

The native policy of the Dutch Boers in the Transvaal. Statement of the Aborigines' Protection Society.

Aborigines Protection Society (Great Britain)
Westminster : P.S. King, 1881.

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THE NATIVE POLICY
OF
THE DUTCH BOERS
IN THE
TRANSVAAL.

Statement of the Aborigines' Protection Society.

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NOTE.

THE ABORIGINES' PROTECTION SOCIETY have sent to the Earl of Kimberley, her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, the following Memorandum on the Native Policy of the Boers. It is issued in the present form in the hope that public attention will be drawn to a phase of the Transvaal question which has been far too much overlooked in the controversies that are now taking place.

Communications on this subject should be addressed to Mr. F. W. CHESSON, Secretary of the Society, 17, King William Street, Charing Cross.

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THE NATIVE POLICY OF THE DUTCH BOERS IN THE TRANSVAAL.

THE attention of the Aborigines' Protection Society has been called to a manifesto issued in the name of the Triumvirate of the Republic of South Africa on January 15th last, and which sets forth the grounds on which the Dutch Boers have taken up arms to re-establish their independence. Upon the question of the justice or expediency of the annexation of the Transvaal to the British possessions in South Africa it is not our intention to enter; nor shall we say one word against conceding to the Boers any rights which they, in common with all other organized communities, are entitled to enjoy. What we contend for is the equal claim of the native populations inhabiting the Transvaal or its frontiers to security against aggression and slavery.

The Triumvirate recite the text of the Sand River Convention of 1852, which gave the emigrant Boers full right to control their own affairs, subject, however, to certain conditions, the most important of which is contained in Article 4, as follows:—

“It is agreed that no slavery is, or shall be, permitted or practised, in the country to the north of the Vaal River by the emigrant farmers.”

The Triumvirate, in commenting upon this Convention, make the following statement:—

“Never has any provision of this Convention been violated, whereby even the pretence of right has been given to England to withdraw from its obligations. Although from different sides the Republic has been charged with favouring slavery; the untruth of such accusation has been glaringly brought to light by the very annexation itself; the representatives of her Majesty in our country having had no opportunity to repair any wrong done by Boers to the natives, for the simple reason that

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no wrong was committed. In the whole country no slave has been liberated, because there were none."

It will be observed that the representatives of the Boers now declare in effect not only that slavery did not exist in the Transvaal at the time of the annexation, but that the Boers have never violated the obligations which Article 4 imposed upon them. We have been greatly surprised at a statement so entirely contradicted by authoritative official, and other testimony. We, on the contrary, affirm that, from the moment the Boers secured their independence up to a recent period, they were constantly engaged in making raids upon the native tribes on their borders, for the purpose of reducing their captives to a state of slavery. At the close of the very year in which the Sand River Convention was signed, they attacked Dr. Livingstone's mission station in the Bechuana country, destroyed his library, and carried off upwards of 200 women and children into slavery. In his narrative of the outrage he says that "he can declare most positively that, except in the matter of refusing to throw obstacles in the way of English traders, Sechele (the Bechuana chief) never offended the Boers either by word or deed." Dr. Livingstone's experience was not exceptional. From time to time, during a long course of years, we received from various trustworthy persons letters describing similar barbarities. The Boers were far too politic to use the word "slavery," or even to establish a system of life-long bondage. Their practice was to kill the men, to employ the women as domestic servants, and to "apprentice" the orphan children—a practice which induced the late Lord Clarendon to ask "how it came to pass that there were so many 'destitute native orphan children' in the territories of the Republic as to require legislation on their behalf by the authorities, and also how the citizens of the Republic came to be possessed of them." Instead of quoting private letters from Dutch or English residents in the Transvaal, or the statements of kidnapped natives—many of which are in our possession—we will cite official testimony. The following is taken from a letter which Sir Philip Wodehouse, Governor of the Cape colony, addressed to President Pretorius in the year 1866:—

