

A HISTORY OF THE TRANSVAAL

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A history of the Transvaal by H. Rider Haggard

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1900

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

It has been suggested that at this juncture some students of South African history might be glad to read an account of the Boer Rebellion of 1881, its causes and results. Accordingly, in the following pages are reprinted portions of a book which I wrote so long ago as 1882. It may be objected that such matter must be stale, but I venture to urge, on the contrary, that to this very fact it owes whatever value it may possess. This history was written at the time by one who took an active part in the sad and stirring events which it records, immediately after the issue of those events had driven him home to England. Of the original handful of individuals who were concerned in the annexation of the Transvaal by Sir Theophilus Shepstone in 1877, of whom I was one, not many now survive. When they have gone, any further accurate report made from an intimate personal knowledge of the incidents attendant on that act will be an impossibility; indeed it is already impossible, since after the lapse of twenty years men can scarcely trust to their memories for the details of intricate political occurrences, even should they be

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prompted to attempt their record. It is for this reason, when the melancholy results which its pages foretell have overtaken us, that I venture to lay them again before the public, so that any who are interested in the matter may read and find in the tale of 1881 the true causes of the war of 1899.

I have written "which its pages foretell." Here are one or two passages taken from them almost at hazard that may be thought to justify the words:

"It seems to me, however, to be a question worthy of the consideration of those who at present direct the destinies of the Empire, whether it would not be wise, as they have gone so far, to go a little farther, and favour a scheme for the total abandonment of South Africa, retaining only Table Bay. If they do not, it is now quite within the bounds of possibility that they may one day have to *face a fresh Transvaal rebellion, only on a ten times larger scale*, and might find it difficult to retain even Table Bay."

And again: "The curtain, so far as this country is concerned, is down for the moment on the South African stage; when it rises again, there is but too much reason to fear that it will reveal a state of confusion which, unless it is more wisely and consistently dealt with in the future than it has been in the past, may develop into chaos."

One more quotation. In speaking of the various problems of South Africa, I find that I said that "unless they are treated with more honest intelligence, and

on a more settled plan than it has hitherto been thought necessary to apply to them, the British taxpayer will find that he has by no means heard the last of that country and its wars."

Perhaps in a year from the present date the British taxpayer will be in a position to admit the value of this prophecy.

Nearly two decades have gone by since these words were written. Put very briefly, what has happened in that time? In 1884, at the request of the Transvaal Government, the Ministry, of which the late Lord Derby was a member, consented to modify the Convention of 1881, and to substitute in its place what is known as the London Convention. This new agreement amended the terms of the former document in certain particulars. Notably all mention of the suzerainty of the Queen was omitted, from which circumstance the Boers and their impassioned advocates have argued that it was abrogated. There is nothing to show that this contention is correct. Mere silence does not destroy so important a stipulation, and it appears to be doubtful whether even a Lord Derby would have been prepared to nullify the imperial rights of his sovereign and his country in this negative and novel fashion. It is more probable to suppose that had such action been decided on, effect would have been given to it in direct and unmistakable language. But even if it could be proved that this view of the case is wrong, the general issue would scarcely be affected.

That issue, as I understand it, is as follows: The Convention of 1881 guaranteed to all inhabitants of the Transvaal equal rights—"Complete self-government subject to the suzerainty of her Majesty, her heirs and successors, will be accorded to the *inhabitants of the Transvaal territory*"—Mr. Kruger explaining verbally at a meeting of the conference, that the only difference would be that in the case of young persons who became resident in the Transvaal, there might be some slight delay in granting full burgher privileges, limited, it would appear, to one year's residence.¹ After that time, then, according to the terms of this solemn agreement, which in these particulars were not modified or even touched, by the supplementary and amending paper of 1884, any one who wished to claim the advantages of Transvaal citizenship might do so.

Some years later an event occurred fated profoundly to influence the destinies of South Africa, namely, the discovery of the Witwatersrand gold deposits, perhaps the richest and the most permanent in the whole world. Instantly adventurers, most of them of Anglo-Saxon origin, flocked in thousands to the place where countless wealth lay buried in the earth, and on the plains over which I have seen the wild game wander-

¹ In 1881, when the Convention was being discussed, President Kruger was asked by our representative what treatment would be given to British subjects in the Transvaal. He said, "All strangers have now, and will always have, equal rights and privileges to the Burghers of the Transvaal."—*Quotation from Speech of MR. J. CHAMBERLAIN, June 26, 1899.*

ing, sprang up the city of Johannesburg with its motley and cosmopolitan population, its speculators, company promoters, traders, miners, and labouring men.

To the Transvaal, at any rate in the beginning, the arrival of these wealth-engendering hordes was what the fall of copious rain is to the sun-parched veld. By this time the country was once more almost bankrupt, but now, as though by the waving of a magician's wand, money began to flow into its coffers. One of the characteristics of the Boer is his hatred of taxation; one of his notions of terrestrial bliss is to live in a land where the necessary expenses of administration are paid by somebody else, an advantage, I understand, that among all the civilised nations of the earth is enjoyed alone by the inhabitants of the Principality of Monaco. It is not usual, either in the instance of communities or individuals, that such ideals should be absolutely attained. Yet to the fortunate possessors of the South African Republic this happened. For quite a long period they lived at ease in their dorps and on their farms, while the dwellers at Johannesburg, delving like gnomes in the reefs of the Rand, provided them with magnificent and never-failing supplies of cash. Then questions began to arise, as they will do in this imperfect sphere. The Uitlanders, as the strangers were called, remembering the terms of the Conventions, drawn under a very different condition of affairs but still binding, hinted at a wish for burgher rights.

The Boers, who if they liked their money objected to the money-makers, instantly took alarm. If the vote were given to the Uitlanders it was obvious that very soon they would outnumber the original electors. Then in a natural, but to them terrifying, sequence would come a redistribution of the burdens of taxation, the abolition of monopolies, the punishment of corruption, the just treatment of the native races, the absolute purity of the courts, and all the other things and institutions, in their eyes abominable, which mark the advent of Anglo-Saxon rule. Behind these also loomed another danger, that of the ultimate reappearance of the English flag. So legislation was resorted to, and bit by bit the Uitlanders were stripped of the rights inherent to their position as "inhabitants of the Transvaal territory," till at last none were left to them at all. Indeed Press laws were passed and other enactments controlling the privilege of free speech and public meetings. Of course had the British Government put down its foot firmly and at once at the first symptom of a desire on the part of the Boers to whittle away such advantages as the Conventions secured to our fellow-subjects, the present sad situation need never have arisen. But British Governments are seldom fond of doing things at the right time, more especially if the issue is not sufficiently distinct to be appreciated by the masses of the electorate. Therefore matters were allowed to drift, and they drifted