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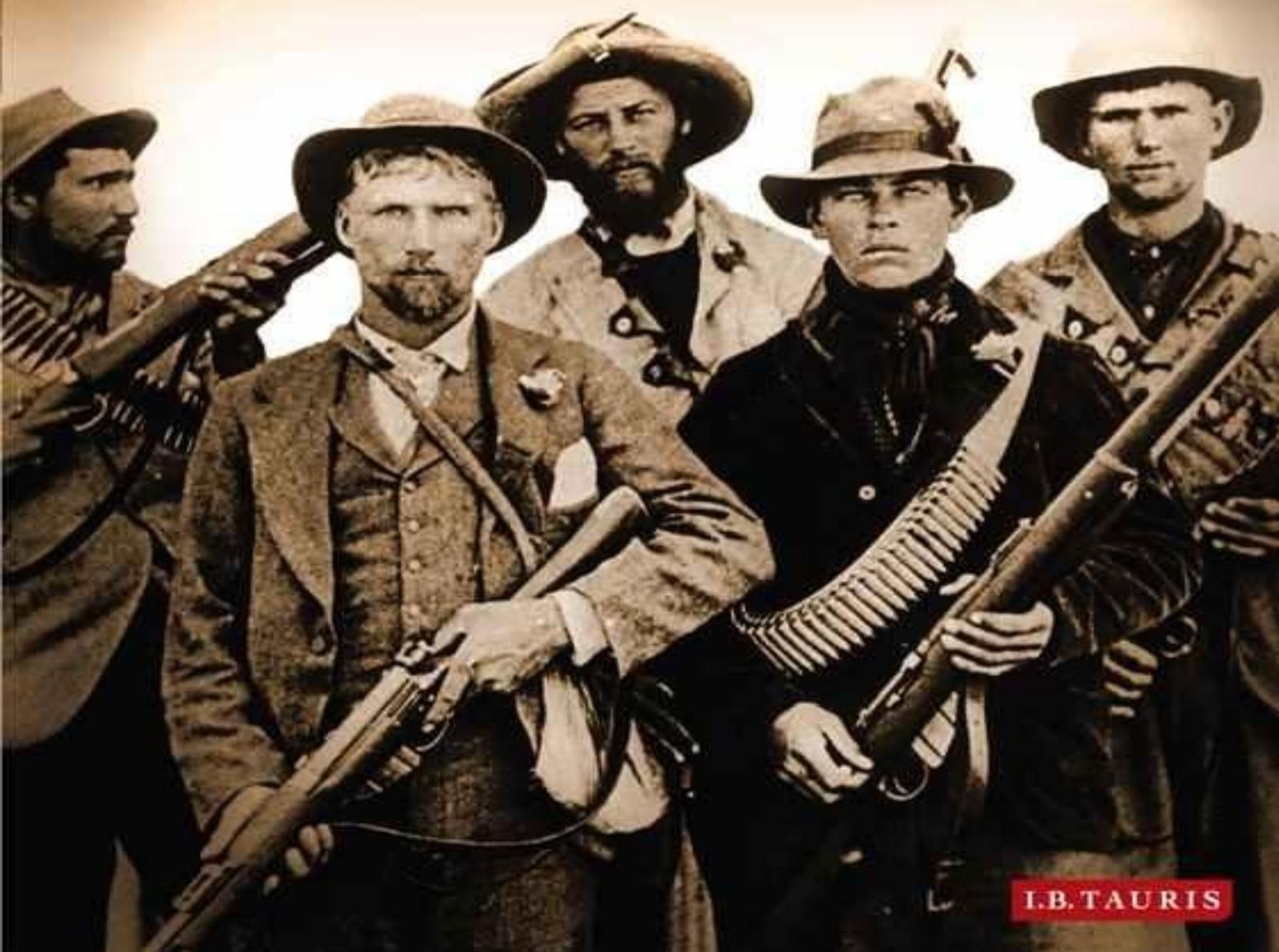
ANDREW ROBERTS, *SUNDAY TELEGRAPH*

DENIS JUDD & KEITH SURRIDGE

THE

# BOER WAR

A HISTORY



I.B. TAURIS

Denis Judd is Professor Emeritus of Imperial and Commonwealth History, London Metropolitan University, and Professor at New York University in London. His books include *Empire; George VI* (both published by I.B.Tauris); *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj*; *Balfour and the British Empire*; *Radical Joe – A Life of Joseph Chamberlain*; *The Victorian Empire*; *Palmerston*; *The Crimean War* and *Jawaharlal Nehru*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Keith Surridge is an independent scholar. He is the author of *Managing the South African War 1899–1902*.

