observe, this Government has never adopted. The peoples of Europe were under the impression, which has been falsely communicated to them, that the war we are engaged in was a war conducted by a powerful empire, animated by greed and the lust of gold, against two feeble Republics. I do not say that that idea could have been altogether dispelled, but nothing was done to try and dispel it. What might have been done, and was not done, so far as I know, was this—at the beginning of the war the Government should have addressed to the King's agents abroad a despatch recapitulating all the steps we had taken to obtain justice for our fellow-countrymen in the Transvaal, the gradual movement of the negotiations, winding up with what I consider the unprovoked attack of the Boer Government on British territory. Now, I do not say that that despatch would have been able to counteract the false and mendacious information which reaches the Continent through impure, though I understand gilded, channels, but at any rate it would have been an authoritative document to which the reasonable and the wise men of all nations could have appealed, and it is, I hope, in the long run, the opinion of the wise and reasonable men which sways the opinion of nations. That was a sin of omission, but there has been a tactlessness, if I may say so, on the part of the Government in all their dealings which has largely tended to this result. I will give you one small instance. Lord Kitchener, in telegraphing from South Africa his weekly return, or monthly return, of Boers captured or killed or surrendered, no doubt used, as a telegraphic abbreviation, to save himself trouble, the word 'Bag.' Well, I think it was a perfectly reasonable thing to do. You all use telegraphic abbreviations, but what seems to me to have been almost insane in its folly is that the War Office, instead of interpreting this as it were as a code, delivered in its naked simplicity to the world that 'our "bag" of the Boers for the week has been so much.' I cannot conceive anything more calculated to produce a more detestable impression than that unfortunate word. Well, then, there is the last element of danger to which I have already alluded, and, therefore, I will not dwell upon it to-night. It is the oratory of the Colonial Secretary. The Colonial Secretary forgets that what is very good for home consumption does not answer abroad, and if he thinks for one moment that the ill-will with which we are regarded abroad is subsiding in any degree, then nothing seems to give him more pleasure than actively to prod up that into a more active feeling of resentment. If he would only keep his undoubted power of invective for his opponents in this country he would do comparatively little harm, and he would save us from what is becoming a national inconvenience if not a national danger abroad.

I have said that with regard to our position in foreign affairs, the Ministry are by no means guiltless. This brings me to the Ministry itself as the second element of danger in this crisis. I am not going to draw up an

impeachment against the Government. I wish to avoid party polemics as much as possible, for I have a good deal of ground to traverse. I think there could be a longer indictment drawn up against this Government than against almost any Government of which I have any recollection, but that is not my point. What I want to indicate to you to-night is the way in which the conduct of the Government has directly led up to the crisis in which we find ourselves; and I, therefore, only touch on three points, and these but very succinctly. The first one is this—the Government, as you know, were perfectly aware of the great preparations made by President Kruger's Government in warlike material—in cannon, in rifles, in ammunition—enormous preparations, far more than would be required for self-defence and which could obviously be only directed against one Power, that is ourselves. Now, the plain and obvious duty of the Government, when they became aware of those preparations—and that they were well aware of them we know, because, though the Prime Minister in the House of Lords denied knowledge of them, yet almost immediately afterwards the Secretary for War followed him and said they knew all about them—I say that the moment they knew all about them they were bound, internationally bound, even as only one adjoining State against another neighbouring State, but still more so as claiming a suzerainty over the State in question—they were internationally bound, for our safety and for the security of our Empire, to demand the occasion of these preparations and to demand that they should cease. Had they done that the war could not fail to have been very much smaller—a much lesser operation—than that which is now going on. They might indeed have nipped it in the bud. They did not do so. Why not? Mr. Balfour, I think it was, told you the reason. He said our hands were tied and our mouths were closed by the Jameson Raid. That is true in part, but not wholly true. The Jameson Raid need not have stopped their mouths or have held their hands; for it might have occurred under any Government. A small body of men meeting in those vast solitudes could easily have escaped attention. What mattered was not the Raid, but what took place afterwards. Had they wished to stand in a strong position they should have probed the Raid, its causes and connections, to the bottom, and they should have paid just compensation to the Transvaal Government for the disturbance which it had caused. But what was the course they pursued? They postponed the committee of inquiry as long as they possibly could, and when it did assemble they limited its scope to that of the committee which had already sat in the Cape Parliament and had ascertained all that there was to be ascertained under that head, while they refused to press for those documents which it was claimed would have thrown a new light upon the Raid and its causes; not that I believe it would have done anything of the kind, but the refusal to press for these papers at the very moment when they were hunting a poor money-lender through the corridors of the House of Commons to make him produce the most precious thing he had in the world—his account book—at that very moment the refusal to produce those papers which the Colonial Office had seen, of which the Colonial Office must have retained copies, and which were therefore accessible to the Government, produced the very worst impression. It not merely spread everywhere, and confirmed, in some cases, the belief that there was some guilty complicity between the Government and the Raid, of which, mind you, I do not believe one syllable. It certainly confirmed that impression abroad. But that was only part of the evil, for it sapped the very basis and foundation of our diplomatic attitude in regard to the Transvaal.

