Open letter to the Duke of Devonshire

from

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OPEN LETTER
TO
THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE.

"The one-sided history with which alone these critics are acquainted is that which is supplied by the information which is furnished by Dr. Leyds to his subsidized organs. — (Hisses)."


MYLORD DUKE.

Your Grace's speech at York last week was so insulting to the press of the Continent, that I feel it my duty to try to refute it. And that even for England's sake. It is always well to know both sides of a case, and how will you ever learn to know the truth, if Englishmen, who blame the diplomacy which caused this needless war, are called traitors, and foreign journalists, who condemn it as cruelly unjust, are branded as either ignorant or corrupt, and that by a statesman like you, whose character is respected abroad as well as in England?

You speak as a judge in your own case. But foreigners, who respect England, who have such a veneration for your Queen, that they hope and pray that their young Queen may take her for example.... who are able by knowledge of more than one language to investigate on both sides many a question, have a right to anticipate the verdict of History: they are as it were a Contemporary posterity.
We, the journalists of Holland, without any exception whatever, proclaim that this war is unnecessary and thus a crime . . . that this war is the worst possible solution of the difficulties in South Africa.

Not understanding the wisdom of Lord Melbourne's habitual query: "Can't you let it alone?" your government demanded by threats and coercion what only patient statesmanship could give. And when honorable journals, representing the cultured reflections of honorable men, thinking their own thoughts, speaking according to their deepest convictions, condemn this policy, your only answer is to accuse them of crass ignorance and worse.

When you declare that the only history of your country's relations with the Transvaal Republic, which foreign journalists know, is that supplied by the information, which is furnished by Dr. Leyds to his subsidised organs, you speak without that moderation, without that shrinking from an extreme, which study of your career had made me think one of your distinguishing characteristics.

It seems to me that you repeat the fault of your own generals and begin an attack without having made a sufficient previous reconnaissance.

You speak of our ignorance . . . you speak of bribed journals . . . how little you know!

I follow the beating of my people's heart in all I write about this war . . . we all have read and questioned and inquired . . . we are so deeply convinced of "this war being a crime against civilisation" as Sir Edward Clarke has termed it, of its being a war against righteousness, as we call it, that we feel sure, that if you only knew what we know, and saw what we see, you would feel what we feel, and believe what we believe.

Our ignorance?

But alas! we know so well how you drifted into this war . . . we know so well what this cruel unrighteousness means for each of those armed peasants, those husbands and fathers, who sacrifice their life for their independence, that we could wish for ignorance, so that our eyes might be shut and our hearts be hardened.

But we cannot . . . we see, we know, and we appeal to God Almighty for justice.

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All serious, liberal minded people in Europe, who have investigated the causes of this war, condemn the wrong your government commits by it.

We catch our fire from the Apostle: “who is offended, and I burn not?”

We see a free-born people using the right which God gave them for their preservation, to fight for a glorious liberty, which their ancestors in Holland and Africa purchased for them with their blood.

We give to the sacred cause of the free Republics our hearts and our thoughts.

All our feelings and hope and prayers go with these struggling freemen, who fight with so great a resolution and trust in God, as we hardly find the like recorded in any history.

These free citizens, disdaining servitude, have the good sense and passionate predilections of all free nations on their side.

And how is this overwhelming verdict of public opinion treated in England?

Is it respected as the same overwhelming public opinion in the Dreyfus-case was respected by the Times and nearly all your papers?

If the universal condemnation of the iniquity in France was—as your press truly said—“the verdict of conscience of the civilised world”, how can a similar condemnation be repudiated as a testimony without significance?

Is a principle right or wrong according to the immediate interests of the moment?

Is it with foreign opinion about the war as with neutral shipments of food-stuffs?

Is it contraband of war or not, just as it pleases you?

Surely, sound criticism consists not in declaring a thing to be good, because it pleases a particular minister or paper on a particular day, and bad because it does not!

Speaking of the foreign press, you expressed respect for those papers only, “that are in relation with the government of their own country” and you said:

“Of one thing I am quite certain, and that is the press of foreign countries does not exercise a material influence on the policy of their Governments.”
beat the measure! That press, which you so rightly prefer to us, the ignorant and bribed press of the continent!

The "Speaker" says:

"South Africa presents a unique example of a large Press owned, controlled and operated in recent times by a small body of men with the direct aim of bringing about a conflict which shall serve their business interests.

"When Mr. Rhodes, failing to obtain forcible control of the Rand by the clumsiness of Jameson and the vacillation and cowardice of his confederates in Johannesburg, spoke of an appeal to "constitutional means" for gaining his ends, he well knew what he meant to do.

"He designed to use the armed forces of the British Crown and the money of the British taxpayer to obtain for himself and his fellow-capitalists that political control of the Transvaal which was essential to his economical and political ambitions. To do this it was above all things necessary to apply an adequate motive power to the minds of the British Government and the British people. For this work he found the Press by far the aptest instrument. Some considerable time ago he had acquired, with Messrs. Eckstein and Barnato, a leading interest in the Cape Argus, the evening paper at Capetown. The Argus Company has now so far expanded its field of operations as to own also the Johannesburg Star, the Bulawayo Chronicle, the Rhodesia Herald and the African Review. The Cape Times, the most influential paper in South Africa, has come under the control of the same body of capitalists, half its shares having been bought by Mr. Rutherford Harris, the well-known director of the Chartered Company and the active coadjutor of Rhodes in many financial exploits. Last year the Diamond Fields Advertiser, of Kimberley, passed into the same control, under significant circumstances.

"Since the Jameson Raid the entire weight of the capitalist Press has been thrown into the scale of a drastic Imperialist policy, "the constitutional means" which Mr. Rhodes, with or without the express assent of Mr. Chamberlain, had devised. So far as the colony was concerned, this engine of education was directed to sow aspersions of disloyalty against the Bond and their British supporters, and to drill into the public mind by constant droppings the notion of a Dutch conspiracy throughout South Africa. Defeated at the colonial elections, the chief part of this Press energy was then directed to exasperate the British colonists of South Africa and the British nation against the Transvaal, working up every misdeed or mistake of the Government, and inventing others as they were required.

"But the inflammation of the credulous mind of South Africa
was a task comparatively simple and of subsidiary importance. The chief object of this Press conspiracy, to attain which every nerve was strained, was the conquest of the Government and the conscience of Great Britain. I have no hesitation in saying that a large proportion of the outrages and other sensations emanating from the Press of Johannesburg and Capetown were designed chiefly, if not exclusively, for the British market. Over and over again I have heard strong Outlander politicians of Johannesburg express their astonishment and indignation that their Press, having so good a cause, should damage it by gross exaggeration and positive falsehoods. The stories of Zarp atrocities and Boer assaults upon women did not even obtain wide credence at the Cape. But faithfully reproduced, and duly endorsed by the most reputable colonial papers, they passed by wire and mail to the great newspapers of London, and were there received with an implicit confidence which must have brought a grim smile into the face of the colonial inventor.

"What I am describing is nothing else than an elaborate factory of detailed mendacity for the purpose of stimulating British action. To those unacquainted with the mechanism it may seem incredible that with modern means of communication it has been possible to poison the conscience and intelligence of England. But when it is understood that the great London Press receives its information almost exclusively from the offices of the kept Press of South Africa, the mystery is solved. Until just before the outbreak of hostilities the three most important London Unionist journals were served directly from the office of the Star with their cable news from the Transvaal. Mr. Monypenny himself serving the Times. That at so critical a juncture the Times should subject its policy to the inspiration and direction of a young journalist of the Rhodes press, just arrived in South Africa and completely unfamiliar with its life and politics, is matter for serious reflection.

