

Dr. W. J. LEYDS  
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SEPTEMBER 15<sup>th</sup>,  
A DAY OF TEARS, NOT ONLY IN  
SOUTH-AFRICA.

BY

F. C. FLEISCHER,  
Mennonite Minister at Broek op Langendijk.  
(HOLLAND.)

*Price 6 d.*

in behalf of the International Boer Women and  
Children's distress Fund Alcmaria.

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— 1901. —

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*Oh, that my head were waters and mine eye a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

*Jer. 9. 1.*

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We Dutchmen have at present to endure an unutterable grief, and sometimes a sudden burst of anxiety overcomes our hearts and we cannot any longer restrain our sorrow, we are forced to cry out before the world, even as the doe cries because of the wounds which cruel hounds have rent in her tender flesh.

We grieve that we do not speak the great languages of Europe, or, if we speak them, that we are not able to express in them our sadness with the same shudder and trembling as when using our mother-tongue.

History has its cruel humour.

Whilst this week closed in South-Africa the third episode of an abominable war and ushered in a time of still greater misery and still more tears a Peace Congress was held in the second and most industrious town of Scotland. Peace sermons were preached last Sunday at various churches in Glasgow and the neighbourhood. A Conference of Christian Churches met to discuss Peace and kindred topics from the Christian standpoint. Treasures of the deeper life, of Peace and Humanity have been brought to the light.

And now the week is ended all is swept away by the frightfulness of this fifteenth of September.

I think it is well, that the day begins at midnight. For the red of daybreak might seem to be the red of blushing. The beauty of sunshine is too good to welcome such a day of abomination.

Who can imagine how the morningsun, symbol of Truth and Happiness, was greeted to day in the Refugee-Camps of South-

Africa? O Sunshine, they have longed for you in the calm of a sleepless night and yet they feared for you, the 100.000 old men, women and children, crowded into cold, shivering, damp and dark tents where the helpless young child can not be properly cared for and cries in vain for food.

It would be a hideous irony if they should call this Sunday there a holiday of rest.

Is it a mere chance or is it on cruel purpose, that for this tyrant's date the dear Lords Day has been chosen?

Our hearts bleed for them in their distress.

Blood is thicker than water. Kinship in itself is something.

But more than our kinship speaks our sorrow, our anger because holy Justice has been violated, because might is above right, because of the violence done to children who are not yet boys, to feeling women, mothers, wives, brides, daughters, to old men worn out with age.

If we belonged to the Ancients, we would cover our faces, we would go in sackcloth and ashes and we would speak as Jeremiah :

*Oh, that my head were waters and mine eye a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

Our hearts bleed because of the misery this war causes.

We will not mention the unmeasured treasures swallowed up by this Idol and Destroyer, though there is much reason to do so.

For Great Britain alone lost in a war of not yet two years 125.000.000 p. st. Two years of war have absorbed the savings of half a century! The squandering of Crime! Sins always bring forth other sins!

We will not expatiate upon

A bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
Which, once destroy'd can never be supplied;

We wish not to speak with prolixity about our sympathy with the poet's grief, when he returned to the village of his youth and found it a mere desolation:



Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,  
 Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;  
 Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,  
 And desolation saddens all thy green:  
 One only master grasps the whole domain,  
 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain;  
 No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,  
 But, choked with sedges, works its weedy way;  
 Along thy glades, a solitary guest,  
 The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;  
 Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,  
 And tires their echoes with unvaried cries:  
 Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,  
 And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall;  
 And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,  
 Far, far away thy children leave the land.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

National credit may be restored, destroyed welfare may be regained.

But there are other wounds which cannot be healed, there is an other spoil which cannot be restored.

Not even God himself gives back killed fathers or mothers, husbands or sons. Poor children! poor wives, poor parents!

War is a licensed traffic in spilt human blood! Regimentals are its trade-marks!

More than 20,000 lives have been sacrificed on the side of the British, killed or broken for ever. How much on the side of their opponents? God only knows.

I trust that no politician even realised the fearful responsibility that rests on the men who make war. If so the remorse would be unendurable.

But I hope and pray that they all will ere long realise the dreadful fact of this responsibility. It will be the end of wars.

We are Christians and we make war upon our brethren? And we decline arbitration?

I once saw a strange picture. It showed the hill of crucifixion. Christ himself was wandering there in the pale moon-

light. Ghastly shadows surrounded the solitary wanderer. In the background three crosses, half sunken in the ground. Jesus seemed to be absorbed in thoughts. He stood sadly pondering. He was apparently questioning himself whether he had lived in vain and died in vain. It was a touching picture!