But if the mouths of the Ministry were silenced and their hands tied with regard to the Transvaal armaments by the Jameson Raid, there was, at any rate, when they knew of those armaments, one primary and obvious precaution to take. If they did not care to ask the reason of them, they should have guaranteed the Empire against being assailed by them. Surely

they should have prepared proper materials of defence, and have had adequate troops upon the spot at a time when they were using the language of menace to the Boers, and assuring them that the sands were running out. They should, indeed, have done all that they left undone; and had they done that they would have not merely saved us from a war of this length, but they might have prevented the intolerable aggression and insult which was sustained by the Empire when the forces of the Transvaal crossed our borders and annexed our territory.

The third point on which, I think, his Majesty's Government have contributed to the gravity of the crisis by their own act is in regard to the dissolution of last year. I do not know if that sunk deeply into the minds of the country. I am bound to say it burned into mine with an acid which nothing can wipe out. I cannot forget the history of that transaction. The Government announced that the war was over, and that, in order to obtain a new mandate from the country for the settlement, they must have a general election immediately, so that the settlement might begin at once. So violent was their hurry to declare that the war was over, and to obtain new powers for a settlement, that they refused even to wait for a few weeks so that the election might be taken on a fresh register instead of one that was stale and obsolete. They dissolved Parliament on September 18th, and they must have made up their minds six weeks before then that the war was over, because Parliament rose in the first week in August, and there was no Cabinet between then and the middle of September. Therefore it is clear that when Parliament rose the Government had made up its mind that the war must be over in the middle of September. That in itself is remarkable. And I would allude in passing to the only reparation that the Government can make for a dissolution held under such a misrepresentation—the only way in which they can put themselves straight with the constituencies and with the world at large, which is this—that when the war is over they should again demand a general election—a new mandate and a new strength for the purposes for which they sought and obtained them fifteen months ago. But, Sir, if the representation that the war was over was scandalous, what are we to say of the methods by which the election was carried on? We hear much now of the war being protracted by misrepresentations: and, failing to find any other stick with which to beat the poor Opposition—the poor, weak, distracted Opposition—it has been discovered that they are responsible for the prolongation of the war. Well, that to me is a very remarkable allegation; but, if anybody seems to me to be responsible, or if any body of men seems to be responsible in this country for the prolongation of the war, it is those who announced that every Liberal who was returned to Parliament was returned as a Boer, and that every seat lost to the Government was a gain to the Boers; for thus, on high authority—the highest in the Government—the Boers in the field, who are very well informed, were made to understand that, in addition to the eighty Irish members who were returned as avowedly the friends and supporters of the Boers, there were a large number of Liberal members who were returned to represent Boer ideas and advance the Boer policy in Parliament. I say this—that that was a scandalous misrepresentation, which, if any representation from England could encourage the Boers, would encourage them twenty times more than anything that has been said by any member of the Opposition. Sir, this is a grave matter. I do not think in all my lifetime, or in all my political recollection—certainly not since the Reform Bill of 1867—that there has been anything which struck so deep to the very roots of political morality as the General Election of 1900. But there is a Nemesis that waits on operations of that kind. And fourteen or fifteen months after that general election took place you see the war flagrant, unabated, raging, and the Government, like the lean kine that swallowed up the fat kine,

not a whit stronger for the majority it obtained in consequence of those misrepresentations.