"Another London Conservative paper was instructed from the Leader office, one of the chief general cable services, widely used by most important English newspapers, was fed from Johannesburg by a prominent member of the executive of the South African League. The London "Liberal" paper, whose perversion from the true path of Liberalism has inflicted the heaviest blow upon the cause of truth and honesty in England, was fully and constantly inspired by the editor of the Cape Times, upon which office, I am informed, no fewer than three other important London dailies relied for their Capetown intelligence. The Cape Times and the Argus offices also supplied two great general channels of cable information of the English press."
We agree with Mr. J. A. Hobson, "that we shall have a clearer comprehension of the Press conspiracy which has successfully exploited the stupid Jingoism of the British public for its clearly conceived economic ends, when it is borne in mind that this great confederation of Press interests is financially cemented by the fact that Rand mining magnates are large owners of several not less considerable weekly papers."

Your Grace will allow me to prefer our continental ignorance to such very knowing journalism.

* * *

How these your journalists made the current, that set your government drifting on to this war, is known long since on the ignorant continent.

I know nothing which, in the least degree, resembles your wild, erratic policy of the last year.

But in England you are still looking out for the cause of the war!

As soon as it had begun most of your statesmen and journalists set out to find a good cause for it.

They remind me of travellers, who, when lost in the desert by their own foolhardiness, set out to dig for water.... and do not find it!

The Marquis of Lorne, showing the paramount power of urbanity and high birth, indicates as the cause of this awful war: "the damned bad government of President Kruger."

This clever discovery did not impress me very much.

During my frequent visits to England, I have so often heard different ministries very vulgarly called "a damned bad government", that I feel sure, there would be a permanent civil war in England, if the conviction of such "damned" badness justified a call to arms.

But some way or other all this "damning" does not seem to bring us "forwarder".

The real question is whether the injustice of which English Uitlanders in the Republic complained justified war and civil war.... whether this war has not caused to the workmen, the women and the children under the English Uitlanders, a hundred times more misery, death and agony than the misgovernment of the Boers caused
them since gold was discovered .... whether cutting off
a head is not too radical a cure for headache?
Your Grace seems not to think so.
You speak of Johannesburg as of a place where life
and property were in constant peril, and "where every
attempt at agitation either in public meeting or through
the Press was cruelly forbidden."

Statesmen, who have a good cause, are not inclined
to damage it by such gross exaggeration as you are
guilty of.
Again you attack without any previous reconnaissance.
You give the most absolute proof that you never set
eyes on those honorable Uitlander newspapers, which I
just now mentioned. A few extracts in the last Speaker
will interest you perhaps, but will most certainly shock
you.
What answer can your Grace give, to the following
question?

"How long would the British Government allow such matter
to be published by an influential journal in Ireland, in India,
or even in London?"

Freedom of press and meeting! Certainly!
But what do you say, of English capitalists muzzling
the independent press of London? ... of public meetings,
suppressed by the hurling of open knives and the thro-
wing of mud and stones?

* * *

I do not deny that the Uitlanders had their grievances.
Some of their grievances were substantial .... nearly as
substantial as many grievances of many people in England,
Scotland and Ireland, whose life's happiness it would be
to be treated, fed and paid as the Uitlanders in the
Transvaal were ... but do these grievances justify war?
Let us never glorify war or revolution. "Statesmanship
is the art of avoiding revolution and war, and of making
progress at once continuous and calm."

I think of Goldwin Smith's noble essay on Pym, when
I say this.
Such Statesmanship asks for knowledge and sober state-
ments of the grievances which have to be remedied.
If has been my duty and my pleasure as journalist to study English politics and literature for 35 years.

So I have learned to esteem your talents and high character, and this knowledge emboldens me to appeal to the Duke of Devonshire in the name of the Marquis of Hartington.

When I ask a great Unionist to remember Gladstone, his great leader, I appeal to his nobler self and bring back to him the spring of his life, when he hoped and believed and was strong.

What a calamity for England has been the headlong recoil from the lofty heroism of the great Statesman, who had the courage of his ideas and his intense convictions... to whom conscience was a daily companion... whose motive power was a habitual sense of the Divine Presence.

The grave tenderness of Gladstone and the solemn power of his religious feeling seem to belong to a golden age now past!

The majesty of death has made him to me as a marble hero in the Valhalla of the Victorian age. What noble inspiration could his words and his example be in these days of strife for all young hearts and plastic imaginations!

But the only words I hear in Holland from English journalists, are angry curses, uttered with malignity when his name is mentioned.

An Elgin marble shot at by the Turks!

And yet "England has need of thee!" Gladstone! England has need of the grasp of your imagination and the strength of your character, of your depth and your decision, of your pure unselfishness and your noble enthusiasm, of your simple gentleness and your fierce and fiery indignation.

What a happiness it is to think now of your earnest mind, of your continuous striving to noble issues, of your beneficent friendship for young, aspiring nations, showing them an ideal and directing their energies, nerving their arm and lending them your spirit power.

Oh happy England! you have now Mr. Charberlain instead of him.

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I know that Mr. T. W. Russell M. P. has said, that
the mischief in South Africa lies in the fact that Mr. Gladstone tried to act towards the Transvaal on Christian principles, but it is impossible to me to believe that you, one of the surviving members of Mr. Gladstone's administration — so rightly honoured in 1881 for the Convention with the Transvaal, which is now cursed as being Christian — feel more pride in the war, made by your colleague Mr. Chamberlain, in flat denial of all principle, than in the noble act of true statesmanship and justice of your former colleague, who believed that politics should be based on morality.

Can you look at the present position of affairs, without acknowledging that Gladstone was a true prophet, when he foretold "that if England persisted in an unjust policy of annexation it should have the whole Dutch population in revolt against it?"

Was this not also the opinion of Lord Randolph Churchill, a clever man of the world? Was Gladstone's statesmanship not a Statesmanship more beneficent and of a higher order than Mr. Chamberlain's?

For Gladstone's Christian policy was bringing peace and reconciliation, when suddenly gold, the Raid and Mr. Chamberlain destroyed Africa's future for generations.

I mentioned the true cause of the war.

In your speech you implored the public to blame the government and not the military chiefs in South-Africa.

We anticipated your wish.

Scapegoat hunting is superfluous, Mr. Chamberlain is the responsible man. Mr. Chamberlain, my respect for whose diplomatic talent, foresight and unselfish conduct could only adequately be expressed for me by the Marquis of Lorne... Mr. Chamberlain, who, as Mr. Asquith said "went whistling for alliances among the Great Powers of Europe" after calling the Czar a devil and threatening France with punishment... Mr. Chamberlain, who in his Leicester speech has so terribly illustrated his tact, his insight, his knowledge and his judgement, that we on the Continent, staring at him with horror, exclaim: "Oh God: this is the Minister who conducted the negotiations with the Transvaal!"
Common sense (healthy sense “gezond verstand” we call it in our language) must have become rare in England, if honest people do not see the evidence of Mr. Chamberlain’s misconduct of the negotiations with the Republics. Does he not stand condemned out of his own mouth? Has he not acknowledged, in his pleasant, lighthearted way, that the sent a despatch to President Kruger, which he meant as an acceptance, but which he had the moral cowardice to allow to be understood as a refusal? If Mr. Chamberlain had written clear prose, if Mr. Balfour, who can write, had corrected his composition, or if Lord Salisbury had asked him: “What do you mean by your despatch? Do you intend to accept or to refuse?” President Kruger would have known that his proposal was accepted in respect of nine tenths.