But where is the artist who could give us the image of Christ wandering about upon the battlefield, on the evening of such a fratricide as Elandslaagte, Modderrivier or Spioenkop? What mighty preaching would be in such a figure! Who could sound the deep pity, the violent grief, the complaining reproach in the noble features of his lofty face? The wounded Christ, pale, questioning, plunged into sorrow in the midst of wounded hosts!

And we are Christians? We are named after him!

*Oh that my head were waters and mine eye a fountain of tears!*

We do not mere complain of the horrors of war in general, but of this war as more dreadful and crying to heaven than the most revolting we could have feared.

In face of these horrors the significance of every inquiry as to the supposed rights of going to war fade away. Without any shrugging of shoulders we are disposed to listen to the assertion that there is no doubt, the Boers' intention was to overthrow the British power in South-Africa and to set up a Dutch republic in its place so that the war was a legitimate action of self-defense. And without judging we allow to the other party their plea that the war has been forced upon them in the interests of the shareholders of some gold and diamond mines. Who made us judges or dividers over you? we say.

But after abstaining from judgment we address the proud Government on the banks of the silvern Thames and our eyes are filled with sorrow and reproach and we say: Even entering this war for the maintenance of your Empire, even if it be undeniable that you have not been impelled by the arrogance of pride, the passion of revenge nor the lust of



gold, . . . . . for God's sake! What right have you to carry on this war as you do?

And we sum up our grievances, many and grave grievances.

Have you not armed your soldiers with dum-dum bullets, an inhuman crime, condemned by civilisation and martial laws? Did not your generals in the beginning of the war like Antiochus Epiphanes selecting the Lord's Day to attack the Boers and deliberately fall upon their camps when engaged in worship? Have you not like Tiglath Pilezer and Nebuchadnezzar carried off your prisoners of war into foreign regions? Have you not burned down their farms and destroyed their furniture and sullied the food of their children? Have you not confined their women and children and old men in camps, where the mortality is disproportional and where you surpassed your own cruelty by cheating them out of a part of their indispensable food as a punishment for their unbroken character? Did you not gather the most distinguished inhabitants of Pretoria to attend a military concert while the remains of Transvaal's first woman were to be buried? Did you not proclaim patriotic citizens rebels before they had ceased to be belligerents? Was this all right or becoming? I despise to ask if it were the wise way to prepare for the future. And have you not just now condemned to everlasting banishment whoever prefers to abide by his oath of allegiance to his own country? Have you not threatened to reclaim the cost of the maintenance of the families of all burghers in the field from their bread-earners and to put as a charge upon their spoiled properties? A heavy payment for the poor man, disowned by your strategy! Have you not appointed the burghers of Pretoria to protect with the shield of their bodies your iron-coated trains? If you are in want of a precedent, it is not quite your invention but the invention of Cambyzes, who was called the tyrant of Egypt, before history knew the crime of Omdurman.

And those whom you fight against are said to be kind for your wounded soldiers and prisoners of war and to be respectful for your deads!

Your warfare is not only bad, it is hideous!



„Oh yes”, you try to justify your politics, „but war is war. *Inter arma leges silent!* In wartime there is no law at all! The military commander is a law to himself and his sole and single will is the law of all within his sphere of influence. A cruel war might be a clement war. At any rate it is a wise war. And to speak of *civilised warfare* is but to use an absolute contradiction in terms.”

You may be right and yet this is but one of those shallow sophistries which are so misleading: a half-truth being often more mischievous than a whole untruth.

If there are no laws of war, why did you accept the Geneva Rules and the Brussels convention and the Hague Arbitration Treaty? Why do you apologize for having fired upon the Red Cross and having disregarded a white flag?

It was Sir John Ardagh himself, who proposed on behalf of Great Britain that the Hague Conference should adopt the following clause to the „Convention relating to the Laws and Customs of War on Land”: Nothing in this chapter shall be considered as tending to lessen or suppress the rights which belong to the population of an invaded country to fulfil its duty of opposing the invaders by all lawful means with the most energetic, patriotic resistance.

And Great Britain’s field-marshal proclaimed patriotic citizens rebels and ruffians!

Art. 5th of the Hague Convention, ratified by the British Government at the time of this war, prescribes: Prisoners of war can only be confined as an indispensable measure of safety.

And Great Britain confines prisoners of war in State-prisons, in men of war and on lonely islands, St. Helena, Ceylon, Bermuda!

Art. 44th runs: Any compulsion of the population of occupied territory to take part in military operations against its own country is prohibited.

