

**THE TRANSVAAL WAR: A  
LECTURE DELIVERED IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
ON 9TH NOVEMBER, 1899**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649278435

The Transvaal war: a lecture delivered in the University of Cambridge on 9th November, 1899  
by J. Westlake

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Cover @ 2017

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**J. WESTLAKE**

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# THE TRANSVAAL WAR

A LECTURE

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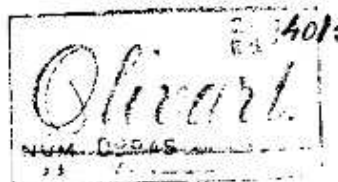
ON 9TH NOVEMBER, 1899,

BY

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SECOND EDITION.



London: C. J. CLAY AND SONS,  
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS WAREHOUSE,  
AVE MARIA LANE,

Glasgow: 163, ARGYLE STREET.

1899

Cambridge:

PRINTED BY J. AND C. F. CLAY,  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Having secured a good shorthand report, I have preferred to throw any further observations into the form of notes. To incorporate them with the text, and thereby turn the lecture into an essay, would have tended to make it less clear that even with their addition my scope has not been to treat the subject exhaustively, but only in a manner suitable to a lecture.

J. W.

## THE TRANSVAAL WAR.

IF a Greek or Roman writer had to tell the story of a war, he usually took some opportunity at its commencement to throw the views and motives of the parties into the form of set speeches, supposed to have been delivered by their statesmen or generals. No better occasion of the kind was ever invented than that which in sober fact presented itself in the last days of May and the first days of June this year, when Sir Alfred Milner, the Queen's High Commissioner for South Africa, and Mr Kruger, the President of the South African Republic, met in conference at Bloemfontein. You know in a general way that at that time there were great complaints of grievances suffered by Uitlanders, or foreigners, in the South African Republic, of whom the larger proportion were British subjects, and that those grievances, which I shall mention more particularly later, had their foundation in the steady resolve of the Dutch government of that republic to maintain the Dutch language and the Dutch social and political system, including their methods of treating the natives. Now at the commencement of that conference Sir Alfred Milner said that he asked for the franchise, that is the power of voting for the election of the volksraad or parliament, for the Uitlanders, together with such an increase to the number of seats enjoyed by the Rand, the district where the gold mines are situated, as would give the Uitlanders a substantial representation in the volksraad.



And he asked that distinctly not as a claim of right; he put it as a friendly suggestion, which would cut the root of the grievances complained of by giving the Uitlanders the power of looking out for themselves in the volksraad. It was a short way out of a great difficulty, that of dealing with all the particular cases of grievance in detail. Sir Alfred Milner tried to induce President Kruger to agree to his demand by pointing out to him that it would secure the independence of his country, because any motives for attack upon that independence which might exist would cease. President Kruger was equally clear in the manner in which he met that suggestion. He said that the effect would be to swamp the Dutch population. I should have said that Sir Alfred Milner put forward his suggestion not as though the numerical majority, which at present is with the Uitlanders, should immediately have a corresponding majority in the volksraad, but that they should at once have a substantial representation, and then, being able to fight their own battles, the increase of their number in the volksraad would follow in the natural course of things, just as we find in our own country the increase of representation of any class in parliament grows with the growth of its numbers and importance in the country. President Kruger went at once to the ultimate result. It was indifferent to him that the change was to be introduced gradually: he fixed and clung to the fact that it would only end, and in fact was meant to end, in the swamping of the Dutch population by Uitlanders. He said "we might just as well throw up the republic,"... it "would be worse than annexation." Independence preserved in that manner he regarded as "independence lost." He showed plainly that what he was contending for was not the mere independence of the South African Republic as a certain territory outlined by a coloured border on the map, within which no outside power was to interfere; what he valued under the name of its independence was the

preservation of its peculiar language and social and political system. Sir Alfred Milner was firm in his demand. In answer to certain hints which had been thrown out about the possibility of compensation, he said "I cannot agree to buy with something else that just settlement which would be in your interest as well as mine." And he went on to say in words, the plainest ever used in diplomacy and plainer than are often used in diplomacy, that the failure of an agreement upon the point which he had submitted "would lead to an open breach between the two governments...There is no other way out except war." President Kruger clung to the possibility of a bargain, and the point upon which at that time it was in his mind that the bargain might turn was that of arbitration, the establishment of a system of arbitration between the Queen's government and that of his republic. But if I understand rightly the previous despatches to which he referred, he did not so much mean arbitration upon the particular differences which might from time to time arise between the two governments as arbitration on the general interpretation of their relations, by means of which he hoped to get an award which would say that his state did not exist in that condition of dependence on the United Kingdom which it was contended on the British side characterized it. That was the last point. In the position I have stated they separated, and during the months which followed until the outbreak of war the parties, although the negotiators were no longer Sir Alfred Milner and President Kruger, but Mr Chamberlain and President Kruger, never came nearer to an agreement. The negotiations dragged on, and I think I am not wrong in saying that war was declared by the South African Republic as soon as by the spring rains and the growth of grass on the veldt it became possible for them to move their forces over it<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The quotations are from the translation of the Transvaal green book containing the full minutes of the conference, published in the *Times* of 18th July from the *Johannesburg Star* of 24th June.

Now it is often said that this is a war between two races. I would rather say that it is a war between two ideals, of which only one is a racial ideal. On one side you have the English ideal of a fair field for every race and every language, accompanied by a humane treatment of the native races. That ideal, no doubt, makes for the English language and for English institutions. We see how under it the English language and institutions are taking possession of a large part of the world, as being those which most successfully compete in that fair field; but although that may be the result it is not the object of the English ideal, neither is it in all cases the only possible result. In proof of that one need only point to Canada, where the French language and French laws, and even, so far as is compatible with the existence of a province which forms only part of a great dominion, French institutions generally, are preserved in loyal subjection to the Queen. But the other ideal, the Transvaal ideal, is racial, not only in its result if it should succeed, but in its object. It is founded, as was practically admitted at the Bloemfontein Conference, on the desire to maintain the Dutch language, the Dutch social and political system, and its mode of treatment of the natives. We must not at once condemn an ideal because it is a racial one. The larger part of the world at present is governed by racial ideals. We see how in Russia a persistent effort is made to Russify the Finns in Finland, the Poles in Poland, and all the other subjects of the Russian Empire. We see in Germany the same eager desire to exterminate by severe pressure the Polish language and the Danish language in the parts which have been annexed from the Polish and Danish kingdoms. We see how in Austria racial ideals threaten the very integrity of the country; it seems to have great difficulty in holding together. We are, then, in a minority in having an ideal which is not a racial one, and we must look at least with respect, if not with approval, upon ideals which present themselves to the