Sir, in face of so grave a breach of political morality, for I can call it nothing else, we are entitled to ask what are the explanations of his Majesty's Government. We have had one from the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister in effect says this:—'The Boers do not play the game; any gentlemanlike enemy, any well-mannered enemy, when his capital is captured, comes to you for terms of peace, and you make peace, and the whole thing is over. But the Boers have done nothing of the kind. How are you to deal with an enemy who refuses to fight according to the recognised methods of civilised campaigns?' I remember something of the same kind was said by the old Austrian generals about the young Napoleon when he was beating them in Italy: 'No doubt he has won the battle, but it has been against all the recognised rules of war;' and such comfort as the Austrian generals derived from that circumstance Lord Salisbury may take to himself. But you have had a more striking explanation given in a city not far from here by no less a person than the Lord Chancellor. His explanation is by far the most remarkable of any that has been offered. He said he believed that the war was practically over. I wonder how that assertion went down in Sheffield. He maintained that the statement which the Government had made at that time was true. 'It might be'—I beg you to listen to it, because that is an exquisite phrase—'it might be that there was going on some sort of warfare, but was it war?' Sir, I think that surpasses everything that I have ever heard on the subject. This was from the Lord Chancellor—the head of our English law. He will, no doubt, at some early period, in a grave and erudite discourse, proclaim to a listening world what is the international difference between a war and a sort of warfare. A sort of warfare must, by his remark, be differentiated from war. It must have, I suppose, some advantages over war, but all the peculiar attributes of war seem to be pretty tolerably represented in 'a sort of warfare.' It takes up a quarter of a million of our men just as much as if they were really at war, it makes women widows, it makes parents childless, it makes children fatherless, just as much as if we were actually at war. It devastates great countries, great tracts of country, almost identically as if we were actually at war. Upon my word, gentlemen, I do not know what consolation I am to hug to my bosom in this state of warfare. If the Lord Chancellor would only tell us what it is that warms his generous heart in the contemplation of a sort of warfare as compared with a state of actual war, he would confer a benefit on the people of this country. Curiously enough, the people in South Africa have not arrived at realising the difference—the friends of the Government in South Africa are still unable to discriminate between a sort of warfare and actual war. There is a telegram I recommend to your attention from the *Times*' Correspondent in South Africa—and you know that the *Times* is devoted to the Government—in which he says that the first need of the present condition of the sort of warfare we are engaged in is that more troops should be sent at once to the front, that for the present exigencies of this sort of warfare more blockhouses must be erected, that at present this sort of warfare demands the absolute service of every man, every soldier or yeoman at present in South Africa. Surely this is an astonishing communication to receive from a correspondent who is admitted to be well informed 15 or 16 months after the war was announced by the Government to be over. I confess that when I read those speeches of the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor I began to think that the Government wanted a little new blood. Ah! yes, you will say, they had new blood last year. Oh! but they had not. You know all about that. It was old blood, it was blue blood. It was anything but new blood. I think, here, that we as a nation, for the reasons I have stated, have some right to complain of the Government in this matter; but perhaps the last

and the gravest of the features of that election is this—that it rendered you the accomplices of the Government's action. No doubt it was on a misrepresentation that you were led to vote as you did. I do not mean you in Derbyshire, but everywhere except in Derbyshire. It is not every evening that one has an opportunity of speaking in the Land of Goshen. And they can justly appeal to you, the people of this country, as having endorsed and supported their action at the general election in October of last year, and as having done much more than that, as having given them a further mandate for six or seven years, during which your utmost exertions are absolutely and hopelessly impotent to interfere with them in any way.

That, again, is a grave matter; but, of course, we were told that the poor constituencies had no choice but to vote as they did. It was not that they loved the Government—because I admit that the Government does not seem to me to be regarded with unmitigated love and confidence even by its own supporters—it was not that they loved the Government, but that there was no alternative Government. No alternative Government? No alternative Government in all Great Britain to this one? The Empire, are we really to believe it, can produce no alternative Government to this? Not out of the Tory party, not out of the Liberal party, not out of both parties, not out of either party is it possible to produce an alternative Government to that which, in the opinion of the great mass of the people, whether they dare articulate it or not, has grossly mismanaged our affairs? A nation of such proud traditions and such Imperial strength is unable out of all its affluence of men to produce an alternative Government to the present administration? Sir, in all my life, from all the bitterest foes of Great Britain, and God knows we have many enough, I have never heard such disparagement of her as such a doctrine involves. If it be true, put up the shutters, forswear your Empire, and go and dig in your cabbage garden. The nation that cannot produce an alternative to the present Government is more fit to control allotments than an Empire.

And now I come to the war, a subject which after all engrosses all our thoughts and will engross all our thoughts until it is over. I am anxious that this war should end for four separate and distinct reasons. In the first place, it is an open sore through which is oozing much of our strength. In the next place, it weakens our international position and reduces us to a standpoint in international politics very different from that which we are accustomed to occupy. In the third place, it stops all domestic reform, and in the fourth place it adjourns and embitters the ultimate settlement of South Africa. But on one point I am perfectly clear—that we must pursue this war to the end with all the energy and all the resource of which we are capable. Our honour, our character, the future of South Africa, all require that we should bring this war as vigorously and successfully as possible to the promptest and most complete solution. On that point I have no doubt—I will express no ambiguity at all. Nor do I believe that we could be in better hands than Lord Kitchener's. He enjoys the confidence of the country and of his armies.