And Lord Kitchener of Khartum appointed the burghers of Pretoria to accompany by turns the iron clad trains to be fired upon their countrymen!

Art. 46th stipulates: Family honours and rights, individual lives and property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated.

And in the Transvaal and Orange Free State individual property is confiscated and spoiled, families are dispersed, churches are deprived from their ministers!

And therefore Great Britain appears to stand before the world as the great violator of the humanities of the international code of warfare to which it was party!

I wish not to refer to Great Britain's love for the world's Saviour. Her humiliation would be too great.

I wil only refer to Great Britain's pride in one of her greatest sons: the „grand old man”, Gladstone. During an other wretched war, he said: „*Now I confess that I believe in war as well as in peace, the great matter is that you should be just.*”

In these words, I fancy, will be found enough judgment and condemnation.

Meanwhile the victims of these injustices accumulate in three parts of the world: Africa, Asia, America. Sad victories of shameless superiority! And the few who are still free, wander about, deprived of all their property, with nothing but their Bible, their horse and their Mauser.

Their Bible says: *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.*

And: *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them, which despitefully use you and persecute you.*

They have of course heard these words and understood them. This is the only explanation of their admirable fidelity to the principles of humanity whilst there is so much which could persuade them to felony. It is especially in account



of this trait of character that their misery goes to our heart.

And meanwhile their wives and little children are sighing in the fatal Refugee camps and their gray fathers die and their infants perish. And these do not know where their husbands are and their fathers and their sons. They do not even know whether their dear ones are still alive at all. And they look to heaven with their true eyes and sigh for deliverance but there is no deliverance, there is no rest from fear.

At Kimberley, it has been related, several Dutch girls dismissed by their pro-English employers have been driven to the broad way of prostitution. Malay women are said to be their bawds. In one of the suburbs 300 children have been born out of wedlock, since the coming of the troops. Oh this abominable war! It makes us sick for sadness. *Oh that my head were waters and mine eye a fountain of tears!*

We are grieved also by the degeneration which this war causes in countries and amongst peoples, far away from the actual scene of strife.

We are especially grieved by the degeneration of noble Old England itself.

*How are the mighty fallen! None calleth for justice! The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it.*

The English people, the „most Christian of nations” as it likes to be named, professedly a peace-loving nation, allows itself to be kneaded by her rulers like clay and was the first to go to war after the Imperial Peace manifesto!

Great Britain for a long time the bulwark of freedom and humanity throughout the world, Great Britain great because she was the home of liberty, because the weak, the small and the oppressed never appealed to her sympathies in vain, because she strove after one sublime ideal: to give to the world freedom, wherever the British flag floats and equal rights for all men under that flag; Great Britain is falling, and it is painful to see, how deep a great nation falls when undermined by the fever of Imperialism. In the eyes of the great mass of the peoples the shameful events of the present war

have entirely effaced her glorious past and this is a matter of deep and sincere compassion.

Great Britain is falling and falls from within, her heart is sick.

The moral consequences of this war are perhaps even more fatal to the conqueror than to the brave people whose nationality is to be destroyed.

All war has a tendency to demoralise those who are engaged in it. If the occupation of a part of France by the German armies had lasted a few years longer, the youth and the future of Germany would most likely have been lost. A people cannot day by day witness new atrocities without the worst consequences. It is growing familiar with such scenes. As the prisoner of Chillon grew friends with his chains so that he hardly could enjoy his regained liberty, a people gets accustomed to its sins. Morally entangled it loses the power to distinguish between its vices and virtues.

Lord Roberts himself is an example of this degeneration. He is asserted to be a kindly and chivalrous man. Towards Cronjé he was behaving as a nobleman. The first proclamation he issued at Pretoria was severe but in accordance with civilized usages of war. But in his second proclamation he already threatened to burn down the farms of all within the territories declared to be occupied by the British army who gave shelter to an armed Boer. He threatened with deportation those who would decline to swear to remain neutral and to shoot any person who would not inform a British commander of any movement of the Boer forces that might come to his knowledge. So war in a short time corrupts a good natured and wise man. If it does these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

We remember further an Anglo-Indian newspaper which urged that the Boers should be treated like „vermin"! An other paper, a London paper, „the Pall Mall Gazette" commenting on the rumour that Lord Kitchener had given orders „to take no prisoners" remarked that it „would like to believe it!" Even the sovereignty of free speech has been overthrown by the tyranny of mobrule. And Ministers of the Crown have



condoned acts of lawless violence and brutal ruffianism! We remember the spirit of equity, magnanimity and forbearance, the pride of the British nation in its glorious days, which Jingoism has devoured as a cheap prey.