What then is the cause of this war? This war is the “one-tenth-war.” You are fighting for the one tenth, for the small difference between what you demanded and the concessions which President Kruger was willing to give. What a noble cause to hate for, to fight for, to die for, to kill and maim for!

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Mr. Balfour, the cultured scholar and graceful philosopher, has discovered another cause. His is the chivalry of taking the meanest possible view of your plucky enemies and their motives... of attributing their glorious self-sacrifice, courage and gallantry not to love of independence, but to their desire to maintain “a corrupt system”.

Nothing disappointed me more than that he of all men should be guilty of such exaggerated language of contempt for an enemy, whom all generous hearts ought to admire, and who will be held up by history to the admiration of future generations, as the equals of the Greeks, who fought the Persians, as the equals of their own ancestors, who fought the Armada of Spain hand in hand with you!

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Mr. Balfour’s description of the treatment of the Uit-
landers by the Boers, as even worse than the treatment of the Irish Nationalists by him, when he was Chief-secretary of Ireland, is as wrong as his absurdly exaggerated description of the corruption in the Transvaal.

What does Dr. Theal say in his sketch of South African history in the Story of the Nations series?

"If corruption existed to the extent, that is stated there would be no reason for further opposition, because all that is asked for could be bought. The existence of corruption in high places implies the existence of corruptors as well".

Bribery would have been cheaper than a war! The Boers had to do with capitalists, who are experts in corruption!... what did these financiers get from the government with all their gold? Corrupt Rulers would have made terms and not have preferred war to loss of independence!

Is it not perfectly true what The Westminster Gazette remarks:

"How would a corrupt governing class, anxious to guard its perquisites and avoid exposure, have behaved in a crises of this kind, if their objects had been these and nothing more? Not certainly have risked everything upon a struggle which threatened the loss of place and wealth and that comfortable security which a corrupt oligarchy holds dear. Corrupt rulers, seeking to perpetuate corruption, would have made terms with the Uitlanders and averted the storm, as also, no doubt, a wise Government with a clear appreciation of the inevitable would have done, though from a different motive".

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To me this talk of corruption is sickening.

Does Mr. Balfour forget how difficult virtuous England found it to prevent corruption at the elections... the great crime against democracy? "The last Reform-Bill" — as Emerson said — "took away political power from a mound, a ruin, and a stone wall, whilst Birmingham and Manchester, whose mills paid for the wars of Europe, had no representative." Have you not a "Corrupt Practices Act"? Does he not know what happens in the United States, where Mr. Chamberlain's ally misbebaves at each presidential election? Has he ever heard of Tammany? Corruption? Does he not know what happens in India?
What does the Simla-correspondent of The Standard write about the condition in India, where millions starve:

"In certain parts of the country impending famine has other effects. In the Northern Punjab, for instance, the people are rapidly becoming lawless and desperate. Gangs of a dozen or twenty men roam about the country, no doubt satisfying the local police with a share of the plunder, robbing, waylaying, and beating all they come across. The rural police—so corrupt are they—are suspected of receiving a share of the profits as a condition of keeping quiet.

"In the Gujar Khan portion of Rawal Pindi district gangs of lawless ruffians, openly and in light of day, loot whole villages, assault women, beat men, and threaten with death all who should venture to think of appealing for justice.

"The native local official, be he Tehsildar or police inspector, is as a rule to be bought over for quite a trifling sum, and if he has been "squared" in this manner it would be quite useless for anyone to complain of having been robbed or assaulted."

I repeat the correspondent's question:

"Is it strange that the simple peasants wonder if there be really a Sirkar after all, and, if so, why such things should be allowed in the Great Queen's raj?"

And to this I add:

Is it not strange that Mr. Balfour shuts his eyes for the corruption in British India, while he makes war to free a foreign state of it?

Does he not feel that before you speak of corruption you ought to be most pure and clear from all imputation?

The South African Republic is a very young state, cursed by gold mines and the corruptors they breed... but it is a healthy state, and reform is in the air and was approaching..., when Dr. Jameson threatened it back.

Nothing seems to me so abject and undignified as the way the Snarley-Yows of your Jingo press snap and bite at president Kruger, a great man, one of the greatest of this century, whose strength of will and character, whose sincere religious conviction make him the Cromwell of the Dutch Republic in Africa.

How a Motley of the future will appreciate him!

What a noble distinction for England that in your music halls his name is every evening received with hisses!

It is grand courage thus to show respect for a noble
enemy, who amnestied the authors of an infamous invasion, and who takes care of your wounded.

* * *

And as to the complaints against his rule, they are well answered in Dr. Theal's book by an imaginary Boer:

"Nearly all other Europeans are satisfied, and submit without demur to the Government of the country; it is only Englishmen who complain.

"In no other country in the world is a foreign language the medium of instruction in State-aided schools. Dutch is the language of the South African Republic, and yet the English are taught in their own tongue up to a certain standard.

"The monopolies complained of and the high import duties on all articles that can be produced in the Republic are to encourage home industries. Other countries—notably the United States—have protective tariffs for the same purpose.

"The system of taxation is not unfair. The burghers have military duties to perform without payment, which fully compensate for the smaller amount of money they contribute.

"The right of voting carries with it duties which the great majority of Englishmen would not perform. The privilege cannot be given without adoption of the burghers' burdens as well as their rights.

"The police are the best that can be obtained, and it is unreasonable to expect from them the demeanour of those of London."

That only English Uitlanders demur we know since long in Holland!

But at last your papers discover it and in the Standard of Saturday 16 December I read the following "Geständniss einer schöne Seele" — the irony of which confession will I hope be felt in your country:

"It now seems that a number of the German, French, and Scandinavian Uitlanders of the Transvaal — the very men for whom we are claiming those equal rights we demand for our own subjects—are fighting on the side of their oppressors, and furnishing them with a valuable body of auxiliaries, trained on European barrack-grounds."

What a terrible oppressor! oh Mr. Balfour.

* * *

Considerations like these make us feel all the more
the colossal waste of human life that this war is entailing and will entail. The world can ill spare men in black Africa like these plucky Boers and courageous English soldiers!

For I ask you: what is "the good government", for the establishment of which the best blood of England is shed?

If you want to know what "good government" means to the capitalists behind the war party, to the motive power, which made you drift into war, you had better ask one of the financiers responsible for this war, Mr. John Hays Hammond of the Gold Rand, whose signature appeared under the cruel lie of the appeal in The Times for "the women and children of Johannesburg!"

This author of the war will answer you that "good government" means "cheap labour." He considers an increase of annual dividends to the amount of nearly four millions a "conservative estimate" of the benefits to be expected in the future! Among other economies to be expected at the close of the war he boldly reckons on "the cheapening of the cost of labour."

There are the joint secretaries of the Consolidated Gold-fields, who expect "an ample supply of labour in the future," the vast reserves, from which native labour is drawn from South Africa, being, according to these gentlemen, "inexhaustible."

And what cheap labour means, Rhodesia, noble and virtuous Rhodesia, can show you!

The Boers saw Mr. Rhodes, the representative of monopoly and capital, as the paramount power in Rhodesia, which has cruelly wronged and oppressed all the natives, who have been placed under its control.