‘An impressive history ... written to a high standard with undoubted scholarship.’

– Andrew Roberts, *Sunday Telegraph*

‘This immensely readable book ... provides a fine panoramic vision. The deeper meaning of the war is now clear.’

– Robert Giddings, *Tribune*

‘Judd and Surridge add a new angle ... they conclude that the war acted as a kind of boil-lancing which enabled the two white races to march forward hand-in-hand on the road to Apartheid.’

– Jane Ridley, *The Spectator*

‘Beautifully clear and remarkably compact, it tells its story with elegance and enormous authority.’

– Martin Rubin, *Washington Times*

‘This is a valuable portrait of the conflict itself and the politics behind it, as well as the concentration camps.’

– Colin Gardiner, *Oxford Times*

‘Denis Judd and Keith Surridge have revisited the conflict and come up with a fresh view which answers some questions and poses others ... a thoroughly decent book, cautious in its judgements and down-to-earth in its approach.’

– Trevor Royle, *Sunday Herald*, Glasgow

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A HISTORY

DENIS JUDD & KEITH SURRIDGE

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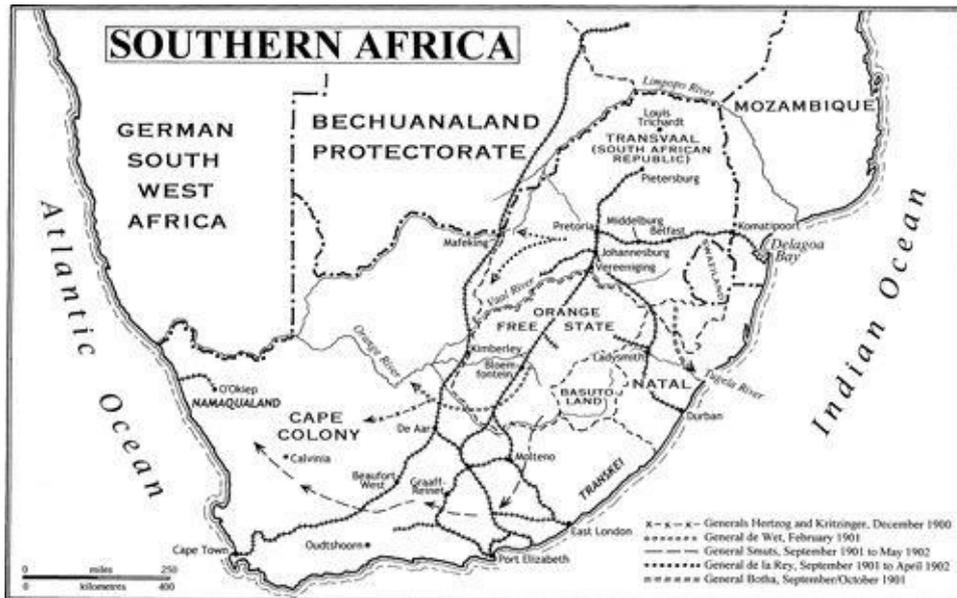
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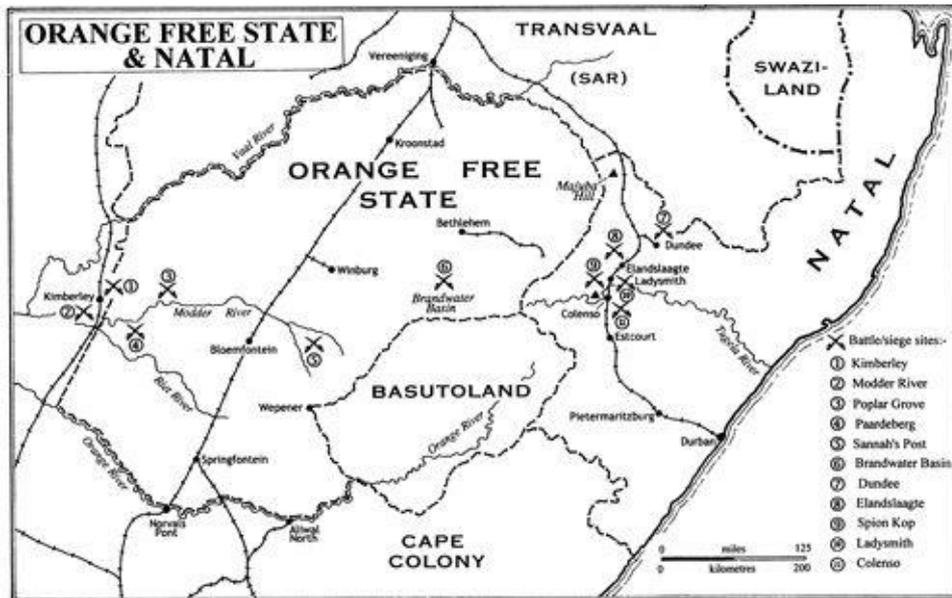
## *Acknowledgements*

