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Frankenstein 1877
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THE TRANSVAAL CRISIS.

By FREDERIC HARRISON.

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As I write there seems a serious danger that our country may be dragged into a war as iniquitous and as pregnant with evil as any waged within this century. If the country were not intoxicated with the craze of Imperialism, it would recognise the preposterous—nay, the comical—nature of the pretext on which war is justified. It is not easy to recall a ground of war between civilised nations in modern days so grotesque as the British demand from a foreign power to take over our own subjects more quickly than it now does. Wars have often arisen on the complaint of a State that its citizens are treated as if they had abandoned allegiance to their native country; but here the complaint is that a foreign State does not assist British subjects to get rid of their allegiance. It is like quarrelling with a neighbour because he declines to burden his own house with any more of your children. The neighbour has already given house-room to many of them, and has taken some of them into his own family with full rights of inheritance. He has found them unruly cubs and dangerous rivals of his own flesh and blood. He is pressed to take on the whole lot at once. And because he demurs you tell him to fight it out.

The other grounds for war are too flimsy to bear discussion except in the Rhodesian press. The sole and essential ground put forth in the official papers and speeches is the free admission of Outlanders to the Transvaal suffrage. In other words, it is the demand on the Pretorian Government to transfer the allegiance of thousands of Britons to itself. Was ever any freak of Imperialism so grotesque as that of going to war in order to force a friendly power to turn loyal subjects of our Queen—our own fellow-citizens—into aliens

and Republicans? And this is called the consolidating of the Empire and the maintenance of our Imperial predominance! The British Empire is to be strengthened by doubling the adult male citizens of a stubborn and warlike Republic, which we declare has been for years past both unfriendly and dangerous! It is plain that the 20,000 Britons, with whose allegiance our Queen is represented as so anxious to dispense, whom she insists at great risk and cost must be turned into alien Republicans, liable to fight against her, if war arose in the future, these 20,000 Britons are really to be thrust into the South African Republic in order to play traitors to their new allegiance, if admitted as Boers, or if they are not admitted, to afford a specious ground for annexing the Republic in arms. It is a bare-faced policy of *grab*—either to grab by political intrigue, or (as is hoped) by war on refusal of the Boer Government to accept dictation.

There are some other grounds of war from time to time suggested; but they are so flimsy from the point of view of serious politics and public law that they may be dismissed. In justice to the Imperial officials, at the Cape and at home, it must be said that these grounds are not seriously urged except *ad captandum* and *in odium*, to decorate a rhetorical despatch or a platform speech. It is admitted (1) that the Transvaal is for its internal law and constitution self-governing and not amenable to British control; (2) that the Convention of 1884 has not been infringed. These things admitted, any threat to the Transvaal to alter its fundamental constitution and recast its franchise law is as preposterous in justice and as repugnant to international law as if the threat were addressed to Germany or France. The only difference is that the Transvaal is a small State, which for years has been greedily coveted by speculators and buccaneers.

The rhetorical grounds for threats of war put forward by these men and their agents will not bear serious examination. That British emigrants have not quite such easy times at Johannesburg as they have in Colorado or the Argentines may be true; but if they find the conditions too hard they can come away. No one pretends that British subjects in the Rand are treated with anything like the denial of justice and protection that negroes and even Italians find in some of the United States. There is gross injustice and a corrupt police in

Spain, in the Balkans, in Russia; in all these and in many Asiatic and African lands British emigrants have grievances. But we don't think of declaring war on Spain, Turkey, or Russia, demanding that our subjects in these countries must at once be offered the national franchise. The administration of justice, the protection of life and property is far worse than it ever was in the Transvaal in many lands—such as Morocco, Persia, China, and many South American Republics. But no one dreams of reforming these States by war, for the reason that we should think twice before undertaking such a risk. At the present time British merchants and adventurers fare worse in Portuguese, or Belgian, or French territories in Africa than they do in the Rand. Their outcries do not move the Foreign Office, which knows that threats of war in their cause would mean European complications. British speculators have to put up with what they find at Delagoa Bay, violently as we want to seize it. The risk of seizing it is too great—as yet. The risk of seizing the Transvaal is supposed to be not excessive. As to that we shall see.

The grievances about education, rotten finance, corrupt officials, restrictions on meetings, the press and the telegraph, monopolies, and industrial ordinances and taxation are mere nonsense—as grounds for a *casus belli*. Some of them are very real grievances, and some of them are scandalous. But most of them exist in various countries, some of them in European countries—some even in our own country. It is not denied that many of the internal laws and ways of the Boers are exceedingly prejudicial to British emigrants in the Rand. Some of these were purposely so made to keep British emigrants out. Chinese coolies find the same thing in Australia and in Colorado. It is not denied—least of all by President Kruger—that the British Government is entitled to remonstrate, and its friendly offices have now been respectfully heard. No one complains that the Imperial Government has used its good offices with all the power of friendly urgency it can command. We do not complain of this. The reforms have been to a great extent conceded by the Boers. We hope the Imperial and Republican Governments may yet find a *modus vivendi*. But all this is short of any *casus belli*. There is a broad gulf in justice and in law, between remonstrances addressed to a friendly power,

and war or threats of war. To attempt anything of the kind with a great Power would be insane folly fit only to raise a laugh. To attempt it towards a small Power, which we have more than once sought to crush and to absorb is wickedness of a very mean sort. It is simple spoliation, based on a falsehood.