I am one of those rare civilians who do not imagine themselves to be judges of strategy and who do not criticise or inspire military operations. Therefore I will say no more on the point. But I will say that at the end of the war, and in some cases before, it will be necessary to have a searching inquiry, such as the Government have promised, into various circumstances connected with the war. They have promised a general inquiry. Well, a general inquiry will take a long time, but the Government have not much foresight in these matters. Perhaps they have promised a little rashly, but I do think it is important that on certain questions which would be embraced by a general inquiry we should have as promptly as possible a special series of inquiries. One is as to the surrenders in the field. The next is as to the purchase of horses

and remounts. The next is as to hire of transports and the cost of demurrage. The next is as to the administration of martial law. The next is as to refugee camps, and the last is as to the medical service. I say that on each of these points you will require special and searching inquiries, because I am inclined to think that investigation will reveal a strange state of things.

There is another point on which I must speak, though with unfeigned reluctance: I should not be honest if I did not. I cannot in any way support the vile and infamous falsehoods which have been spread on the Continent with regard to the behaviour of our army in the field. When I think of our armies and their patience, of their courage in this dragging, slow, wearisome, and embarrassing war, now in its third year, in which there is no glory any longer to be gained, when I remember the circumstances of infinite fatigue and of everything which can depress or affect a soldier's mind, and think of their patience and cheerfulness, I am moved to horror and indignation at the newspapers abroad which speak of our soldiers as mercenaries, when they are after all the only volunteer Army in Europe. When I hear those soldiers spoken of as mercenaries and held up to execration for their barbarous methods, I cannot keep patience. I think then, Sir, that any words which have been used by any one, however old a friend of mine, to imply that barbarity has been exercised by any one of English birth and English name were words which were unhappily employed. For I equally acquit the Government of any barbarity in this matter. In the first place, it is totally unreasonable to think that our Government could be barbarous. They do not inaugurate the measures in the field. They sit passively at home, and, if any charge of barbarity is to be brought, it must be brought against those in the field. Whatever else I think about the Government, I acquit them of any barbarity either in intention or in deed. No doubt, their methods have been sometimes deficient, but if I were to criticise them for deficient methods I might keep you here for a week. As to the methods of barbarism, the refugee camps were a result of the necessity of clearing the country. It is clear that they were mismanaged at first, but it was not a very easy matter to manage. With regard to those camps, I gladly adopt all the words of the resolution that was passed at Derby, though I must limit my adherence to the resolution upon the camps. Then, again, with regard to martial law, of which there is some complaint, and of the administration, of which I am afraid there is more. As regards martial law itself, it was, I believe, a necessity of the situation, it was to prevent the importation of arms, munitions, warlike supplies, and men to our enemies in the field, and, so far from blaming the declaration of martial law when it was made, I am disposed to blame the Government that it was not declared long ago, and that this open channel of supply was not stopped at an earlier period.

Sir, in regard to all these subjects you must remember one great fact, that war is a terrible thing, however you look at it. In every slight detail of it, it is a horrible, unspeakable-outrage on humanity. Necessary, no doubt, but to be curtailed as much as possible, and therefore, the more vigorously and the more ruthlessly it is carried on, so long as it is carried on within the rules of civilised warfare, the more effective and the more merciful it is likely to be. If I were to speak about atrocities to-night—which I am not going to do—I should turn my attention rather to those exercised by the other side. I should have a word to say about the constant cold-blooded massacres of the natives; I should have something to say about the flogging of those burghers who have taken the oath of neutrality in order to induce them to perjure themselves; I should have something to say about the murder of our wounded soldiers on the battlefield; and, last of all, I should have something to say on that most unspeakable crime—stigmatized as unspeakable from the remotest antiquity—the flogging and the murder of an emissary of peace in cold blood.

Well, Sir, I pass from that subject, on which I have only touched with pain, and I turn to the war and the policy which I should recommend with regard to the war. I have said that I am in favour of prosecuting the war as vigorously as possible to a successful termination. Now, I do not doubt that the Government wish to end the war quite as much as you or I do, but I think that we part on the question of making peace. I do not think they are as anxious to make peace as I am. Now, you may not quite understand the bearing of that remark, so I will explain myself. I am alluding to a speech of Lord Milner's at Durban, in which he said—and I take the unfortunate words as an indication of a policy—he said that the war might never formally be at an end; that, in the formal sense of the word, the war might never be at an end at all. That means, as I understand him, and it can bear no other meaning, that the idea and the policy of the Government were to continue hunting the Boers, and capturing them, and killing them, and getting them to surrender as they are doing now, and when these had got to a certain low number, and were comparatively inaccessible, to treat them as banditti, and non-existent as combatants. That means that there must be no formal close to the war, no peace signed at the end of the war, no settlement to close the war.