They know how to the natives English power has only brought misery, rebellion and death.

Yet they see the Rhodes party triumphant, while the Africanders are treated as the scum of the earth.

I know that according to your warpress "the Boers are cruel slave owners." But how is it that your philanthropic Empire acquiesces in this cheapening of labour, in the indenturing of natives, in the practice of the hypocritical "compound system," in the turning to account of Bechuana prisoners of war! "Good govern-
ment" in Rhodesia means government by monopoly and a fall of wages from 2 £ to 15 shillings.
This the Marquis of Lorne would certainly call: "damned" good government.
I agree with him!

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Why did the Orange Free State throw in its lot with the Transvaal?
Is its government also "corrupt" and "damned bad"?
Did its farmers also want to conquer Africa?
Mr. Balfour said:

"We never had any quarrel with the Free State. We never did interfere or desire to interfere with their internal affairs. If I had been asked two months ago whether it was likely we should be at war with the Orange Free State, I should have said: "You might as well expect us to be at war with Switzerland."

Which artless admission and bland confession show that there are responsible British Statesmen even more ignorant than foreign journalists!

For in Holland we knew that the Jameson-Raid had consolidated the bond between the two republics... we knew that the breaking by the British Government of the Convention of 1884 — which purposely ignored Suzzerainty — as well as the language of Mr. Chamberlain convinced the two Republics that their existence was threatened... we knew that the Free State and the Transvaal were bound by treaty to defend each other, if the independence of either was attacked.

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And when some of your statesmen speak of a far-reaching conspiracy, to explain a fact, which they ought to have known and failed to foresee, I miss the sound estimate of probability, essential to judging things rightly... I miss ordinary common sense which prevents you looking for "midi à quatorze heures" (has not your great Newton said: "hypotheses non sunt praeter necessitatem multiplicandae"?) and I miss besides the necessary knowledge of facts!

For, that the Boers did not begin arming for a conflict before the Raid of the Buccaneers, has now been proven
to the hilt. I have read the assertion of the contrary by the papers responsible for this war, but the fact that the Boers had no arms worth speaking of in 1895 is proved by the report of Major White, who was sent to Pretoria to investigate the condition of Boer armaments. The following extract is taken from Major White's diary, which is published in the Blue Books:

"At Pretoria I visited the Artillery Camp. Saw halfdozen very old pieces of ordnance, mortars, &c. One gun of the date of the Second Empire, bronze. A Maxim-Nordenfeldt of 1820 (sic) (this gun was broken). A 9-pdr. muzzle-loading gun, in very bad condition. None of the guns I saw were fit for much work. The oberwachtmeister told me that there were three batteries in the "magazine", one battery equal three guns. These three batteries are 9 and 6-pounders, also three Maxims in good condition. I did not see these... Saw the cavalry troop, 250 horses in the camp. These horses are in miserable condition. The cavalry do not use the sword. They are taught a kind of M. I. (mounted infantry) drill. The system of conscription consists in the commandants sending two men from their districts to be trained every two years. A contractor (Green) has lately sold 3000 M. H. rifles and 1,000,000 rounds to the Transvaal Government.

That is surely conclusive evidence, but there is more. In 1890 The Times printed an article, which summed up the standing army of the Boers as "a single battery," "the horses broken down with age," and "the harness old and filthy."

The special correspondent of The Times, Captain Younghusband, whom it sent in 1896 to inquire into the Boer military preparations, absolutely disproves the contention that the Boer armaments were a standing danger to England. He tells us that:

"The Boers had very nearly been caught napping at the beginning of the year 1896. One attempt had been made to take their country from them; they were thoroughly convinced that the attempt would be renewed at some future date; so the Boers were determined to be thoroughly on their guard the second time."

Captain Younghusband dismissed as "absurd" the notion that the Boers intended to attack Great Britain. "Defence," he declares, "and not offence was intended."

And a very convincing proof of this can be given.
If not defence but offence had been intended, President Kruger would have accepted the proposals formulated at the Bloemfontein Conference.

In England the South African question would have been considered as settled by this for a few years... the Transvaal would have gone on arming and preparing for war, and would have only sent an ultimatum when the British Empire was in difficulties in India or with one of the great Powers!

The conclusion then which remains is that the Boers armed only for defence after the monstrous invasion of 1895. They dreaded its repetition... and with reason!

The editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, himself a Unionist M.P. declares that the notion of a Dutch conspiracy to destroy British paramountcy in South Africa is the veriest nightmare.

You have gone to war against a nightmare in South Africa and the nightmare sits now on your chest!

The talk about the long preparations for a war, aimed at the heart of English rule, is made to cower the folly of the Colonial Office, which was playing a game of "bluff." President Kruger never began seriously to arm his State until after the Jameson raid, and that Mr. Chamberlain was privy to the Jameson-plan, he knew perfectly well.

President Kruger had been attacked by burglars and he bought a revolver.

A threatened man, who buys a revolver, does not show by this acquisition his intention to turn up burglar himself!

It really is not to the fathomless iniquity and corruption of the Dutch that the war is due, but to the obliquity and perversity of Mr. Chamberlain's policy; to the same ignorant and foolhardy impatience as caused some of your defeats in the war.

Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman frankly acknowledged:

> "Mr. Chamberlain is mainly answerable for this war. It is the natural result of his persistent policy."

Surely England is not going to kill all the citizens of the two Republies, and perhaps their wives and daughters also, who are all willing and ready to die for their
country, as a punishment for a war, for which Mr. Chamberlain is answerable?

** * **

"Mr. Chamberlain, answerable for the war? This is laughable... did not the Boers declare the war?"

Thus I have heard the men ask, who had been busy for years in destroying the independance of the Republic!

But no honorable and fair statesman can use this childish prevarication. A despatch was sent to President Kruger, telling him that the ministers were about to formulate their own proposals for the settlement of the question — proposals, which they set about preparing to enforce by despatching ten thousand men to Africa, with an army corps in reserve. There was no attempt to disguise the nature of the menace. President Kruger was confronted with a demand, that he had to do as was told him or take the consequences. He waited for proposals for a fortnight. These were held back, and all the while military preparations were pushed forward!

The Boers met threats by armaments, as all free peoples use to do, and, when reinforcements for the garrisons were sent to the Cape, the Boers, in Mr. Bryce’s words: "very naturally felt that if they remained quiet till the British forces had been raised to a strength they could not hope to resist, they would lose the only military advantage they possessed."

Unanswerable is the question Mr. Courtney put to you in parliament:

"How can you expect them to wait until you come up with all your forces and then communicate your demands under conditions which require instant fulfilment? It is as if two men are disputing and one says, “Tell me what you want”, and the other says, “Wait five minutes and I will come back and tell you what I want, and I will bring a loaded pistol with me”.

Acts of war and strategical devices such as the ultimatum and the annexation of British territory are certainly no evidence of an aggressive policy!

Your statesmen did not find an enemy in the Transvaal, but made one, just as your troops did not find a revolution in Cape-Colony but are likely to make one.
The war is your war, it is the war of your press and your financiers.

Your statesmen saw the warclouds gather on the horizon, and, to use the words of your noble Ruskin — I quote from memory and have no time for verification —: "there was no rebuke to awe them into peace, no hand did rein them back by the way by which they came."

You accuse the Boers of beginning the war?

Ah, your Journalists, in saying this, behave as men "in whose hearts the great charites of the imagination lie dead, and for whom the fancy has no power to raise what is ignoble, and disguise what is discordant."

