

**MATERIALS FOR A SPEECH IN
DEFENCE OF THE POLICY OF
ABANDONING THE ORANGE
RIVER TERRITORY, MAY, 1854**

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Materials for a speech in defence of the policy of abandoning the Orange River Territory, May, 1854 by William Molesworth

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WILLIAM MOLESWORTH

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PRIVATE.

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FOR A

SPEECH

IN DEFENCE OF

THE POLICY OF ABANDONING

THE

ORANGE RIVER TERRITORY.

MAY, 1854.

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June 21, 1940

THE Delegates from the Transvaal to Her Majesty's Government avail themselves of the permission kindly accorded by Lady Molesworth to re-publish the following pamphlet.

They have thought that the facts and arguments therein put forward are so true and just as regarded the Orange Free State in 1854, and that they apply with so much greater force to the present position of Transvaal, that they cannot but hope that the reproduction of the opinions of so distinguished a statesman may prove of service to their country and people.

S. J. P. KRUGER.

P. J. JOUBERT.

ALBEMARLE HOTEL,
October, 1878.

MATERIALS FOR A SPEECH,

&c. &c.

IF any person will refer to a map of Southern Africa, and examine the position of the Orange River territory; if he will consider its situation with regard to the colony of the Cape of Good Hope; if he will ascertain the nature of the country and the character of the races of men who inhabit it; and if he will estimate the cost of retaining it: I think that he must arrive at the conclusion that we ought never to have taken possession of that territory; and having arrived at that conclusion, he must I think, ultimately arrive at the conclusion that the determination of the Government to abandon the Orange River territory was a wise and a prudent one, which Parliament ought to ratify.

For if he will look at a map of that part of the world, he will see that South Africa stretches from the Equator towards the Southern Pole in the shape of a huge blunt promontory. It is an elevated table land, bathed on three sides by three oceans, namely, the Atlantic, the Antarctic, and the Indian. From the shores of these oceans, the surface of the land rises towards the interior, not gradually, but by a succession of terraces, that are separated from each other, and from the great upland of the interior, by ranges of rugged mountains. The lowest terrace, that nearest the seaboard, is fertile; the upper terraces are sterile, and become more sterile, and the dividing ranges more rugged, as they ascend towards the interior. On the southern declivity of this great promontory, stretched out for five hundred miles along the terraced shores of the Antarctic Ocean, is our colony of the Cape of Good

Hope. It is cut off from the interior by the ranges of rugged mountains which I have just described. Beyond those mountains are deserts which extend northwards to the Orange River. These mountains and deserts are almost impassable, and they form for nearly six hundred miles the great natural bulwark of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope against the incursions of the savages who dwell on the plains of the Orange and Yellow Rivers. In the fork of these two rivers, in the heart of the southern portion of the great upland of South Africa, beyond the mountains, beyond the deserts, is a tract of land, about the size of England; this is the Orange River territory; though less sterile than the adjacent desert, it is not capable of producing anything of much value; it is incapable of extensive commerce, for, as I have already said, it is cut off from the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, from the seaboard, and therefore from civilization, by mountains and deserts. It is inhabited by a few Europeans of Dutch descent, who hate the name and dominion of England. It is inhabited also by many warlike barbarians, who are rapidly acquiring skill in the use of fire-arms and the habits of horsemen. It is exposed along an open frontier of five hundred miles to the incursions of the unnumbered tribes of the great South African race of Kafirs. To keep possession of the Orange River territory, Sir George Cathcart estimates that at least two thousand troops would at present be required, of whom one-fourth should be cavalry. To maintain these troops in the heart of South Africa would cost this country directly and indirectly not less than £200,000 a-year. This expenditure would increase, and the number of our troops would have to be augmented, in proportion as the savages by contact with us became better acquainted with the use of fire-arms, and with the arts of European warfare. The new Kafir wars, similar to those of the eastern frontier of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, would be waged in the Orange River territory, but on a larger and more expensive scale; and in return for our expenditure we should reap neither honor, nor profit, nor renown.

These facts, I think, suffice of themselves to shew how undesirable an acquisition the Orange River territory was, and how desirable it would be to abandon it, if the causes which led to the acquisition of that territory, or the obligations attendant on its acquisition, do not now forbid its abandonment with honor.

