

THE SCANDAL OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN COMMITTEE.

A PLAIN NARRATIVE FOR PLAIN MEN.

BY

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"The Chastity of Honour feels a Stain like a Wound."

BURKE.

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PREFACE.

THE time has come when it is necessary to set forth in plain words, which the plain man can understand, a narrative of Mr. Chamberlain's complicity in the conspiracy to overthrow the Government of the South African Republic in 1895.

Let me, at the beginning, emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the conspiracy to bring about a revolution in the Transvaal with a British force on the Border in support, which was the Jameson Plan, and the Jameson Raid. The two things are almost always confounded by the indiscriminating public. So far from being identical, the Jameson Raid cut the throat of the conspiracy. Dr. Jameson acted, no doubt, with the best intentions in the world, but, as a matter of fact, he not only upset Mr. Rhodes's applecart, but from excessive zeal caused the miscarriage of an enterprise which, however, indefensible it may have been from the point of view of constitutional law, would, if it had succeeded, have delivered us from all our present troubles. If, therefore, any person should say that Mr. Chamberlain was privy to the Raid, or that Mr. Chamberlain had anything whatever to do with the Raid, either that he knew about it beforehand, or that he sanctioned it, or that he was in any way whatever responsible for it, such person would say that which is not true. The Raid was Dr. Jameson's own act, and it spoiled everything. The Jameson Plan was that to which Mr. Chamberlain was privy.

I have never made any charge, or accusation, or complaint against Mr. Chamberlain for the support which he gave to the conspiracy against the Government of Paul Kruger. Neither do I at this moment lay any stress upon that side of the question. Others, no doubt, take a very serious view of the matter. They may be right, and I may be wrong. All that I wish to point out is that, so far from being animated, as many ignorantly declare, by a persistent and vindictive animosity against Mr. Chamberlain, I have from first to last endeavoured to make every conceivable excuse for his action in the autumn of 1895. If since I have been driven to criticize his action, it has been due, not to anything that he did in 1895, but to the manner in which he persisted, in the face of all warnings and protests, in adopting a policy of concealing the truth, denying facts and making both parties in the House of Commons unwilling accomplices in a conspiracy to deceive the nation, which is, I believe, without parallel in the history of Parliamentary Government. It is this offence which is rank, an offence committed in the full light of day, after careful and long deliberation, and with the distinct purpose and object of concealing the truth and giving official Parliamentary currency to a lie.

If any one blames me for this publication, I have only to say that I have been so vehemently assailed, alike by friends and foes, for saying that the scandal of the South African Committee was far more serious than that of the Raid, that a plain straightforward narrative compiled from the official record is necessary to show that I have not spoken without book.

W. T. STEAD.

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PART I.

BEFORE THE PLAN.

CHAPTER I.

A QUESTION OF MORAL MERIDIAN.

"OF all forms of prestige," says Mr. Lecky, in his new book, "The Map of Life," "moral prestige is the most valuable, and no statesman should forget that one of the chief elements of British power is the moral weight that is behind it. It is the conviction that British policy is essentially honourable and straightforward, that the word and honour of its statesmen and diplomatists may be implicitly trusted, and that intrigues and deceptions are wholly alien to their nature." "The statesman," says Mr. Lecky, "must steer his way between the fanaticism of those who have recognized no morality in Imperial politics and the fanaticism of those who imagine that in dealing with savage or half-savage military populations it is possible to act with the same respect for the technicalities of law and the same invariably high standard of moral scrupulousness as in a peaceful age and in a highly civilized country." This is true, and admirably well said.

The popular memory is so short and the passion of controversy so hot, that people are apt to forget everything but the last impression; and as it has been my lot to oppose the present war as unnecessary and unjust, it would not be surprising if Mr. Lecky were to put me down as a representative, perhaps the most conspicuous representative, of the latter class of fanatics. So far from this being the case, I feel that I lie under much greater danger of condemnation for an exactly opposite reason. I do not think that there is any one in this country who has asserted so uncompromisingly the injustice of judging men who live, let us say, in the moral meridian of Pretoria as if they were ethically in the latitude of Westminster. No doubt many of those with whom I am now acting have done so, and have in times past deemed it their duty to denounce me very roundly for what they consider my failure to apply an unalterable standard of right and wrong to all men in all places and at all times. I recognize the honesty of their censure, and sympathize largely with its motive; but it has always seemed to me unjust to expect that men, whether they are Boers or Britons, who live in the amorphous, semi-chaotic conditions that prevail in South Africa should be expected to conform to the same high standard of constitutional correctitude on which we have a right to insist from statesmen who are dealing with problems in a land like ours, "of old and just renown, where freedom broadens slowly down from precedent to precedent." It must be admitted that circumstances alter cases, and that when you are dealing with thieves and murderers you can hardly act in exactly the same way as you would if