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And who is the man, the author of all the evil, who was and is honoured above even your noblest sons in England? That is Mr. Rhodes, whom Mr. Chamberlain fears and flatters and who remained Privy Councillor after his crime.

What does Mr. Lecky say of his act?

"When holding the highly confidential position of Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and being at the same time a Privy Councillor of the Queen, he engaged in a conspiracy for the overthrow of the Government of a neighbouring and friendly State. In order to carry out this design he deceived the High Commissioner, whose Prime Minister he was. He deceived his own colleagues in the Ministry. He collected under false pretences a force which was intended to co-operate with an insurrection in Johannesburg. Being a director of the Chartered Company, he made use of that position, without the knowledge of his colleagues, to further the conspiracy. He took an active and secret part in smuggling great quantities of arms into the Transvaal, which were intended to be used in the rebellion, and at a time when his organs in the Press were representing Johannesburg as seething with spontaneous indignation against an oppressive Government, he, with another millionair, was secretly expending many thousands of pounds in that town in stimulating and subsidising the rising. He was also directly connected with the shabbiest incident in the whole affair, the concoction of a letter from Johannesburg conspirators absurdly representing women and children at Johannesburg as in danger of being shot down by the Boers, and urging the British to come at once to save them. It was a letter drawn up with the sanction of Mr. Rhodes many weeks before the Raid, and before any disturbance had arisen, and kept in
reserve, to be dated and used in the last moment for the purpose of inducing the young soldiers in South Africa to join in the Raid."

Duke of Devonshire, to you, a nobleman in the true sense... to you a man "sans peur et sans reproche,"... to you whose honour is without blemish, I appeal. What is your answer to Mr. Lecky when he asks:

"What can be thought of the language of a Minister, who volunteered to inform the House of Commons that "in all the transactions I have described Mr. Rhodes, though he had made a gigantic mistake — a mistake perhaps as great as a Minister could make — had done nothing affecting his personal honour?"

***

It is not an ignorant and perhaps corrupt foreign journalist, it is a historian and philosopher, one of the great men of the Victorian age, who asks you this! Can you deny, that when the party of Mr. Rhodes, notwithstanding all the money spent by it — without corruption of course! — was beaten at the elections at the Cape, the business-patriots at once began to work up the grievances of the Uitlanders, while the Rhodes-press began to manipulate English opinion?

And that is why I have the firm conviction that, if a statesman, as just and honorable as you, had been Colonial Secretary, there could and would not have been war!

And if I show my ignorance in believing that a saner and wiser diplomacy would have prevented war, I range myself humbly behind three of the most respected members of your own Unionist party:

Mr. Frederick Greenwood, who as journalist has no superiors, few equals...

Mr. Courtney, whose sturdy common sense and love of principle carries me back to Cromwell's time...

Sir Edward Clarke, whose moral courage equals his insight and wisdom. While Mr. Balfour tries to persuade himself that the war he did not foresee was inevitable, he strictly abstains from any discussion of the evidence. "Mihi constat!" is his motto.

***

But still the Jingoes shout about another reason for
the war... these conflicting explanations being the penalty of a bad cause.

The cruel war is necessary for the holy cause of Imperialism!

I read the other day of a proud English mother, who, when asked what she intended to make of her little boy, answered:

"Butcher, sir. E's bound to be a butcher. Why, e's that fond o' animals we can 'ardly keep 'm out o' the slaughter-house."

The same proud mother would say in the present year:

"An Imperialist, sir! Why, e's that fond of liberty and independence and self-government, that we can't keep 'im from annexing, bullying, coercing boasting and longing for what is not his own!"

I humbly profess my ignorance in not understanding how "Imperialism" has been able to elbow the old English "patriotism" out of the way.

For they, who as from a satiety of principle, of self-government and of liberty, cloak their greed with the purple stolen from the Caesars, begin a policy, which requires before anything the legionaries of Caesar, an enormous army and absolute power. No parliament can act as Caesar!

Your Imperialists—who are admirers of England, given to admiring exclusively in the wrong place—want to stifle the Dutch Republics within murderous English walls.

"Saigner à blanc" is their motto, as I read in one of your most respected papers, and this makes me ask: "for what are you bleeding South Africa white? Where are the Puritans, the nonconformists, the liberals of England and Scotland, that they suffer you to commit so great a crime against a free-born people?

Are they shadows of their forefathers or only such images of Britons as Virgil describes to have been wrought in tapestry?

"Purpurea intexi tollant aulea Britann" "And Britons interwove held up the purple hangings";

as your glorious Milton translated these words.
Liberals, holding up the purple hangings of Imperialism, seem to me "needlewrought men"!

**

In this solemn crisis of the life of free nations, the people of Holland, seeing how a war has been forced upon the Boers by a policy, which you condemned when the Austrians did the same evil work in Italy, makes an appeal to the Sons of the Puritans, to their love of righteousness, to their freedom-loving heart.

For the sake of England's liberty, the development of your democracy and the true greatness of your nation — which in our youth we thought indispensable for freedom and self-government in Europe! — it is to be hoped that you will be beaten to the ground in this unjust, imperialistic war. It would be a blessing for England, yes, perhaps it would be your saving!

Do Englishmen not see where Mr. Chamberlain leads them?

Can the historical sense no longer be kindled in you?... do you not see where Imperialism leads you?

Do you not see what harm you do to all free nations, to all struggling nationalities, who once believed in English principles of government and looked up to you?

Now you repel those you once attracted! You do the work of Turks and act according to their principles.

You have killed in thousands of hearts the hope that better times were coming... you show that a free people under free institutions can be as full of envy, of malice, of injustice and vain glory as a long enslaved race.

By all the precedents of the past your rebellion against the principles of justice makes the nations anticipate your approaching fall.

I see, as Milton said, "a nation precipitate the downfall of a nation!"

Your terrible and arrogant selfishness brings you under the law of decay.

You will want to make a sultan of your King, before you know where you are, for Imperialism requires an all-powerful government... entails ruinous expense... breeds great armies and military insolence.

You will give the people beautifully coloured maps as
a substitute for liberty and selfrespect, and for a strong organisation you will make them sell their birthright.

When first I look at the new Imperialism and then at the noble mother of free parliaments, I revered in my youth, I say with Victor Hugo: "Cecí tuera cela!"

And before honorable Englishmen rejoice in the new Imperialistic broom,

"Sweeping... vehemently sweeping,
No pause admitted, no design avowed,"

I make an urgent appeal to them to investigate whether gamblers, playing for desperate stakes, are not amongst the loudest of Imperialists, whether the Transvaal is not to them just as Rhodesia a gaming table?

**\**

Are the Boers fools? Can't they read? What was it that Mr. Rhodes—their enemy, who wants their country to save Rhodesia—openly acknowledged?

"There will be peace," he said, "because Mr. Kruger, yielding to irresistible force, will climb down, and be obliged virtually to deliver the Transvaal into the hands of the Outlanders."

Well, the Boers do not belong to a race, that was ever inclined to climb down, and they knew besides how much weakness was concealed by all this bluffing with "irresistible force."

If you English did not want to force the Republic to war, you would have treated with contempt, "the agents provocateurs of Mr. Rhodes at the Gold Rand, the speculators, who deceived the English people."

You would not have broken a solemn convention by interfering in the internal affairs of "a foreign state", as Mr. Chamberlain rightly called the Transvaal after the Raid!