Now, if that be the policy of his Majesty's Government, and I can put no other interpretation upon the words of Lord Milner, it is a policy against which I offer the most emphatic protest in my power. In the first place, it means a long, indeed endless, condition of war; perhaps I ought to say a long, indeed endless, condition of a sort of warfare. In the next place, it means a garrison of at least 60,000 or 70,000 men indefinitely kept in the country. In the next place it means that there can be no settlement of South Africa within any time that is to be contemplated in our political horizon. In the next place it ignores altogether the Boer authorities, the people to whom the Boers look up—their generals, their leaders, their Presidents, their Government—and, by ignoring them and not settling with them, leaves them to be cherished for ever, for generations and for generations, as heroes, martyrs, and saints, by the Boer population in South Africa, a circumstance which in itself would be a permanent difficulty in re-settlement. And lastly, I would ask this question. You have, sooner or later, to bring back 40,000 or more Boer prisoners—Boer men in the prime of manhood—from exile to settle again in South Africa. What, if you pursue this policy, are you going to do with them? If you bring them back while the Boer commanders are still in the field, by however small a number they may be followed, you are bringing back gunpowder to sparks, and you are producing a state of affairs which I hardly dare to contemplate. Gentlemen, on that policy is written once more, for the hundredth time in the history of this Government, the fatal lack of statesmanship which has marked every step of their proceedings. Statesmanship is, at the lowest, the foresight of common sense, and it is in the foresight of common sense that the Government have shown themselves so unfortunately deficient. I recommend them, then, in their moments of leisure—and they have moments of leisure—to apply themselves to reading a little history. I beg of them to peruse with attention the history written by Mr. Motley of the struggle of the United Netherlands against the power of Philip the Second, a struggle indomitable, almost unending, which was carried on by the ancestors of these Boers in the field: and in the next place I would venture to ask them to read with deep attention and, perhaps, with some degree of melancholy, the history of Lord North's Administration. It bears many parallels to that of the present Ministry. It lasted a long time. It lasted twelve years, so that the present Government, if that parallel hold good, is only half-way through. It lasted twelve years. It was supported by large, blind, docile majorities, and it almost consummated the ruin of the country. I say that the policy which I have adumbrated and have inferred, I hope erroneously, from Lord

Milner's speech, is a policy like the policy of Lord North, which will be carried on ineffectually against the descendants of the people who held the United Netherlands against the armaments of Spain.

You may ask me then what my policy is on the point, and as we are living in a palace of truth to-night,—a somewhat dripping palace, by-the-by,—I will give it you fully and frankly. I believe in the stern, efficient, vigorous prosecution of the war to its natural end, but I believe that its natural end is a regular peace and a regular settlement. Therefore I should not be deaf to any overtures of peace that came from any responsible authority, more especially if they came from the exiled Government which now exists somewhere in the Low Countries, and which surrounds ex-President Kruger. You may say that it is a Government in exile. You may say that it is a scattered Government. You may say that it is a discredited Government. I really do not know if it is discredited by its own people, but I do know this, that it is the only Government, that it is the Government, which went to war with us, and must, even in Belgium or Holland, in the absence of any other, retain some vestige of its former authority. You cannot negotiate with the scattered centurions in the field, for they have no powers, and you do not know where to find them. You cannot negotiate with the other ex-President—President Steyn—because he is lost somewhere in that infinite space which is now the theatre of war in South Africa. Therefore, I say, that if the Government that is now in Europe, that scattered and dejected Ministry, should make any overtures of peace directly or indirectly to his Majesty's Government, if I were a Minister I should not turn a deaf ear to them. I do not mean, of course, that a Boer Ambassador should come to London or that the King should send an Ambassador to Holland. I mean nothing of that kind. But some of the greatest peaces, the greatest settlements, in the world's history have begun with an apparently casual meeting of two travellers in a neutral inn, and I think it might well happen that some such fortuitous meeting might take place under the auspices of his Majesty's Government and of the exiled Boer Government which might lead to very good results. At any rate, though I would not offer terms to them, I should not be deaf to any overtures from them. Now, gentlemen, I doubt if that be the policy of his Majesty's Government. I greatly doubt if that be the policy of the Government. Of course they may be right. They are in possession of better information than I can pretend to. They may be right in the policy—if I have judged it rightly—of not completing the war in any formal manner. They may be right in regarding the fugitive Boer Government as something beneath their notice.

