

## XIV

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE BOER

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JULIAN RALPH, "At Pretoria," p. 17, says of the Boer: "*All his attributes are those of the clever stalker of wild and savage game.*"

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Conflict between Dutch East India Company and the Boers—Attitude of England Toward the Boers—Future of South Africa

THE nineteenth century has known the Boer of South Africa mainly through his efforts to avoid British jurisdiction at the centre of South Africa. His efforts in this direction have been characterized by so much bravery, moral virtue, and religious piety, that he has succeeded in drawing to his side the sympathies of continental Europe as against the one country whose flag represents freedom of commerce, religious tolerance, and local self-government.

It is a sad reflection that political and religious intolerance should have been the mainspring of movements which have done great good to our race. The religious bigotry of France sent forth the Huguenots; the petty princes of Germany drove the most enterprising of their people to America; Brazil was leavened by a nucleus of Portuguese Jews who were outlaws in their own country; the first Englishmen to settle New England abandoned their country in order to escape a tyrannical Church government. And if to-

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day the white man has planted his foot securely upon the high central plateau of the great black continent, we must seek the cause in the intolerance which characterized the rule, not of England, but of her predecessor, the famous Dutch East India Company. In the cases of Spain, Portugal, and Holland, three countries whose colonial expansion was abnormally rapid and whose decline appears at first sight equally remarkable, certain elements are striking in the very beginning of their career. Spain and Portugal developed their greatest strength at a time when national and religious feeling had been stirred to the utmost by generations of warfare against the common enemy of their country and their religion.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Philip II., though acknowledged as the richest and most powerful of kings, found that his most mighty Armada was chased into fragments by a handful of English fishing boats armed with men like Drake and Hawkins. In the Netherlands his troops, reputed invincible, were repeatedly baffled by Dutchmen, whose country on the map hardly shows land enough to make the canals worth digging.

The years which saw Spain and Portugal rich in soldiers but poor in liberty, found little Holland an insignificant state in what pertains to pomp and circumstance of government, but invincible in the qualities of civic and commercial rectitude, religious tolerance, and aptitude for navigation. Her few square miles of bog and sand dunes, peopled by a handful of amphibious heretics, staggered the humanity of that day by the ease with which they held their own against the

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mighty ships of Spain and Portugal. Little by little Dutchmen learned the secrets of the Far East; learned the relative prices of spices and silks, and established peaceful relations with native rulers. Portugal's unpopularity was Holland's opportunity. Her leading merchants wisely concluded that they might profit by Spanish and Portuguese failure; contest the commerce of the world, not as conquerors or even monopolists, but merely as traders who would fight only when themselves attacked.

In 1602, therefore, was formed that famous Dutch East India Company, which embodied the highest commercial spirit of the age and was a huge step in advance of anything conceived in Spain or Portugal. It was to some extent a national institution, its shares being held by the different chambers of commerce throughout the country. From the beginning it reflected the correct mercantile habits of the nation, and gained its ascendancy in the Far East by constantly holding commercial honor high. The clerks and agents of this company were held to strict accountability, were forbidden to trade on their own account and, above all, were forbidden to approach the natives in any other capacity than merchants. They sent no missionaries, and did not, in the beginning, even care to build forts. The trade they offered was so valuable that Eastern merchants found it to their interest to cultivate Dutchmen in proportion to their dislike of Portugal and Spain. In Japan the story is still current that Dutch traders were admitted when the Portuguese had been driven out, because when interrogated regarding the religion which the friars had made odious, the new-

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comers answered that they were not Roman Catholics, "*they were Dutchmen!*"

The awakening of Holland as a colonial power was under conditions somewhat analogous to those under which Spain and Portugal produced her heroes. At the end of the sixteenth century the Dutch had emerged from a period of warfare against a political and religious domination which they detested, and were in exactly that state of national exaltation which fits men for enterprises of a daring nature.

At this time England and Holland had a common bond in hatred of Spain and the Papacy, and neither country had yet developed strength enough to make her progress seem a danger to that of the other.

Modern economists have had much to say against privileged trading companies, no doubt influenced by the fact that nearly all of them have ended in bankruptcy, owing to corruption and mismanagement.

