

PREFACE

IN the following pages I have endeavoured to present an accurate picture of the Boers in war-time. My duties as a newspaper correspondent carried me to the Boer side, and herein I depict all that I saw. Some parts of my narrative may not be pleasing to the British reader; others may offend the sensibilities of the Boer sympathisers. I have written truthfully, but with a kindly spirit and with the intention of presenting an unbiased account of the struggle as it was unfolded to the view from the Boer side. I shall be criticised, no doubt, for extolling certain virtues of the Boers, but it must be noticed that their shortcomings are not neglected in these lines.

In referring to Boer deeds of bravery I do not mean to insinuate that all British soldiers were cowards any more than I mean to imply that all Boers were brave, but any man who has been with

armies will acknowledge that bravery is not the exclusive property of the peoples of one nation. The Boers themselves had thousands of examples of the bravery of their opponents, and it was not an extraordinary matter to hear burghers express their admiration of deeds of valour by the soldiers of the Queen. The burghers, it may be added, were not bitter enemies of the British soldiers, and upon hundreds of occasions they displayed the most friendly feeling toward members of the Imperial forces. The Boer respected the British soldier's ability, but the same respect was not vouchsafed to the British officer, and it was not unreasonable that a burgher should form such an opinion of the leaders of his enemy, for the mistakes of many of the British officers were so frequent and costly that the most unmilitary man could easily discern them. On that account the Boers' respect for the British soldier was not without its mixture of pity.

There are those who will assert that there was no goodness in the Boers and that they conducted the war unfairly, but I shall make no attempt to deny any of the statements on those subjects. My sympathies were with the Boers, but they were not so strong that I should tell untruths in order to whiten the Boer character. There were thieves among them — I had a horse and a pair of field-

glasses stolen from me on my first journey to the front—but that does not prove that all the Boers were wicked. I spent many weeks with them, in their laagers, commandos, and homes, and I have none but the happiest recollections of my sojourn in the Boer country. The generals and burghers, from the late Commandant-General Joubert to the veriest Takhaar, were extremely courteous and agreeable to me, and I have nothing but praise for their actions. In all my experiences with them I never saw one maltreat a prisoner or a wounded man, but, on the contrary, I observed many of their acts of kindness and mercy to their opponents.

I have sought to eliminate everything which might have had a bearing on the causes of the war, and in that I think I have succeeded. In my former book, dealing with the Boers in peaceful times, I gave my impressions of the political affairs of the country, and a closer study of the subject has not caused me to alter my opinions. Three years before the war began, I wrote what has been almost verified since—

"The Boers will be able to resist and to prolong the campaign for perhaps eight months or a year, but they will finally be obliterated from among the nations of the earth. It will cost the British Empire much treasure and many lives, but it will

satisfy those who caused it, the South African politicians and speculators."

The first part of the prediction has been realised, but at the present time there is no indication that the Boer nation will be extinguished so completely or so suddenly, unless the leaders of the burghers yield to their enemy's forces before all their powers and means of resistance have been exhausted. If they will continue to fight as men who struggle for the continued existence of their country and government should fight, and as they have declared they will go on with the war, then it will be three times eight months or three times a year before peace comes to South Africa. Presidents Kruger and Steyn have declared that they will continue the struggle for three years, and longer if necessary. De Wet will never yield as long as he has fifty burghers in his commando, and Botha will fight until every British soldier has been driven from South African soil. Hundreds of the burghers have made even firmer resolutions to continue the war until their cause is crowned with victory. There may be some among them who fought and are fighting because they despise Britons and British rule, but the vast majority are on commando because they firmly believe that Great Britain is attempting to take their country and their government from them by the process of theft which we

enlightened Anglo-Saxons of America and England are wont to style "benevolent assimilation." They feel that they have the right to govern their country in accordance with their own ideas of justice and equality, and, naturally, they will continue to fight until they are victorious, or might asserts itself over their conception of right. If they have the power to make Great Britain feel that their cause is just, as our forefathers in America did a hundred years ago, then the Boers have vindicated themselves and their actions in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world. If they lack in the patriotism which men who fight for the life of their country usually possess, then the Boers of South Africa will be exterminated from among the nations of the world and no one will offer any sympathy to them.

We Anglo-Saxons of America and Great Britain have a habit of calling our enemies by names which would arouse the fighting blood of the most peaceable individual, and when there is a Venezuelan question to be discussed we do not hesitate to practice this custom, born of our blood-alliance, by making each other the subjects of the vituperative attacks. During the Spanish-American war we made most uncomplimentary remarks concerning our short-lived enemy, and more recently we have been emphasising the vices of our *protégés*, the Filipinos, with a scornful disregard of their

virtues. The Boers, however, have had a greater burden to bear. They have had cast at them the shafts of British vituperation and the lyddite of American venom. In a few instances the lyddite was far more harrowing than the shafts, and in the vast majority of instances both were born of ignorance.

There are unclean, uncouth, and unregenerate Boers, and I doubt whether any one will stultify himself by declaring that there are none such of Britons and Americans. I have been among the Boers in times of peace and in times of war, and I have always failed to see that they were in any degree lower than the men of like rank or occupation in America or England. The farmers in Rustenburg probably never saw a dress suit or a *décolleté* gown, but there are innumerable regions in America and Great Britain where similarly dense ignorance prevails.

I have been in scores of American and British homes which were not more spotlessly clean than some of the houses on the veld in which it was my pleasure to find a night's entertainment, and nowhere, except in my own home, have I ever been treated with more courtesy than that which was extended to me, a perfect stranger, in scores of daub and wattle cottages in the Free State and the Transvaal. I will not declare that every Boer is a saint, or that every one is a model of cleanliness or virtue, but I make bold

to say that the majority of the Boers are not a fraction less moral, cleanly, or virtuous than the majority of Americans or Englishmen, albeit they may be less progressive and less handsome in appearance than we imagine ourselves to be.

As I have stated, the politics of the war has found no part in the following pages, and an honest effort has been made to give an impartial account of the proceedings as they unfolded themselves before the eyes of an American. The struggle is one which was brought about by the politicians, but it will probably be ended by the layman who wields a sword, and who knows nothing of the intricacies of diplomacy. The Boers desire to gain nothing but their countries' independence; the British have naught to lose except thousands of valuable lives if they continue in their determination to erase the two nations. Unless the Boers soon decide to end the war voluntarily, the real struggle will only begin when the Imperial forces enter the mountainous region in the north-eastern part of the Transvaal, and then General Lucas Meyer's prophecy that the bones of one hundred thousand British soldiers will lay bleaching on the South African veld before the British are victorious may be more than realised.

One word more. The English public is generous, and will not forget that the Boers are

fighting in the noblest of all causes—the independence of their country. If Englishmen will for a moment place themselves in the position of the Boers, if they will imagine their own country overrun by hordes of foreign soldiers, their own inferior forces gradually driven back to the wilds of Wales and Scotland, they will be able to picture to themselves the feelings of the men whom they are hunting to death. Would Englishmen in these circumstances give up the struggle? They would not; they would fight to the end.

HOWARD C. HILLEGAS.

NEW YORK CITY, August 1, 1900

.