

*Letters from
an Utlander*



1899-1902.

LETTERS FROM AN UITLANDER

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WITH INTRODUCTION BY

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LETTERS FROM AN UITLANDER*

INTRODUCTION

THERE seems no need to say very much in introducing these letters to the public. They were written to me, in regular succession, from a date shortly before the war broke out.

They make, it is obvious, no pretension to careful literary composition, and any attempt by their writer, or others, to have "edited" them with any completeness, would have necessitated the whole thing being re-cast, and would also have taken away from their fresh colloquial style.

The writer is a man who has long been resident in South Africa, and has held more the position of onlooker than of participator, in its political and commercial affairs. He is not connected with gold mining, he has carefully watched events, and he is an honest English gentleman. More I am not at liberty to divulge, but this I am willing to vouch for.

* Pronounce as in English word "Eight."

Beyond this I will not attempt to add much, nor enlarge at any length regarding the South African question. There is indeed much to be said, but Heaven has happily provided us with plenty of people to say it! I might, however, add just one word or two.

What South Africa needs above all now is Permanent Peace, to enable its inhabitants to work out harmoniously what ought to be their very great and important destinies.

Yet how strangely do these words "Permanent Peace" and "South Africa" look in juxtaposition.

Can any two groups of ideas seem more remote from one another? For how many years has this pot been seething, what precious lives have been sacrificed, in divers ways, on the hell-broth that has there been brewed!

And what have we to show as a result of our clumsy incantations?

In truth the South African question is only a part of a much larger scheme of ideas, which—if discord is ever to give place to harmony in that and other regions of the Empire—must be considered in bulk, and, each and all, treated on simple general principles.

It may be claimed at the outset that in an Empire constituted as ours is, the man-in-the-street in Great Britain cannot conduct the politics of a remote portion of that Empire. Indeed, to do that worthy justice, he rarely wishes seriously to attempt it. All he says is, "We have put the existing Cabinet in power, and I look to its members to discharge their duty."

On the other hand, there is no formula by which such an Empire can be conducted. Our peoples cannot, by laying down a string of rules and regulations which are to be followed, leave it to experts to draw up a scheme for any portion of the community, and then themselves go to sleep again. On the contrary, they must always keep awake. And by keeping awake I do not mean fussing; but I mean, choosing in the first place honest and reliable managers for the Empire's affairs, and afterwards intelligently following the action of these, to whom have been handed the responsibilities of the concern, and keeping them "up to the mark"; realising that eloquent speeches will less frequently save a country than honest men.

To go for a moment, however, a little

more into detail, and regard the present situation at the Cape.

“What,” says the English citizen, “are we to do with the Cape irreconcilables?” I would reply—simply carry out your normal course of action. If you hoist the political white flag, and pamper rebellion now; you merely betray loyalty, without in the least conciliating your enemies. And remember, in this instance, you will be betraying it for the last time. “Oh, but,” says Mr Wiseacre, “you forget that you have got to live with these men.” I would say rather—put it the other way—they have to live with us.

Has treason, forsooth, ceased to be treason, because Queen Elizabeth no longer holds a sceptre, and orders people’s heads off? Is there no longer such a thing as High Treason, now that a ruling Dynasty has wisely committed much of the details of its administration to the representatives of a Commonwealth? Is there no treason to the loyalists *in all parts of the Empire*, in the action of those who foment discord in one particular part of the Empire?

It is because leisured observers, such as the writer of these letters, are especially rare

in South Africa, that I think these notes on current South African topics may be of great service to many of the public, in estimating the nature of the problem with which we are there confronted.

By his showing, and by all knowledge of informed, and unsophisticated, men, these problems are perfectly capable of solution, but towards that solution we English have "no use" (as our American friends say) for the rhetorician—the place hunter—the man who is ignorant of his subject and yet attempts to direct us.

Would it be too much to ask of such persons when they aspire to lead our counsels by their words, that they should travel in the regions they propose to discourse upon, and saturate themselves with the information which can *only* be locally acquired?

All who have watched the numbers of honest English, and Foreign, men and women who started out to the Cape fervent "pro-Boers," and returned with completely modified views, must indeed realise how impossible it is for the ordinary resident in Europe, rightly to master the South African question.

There is no manner of doubt that the Transvaal leaders, and the Bond leaders, had elaborated an ideal which was quite incompatible with the existence of the British Empire. Their ideal was, "Away with the English view of life altogether; let us, as the Dutch race, *dominate everybody!*"

On the other hand, the idea of the right feeling Englishman, when he speaks of his wish that our flag should fly from Cape Town to the Zambesi, is founded upon what that flag implies—equal justice and freedom for all—and is *not* founded upon any wish that "Rooineks," *quâ* Rooineks, should put their heel on every one else's head. It were better that that honoured flag should be rolled up in South Africa and buried there, than that so foolish and shallow an idea as this last should actuate us; if only because the attempt would certainly fail, and bring ruin in its track to all that we most honour and revere.