But if so, I differ from them, and I console myself by the example of those who are now dead, with whom I agree in this matter. The three greatest civilians who waged war in the past century were Pitt, Bismarck, and Abraham Lincoln. What was the behaviour of those great men? Lincoln did not disdain any means, as I read his biography, of communicating with those whom he deemed to be rebels in the field. He did not disdain any means of communicating with them and endeavouring to obtain a peaceful settlement, though he regarded them as rebels, and though we regard the Boers as belligerents; and what is more, I may note in passing that in the middle of the war—in 1863—he issued a proclamation of amnesty to the rebellious States. What was the course of Bismarck, as you know, who, at the head of a victorious army, had dispersed or captured almost all the regular armies of France that were in the field? He did not imagine that he could close such a campaign, however victorious he might be, without making a peace, though there was no regular Government in France, only a self-appointed committee of national defence. So keenly alive was he to a necessity of searching out and fabricating, as it were, some authority with which he could make peace, that he seriously threatened to reinstate under the protection of a German

army the exiled Imperial dynasty of France, which was then in very bad odour after the catastrophe of Sedan, simply in order that he might have an authority with which he might make peace. And as for Pitt, our own man, who stands to us for the resolute and unflinching prosecution of war in spite of every difficulty—I know that there was no man more anxious for constant pacification than he was, for example, in 1796 and 1797. Three times in those two years he made overtures to the revolutionary Government of France, though he did not recognise it as a Government at all, and had on two of those occasions to submit to the humiliation of seeing his Ambassador ordered out of France within forty-eight hours. I say, then, that, according to the most illustrious examples in history, there is nothing degrading or abasing to us in the recognition of a Government—if it be the only Government, even though it be in exile—if the object be to make peace. I beg you to understand that by this I have no idea of making any overtures of peace to the Boers. My policy is a passive policy of peace, and not an active policy. I think if you were to make overtures of peace to the Boers you would commit the greatest possible mistake in your own interest. It would be mistaken for a fatal act of weakness, and it would encourage the flagging forces of the enemy. Nor am I in favour, as some of my friends are, of indicating the terms on which I would make peace. I will tell you why. There is a great deal to be said for it, but, as a matter of fact, the Boers know perfectly well the terms on which they could have peace. When Lord Kitchener and General Botha initiated their negotiations last March, terms were agreed upon which should be offered to the Boers; and, though I admit that the Government declared that those terms were no longer open, the revocation after all is only formal, and the Boers, who are an astute race, are perfectly well aware that in case they wish for peace those terms are still open to them. Moreover, I greatly fear that if you proclaim *urbi et orbi* what your terms are, the Boers in the field would treat it as one of the forty-odd proclamations which you have issued, and which they have disregarded; and I am afraid they would put it into the waste-paper basket of the war.

Now, of course, to peace there are certain obstacles. I do not believe they are so insuperable as people think, but that there are obstacles cannot be denied. The first that is raised is raised chiefly by our Government, which appeals to the declarations of the Boers that nothing will satisfy them except independence. I do not believe anything of the kind. The Boers are a very shrewd people, they have occasionally proved themselves not less shrewd than his Majesty's Government—and I venture to say that there is not a sane Boer, who is not under the influence of fanaticism, who does not know, as well as you or I do, that their independence is gone for ever. If by chance they deceive themselves upon that matter, or if by any chance they build on the foundation, the very crazy foundation, of a handful of men in this country who hold out hopes that that independence will be restored, then the Boers are a much less sensible people than I take them for.

They cannot complain if they are incorporated in the British Empire. They chose the arbitrament of the sword, they appealed to it, and by that they must abide. I may be wrong, but I go so far as to say my firm belief is that, had they never crossed the border, had they never sent an ultimatum, it would have been practically impossible for any British Government, in the state of divided opinion which existed till they took their offensive action, and in the apparently slender difference of terms, to attack and invade them. But they took the law into their own hands, and as they chose to invade and annex the King's dominions, they must be aware that their independence is gone, and that we have not undergone all this sacrifice, this loss of treasure and of precious lives in order that, under any circumstances, at any time, the danger of an independent Transvaal and Orange Free State shall again threaten the people of this

Empire. As a matter of fact we know that when General Botha negotiated with Lord Kitchener last March the terms of peace that were arranged excluded independence, that when General Botha pleaded for independence Lord Kitchener told him that that was out of the question, and that they then went on discussing other terms. It is quite true that when those terms were found to be unacceptable General Botha went back to his troops and declared that he could not sacrifice their independence; but you and I would have done the same, for you could make your troops fight for independence when you could not induce them to fight for the minor articles of a treaty. General Botha might get them to fight for independence, but he could hardly persuade them to fight for the right of every Boer to possess a sporting rifle and for the sacred character of the Boer bank paper that was issued during the war. No, Sir, I think you may anticipate with confidence that the flag of independence will be stoutly upheld by the Boer Ministers and the Boer leaders until such a time as you have signed a definite peace or a definite armistice.