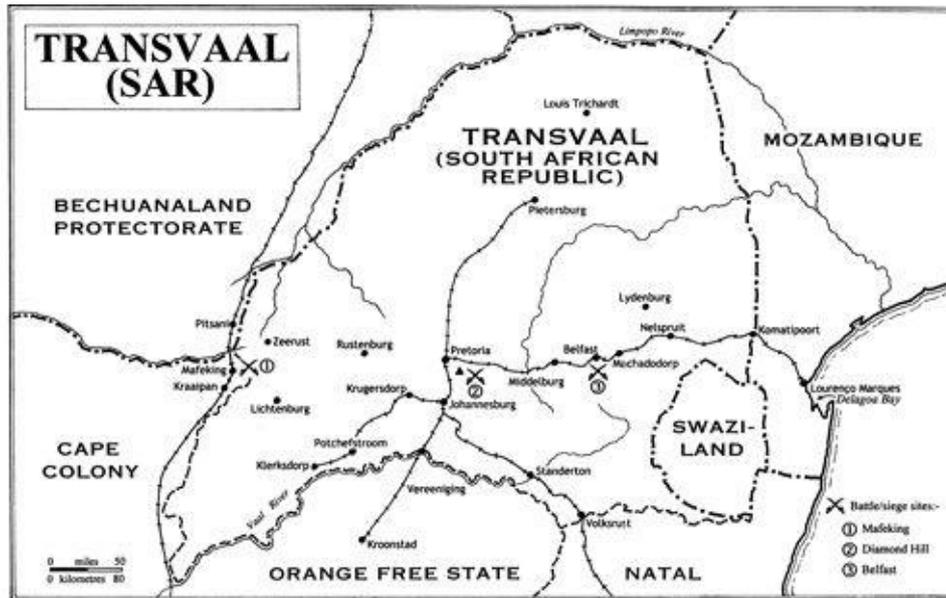
We are indebted, predictably enough, to many institutions and people for their help during the research and preparation of the book. For the use of documents in their care, we would like to thank Birmingham University Library; the Bodleian Library and the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford; the University of Cape Town; the library and archives of the Ladysmith Museum; the Manuscripts Department of the British Library; the Marquess of Salisbury; Royal Pavilion Libraries and Museums (Hove Reference Library); the National Army Museum, Chelsea; and the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office for permission to use Crown copyright documents held in the Public Record Office, Kew. In the Preface we mention the many individuals to whom we are grateful for their assistance in bringing this book to fruition.

## Maps









## *Preface*

This book is a cooperative venture – a successful and creative one we hope – arising out of the academic and professional interaction of the two authors and their shared areas of research interest. We are each responsible for certain sections of the text, but have also made amendments and suggestions, sometimes substantial ones, to each other's work. We have worked closely together throughout the writing of the book. More importantly, perhaps, we have been able to work harmoniously and happily on a project that is dear to our hearts and central to our academic interests. We sincerely hope that our readers will be satisfied with the final product.