You would have prevented all the provocations and delays, which deepened the conviction of every statesman, answerable for the safety of both the Republics, that somehow and at any cost a quarrel would be fixed on them...

You would have felt how irritating and unjust it was, that not a penny of indemnity for the Raid was ever
paid... that arbitration, sought by Mr. Kruger, was constantly refused.

You would not have tried to force them under threats to admit to citizenship men, who wanted at the same time to remain subjects of the country, which the past and present of the Transvaal taught the Boers to regard as a covetous neighbour, whom they had strong reason to dread.

You would have understood why they preferred death on the battlefield to seeing the State they created rushed and captured by English voters, who could easily succeed where the Raid had failed!

**

No small State can be safe when its citizens, who till the ground and remain, may thus be outnumbered by foreigners, who settle for a few years in a mining centre.

Thus the absorption of Greece could be accomplished by Turkey, the Sultan following your example and demanding by threats political rights for his subjects.

How would Englishmen feel under such bullying? What would they do if the case were reversed?

The citizens of both the Republics understood the signs of the times and rightly and wisely armed themselves.

The Jameson Raid... the knowledge that the Colonial Office had been privy to the foul conspiracy... that travesty of justice: the sham inquest by the South African Committee at Westminster... the complicity of The Times... the proclamation by the Cape Times that “Jameson’s march will remain a glorious tradition of the Anglo-Saxon race”... the popularity of Dr. Jameson, who was at once set free for the sake of his precious health, which since seems to have remained in the most satisfactory state... your retaining Mr. Chamberlain as Minister and Mr. Rhodes as privy councillor... the bullying and threatening by Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Alfred Milner... the open instigators to war and revolt by the Rhodesian press convinced the Boers as well as the lifelong friends and admirers of England in Holland, that British fair play had been killed by an attack of Imperialism to the head... that the Jameson raid would soon be followed by a Chamberlain raid... that, unless
the Transvaal and Orange Freestate were thoroughly well armed their existence as independent Dutch republics would not be worth two pence halfpenny.

They and we foresaw what happened.

The war was forced on by the Gold-Rand press, its agents and owners... by your boastful indifference to the rights of others... by your ministry drifting to this abyss without will and foresight.

No convenant lays an obligation upon you, no convention restrains your diplomacy within bounds.

Where is the England of Gladstone and Bright?

If I write bitter things it is because my soul is bitter for the sake of a small nation, overwhelmed by an enormous State with spoilings, plunderings and conflagrations, with cruelty and wounds and sudden death,

“But English Metternich can fix no yoke unless the neck agree”.

I feel so helpless, for what is the good of all these reasonings?

Your Jingo-press after being defeated in argument always jumps back to its first assertion with that quiet, dull, unreasoning stubbornness of English people when they are in the wrong; which reminded one of your divines — I believe it was archbishop Whately — of a green baize door, which you try in vain to keep open, but which shuts again and again with a soft, resolute slam.

— “You may say what you like! The war was inevitable!”

Slam!

Well, if your Jingoes won’t give us an argument they might give us a song.

Now that it is proved that Mr. Chamberlain did not foresee the war, to which the Boers were coerced by himself, it seems probable that Mr. Kipling, who is fond of stirring subjects, will take as theme for one of his noisy, jolly, go-a-head, ringlet-jingle, rub-a-dub rhymes: The absent-minded minister!

And with his tambourine he may then beg for mercy for the minister, who is responsible for this war of greed, as he, a true poet, but whose rude vigour carries him away,
is responsible for the awakened love of brutal violence and coarse imperialism.

* * *

And now that your faults and sins and their consequences are irrevocable the pretty little invention has been patented in your government offices of an enormous African conspiracy as the cause of the war. Inventions take the place of arguments. "Ni cet excès d’honneur, ni cette indignité !"

After misleading the English nation into believing that the Boers are cruel slave drivers and blustering brutes, you suddenly make them too progressive, too imperialistic, too Jingo and commencement de siècle.

The "sinister intentions" of the Boers of the two republics are the same "sinister intentions", which made the Dutch under William of Orange fight the Spaniards till the last ditch for the independence of the United Provinces. They really did not want to conquer Spain!

The Boers are kin to the English of former times. They are Tories, conservative tillers of the land, who believe in God, love their Dutch Bible, their wives and children, their language, their self-government, their independence, and who are strengthened by their past to fight for their future. They hate Johannesburg, that city of the plain, and will not be governed by its goldwolves... their only ambition and ideal has always been to be let alone, and they began all their "treks" just for this reason.

Nothing is so absurd and childish as to make of a few thousand conservative married men and fathers, who till the ground and hate the towns, so many ambitious Dutch Rhodes's and Chamberlains, Jamesons and Beits! That way madness lies.

Leave them alone and they will leave you alone... with enthusiasm!

When I read the passionate pleading of the financiers of Rhodesia and of the newspapers, which have misled your people, for the absolute destruction of the Republics as independent States, and the incorporation of their territory in the British Empire, I wonder at the blindness of your patriots. "Quem Deus vult perdere" etc.
But before this suicidal idea has fastened irrecoverably on the English brain ... one question.

What makes these Dutch freemen, sons of freemen through the ages — so formidable?

Not the Boer armaments, but the armed Boer with his wiry horse and his unerring rifle!

You cannot disarm him ... you cannot prevent munitions of war reaching him!

Not his armaments, but the Boer himself with his self-control, his rifle and his cartridges withstood your murderous lyddite shells.

Do you really think you will make him less formidable by embittering him for ever, by robbing him of his independence and of the fatherland he won from the wilderness?

This is Jingo-madness!

* * *

And who are those that babble to the contrary?

They are vain and flashy men, whose covetousness and vainglory break through all restraints of religion and wisdom, and who with their fallacies and jugglings try to make out England's right to domineer and be imperious everywhere.

South Africa can only be saved from an endless repetition of the horrors of war and civil war by your doing the things which you have not done ... by your undoing the things which you have done ... by patience ... by not breaking solemn treaties ... by respect for an independent nation ... by not interfering with its internal affairs ... by kicking your financiers aside and by thus resettling every thing on a peaceful basis.

You may try to buy your Empire with silenced consciences and broken vows, but, as your great historian has observed: "I doubt whether it be possible to mention a State, which has, on the whole, been a gainer by a breach of public faith."

And such a breach is the quarrel you sought with the small state, with little David, whose sling brings your big body down.

I dare say this sounds very high flown to your very
practical business-patriots... but I believe my advice contains reasons of sound prudence.

By not thinking, by not searching their consciences, by simply and obstinately repeating what The Daily Mail and consorts say, jingopatriots certainly are spared the problem, which must constantly vex the hearts and brains of honest Englishmen! But woe to you, when these will at last begin to understand how their country began this murderous war, when they will feel oppressed by the sore misgiving that Dead-Sea-apples, full of ashes, are the imperial fruit, which Mr. Chamberlain has offered to his Queen and his country as a Christmas gift in the year of the Peace-Congress.

* * *

If only, instead of using Mr. Balfour's language of violent contempt towards an enemy, whose character, courage and sturdy love of his country and freedom appeal to all the generous hearts in the whole world, Englishmen tried to understand the old-English, the old-Dutch qualities and strength of the heroic Boers!

We know how you began this war. You wanted vengeance for Majuba. When disarmed Boers went down on their knees for mercy they were pinned to the ground by your lancers with the words: "You didn't show us any mercy at Majuba!" as if that fight had not been a fair fight!