*How the mighty are fallen!*

I lately observed in a London bookseller's shop near Trafalgar Square a copy of „the Holy Bible” bound in *Khaki* and with the *Union Jack* stamped on the cover! It is dreadful indeed! What would Horatio Nelson have said of it! And how would Gordon, the stainless knight and Christian, have grieved at it!

No wonder indeed that honest patriots, although they hope for the best of their country, fear for the future and lose all hope of any better glory in the judgment of posterity than the glory England reaped by the burning of Joan of Arc.

Do not suppose that all this does not matter us foreigners. For it would be a terrible disaster to civilisation itself were Great Britain to go under so swiftly and so shamefully. Great Britain, Protestant England, is too good and too strong to act the part of Spain!

We are not only sorry at the degeneracy of England. We are sorry too at the unfeelingness of other Governments. It makes us sad to think in what hands the destiny of Europe has fallen. Portugal has openly violated International Law. Russia preaches glorious virtues and practises rotten sins. The German Kaiser is an enigma.

Oh the politics of the great powers!

For the sake of one or two missionaries they claim a town. For the sake of an imperial ambassador they go to war unto the uttermost parts of earth.

But, when a Christian people is going to be murdered by Christians even the mouth which is hardly able to be silent does not speak a single word. And when an old man, bent and broken, asks to be listened to, he is to be rejected when hardly past the frontiers. A prince by birth seems to be unable to excuse a mistake of etiquette committed by a commoner! A strange superiority, that of nobility!

How safe it is for Christians to be oppressed by Moslems or Buddhists, by Turks or Chinese, by Barbarians or half barbarians! Then there is at least to be found sympathy in the government circles of Christian Europe! Then there is some opportunity to be delivered. But when Christians put their knife to the throat of Christians there is no compassion, no deliverance, not even a word of encouragement!

We grieve too at the backwardness of the Christian Churches to do the work of Christ. Their attitude undoubtedly is the most surprising and alarming of all. This time at least they ought to take unanimously the part of Peace and Justice. The Judgment of God is against all war, for God is Love and all men are the children of his love. And those who are taught to pray „Our Father in Heaven” are not justified in such hellish work against their brethren. „War”, said General Grant „is Hell”. And he knew war by sad experience.

The Churches however for the most part have lost a rare opportunity to show that *the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*. Among the leaders of the great movement for Peace I find Frederic Harrison the positivist, the agnostics Herbert Spencer, and John Morley, but the whole bench of bishops has been with hardly a single exception on the side of bloodshed.

Matsumura Kaiseki, a Japanese, wrote not long ago: „To the Oriental Christian there seems to be something absolutely contradictory between the Gospel preached by the missionaries and the action of their Governments”. And nevertheless the Churches for the most part are on an especially good footing with these Governments. And with good reason Max Nordau, the Jew, writes scornfully: „The Church does not seem to see that it is blasphemy to ask of the God of love to look with favour upon murder and destruction”.

We are sorry too at the militant lower class.

When anywhere a labourer is dismissed and exposed to starvation, his comrades throw down their tools and troop together with threatening faces full of challenging pride and hoarded up hatred.



But now that a whole people is wronged and starving, they remain quiet, they talk about it and infinitely talk; they meet at night and cheer every word by which capitalism is cursed because of its hellish triumphs. . . . and the next morning they meekly resume their daily task. Are they their brothers' keepers? Let the women suffer! Let the children suffer! Let the old men suffer! What is that to them?

Most likely our words will be in vain. Those who need regeneration scarcely attend the preaching of purification. We are aware of it.

But sometimes there is an outcry of sorrow which cannot be kept back.

— all words are idle.—

Words from me are vainer still;  
But the thoughts we cannot bridle  
Force their way without the will.

Our eyes look towards the mountains, which rise to the west if perhaps there may be some morning-light which the easterly ridges still cover. But there is no light on the tops. Great Britain's noblest victory over pride and passion is long in coming.

How long shall we still hear *the cry of the daughter of my people from a far country?*

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician? Why is my wound incurable?*

Our grief is so painful because incomprehensible.

How can a man understand its own way?

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his way past finding out!*

We will not strive with our Maker!

We will try to believe that all ought to be as it is, but we strive at this conviction with the same sorrow as when we strive at submission at the death-bed of our beloved. We rely upon the Lord's love but we do not understand.

This darkness may some time clear up.

The throes of the future are violent and cruel.

It will perhaps appear from the future that we do not pay  
an unreasonable price.

But at present we wander in darkness and grief.

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