The Dutch East India Company did not live to see the end of the eighteenth century, though it lived too long for its reputation; yet with all the faults of its late years, it accomplished a task at the beginning that would have been almost impossible without such an organization. The fitting out of a merchant ship three hundred years ago was almost as much of a venture as in our day the journey of Stanley across Africa. To-day the trading-ship captain has a chart of the seas he proposes to navigate; in every port he finds a consul who watches the interest of his flag; his cargo is consigned to an agent who unloads the vessel for him, loads it again, and settles all accounts with the owners. He finds assistance not merely at the hands of his own

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countrymen, but from those of every other nation, and, in short, the trade to the Far East to-day resembles more a yacht cruise in one's own waters than the voyages we are considering when the Dutch East India Company was formed.

There were then almost no charts or light-houses or consuls or agents of any kind, to help the mariner in difficulty. If his ship was wrecked, the crew, as well as the cargo, were deemed the property of those into whose hands they fell. Dutch and English sailors were put to death or enslaved when they fell into Spanish or Portuguese hands—indeed in those days the white man fared better at the hands of the Japanese and Chinese coasting population, than at those of his fellow-Christians on the shores of Europe. In those days not only was war a trade, but trade itself was war, and costly as all war must be. Trade, therefore, had to be organized and treated as a form of war. Dutch merchants, before the founding of the company, had no means of regulating the interval between cargoes. A ship might enter an Eastern port after a costly journey and find that one or more ships had preceded her and overstocked the market; whereas, had those vessels come at regular intervals, each might have realized fair profit.

The Dutch East India Company was, therefore, nothing more than a practical application of commercial principles to a commercial question far beyond the capacity of a small corporation. We see the same sort of thing every day in America under the name of a "trust," which unites under one control a number of industrial enterprises of analogous character for the

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purpose of, economy in administration and, consequently, immunity from competition.

The original monopoly of the Dutch East India Company was a "trust" in which the chief trading communities were represented as share-owners. This trust was national to the extent that it was subject to government inspection and was the standard-bearer of Dutch power in the Eastern world. If ever there was such a thing as a beneficent monopoly it was the Dutch East India Company, so long as it was administered according to the spirit of those who framed its original constitution.

But Holland, unfortunately for her, did not live up to the constitution of her great monopoly. Her progress in the Far East was so rapid, the resistance of Spain and Portugal so feeble, that little by little she abandoned those liberal trading principles which had animated her at the outset, and entered upon a policy of exclusion which not merely involved her in war with England, but lost her the good-will of the natives, who had been her chief support from the very beginning.

She began to pass harsh laws, to limit the planting of spice-trees in order that the price might remain high—her inspectors made annual tours in order to destroy all plants in excess of those allowed by law, natives were forbidden to trade with other than Dutchmen, and they were forced to sell their products at prices that were not fixed with reference to the producers.

To enforce these laws, which recalled the tyranny of Spain and Portugal, the Dutch had necessarily to

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revert to the same means—costly military establishments—forts and garrisons. Thus the profits of the company became more and more swallowed up in cost of administration.

Then too, little by little, a large permanent staff of officials grew up to watch over the enlarged administrative area, and with this force was introduced the same sort of corruption which afflicted Spain and Portugal. The original constitution of the company contemplated only trade, and in the earlier years the servants of the company were mainly sailors and clerks, with a few agents at main distributing points. But when the company departed from this principle in order to impose laws upon people with whom they had originally sought only the right to exchange European goods for an equivalent in spices, then a new departure was made—trade expansion became “empire”—a very different thing, as we shall see later on.

From 1700 on, the company, alarmed by the waning in profits, sought to improve matters by changing her officials more frequently—but the result was even worse, for the man who expected to remain but three years at his post was equally disposed to make his fortune before returning home. Clerks who left Holland on a small weekly salary returned rich men. This condition was scandalous, but the Government proved unequal to the task of introducing a reform. It is only after studying the failures of Spain and Portugal and Holland in this direction that one can appreciate England, which has commissioned many privileged companies; has checked them when they have gone wrong, called them to account without in-

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terfering with their commercial usefulness, and shown the world that she can produce administrators like Cecil Rhodes and Warren Hastings without endangering the liberties of her people at home—or the rights of her colonists abroad.

The Dutch paid their officials poorly—and in consequence they secured men who attempted to make money in other ways.