Private F. Woliscroft (626), of the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifles, thus describes his first battle:

"When we charged the Boers with our bayonets those who did not get away went on their knees for mercy, and I can tell you they got it with a long hook!"

Lieutenant-colonel Dick Cunyngham of the Gordon Highlanders showed the same fire of hate and revenge, which inspired your soldiers as well as your poet Swinburne, by crying to his men: "exterminate the vermin... Charge!"

About the same first battle an other British officer writes:

"The most excellent pigsticking ensued for about ten minutes..... the bag being about sixty. One of our men, seeing two Boers riding away on one horse, stuck his lance through the two, killing both with one thrust."
Without a word of reproof *The Times* printed the 13th Nov. this noble tale! What a cruel hate of the Boers this shows!

**

Bravo! Mr. Kipling! Stalkey & Co., are at work! But if you English have to avenge all your defeats in South Africa with the same undisguised brutality wherewith they avenge Majuba, you will have your hands full in the new Century!

But what these savages and nearly the whole of your press — whose knowledge shames my ignorance! — seem to forget, is that the Dutch and British will have to live together in South Africa after this war... that the Dutch race outnumbers the men of British descent... that every one of these insulting and shamefull words of Mr. Balfour, the Marquis of Lorne, your press and officers will be recollected for ever afterwards... that the "damning" and blackguarding of the Dutch by your politicians and pressmen is the worst possible introduction to a harmonious life after the war.

The Burghers of the two Republics are of our race, they have a glorious descent from protestant heroes and martyrs, from gueux and Huguenots... they are of a tougher fibre than the Celtic Irish and French Canadians as you will experience if you try to make a New Ireland in the South!

Would it not be wiser to try to understand that race instead of persecuting and slandering it?

**

When the Boers began the great Trek, leaving Cape Colony to escape from English oppression, the English Governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, in a despatch recorded his opinion, that the *trek* was caused by "the insecurity of life and property occasioned by recent measures" and he described the Hollanders, who were trekking, as

"a brave, patient, industrious, orderly and religious people, the cultivators, the defenders, and the tax contributors of the country."

Persecuted by the English, they had a couple of times
to renew their weary trek into the desert, which again they cultivated, and now that their goldmines have attracted the goldwolves from everywhere, and they can’t trek any further, you have pressed them to the wall and forced upon them this war for their existence.

And yet they still deserve the same testimony, which Sir Benjamin once gave the emigrant farmers.

* * *

This is lucky for you, for you cannot do without them in South Africa!

The very same craving for excitement, the very same aversion to fieldlabour which drives your rural population to your large towns, drives your adventurers to the goldmines,... but they do not anymore till the land, they are birds of passage and many of them birds of prey at the same time.

The Dutch are the backbone of South Africa. If you weaken them you weaken Africa's future.

These “pioneers” — as Walt Whitman would call them with his strong hand in theirs, — these “pioneers” are the strength and the hope of the future Confederation of South Africa. You can not coerce them, you can not subdue them, as now you feel and as you will feel even more, if, like Pharaoh you harden your heart.

The Transvaal Volkslied, expresses what they feel in their hearts, what they think with their heads, what they do with their arms:

They drove the burgher northward
From Cape and Natal’s shores,
To where the bushman wanders,
To where the lion roars,
He found the land a desert,
He won it by his toil.
The men who till will keep it
Or die upon the soil.

Echo the strain from hill to plain,
Wherever the burghers stand;
Strong is the ward and stern the guard —
The guard of the burghers’ land.

* * *
I am a busy man at the head of a great daily paper, I have no time to write to you all that I long so say on the subject, of which my heart is full and English does not flow as rapidly from my pen as my own language. I endeavoured to be short in what I undertook to perform, and as a consequence how much I had to pass without taking notice of!

But before I end this letter I want so very much to impart to your Grace the conviction, that most certainly I feel no hate and no dislike for the great English nation, which will discover soon enough what terrible mistake was made by the policy of brute force.

In a life so diverse as ours I distrust generalisations. It is absurd to rail against a whole nation. Do not the sons of the puritans cherish righteousness? Does not Mr. John Morley hold up the standard of Gladstone? But even if I were inclined to generalise, the warm friendship which binds me to so many subjects of your noble Queen, would make me say of the English what Voltaire said of women:

"Je hais ce sexe en gros... je l'aime en détail!"

Besides, adversity suits you better than prosperity, and I think it a grand spectacle to see how your Regulars are now being reinforced by many of your Volunteers. The eager alacrity, with which they face the hardships of a war so far from home, is an inspiring proof, how a free people can take on its shoulders the duty, which their government so grievously neglected.

* * *

But could your statesmen and your press not leave to others a few adjectives for honouring British pluck?

It does not strike with awe the great amphitheatre of nations — now looking at your struggle and listening to your words — to witness your orators and journalists continually shrieking out "that Britons never, never shall be slaves!" while their fatherland is perfectly safe, is not invaded, is surrounded by an iron wall of men of war, while their troops fight at a comfortable distance of 6000 miles a very small people of farmers and peasants.

The coarse sound of that bragging makes us sick at
heart... it is not dignified. "You may do it ex tempore, for it is nothing but roaring!"

For the sake of English reputation you ought to appoint a censor for Bulletin-writers and Press-leaders as well as for Press telegrams!

What exaggeration about a war with a few thousands of armed farmers! And not even a picturesque exaggeration!

If you were at war with Russia, France and Germany combined, you could not show more desperate courage in your words!

The action of the Modder River, where you lost 4 0/ of your troops and did not succeed, your own general describes "as one of the hardest fought battles in the history of the British army!"

But if you read what the Germans did in 1870, when they sometimes lost 10 0/ of their men... but conquered the position they wanted, you will understand the smile with which we read abroad day after day, "that only British troops" could have done this or that.

You magnify yourselves and every thing in which you are concerned.

Your right hand shakes your left hand in passionate congratulations over the admirable spirit in which you bear your terrible reverses; you speak with manly resignation, as if your country was at death's door, but if now already you have your backs to the wall, fighting with set lips, unblanched cheeks and the dauntless lion hearted bravery which — as the whole universe knows — no nation but yours shows in times of national danger, I wonder what you would do if like that brave people of France, you saw your country invaded, your capital surrounded, your sovereign a prisoner, and your fortresses in the hands of the enemy!

** How hysterical you English have become! I do not recollect to have read in French and German papers in 1870 one tenth of all the blustering boasts with which day after day you incense your noble selves in England.
Surely your press does not rightly represent you in these days. It is as if the excitement and nervousness of the whole past century direct the pens of your journalists. I hear the whistle of engines, the click of the telegraph, the ringing of the telephone bell in their despatches and articles. They are not content to wait through some long and weary days for what competent men may write about your soldiers... to use a phrase of the Kaffir-circus: they are anxious "to realize" at once.

I thought I knew John Bull, but if your papers speak in his name, I ask: is this boasting, self-advertising fellow, who with puffed up cheeks blows his own brass trumpet, astonishing all military men abroad by the extravagance of his claims, our old friend the steady, sturdy squire, whose silent self-confidence made us respect him, and who by the quiet way he stood squarely on his strong legs gave us an impression of reserved power? Can anybody imagine the old John Bull mounting on a platform and trying, by continual loud assertion, to convince the whole universe that none but British troops could have stood up against the armed farmers?

We see Armadas with British troops going full speed on all the seas to smash two tiny nations.

