

**TRANSVAAL VERSUS GREAT-  
BRITAIN: A SHORT  
COMMENTARY UPON THE  
DUTCH  
ADDRESS TO THE BRITISH PEOPLE**

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Transvaal Versus Great-Britain: A Short Commentary Upon the Dutch Address to the British People by W. van der Vlugt

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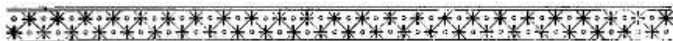
A short commentary upon the Dutch Address  
to the British People

BY

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*Professor at Leyden-University.*

AMSTERDAM — J. H. DE BUSSY — 1899.



A Committee of loyal subjects to Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands, feeling deeply and seriously aggrieved by the ever growing rumours of an impending war between the government of your glorious Queen VICTORIA and the Dutch Republic of South-Africa, has ventured upon a strong appeal to your high-minded sense of justice.

Do not think we have been impelled to this act of ours by such a thing as race-feeling, by a partial preference for the Boers who speak our tongue and bear Dutch names? Nothing of the kind. Our fellow feeling for our cousins in South-Africa is duly counterbalanced by the high esteem in which we hold our neighbour nation across the sea, the grand people of the British Isles, that has set the ever memorable example to all mankind of how a national community may politically come of age without consuming its moral and intellectual forces in fruitless party-strife. Really, if mere national sympathy were our motive, we might well be in doubt, which side to take.

That there has been no question of hesitation is explained by this simple fact; we have been prompted by no personal motive; we have acted upon an ideal one — our deeply inborn sense of right

and wrong. And as that feeling was our only prompting, so it has been our only argument. We cannot believe that the cynical threats and brutal cries for war, which at present predominate in the speeches of your leading statesmen and in the articles of your daily press, give adequate utterance to the real feelings animating the bulk of the British nation. Are, then, the noble strings of English hearts, upon which to the world's relief your deeply mourned GLADSTONE so often masterfully played, almost all broken? At least the half of them, we think, are only mute. Your country is suffering for the moment from one of those strange influences whereby a really small but presumptuous minority hypnotises almost the whole of its adversaries into a bashful silence. We have therefore dared give expression to the firm hope, that of those who have been silent up to now by far the greater half would homologate our remonstrances. And further we intended, within the humble measure of our feeble powers, to strengthen that undaunted group of British champions for a policy of peace and patience with Transvaal, which even your colonial secretary, in answer to Sir H. CAMPBELL BANNERMAN, has denounced beforehand as able to overturn the whole fabric of his unjust designs.

Every sensible man who has taken due notice of your present government's proceedings with the South African Republic, will have been vividly struck by this important fact: those are not the proceedings, that is not the tone to be used between

members of the international family. The diplomatic intercourse of modern times is animated by the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. Of Liberty first, — in the society of civilised states every member shall, as a rule, be free to work its own salvation in its own way. Then follows Equality, — the right to the aforesaid freedom belongs equally to each and all; the principality of Montenegro is quite as independent, according to the law of nations, as the empire of the Tsars; by virtue of that principle anything, that is either lawful or forbidden to one nation, is equally lawful or forbidden to all others. And lastly we have Fraternity, — the treatment, every one of the subjects of international law owes to a fellow-subject of that law, ought normally to be, not the treatment of an inferior by his master, but rather the treatment of a brother by his brother; in international relations different forms of ascendancy and subjection are certainly not unknown; but the presumption is for mutual treatment upon an equal footing; the state, which claims a certain superiority over a neighbouring state, has to make the point clear by conclusive proof; and that which is thus proved to exist in the teeth of the general rule should never be extended to consequences, not expressly stipulated.

Now, — once more — the attitude, which some years ago, your government deliberately assumed towards the President and the Volksraad of the South-African Republic, has been on every point, not the fraternal attitude, which should be the normal one in matters of this kind, but the



masterful tone, which the law of nations only allows in exceptional cases. In saying this we would not specially allude to this sample or that among the crude amenities of language your present colonial secretary seems so fond of; those are rather signs of the time which prefers the straightforwardness of the self made dilettante to the flattering insincerities of the old school diplomatists. No, what we hint at, is a continuous abnormality. Since the London-convention of 1884 a new era has opened in the history of South-Africa. From that moment the tale of the correspondence between your Imperial dignitaries and the State secretary of the Republic has been a long and monotonous tale of disagreements and quarrels, now about the correct interpretation of one article, and then about the true meaning of another. What is the right moment, at which a treaty between the Republic and a foreign state ought to be called "completed", — the moment, that is, for the republican authorities to deliver "immediately" (see article IV) unto Her Majesty's Government a copy of the said treaty? Were the laws, by which the Volksraad intended to regulate the admission and the exclusion of aliens, at variance with the liberal principle, sanctioned by article XIV? Should the Republic's accession to the convention of Geneva have been submitted, in accordance with article IV, to Her Majesty's approval? Was KRÜGER's suspension of the "Critic" newspaper another device of the president's cunning in order to avoid the provisions of the convention? Thus, within a few years, a series of differences have arisen in close

succession. It is impossible for the ordinary reader not to scorn at last the spirit of malignant fault finding, which pervades the whole of the said correspondence on the Imperial side. Yet, that is not the point now. The thing we want to insist on is this, that upon every one of those questions Her Majesty's government has, openly or implicitly, declined the acknowledgment of the equal right of the republican authorities to have a contrary opinion of their own, yea, that it has at last accentuated the "bearing" of that unwillingness by formally rejecting President Kruger's proposal -- so perfectly in accordance with the principle of international equality -- to refer to arbitration all those points of dispute relating to interpretation.

And a more jarring anomaly still has since occurred. Thus far the chief of your colonial office had been careful always to assume a *tender vigilance* for the strict adherence on both sides to the convention-articles. But even that remnant of juridical prudery has since been gradually dropped in your government's dealings with the question of the "Uitlanders". You know the „grievances" with which that most honorable set of men, a part of the gentlemen speculators and mine-magnates at the "Rand", has lately troubled the world. As summarised by their Imperial advocate, they include the following: the surly jealousy of the Transvaal-oligarchs in keeping back as much as they can from the hands of their honorable guests the benefits of naturalisation and the franchise; the postponement of urgent educational reforms; mismanagement of the finances; restrictions on the right of

public meeting; the policy of granting State-monopolies; the Volksraad's unwillingness to face the labour-question; its railway policy; and lastly the insufficiency and wilfulness of the Republican police. Whatever grounds there may be for some of those grievances, — the relative suddenness of the social transformations the Boer-government has had to cope with, could not otherwise than render a great many temporary defects almost inevitable, — there can be no doubt as to the only suitable form, the remonstrances of your Imperial authorities, should ordinarily have taken if they thought fit to mind and mend those things. A state's meddling with its neighbours home-affairs is as a rule not permissible, unless it keeps to friendly suggestions. At first your dignitaries kept to that tone. The proceedings of Her Majesty's High Commissioner at the Bloemfontein conference were on the whole correct. But the threats and brow-beatings, by which the suggested reforms have afterwards been urged upon the president and his fellow-citizens, are entirely in disharmony with the elementary traditions of international comity. There was no longer a brotherly discussion as between free and equal subjects; on your side your formerly friendly advice has degenerated into a climax of commands as from a superior to his subordinate.

We are well aware of the arguments by which your rulers have tried to justify that twofold departure from the recognised "law of nations". They centre in two words. As to the endless disputes on the proper interpretation of some