What were those causes? We entered the Orange River territory in pursuit of the Dutch Boers, when they fled from the eastern frontier of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. They fled in consequence of the change which we made, about twenty years ago, in our South African policy. The new policy, then adopted, rapidly led to a vast increase of our possessions in South Africa: it led to the annexation of Natal, to the acquisition of the Orange River sovereignty, and to the extension of the nominal dominion of England over an empire twice the size of the United Kingdom, the greater portion of which is a howling desert, as barren as any on the face of the earth. If that new policy be adhered to, that worthless empire must continue to augment, till it extend to the Equator, and cover a large portion of the continent of Africa.

The question, therefore, whether we ought to retain or abandon the Orange River territory, may, I think, be resolved into the question whether we ought to persevere in or reverse that policy, which I have already said we adopted about twenty years ago. Before that period our South African policy towards the native races was similar to that of our Dutch predecessors. I will describe that policy in as few words as I can.

About two centuries ago, the Dutch landed on the south-western extremity of Africa. They found in the neighbourhood some tribes of a native race whom they named Hottentots, and who were then a numerous and happy people; living under the patriarchial government of chiefs; wandering about with flocks and herds in small communities; clothed in sheepskins; dwelling in moveable huts; riding on oxen; armed with bows, poisoned arrows, and light javelins; active and skilful in the chase; mild in disposition, but courageous in warfare; diminu-

tive in stature, yet well proportioned; with ugly countenances and features like the Chinese. The Hottentots seem to have been the aboriginal inhabitants of British South Africa. The greater portion of the race has perished, slain partly by European, partly by native foes. For about the same time that the Hottentots were attacked from the west by the Dutch, they were assailed from the east by those tribes of the great South African race whom we call Kafirs.

According to the best authorities, all Africa, from the Orange River to the Equator, and from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean, a vast space covering 27 degrees of latitude by 25 of longitude, is inhabited by innumerable tribes, speaking analogous languages; and though differing much in physical form, yet all probably belonging to one great South African race. The tribes who inhabit the interior, or dwell on the eastern seaboard in the neighbourhood of our dominions, consist of tall, athletic, and well-proportioned men, with peculiar countenances, combining the high forehead and prominent nose of the European, the thick lips and woolly hair of the negro, with the high cheek-bones of the Tartar. They are said to be acute, intelligent, high-spirited, and brave; but cruel to their enemies, cruel to each other under the influence of superstition, and readily obeying the cruellest commands of their chiefs. Their religion, if they have any, is a sanguinary superstition, and all the efforts of the missionaries to convert them to Christianity have invariably failed. They live under their chiefs in large communities. Though seminomadic, some of the tribes have towns of considerable size, moveable like camps; other tribes are subject to a regular military system, and at times form large and conquering armies. They seem to have the remains of a higher social state; they possess the rudiments of various arts; have some knowledge of agriculture and of the working of metals. Their chief wealth and most valued property are cattle; in their eyes cattle-stealing from other tribes, and especially from Europeans, is no crime, but when skilfully performed a meritorious act, to which they are much tempted by their custom of pur-

chasing their wives with cattle. These tribes were first called Kafirs by Arab voyagers, who gave that name to all savage nations who had not been converted to Islam. The Portuguese and Dutch adopted it, and transmitted it to us, who have applied it specifically to those tribes of the great South African race, with whom we have come in contact on the eastern frontier of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope. One of those tribes is the well-known Amakosa, our most resolute foes. Of them the tradition is that they descended from the interior through a gap in the mountains, and advancing from the north-east along the terraces of the seaboard, settled about two centuries ago on the banks of the river Kei. As their herds and numbers increased they moved on westward, driving out and exterminating the Hottentots, until they came in contact with the Dutch, who were doing the same thing from the opposite direction. For some of the Dutch, finding South Africa to be best fitted for the rearing of flocks and herds, became a pastoral people. They spread themselves over the surface of the land, increased, and multiplied. To provide food for their augmenting flocks and herds, new and extensive pastures were required; and the Boers (as the pastoral Dutch are called) also drove out and exterminated the Hottentots. The Boers are a fine, tall, athletic race, good-humoured, but prone to anger, bred in solitude or among inferior beings whom they despise; they are self-willed, self-relying, and apt to be tyrannical.

When Boer and Kafir met on the eastern frontier of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, the superior cattle of the Dutch irresistibly tempted the cupidity of the savage; and a border warfare ensued, similar to what raged in olden times on the frontier of England and Scotland, and on the Indian frontier of our North American plantations. The Dutch combined for mutual assistance, and formed an organized system of self-defence, well known as the Commando system. When the cattle of the Dutch were stolen, they assembled under their captains, followed the traces of their property, seized it or its equivalent wherever they found it, and righted themselves with a strong hand. In these excursions, the Boer drew no distinction