"I cannot close this communication without inviting your most serious and immediate attention to those provisions of the laws of the South African Republic under which, as I am in-

formed, native children and youths, called orphans, or perhaps made so by the murder of their parents, can be registered as apprentices for a term of twenty-one years, and can, during that term, be sold from hand to hand as a marketable commodity. I must plainly state that such arrangements, no matter under what name they may be disguised, can only be regarded as sanctioning practical slavery, and as being therefore a clear violation of one of the most important stipulations of the Convention between the Government and that of her Majesty. It is my duty, therefore, to seek, at the hands of your Government, a plain and positive repeal of any such laws, and the enactment of such penalties as will effectually put a stop to any further traffic in human beings, and will satisfy her Majesty's Government that the terms of the Convention will be honourably adhered to."

This despatch produced so little effect, that in August, 1868, the Legislative Council of Natal passed a series of resolutions condemnatory of the slave-trading practices of the Boers; and in the ensuing month Lieutenant-Governor Keate, in writing to the Secretary of State, says:—"It is very much to be feared that owing to the example set by the Portuguese for so long a time past, and to the later practice of some of the subjects of the Transvaal Government, all these tribes, or nearly all, with the marked exception of the Zulus, pursue a policy which is favourable to the prosecution of the slave-trade. Captives taken in war, children, or adults, are valuable property. The slave-ships take the adults, because, when carried beyond the seas, they cannot, by absconding, return to their homes. The subjects of the Transvaal take the children, because their infancy renders their ever reaching their homes hopeless. This slavery in the Transvaal territory, on the native soil of the slave, gives rise to the most atrocious crimes. It requires and leads to the extermination of the parents and friends, whenever possible, of the captured children, who otherwise might be sought for, and be inveigled away. It makes desirable, too, for its purposes the annihilation of the very commonest instincts of human nature."

It is now said that these facts exclusively belong to a bygone period, and that for many years past they have ceased to represent the actual condition of affairs in the Transvaal. We wish that we were able to take this view of the matter, but unfortunately we

shall, we think, be able to show that up to the eve of the annexation no change in the policy of the Boers on the native question had really taken place.

In proof of this, we beg to call attention to Sir Henry Barkly's despatch of January 25th, 1875, in which he encloses a communication from Mr. Southey, Lieutenant-Governor of Griqualand West, pointing out that the Pass Laws of the Republic not only tended to prevent labourers from proceeding to work at the Diamond-mines, and on the public works of the colony, but constituted a virtual breach of Article 4 of the Sand River Convention. The Pass Law of 1873, as Mr. Southey states, "imposed a tax of one pound upon all coloured persons, who were required to possess what are styled passes." Without these passes they were not allowed to leave the country. In 1874 the price of the pass was increased to five pounds, although, owing to a vigorous protest of the President, the operation of the law thus augmenting the tax was indefinitely postponed. Mr. Southey, in commenting upon this fact, says:—

"A system similar to that now sought to be enforced in the South African Republic, to compel coloured persons to work for the whites, and to render them liable to suffer corporal punishment by order of Field Cornets for non-observance of the law requiring them to be in service, was in operation in the Cape colony within my recollection. But, beyond a doubt, the effect of it was most disastrous, for it very naturally aroused in England and elsewhere feelings antagonistic to the best interests of the colonists, which resulted in the adoption of measures for withdrawing coloured persons from the service of their white employers, and placing them in independent positions at missionary stations or in locations set apart for their special use, where, collected together in masses without intelligent supervision, they brooded over their wrongs, or supposed wrongs, until they broke out in open rebellion, and joined the Kaffirs in war against the British Government in 1850."