Then there is another obstacle to which Liberal meetings often call attention. I mean the character of his Majesty's Government. Well, I do not doubt that it will be very disagreeable to the Boers to receive terms of peace at the hands of Lord Milner and Mr. Chamberlain, to whom they have a very strong objection, but, for all that, I do not understand the policy that is advocated by some of getting rid of Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Milner. In the first place, I ask the advocates of that policy, as I used to ask the people who, when I was in office, came to urge me to abolish the House of Lords. I said, Granting that it is desirable, how are you going to do it? You cannot get rid of Mr. Chamberlain or Lord Milner without getting rid of his Majesty's Government, and, having just given his Majesty's Government a majority of 200 over the Liberal Opposition, you are not likely to find yourself in a position to eject them. And as regards Lord Milner, at any rate, you might find yourselves, if you recalled him, out of the frying-pan into the fire. I do not admit by that metaphor of the frying-pan that Lord Milner has done anything to deserve your censure in any way. He deserves our confidence, so far as I know, in the transactions that have occurred. But I mean that you will find yourself in a worse position if you recall him. Lord Milner has not the confidence of the Boers; we could not expect it. But he has in a remarkable degree the confidence of the loyalists of South Africa, and if you were to recall Lord Milner now it would be held throughout South Africa as a lowering of the flag, as a change of policy in regard to the war, and would have, I believe, a most fatal and far-reaching effect throughout that vast community. And, for the same reason, I must state quite frankly that I am not in favour of sending a High Commissioner to negotiate terms of peace with the Boers or to resettle South Africa. What would be the use of him? You have a High Commissioner already. Are you going to supersede him by a new High Commissioner? If so, what is the new High Commissioner going to do? Is he to sign a peace or to make a peace with the enemy? Then what are his new functions to be? The Boers can make peace with Lord Kitchener. They have already negotiated with him. If they wish to make peace they will go to him. I cannot, therefore, understand what the functions of this new High Commissioner are to be, except by an indirect method to get rid of Lord Milner.

There is another objection to getting rid of Lord Milner, as there is to getting rid of Mr. Chamberlain in his department, which is fatal to the operation, even if it were practicable. I have heard of powerful nations imposing on weak nations the duty of dismissing a Minister who was obnoxious to them. I have heard of the Minister of a defeated Power in a war retiring at the peace because he was distasteful to the victorious Power. But never in the whole range of history have I heard it even hinted at that a small and defeated nation was entitled to ask of a conquering nation the dismissal of a Minister or of a Pro-consul because he was obnoxious to it.

Now, Sir, I do not believe in independence or in Lord Milner being the difficulties in the way of peace. The real difficulty transpired in the Kitchener-Botha negotiations—it is the question of amnesty. But you will remember that on that point two great authorities differed. Lord Kitchener was in favour of amnesty, and Lord Milner was against amnesty. Now, if you want to consider this point, I beg of you to remember the four elementary conditions which are required of any peace in South Africa. You must first recollect that the settlement must be a real settlement—not a sham settlement—it must be a real settlement and a permanent settlement. Then you must remember what is due to our loyal and suffering people in South Africa. Again, you must bear in mind that you do not wish to do anything to humiliate the Boers unnecessarily, or to crush the Boers unnecessarily, for they are hereafter to be your fellow-subjects, and I trust loyal and valuable elements in your Empire. Lastly, and most important of all, you cannot forget the great crucial, capital, radical fact of the situation, which is that, at the end of the war, the two combatant races have got to settle down and live together in such harmony as may be in South Africa. I wish the Boers to blend with our people when that time comes, and not to settle once more as a hostile and injured and a sullen camp of menace and disaffection in the midst of our territories. Well, Sir, whether they do or not, you have to deal with two capital facts; you have to deal with the fact that these Boers have hereafter to live side by side with the British, and you have to deal with the further fact that you have to bring 40,000 of them back from prison to their own country. I say, then, that in view of these facts I do not doubt on which side my vote would be cast. I am for as large and as liberal an amnesty as it is possible to give as part of the final settlement. Of course, there will be cases which must be excepted which do not fall within the rules of warfare. Temporary disenfranchisements may be necessary. But on the broad policy of a large and liberal amnesty I am as clear and convinced as on any subject of politics at the present time. What is more, no other policy is practicable. Can you imagine a British Government responsible to a British Parliament, when it is, in the 20th century, endeavouring to resettle South Africa, carrying on for months, possibly for years after peace, a sort of bloody assize calculated to stir up the dying embers of civil strife and undo all the good that it is endeavouring in other ways to effect? I do not believe it is practicable, I do not believe it is desirable, and therefore, I, for one, declare myself in favour of the promptest and the most liberal amnesty which security will allow you under the circumstances of the pacification.