No one denies that there are many things in the political and social system of the Transvaal which need reform. There are many such things in various countries, and not a few in our own. We have no special interest or affection for the Boer community, except as a curious archaic survival, and we cannot suppose that a society so intractable to modern life can remain in permanent isolation from European civilisation. The European Outlanders in the Transvaal may have a very strong case in their struggle against the primitive conditions of Boer habits. But they and we have to remember that the Boers went forth under sufferings and sacrifices to find in the desert a free field for their primitive life; which, but for the *auri sacra fames*, no one would have disturbed. The accident of discovering goldfields in the Rand has led to unexpected complications. These the foreign immigrants must settle as best they can. But for Great Britain to make these complications a pretext for destroying the independence of the Transvaal, and finally absorbing it in the British Empire (for that is what war must come to), this is a flagrant case of spoliation of the weak by the strong.

The Jingo Press is full of a ground of war which sounds plausible enough in articles, but is quite rotten in international law as a *casus belli*. We are constantly told that Great Britain is the paramount Power in South Africa. If this means that it has the largest territory, the greatest population and wealth, the widest interests of any power in South Africa, it is true enough. If it means that Britons regard themselves as far more important than any other people in that continent, it is also true. But the same may be said of many other powers in various parts of the earth. Germany naturally claims all this in the lands of the Rhine and the Elbe. But this gives her no title to dictate to the internal constitution of Denmark or Holland. France claims to be the paramount power in North-West Africa—but she does not as yet attempt to reform Morocco or Tripoli. Russia claims to be the

paramount power in Eastern Europe; but we do not admit her claim to settle matters in the Balkan States. The United States may call themselves the paramount power in the West Indies, but neither England nor France admit their claim to interfere in Jamaica or Guadeloupe. The claim to be the paramount power (in the absence of international treaties) is a matter of national swagger. It has no meaning in law, and gives no just ground for war or threats of war. No foreign power formally admits that Great Britain is *the* paramount power in South Africa, neither Germany, nor France, not even Portugal, or Holland. They might admit that it was the biggest or the strongest. But to be the biggest and the strongest gives no title to a State to dictate, interfere, and coerce the internal affairs of their small neighbours. If it did, what would become of Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Servia and Roumania, Montenegro and Greece? All the best traditions of British foreign policy have been centred in efforts to prevent the assertion by so-called paramount powers of domination over their weak neighbours. And it was a melancholy day for England when a British minister was heard to repeat this clap-trap sophism about the right of the paramount power—in other words bigness—as constituting a *casus belli*; for he thus threw aside the most honourable traditions of our statesmen, and opened the door to the old robber maxims of “*Might is Right*,” and “*Let him take who can*.”

The Liberal Party, it must be said, have shown miserable apathy and cowardice throughout this affair.

The official leader of the Opposition early in the crisis formally and positively stated that in his opinion, there was no ground for preparations for war or for threats of war. That opinion he repeated as distinctly in one of the last sittings of the House. But this was not enough. He and his party sat by for months and have seen preparations for war and hardly veiled threats of war. And they have done nothing more, in Parliament or in the country. But to suffer in silence the nation to be dragged and misled into an unjust war, is a frank betrayal of the duties of an Opposition. If, as they formally declared they could see no grounds for war, their duty was to rouse the country to be no parties to so odious a crime, so

sinister an adventure. If the majority were too strong to make resistance possible in Parliament, they should have appealed to the country as their party have often done before. They did nothing, beyond officially committing themselves to a formal disapproval. They even left their places in Parliament before the final debate. It is pretended that the Liberal party as a whole acquiesced in the action of the Colonial Office. They did nothing of the kind as the Colonial Office will find in its hour of difficulty. After their formal protests the Liberal party could not acquiesce. They are lying in wait to denounce the government, if any humiliation awaits this intrigue, and to take advantage of any disaster which may chance to befall the adventurous minister. To such a point has Liberal policy sunk.

We all know the cause of this apathy. The country has been violently excited by the organised agents of the speculators and buccaneers. The Jingo boom runs strong, and public opinion has been bebauched by swagger and lust of blood more deeply than in the memory of two generations. Official Liberalism had not the nerve to face this rowdyism, to do what Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bright, Mr. Forster, and others did of old. They chose rather to keep what they could save of popular approval and to watch for some blunder or disaster to give them a chance. But what were Sir W. Harcourt and Mr. Morley doing? They had cut themselves free of party entanglements: they were free to speak out. A criminal war, destined no doubt to strain the Empire to its foundations, certain to embroil South Africa for a whole generation, is a thing more important than incense and candles in a church; more important and certainly more urgent than a biography of Mr. Gladstone. It is a pity that his follower should be writing about what Mr. Gladstone did instead of helping to do what Mr. Gladstone would have done.

There is another body of men who may yet make war impossible. It would be unjust to charge the honest Afrikanders of Cape Colony with apathy or cowardice. But there remains much for them to do. They hold the lawful ministry at the Cape, with a working majority in its Parliament, and the certainty of increasing that majority if they appeal to their constituents. They have done much to neutralise the rhetoric of the Governor and the arrogance of the Colonial Office.

They have much more to do. They can make war impossible. It is ridiculous to talk to them about loyalty and patriotism. Their loyalty is to their own race, and their families, their homes : their patriotism is to South Africa where they were born and bred, and where their descendants will live. And their true duty is to save that land of their fathers and their children from being soaked in blood and torn in feuds to serve the greed and the ambition of foreigners in another hemisphere.

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