To-day Germany pays her officials also very little, but this is the day of telegraphs and fast steamers—when officials at Kiao Chow or Dar es Salaam can be checked from Berlin almost as easily as though they were in Posen or Metz. But in the seventeenth century the Governor at Batavia, on a salary of 12,000 gulden, had little to fear during his term of office. There was no regular post, and all his brother officials were practically fellow-conspirators, leagued against the natives for purposes of gain. The Dutch settlements in the East Indies soon offered little advantage over those of Portugal, save in the facts that the Dutch did not interfere with native religion, and did not practise slavery to any great extent. The policy of the East India Company became more and more tyrannical and narrow, but, as its activity was limited mainly to gathering the fruits of spice-trees, there was no occasion for the employment of large bodies of slaves, as in the plantations and mines of the Portuguese and Spanish colonies. The Dutch required but a small number of servants, for domestic purposes, and slavery under such conditions caused but slight complaint. Holland attached much importance to the Cape as a station where her ships might refresh themselves on



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the way to and from Java, but the Dutch East India Company, far from showing a desire to colonize the place, passed regulations which made the life of a white colonist almost intolerable. Nothing, perhaps, illustrates more completely the relative insignificance of the Cape Colony in the eyes of the Dutch than that it was made a mere appanage of Java. A crime committed at Cape Town had to be decided, when appealed, at Batavia, not at Amsterdam. It is from this long connection with Java that to-day we see so many Malays about the streets of Cape Town, though they are practically unknown in the interior or farther up the coast.

But in spite of the selfishness that characterized the Dutch East India Company toward the latter half of the seventeenth century, so excellent was the climate at this place that a thin stream of emigration found its way thither, partly Dutch, partly French Protestants—and these were from the outset at war with the repressive measures of the Dutch Government. Thus, naturally, and almost imperceptibly, was bred a race roughly analogous to the American "Frontiersman" who chafed under the restraints of old-world legislation, and whose progress was marked by perpetual warfare with natives and wild beasts. The Great Trek of 1836 would have been impossible but for the preceding generations of discontented colonists, who ended the dominion of their legal rulers by settling on the fringes of civilization and becoming a law unto themselves and to the natives who came within range of their rifles. These Boers were like the American backwoodsmen, tough in fibre, lawless as

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regards the law of men whom they did not acknowledge, but devout Puritans as regards the law of God—at least that portion of it which they regarded as peculiarly suited to their requirements. Their life was not favorable to the founding of schools and churches. They became nomads—living in a huge tented ox-wagon, or “prairie-schooner,” as it would be called in America. To-day, in spite of the railway, these great family ox-wagons may still be seen, drawing the Boers farther and farther from the civilization they detest. That movement must proceed as it did in America, until the “cow-boy” finds no more frontier, and must perforce accommodate himself to civilization as best he can. The spirit of the frontiersman is a strange thing, and must be understood if the history of South Africa is to be intelligible. Blood counts for much, and the Boer could not show his present tenacity of purpose did he not acknowledge his Dutch and Huguenot ancestry. But the Dutchman of Amsterdam can no more understand the Boer than could the cultivated New Englander understand the people of his own race who lived by choice a life of savagery beyond the Mississippi fifty years ago. Legislators of to-day commit the common mistake of regarding the De Wets and Cronjes and Krugers as Europeans who in our day have become rebels. We are apt to think of them as of the emigrants who land in New York, and in a few months become voters or anarchists. We cannot accustom ourselves to the historic evolution of a man who has been two hundred years an outlaw—who has been suckled on principles which we count as treasonable, but which his leaders regard as conform-

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ity to the will of God. It is the Boer and not the Englishman who conquered the upland of South Africa; he it is who represents white aristocracy from the Zambesi to Cape Town; he regards himself as the superior man, physically and morally, and he resents scornfully the pretension of any government toward suzerainty over him. In a rough way his case bears analogy to that of the strange community of English Boers who, with a peculiar religion, hardy constitutions, and boundless ignorance, penetrated the American desert and created a splendid isolation for themselves in Utah. These people asked no favors of the United States, save to be let alone; they occupied land which was of no value save through the irrigation which they introduced; they minded their own business, assisted in spreading the white race amidst savage tribes, and, with the one exception of polygamy, did nothing to excite the ill-will of the paramount government.

But precious metals were discovered in their neighborhood, the New England Yankee knocked at the Mormon gates; he was refused admission—so he went in without. The fight commenced, and now the Mormon figures in American political life just as any other white man, no more and no less. The Mormon had thought himself as strong physically, as he conceived himself to be theologically infallible. When his mistake was demonstrated, he conformed to the new order of things; and so will the Boer.

As one who has been hospitably entertained by the Boers in lonely farm-houses, who has found among them men of rounded culture, of honorable instincts,

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and fine physical courage, the subject is for me not an easy one to treat without causing misunderstanding. In situations that are paradoxical, it is hard to make any statement not open to contradiction. There are so many different kinds of Boers, that in using the word I am conscious that it comprises almost as much variety as the word Englishman—which includes the Piccadilly dandy and the East End costermonger.