I must summarise the one or two other points I would deal with in the settlement; there are many others, but I will only deal with one or two. I would go so far as to give full civil rights to all Boers who should take and sign a definite and drastic oath of allegiance. I believe that the sooner you put them in a position of civil responsibility, of honourable loyalty to yourselves, the better it will be for yourselves and South Africa. I do not believe that as regards representative government you can bestow it at once. I believe you must wait till the country is resettled, till the farms are rebuilt, and until the country is once more inhabited. Till then I would have a commission of four or five rough-and-ready administrators of the Indian type to settle the country in the name of the High Commissioner, Lord Milner. I would have them assisted by a representative committee in which our own people should, of course, be in the majority, but in which there should also be a Boer element, and I would hasten as soon as possible the era at which responsible government could be granted. And with regard to all transactions which involved money, such as the resettlement of the farms, the restocking of the farms, the rebuilding of the farms, I would act with the most lavish liberality. We are spending five millions a month in

prosecuting this war. I would infinitely rather spend that five millions a month in procuring, even by extreme generosity, a real condition of peace in South Africa and in appeasing the remains of civil rancour. As to what is called the Kitchener proclamation, which I suspect emanated from some one nearer home than Lord Kitchener—a proclamation which, so far as I know, has done unmixed harm in prolonging the war and in driving the Boers to despair—as regards that, I would, as an item of the pacification, certainly annul it. As regards the other matters in dispute between Lord Kitchener and General Botha, I venture to say that half-a-dozen sound business people, representing the Boers on the one side and Great Britain on the other, could settle them in a week. I, therefore, for one, believe that when the time shall have come for the Boer Government to open itself freely in overture to his Majesty's Government, the time of peace will be at hand. Nor should the period of overture be remote if the Boer leaders remember their duty to their own people who are suffering the horrors of war, of exile, of prison, and who, until there is a settlement, are cut off not merely from their homes and families, but from the enjoyment of a free government, of equal laws, and of the public and private privileges of British subjects.

Gentlemen, I have expounded to you my policy, I think you will admit, with sufficient frankness; but the key and base of it all is this—that we are bound to the Boers for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in a permanent, inevitable, and fateful marriage, which it is beyond our power to dissolve, and that it is in the interests of all of us, Boer as well as Briton, that a war such as this should never again be allowed to disturb and ravage that peaceful region. Sir, I want to bind, to heal, and not to keep open the mortal wound which is being caused by this war.

And now I would summarise the policy that I have expounded to you at so great a length, for I had no idea it was so late. I would sum it up in these words:—It is at home to restore efficiency to our Parliament, our administration, and our people; it is abroad, as a foreign policy, to dispel the atmosphere of suspicion and hatred which has grown up around us under this present Government, and to restore things to the footing on which they were when we left office in 1895; and, as regards the war itself, to pursue it with vigour and efficiency, but to be prepared to listen to overtures for peace, and then to grant just and most liberal terms, always excepting the closed and sealed question of incorporation.

Gentlemen, that policy represents the best advice that I can give the country to-night. What I can do to further it I will do, for my services are, as they have always been, so far as health and strength permit—as the services of all British subjects are—at the disposal of my country. But I am under no illusion. Had I the tongue of men and of angels I could do little or nothing, for the country last year parted with its liberty of action for the next six years on the representation that the war was over. I am quite aware, too, that my policy does not run on party lines; but it is not to party that I appeal. Party in this matter can avail little or nothing. I appeal unto Cæsar. From Parliament with its half-hearted but overwhelming majority for the Government, and its distracted and disunited Opposition, I appeal to the silent but supreme tribunal which shapes and controls, in the long run, the destinies of our people, I mean the tribunal of public opinion and of common sense. If that fail us, we are lost indeed, and I know of nothing else that remains to avail us.

And now I have done. I have only one further appeal to make to you, for your friendship, if not your support. In this country I understand you like a man who speaks his mind. Well, I have spoken mine.

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