John Bull is crying in despair "Help! Help!" in every place, where food and horses can be borrowed or taken; he knocks at the palace doors of native Indian princes, whose white teeth gleam in dusky faces, but all in vain.

For Nemesis has overtaken you.

The military prestige of England lies dead and nothing can give you glory in this war, even if at last, by numbers only, you crush on the battlefield the people that you never will subdue. Yours may be perhaps the honour to make an other Poland... but you cannot recover your military prestige unless you conquer in a war — somewhere else!... you cannot recover your honour unless you stop the unjust war, which ought never to have begun.

** * *
I do not like to copy the vapouring of your press about the courage of your soldiers.

It seems to me that people of your race and ours might take our soldiers' pluck for granted!

It is true we know in what insulting way the English always sneer at our "Dutch courage", but we quite understand that you do not really mean that taunt...

It is only one of the endearing insolent ways, which make the English so beloved among the Celtic Irishmen on the continent!

But if you want to know what Hollanders call courage, look at the trenches near Colenso.

I know few things so magnificent and solemn even in music as the mighty silence above the trenches near Colenso, where Boers and Burghers without discipline and training, who never had experienced what an artillery bombardment with lyddite means for poor humanity, kept cool as veterans of the great Napoleon, reserving their fire until the sign was given by their chief!

And of these grand fighters every male, capable of bearing arms is in the field... every woman will stand at the side or in the place of husband, father, son and brother, to fight to the death and to defend Pretoria as their forefathers defended Leiden.

If you believe you can conquer this people by brute strength, by overwhelming numbers and by many defeats however crushing, I respectfully draw your Grace's attention to Lord Chatham's words:

"Conquer the Americans... I might as well think of driving them before me with this crutch."

If you kill all the fighting men... their sons will afterwards show you the strength of a race, that cannot live if it is not free.

The whole young generation will wait for the right moment to be at you, always watching you: "sleepless with cold commemorative eyes".

* * *

I write this letter to your Grace on Christmasday, for though surrounded with children and grand-children, I cannot well spend a merry Christmas with the sound
ringing in my ears of your lyddite shells bursting in the midst of Dutch citizen-soldiers, nearly all married and fathers, and who have done you no harm.

Snow is falling, everything looks grey and sad... but sadder than anything is the thought of the thousands of English churches, where now will be sung God's message: "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men"... while in Africa you try to destroy a small protestant nation! The sense of contrast between precept and example is too awful!

I write this in the country: I hear the low moan of the winter-wind over the frozen Zuiderzee behind the swaying pines... the dusk of the atmosphere is darkened by flying snow and rain... white trees are glaring out into the wet gloom... And over the moving whiteness of the troubled snow there is a confusion of vanishing and reappearing forms as blast follows blast.

Am I haunted by the horrors of this war?
It is to me as if I saw before me a dying father with his dead son in his arms.

I cannot get away from before my eyes what I read in the letter of an English soldier employed in one of the bearer-companies:

"We were out looking after the wounded at night when the fight was over, when I came across an old, white-bearded Boer. He was lying behind a bit of rock supporting himself on his elbows.....

"I kept my eye on the old chap. But when I got near I saw that he was too far gone to raise his rifle. He was gasping hard for breath, and I saw he was not long for this world. He motioned to me that he wanted to speak, and I bent over him. He asked me to go and find his son—a boy of thirteen, who was been fighting by his side when he fell.

"Well, I did as he asked me, and under a heap of wounded I found the poor lad, stone dead, and I carried him back to his father. Well, you know I'm not a chicken-hearted sort of a fellow. I have seen a bit of fighting in my time, and that sort of thing knocks all the soft out of a chap.

"But I had to turn away when the old Boer saw his dead lad. He hugged the body to him and moaned over it, and carried on in a way that fetched a big lump in my throat. Until that very moment I never thought how horrible war is. I never wanted to see another shot fired. And when I looked round again the old Boer was dead, clasping the cold hand of his dead boy."
After reading this... after seeing this consequence of the war they made, I look at all those singing Imperialists in your churches to day with an inner blank sense of tingling and loathing.

* * *

What an English Christmas! While the desperate battle for food is waged by thousands in England and millions in India, you squander torrents of gold... for what? Expansion, extension, the colouring of maps blood-red in stead of the moral and social passion for doing good! What a Christmas!

I see your noble widdowed Queen during Christmas-service in Windsor-chapel trying to find comfort in the old but ever-new vision of Bethlehem. But lo, a sad procession of widdowed Boerwives is passing, ever passing along between Her Majesty and the Child Divine.

I see your noble old Queen afterwards looking from Windsor's towerwindow for the promised return of her conquering warriors from the fields from Over-sea... and instead of them H. M. sees bowing Mr. Chamberlain advancing up the avenue with apologies and explanations.

* * *

When will any British statesman put on again Gladstone's armour of light?

This Christmas your collective religion grins at us out of the blackness of the winternight.

Not since you fought in the Crimea in support of the Turk have you so grievously repudiated the Christian ideals as you do in this war, in which morally you are the aggressors.

"To gain the power in Africa is every thing... the means do not matter!" this is your Christmas-song as 1900 approaches, and the Archbishop of Armagh sings sweetly of "God forming noble natures under the war's red rain", which horrible image may illuminate your Christmas-cards this year.

What shall it profit you if you gain the whole of Africa and lose your own soul?
It is as if Christian hope and love and ideals lie dying with the century in Engeland.

L’Espérance humaine est lasse d’être mère,
Et, le sein tout meurtri d’avoir tant allaité,
Elle fait son repos de sa stérilité.

And the man who mumbles the beautiful lines of the Archbishop on his way to Church is Mr. Chamberlain, who tried to copy some of the bold statesmen, whose greatness he envies, but who used a blunderbuss instead of the thin stiletto of Macchiavelli.

Thanks to your Protestant nation trying to murder and destroy another Protestant nation in the mercenary name of a false, soulless Imperialism and of vain-glory and greed, you end this age — your Victorian age — in a sea of blood and in a flat denial of Christianity.

You make the end of this age much lower and meaner than the end of the 18th Century was.

You end it with a war not for an idea but for your financiers and gamblers. The peasants-war in Africa will be your disgrace through all the ages.

* * *

Believe a man, who really does not speak as an enemy of England..., who has some of his dearest relations and friends in England and Ireland..., who knows your people, your history and glorious literature..., whose ignorance is not due to want of knowledge of your language, and who has relied upon the fairness and nobility of your statesmen, till after the Jameson raid... believe me, do not try to substitute in the place of the four coloured flag — the flag of Holland with the hopeful green of a country, to whom the future belongs, added to it — do not try to substitute in the place of that flag the British colours.

If ever you do, the democracy of England will certainly curse you.

Listen to what all the free nations of Europe unanimously say, and what happily is more and more felt and expressed in the United States also.

They all send up prayers to God Almighty to decide the issue of this war according to righteousness.
Do you Englisch dare to join in that prayer? If really you dare, I hope that many sons of the Puritans will think of the burning words of Isaiah:

“When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.”

To your Grace the universal “condemnation and execration” of the wrong your government commits by this war is proof of the ignorance of the continental press, “the only source of its knowledge about South Africa being due to the information which is furnished by Dr. Leyds and his subsidized organs…”

I hear something different in that universal outburst of indignation, in the passionate prayer for the Republics of all the free Nations of this world.

“I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying:

“Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

With the highest respect, believe me, your Grace’s obedient servant

CHARLES BOISSEVAIN,

Director and Editor of the
Algemeen Handelsblad.

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