We find that in the Pass Law, as amended, it was intended that Kaffirs should be compelled to go into service three months out of every year, and to be provided with a certificate thereof, for which they were to pay a sum of five shillings; and further that coloured people who failed to comply with the law were liable to be taken before the nearest Field Cornet and subjected to a penalty varying from one to ten pounds, and to a severe

flogging. The new law was never enforced, but the fact that it actually passed the Volksraad showed clearly enough that the majority of the Boers were still prepared to maintain the fundamental law of their state which declares that "the people will admit of no equality of persons of colour with white inhabitants neither in State nor Church."

It appears that the practice of flogging Kaffir servants is by no means confined to the men. A writer who possesses an intimate knowledge of the Transvaal, in an article published in *The Cape Monthly* in January, 1875, after stating that the only inducement which the Boers have any idea of offering to the natives whom they wish to work is "compulsion," says:—"They flog women there, and hold that to be the right treatment to make good servants of them."

On December 11th, 1876, Sir Henry Barkly forwarded to Lord Carnarvon an extract from the *Cape Argus*, detailing various atrocities committed by the Boers. The writer stated that not many weeks previously a friendly kraal had been attacked, and women, children, and cattle captured. "An order from the President compelled the farmers to release their victims, but threats were uttered that in a short time were put into effect. Kaffir allies were sent to destroy the women and children, and about sixteen were put to death." The object of the Boers in this case was clearly to reduce the women and children to slavery. Baffled of their purpose, they caused them to be massacred, but the President was powerless to punish the murderers.

In another letter from Lydenberg, dated November 28th, 1876, which Sir H. Barkly forwarded to Lord Carnarvon, the authority of a Boer is given for the statement that, in the previous week, slaves had been offered for sale on his farm. "The captives," we read, "have been taken from Sikukuni's country by Mapoch's people, and are being exchanged at the rate of a child for a heifer." It is also stated that "the whole of the Highveld is being replenished with Kaffir children whom the Boers have been lately purchasing from the Swazies at the rate of a horse for a child."

Our object is not to set forth the cruelties with which the Boers prosecuted their war against Sekukuni and Johannes—cruelties which provoked Lord Carnarvon to address a series of indignant remonstrances to President Burgess—but to show that at this period the Boers were still engaged in violating Article

4 of the Convention. Yet we must remark that the brutalities which disgraced the progress of that wanton and aggressive war—we refer more especially to the cowardly murder of many native women—contrast strangely with the tenets of the religious faith which the Boers profess, as well as with the solemn appeals which they so often make to the Almighty.

No retrospect of the dealings of the Boers with the native tribes in their vicinity would be complete without some reference to their repudiation of the Keate award of 1871, which involved the question of their right to claim the territory of the Bataplin and Barolong tribes as forming part of the Transvaal Republic. Although their President, Mr. Pretorius, had pledged the Republic to accept arbitration, yet because the decision of the referee, Mr. Keate, Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, was adverse to their pretensions, they refused to be bound by it. They subsequently occupied territory outside of the boundaries fixed by the award, and insisted upon regarding the native owners as their subjects. So recently as January, 1877, Montsioa, a Barolong Chief, complained that by President Burgess's "order and power, his (the Chief's) lands, water, and crops were in possession of strangers." Lord Carnarvon, in writing to Sir Henry Barkly on February 20th, 1877, was, we think, fully justified in pointing to these acts as showing an aggressive spirit, "dangerous alike to the liberties of the tribes and to the prosperity of the Republic itself, and which may at any moment result in serious and widespread disasters to the whole of South Africa."

In 1879 Sir Bartle Frere, when he was at Kimberley, sent a number of official documents to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, from which we learn that under the laws of the South African Republic no native, civilized or uncivilized, can hold a title to land; and that, "to avoid this difficulty, several chiefs and others got missionaries to buy for them." On July 23rd, 1878, the Chief Mokhalte expressed, through Mr. S. J. Van du Toit, "his earnest wish to be allowed to purchase landed property in his individual name, in order also to make provision for his children." Mr. du Toit says that in the Rustenburg district alone, "at least nine hundred farms were granted to the white burghers of the late Republic without making provision in this district for the blacks. The Kaffirs have, however, by purchasing, acquired some forty of the freehold farms, but not yet in their own names; besides last year they paid into the Treasury for capitation and

hut tax 2500*l*, sterling through the landdrost of Rustenburg." Yet the law that no coloured man can possess immovable property in the Transvaal is still on the statute-book; and Mr. C. G. Maasdoorp, the Attorney-General, actually expresses the opinion "that the alteration or repeal of so fundamental a law will be contrary to both the letter and spirit of the Annexation Proclamation of April, 1877."

