

**THE DUTCH REPUBLICS OF
SOUTH AFRICA: THREE
LETTERS TO R. N. FOWLER,
AND CHARLES BUXTON**

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The Dutch Republics of South Africa: Three Letters to R. N. Fowler, and Charles Buxton by F. W. Chesson

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F. W. CHESSON

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THE DUTCH REPUBLICS
OF SOUTH AFRICA;

Three Letters

TO

R. N. FOWLER, ESQ., M.P., AND CHARLES
BUXTON, ESQ., M.P.,

BY

F. W. CHESSON.

"It would not do to agree that negroes are men, lest it should appear that
whites are not."—MONTESQUIEU.

London:

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1871.

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PREFACE.

THE first of the following Letters was published, although in a more extended form, at the close of the year 1868. It is now revised and reprinted, and two other Letters are added, in the hope that they will assist to form a public opinion favourable to the just treatment of the native races of South Africa. Every day the slave-trade is permitted to exist in that region the difficulty of its abolition is increased. It was from equally small beginnings that negro slavery took its rise in America; and unless great efforts be made to arrest its course, that nefarious institution will assuredly prove fatal to civilization in the southern parts of the African continent.

In advocating the establishment of a Confederation as the best means of putting an end to the two-fold curse of war and slavery, the writer has simply expressed the views of the most enlightened statesmen to whom the destinies of the Cape Colony have been entrusted. Those views have been endorsed by the Legislative Council of Natal, by the influential portion of the colonial press, and by the South African merchants resident in this country. It will of course be understood that the proposed Confederation can only be established with the voluntary consent of the several communities which would be invited to enter it.

7, ADAM STREET, ADELPHI,
1st February, 1871.

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THE DUTCH REPUBLICS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

LETTER I.

To R. N. FOWLER, Esq., M.P., Treasurer of the Aborigines' Protection Society.

MY DEAR SIR,—You have repeatedly brought the subject of the conduct and policy of the Dutch Boers towards the native tribes of South Africa under the notice of the members of the Aborigines' Protection Society, at its annual meetings. This is my apology for addressing you on a question which is perhaps as important as any now claiming the attention of those who are interested in the colonies of Great Britain. I refer to the practice of slavery in the Trans-Vaal Republic, to the violation of the treaty of 1852 which it involves, and to the external warfare and domestic tyranny of which it is the fruitful cause.

The Trans-Vaal Republic is bounded on the north by the Limpopo, where gold has recently been discovered; on the south by the Vaal River, which separates the territory from the Orange Free State; on the east by a portion of the Drakensberg Mountains, and on the west by native tribes which still enjoy their independence. A glance at the map will suffice to show the vast superficial area—estimated at 100,000 square miles—over which 20,000 or 30,000 Boers claim to exercise jurisdiction. The other Dutch Republic—once known as the Orange River Sovereignty, and now designated the Free State—is a rich pastoral country, the southern boundary of which, the Orange River, partly constitutes the frontier line of the Cape Colony.

The two Republics of South Africa have a common origin, and, so far as their relations with the native races are concerned, a common history. The Dutch, in their own country, are the most peaceful and law-abiding of citizens; and those who have sat by their firesides in Holland find it difficult to understand why it is, that, as colonists, they have ever been cruel and mercenary. It is true that in this respect they are not singular;

for in the northern island of New Zealand, in the pastoral districts of Queensland, and in the border territories of North America, men of the English race have vied with the Boers of South Africa in their selfish or inhuman treatment of the Aborigines. But, to the honour of the British Government, its influence in the collisions which so often take place between colonists and natives is generally exercised on the side of justice and mercy. It has more than once prevented the extermination of the Maories, and the wholesale confiscation of their lands; and to it is due the non-recurrence, for a period of fifteen years, of a Kaffir war—that gulf into which Chancellors of the Exchequer once periodically cast their surplus. As the hands of the Imperial Government are now tolerably clean, there is no inconsistency in appealing to them against the misdeeds of the Boers of South Africa.

It may be alleged that this is a proposed interference with the internal government of an independent state. It is true that the Dutch Republics of South Africa have enjoyed a separate existence for many years past. In the interval they have been as much masters of their own affairs as if the English had disappeared from the Cape; but it is not the loss a fact, that their independence is based upon treaties which impose upon them (as well as upon us) certain well-defined obligations. As these obligations are just and reasonable—as indeed the non-observance of them involves, as a consequence, the subversion of public morality—the lapse of sixteen or of sixty years cannot lessen their force, or diminish the weight of the responsibility they entail. England may fairly consider the expediency of enforcing the treaty which has been broken; but of her moral right to enforce it there cannot be the shadow of a doubt.

The story of the wanderings of the Boers in the South-African wilderness is one of the most remarkable in the annals of colonization. Owing large numbers of Hottentot slaves, they resented the Act of Emancipation as a piece of grievous oppression towards themselves. Their fears were so worked upon by unscrupulous speculators, that many of them believed they would receive no compensation for the liberation of their slaves, and sold their claims on the Imperial Government at a ruinous loss. In 1835 there was a strong emigration movement among the disaffected, and an advance party, headed by Uys and Maritz, turned their backs upon the old colony, and, after encountering