The Boer most in evidence of late is he of the Kruger\* type—the man who hugs the memory of Slaagter's Nek. The average Englishman knows no more of Slaagter's Nek than he does of Nathan Hale, the Yale graduate whose hanging during the Revolutionary War determined the execution of Major André. But every American school-boy reveres the memory of Nathan Hale, and the Kruger Boer holds in sacred recollection the martyrs of Slaagter's Nek.

The story in a nutshell is that the English Government, in 1815, condemned to death and hanged half a dozen Boers who had defied the authority of the English courts and had been guilty of rebellion against the Crown. The case was perfectly clear—quite as clear as that of Jameson in 1896—but a large part of Boer public sentiment, even while deprecating the action of the rebels, refused to admit the right of England to govern the colony which Holland had ceded to her in the year of Waterloo. The Boers did not read much, and cared little for the opinion of

\* In the spelling of Kruger I am following the orthography employed by the late President himself in my presence. Why the English and American press persists in putting two dots over the u I cannot understand.—P. B.

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learned jurists. They believed, with the late Henry George, that land should be the property of those who made good use of it, and in their opinion it was they and not the English who were improving the soil of South Africa. Thus from the very beginning, British expansion in South Africa caused a succession of conflicts with the Boers, who, though overborne by numbers, always retired—undismayed, if not undefeated.

In the early days—before 1815—the Dutch Government disliked the Boer, and persecuted him more than ever did the English in the succeeding years. But that fact has been lost sight of nowadays, when the Dutch of Holland seek to demonstrate that the Boer is their kith and kin. The German now speaks in the most affectionate way of his cousin, the Boer, for it is the fashion to pretend that the Boers would naturally welcome German or Dutch control in South Africa. But this view is entertained by people who take counsel of their hopes rather than of history. The Boer dislikes the Hollander cordially—their ways are very far apart, and the supercilious clerk of Rotterdam excites only contempt in Pretoria. He was tolerated because Dr. Leyds declared him necessary.

As for the official German, the Boer of South Africa knows him as a neighbor far more dangerous than England. Efforts were made after the Jameson Raid to trek away into German West Africa, but those who took part in this came back so much discouraged that they effectually put an end to all desire of nearer acquaintance with their cousins from Berlin. Indeed, contact with official Germany has done much to reconcile the Boer to his lot under the English flag.

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The Boer of the Kruger type, who has been the foremost in ambushing the advance column of English progress, is grossly misrepresented when credited with a preference among European governments. He distrusts them all equally. He looks upon the man of modern Europe as the Puritans of the Restoration looked upon frivolous cavaliers.

Of all Holland's great colonial empire South Africa is the only land where the white man has bred a strong race, and where Dutch is spoken. To be sure, the Dutch of South Africa is not intelligible to a classically bred professor of Leyden—it bears the same relation to the mother-tongue as does the jargon of German-Switzerland to the academical accents of Hanover or Bremen. Each can understand the other, after a preliminary course of misunderstanding—much as Spaniards get along with Portuguese, or Norwegians with Danes. The Dutch tongue may live for some time yet as a secondary language in certain portions of the country, but every Boer recognizes, even to-day, that English is necessary for him, if he wishes to move out into the broad current of modern life; and thus without any special legislation on the subject, Dutch will become obsolete. The Huguenots gave up their speech for Dutch, the Boers will surrender theirs for English.

A learned German official recently justified the exclusion of Boers from German West Africa on the ground that it would be a national disgrace if Dutch prevailed in a German colony!

The Germans are not the only ones who have sought to compel language to follow the flag, and

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they will probably recognize their mistake as others have had to—too late. The Government of Paul Kruger made desperate efforts, in 1896, to drive English out of the Transvaal schools and to substitute Dutch in its stead, but the result was that Boers sent their children to the Orange Free State, where more liberal maxims prevailed.

It is no small praise to the Dutch character to recall that Boers and Anglo-Saxons are the only colonists that have kept their blood pure. The Portuguese and Spaniards not merely tolerated the abominable practice of cohabitation with negroes, they even encouraged it as a means of more rapidly producing a population calculated to withstand tropical climates.

In early New England, as among the Boers, the Bible was at the bottom of this disinclination to mingle with the native. The Boer looked upon the Kaffir as the Englishman of 1620 looked upon the red Indian, as one of the heathen tribes which they, as a chosen people, were called upon to exterminate, after the example set by Joshua, and, indeed, Joshua reminds me much of Paul Kruger.