The annexation of the Transvaal has materially increased our responsibilities towards the native inhabitants of that country, as well as towards the outlying tribes. As respects the former, one other illustration must for the present suffice. Mapoch is one of the most powerful chiefs in the Transvaal. He was one of our allies in the Sekukuni war; and at the termination of that miserable contest we promised him that he should be secured a good title to the land which his tribe occupy. But we learn that in November last two white men set up a claim to this land on the plea that they had bought it from the old Government of the Transvaal so long ago as August, 1874. This is surely a case in which our good faith is pledged to see that justice is done to the natives, especially as it is only too probable that if they are deprived of the land a war will ensue which might gravely compromise the general peace of South Africa.

These considerations apply with augmented force to the frontier policy of the Boers. They are in contact with the Zulus, the Swazies, the Bapedi (Sekukuni's tribe) and many other Bechuana tribes; also with the Matabele, the Amatonga, or Magwamba, &c. The aggressions of the Boers on the territories both of Sekukuni and of Cetywayo led to two of the most destructive wars which have ever taken place in South Africa. These wars have resulted in our breaking the military power both of the Zulus and of the Bapedi, and in thus depriving them of all effective means of self-defence. If the Boers are at liberty to resume their old native policy, they will be able, with comparative ease, to overrun native tribes which formerly held them at bay, but which are now no longer in a position to offer resistance to the invader. That our fears are not unfounded is shown by a recent report of Mr. Osborn, British Resident in Zululand, in which he states that since the close of the Zulu war, several Boers have attempted to re-establish themselves in the districts ruled by Oham and Seketwayo, but have been

warned off by him. Even a country as large as France must necessarily become too small for a people who are not satisfied with farms of less than 6000 or 8000 acres. With a community so covetous for land, constant encroachment upon the possessions of their weaker neighbours is inevitable, unless the British Government, acting in the general interests of South Africa, protects the natives. A trustworthy correspondent, who has long resided in the Transvaal, in a letter which we have just received from him, says:—"The Boers cannot rule the natives. This has been clearly proved in the late collisions. In general they do not care about civilizing and educating the natives; and were it not for the British Government's influence and constant watching, the Boers would soon try again to enslave the black people. Even now, under the British rule, a Boer jury will condemn to death a native who has committed some crime, whilst they would liberate or sentence to a very small penalty any white person who had wilfully, and in a cruel manner, murdered a black."

With regard to the statement of the Boer Triumvirate that since the annexation no slave has been liberated in the Transvaal, because there were none, we must express our conviction that hundreds, if not thousands of Kaffirs now working on the farms of the Boers, were originally kidnapped, and are still held in domestic servitude. We submit that in the absence of any official investigation into the condition and treatment of the natives engaged in agricultural service, it would be very unwise to assume that slavery or forced labour no longer exists. At the same time, we willingly admit, to quote the language of one of our correspondents,—that "since the native tribes have provided themselves with fire-arms, the Boers have become afraid of them," and consequently, that for several years past, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for the Boers to obtain supplies of so-called "apprentices" from the neighbouring countries.

We have no desire to say one word to limit the freedom of the white population in the Transvaal. We, however, ask that equal consideration be paid to the rights of the natives; and we therefore beg to express our earnest hope that her Majesty's Government, in any new arrangements they may make for the administration of the Transvaal, will keep steadily in view the duties they owe to the coloured race.

London, February 14, 1881.

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