Take, as a typical example of our best methods, the admirably organised system which has been inaugurated for the education of Boer children, since many thousands of them came into our keeping. The result of that scheme, as regards the matters here referred

to, should be to make the children proud of South Africa, as part of the Empire, not of being "Dutch" or "English."

Our object in these regards should surely be, as in "composite photography," by keeping the characteristics of the various component races it contains, to produce an homogeneous Empire, which is not solely English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Boer, Canadian, or Australian, but shall contain the most vigorous and useful characteristics of each group.

One word more. Truism though it be, it needs constant repetition—Party government, when carried to the length it has reached with us is a national danger, for it diverts to trumpery local wrangles, attention and energy which should be devoted to large and widespread interests; and the electors of Great Britain should recognise, that disappointed politicians of a certain, and, alas, not uncommon, type, are frequently really desperate men, and will stick at nothing to damage whatever party may be in power. Many of them will even intrigue with hostile Boers, or with discordant Irishmen, with perfect impartiality—and their words should be valued accordingly. All down the ranges of history we may note the "wire-

puller" seeking his own ends by exploiting honest human instincts.

On the Native question these letters contain much that is of the greatest value.

And on this point I would ask any of my countrymen in England who may come across these pages, to remember one thing. The Englishman, though he changes his skies most readily, does not at all readily change his nature: and that generous nature, which inclines him to befriend the weak and the oppressed in this country, does not desert him when he migrates to the Cape.

Do not let us therefore suppose, because the South African colonist sees the vital necessity of (as he would put it) "keeping the native in his place," that he has formed any dark schemes for turning the Kaffirs into mine-slaves, or victims of a tyrannical oppression.

Reverting to the main argument, I hope that no reader of these letters will think that the writer, or recipient, have any dislike to the Dutch as Dutch, or to the Boers as Boers. Passages constantly occur in these letters, indeed, which directly controvert such an idea.

INTRODUCTION

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And for my own part I would say SEHNITTS O
one who remembers the Cape in the old days
—with the delightful highly-bred Dutch
society, which had its focus in Cape Town and
the neighbourhood; or who remembers the
simple unaffected hospitality, which all who
travelled in South Africa must have frequently
experienced, from the Cape Dutch, and from
the Boers all over the land, can fail to have
a cordial feeling in his heart for both of
these—so different—groups.

But let it be none the less remembered, that
a hastily patched up *modus vivendi* between
Briton and Boer can have no enduring founda-
tion. All the Empire, and the rest of the
world too, are looking on at events which are
occurring in South Africa, brought about
and necessitated by the cumulative poison of
political folly.

The plain fact, which appears more clearly
now that the dust of the commotion is sett-
ling down, is this; our colonies are full, not of
our scum, but of some of the best and most
vigorous blood of our race. They love the
Old Country (and its traditions and history,
and those ideals of justice and freedom-for-
all which the mention of "England," above

that of all countries, raises to the imagination) with apparently a much firmer love than many of its own inhabitants. They love the Crown, the Ruling Family, and the Dynasty generally. They hate and detest "Downing Street," or rather all that that sinister phrase formerly conveyed to the Colonial mind, of inaction, interference, and uncertainty.

We may scarce wonder if despair of any timely action at home bade fair to convert the Boer Republic of the Transvaal, governed by Kruger and his Hollander clique, into an "English-cum-Boer-Progressive" Republic, at least so far as the Rand was concerned; and that (such tendency being countered by the events culminating in "the Raid,"), the crisis hastened on, which was to decide if Great Britain meant to stand by her position in South Africa, or to let the various conflicting forces together "eliminate the Imperial factor."

Fortunate for us was the timely conjunction of a Secretary of State and a High Commissioner, who both realised the position; and now from the turmoil is emerging an Imperial policy, which promises to make Downing Street a name of wholly different omen.

The question arises, How are we now going to conduct affairs?

Not as of old, let us hope, by constant change of experiment, nor as questions of party politics, nor by the attempt to control every detail from 6000 miles away.

It is evident that in Lord Milner we have been so fortunate as to get—much beyond our deserts—a man most richly endowed with capacity and honesty of purpose, just the man that we want.

And to him and his likes, in the future of our Empire, we must entrust more and more authority, and repose in them the greater confidence, to enable them to assist those with whose welfare they are charged, to govern themselves well, and in harmony with the general Empire scheme; this, notwithstanding that some in the Mother Country may still share the dismay of the hen, who sees her duckling charges gradually taking to the water, and showing a capacity to shift for themselves. And, if rightly perceived, it will be noted that this should lead to no break up of the Empire, but to a strengthening thereof.

In conclusion—the “case” of South Africa

has at length been taken in hand by the greatest specialists we have: two of whom, Mr Chamberlain and Lord Milner, are on the spot: health, we may hope, is being restored.

By all means let us watch the men in whom we thus confide, but let us not, from far away, foolishly or needlessly hamper their wise and enlightened ministrations.

BARTLE C. FRERE.

22nd December 1902.