Essentially, we have tried to examine and clarify certain aspects of the conflict – confusion, ambivalence, surprising alignments and realignments, misrepresentation, 'spin doctoring', double standards and the great residual mass of mythology attaching to the war – that have traditionally been either ignored or misunderstood. We have also presented a substantial section describing the military campaign.

In writing this new history of the Boer War we have inevitably read and profited from the works of many scholars and writers; our warm thanks go to them all. Many of them are acknowledged in the endnotes – though at the publisher's request we have tried to keep these notes to a minimum. Anyone wishing for more details about the books consulted will find this information in the bibliography. The same applies to the primary material used; readers who want to know more should consult the abbreviations page and the bibliography.

Denis Judd has found various conversations with fellow scholars, draft chapters for books, and a number of conference paper presentations, very useful in the preparation of this book. He would especially like to mention Professor Bill Nasson, Professor Albert Grundlingh, Dr Iain Smith, Dr Jacqueline Beaumont, Dr Donal Lowry, Dr Amanda Nelson, Dr Jeremy Krikler, Dr Bernard Mbenga, Dr Bala Chandramohan, Professor Shula Marks, Tim Jeal, Dr André Odendaal, Philip Sellars and Dr Christopher Heywood.

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Denis Judd is particularly grateful for the sabbatical leave and research relief granted to him by the University of North London. He also remembers with great affection his tramps over Boer War battlefields under the expert guidance of John

Snyman. Lesley Hart, keeper of the historical archives deposited at the University of Cape Town, and Cornia de Villiers of the Ladysmith Museum and its archives, were especially helpful. Both he and Keith Surridge are greatly indebted throughout to the good sense and creative advice of Bruce Hunter of David Higham Associates.

Finally we would like to give especial thanks to everyone – our families, friends and colleagues – who have had to come to terms with our frequently distracted and preoccupied states while working on this book. We hope that, for all of you, it has been worth waiting for.

*Denis Judd and Keith Surridge*  
*London, 2001*

### ***Preface to the 2013 Edition***

We are delighted with the publication of this new edition of our book by I.B.Tauris. We are especially grateful to Jo Godfrey of I.B.Tauris for her enthusiasm for the project and to Marigold Atkey of Higham Associates for her help throughout. The Bibliography contains some new items.

*Denis Judd and Keith Surridge*

## ***Introduction: An Irrepressible Conflict?***

The Boer War of 1899–1902 was Britain’s last great expansionist imperial war. Its events both symbolised Britain’s unique imperial status and, simultaneously, exposed embarrassing and potentially crippling weaknesses at the heart of her military machine. The final victory seemed to mark the climax of Britain’s late-nineteenth century process of imperial expansion, but it also coincided with, and helped to produce, a conspicuously more sober and introspective approach to Empire and overseas commitments – the result perhaps of the reverses, frustrations and defeats so honestly acknowledged at the war’s end in Rudyard Kipling’s celebrated and cautionary poem ‘No End of a Lesson’.<sup>1</sup>

Like so many wars, the Boer War promoted legends, convenient national myths and a wide variety of half-truths. It consolidated patriotic sentiment at home and also led to bitter internal disputes, within political parties and the media and among the public at large. It was marked by great acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, both individual and collective, but was also, on closer examination, shot through with scandal, corruption and malpractice. It provoked widespread hostility overseas, where a variety of foreign states, many of them imperial rivals of the British, expressed misgivings over Britain’s conduct – misgivings that were often most vehemently expressed by the policy-makers and leaders of public opinion in those states. But the war also led to the active participation of a number of foreign volunteers who fought for the Boers within the late-nineteenth century equivalent of the International Brigade of the Spanish Civil War.

Indeed, one of the characteristics of the war was its capacity to produce confusion and ambivalence and to highlight the complexities found within both the group and the individual in relation to loyalty, motive and even identity. This is not unusual, of course, in any number of confrontations, whether or not they proceed to the point of war. In South Africa, however, the conflict had many of the qualities of a civil war. Naturally, once the war began, both sides chose to dwell on the failings and perceived wrongdoings of their opponents; much was made of differences, real or imagined; and, in an acting out of one of the major but fundamental characteristics of conflict, all manner of sins and crimes were projected onto the enemy, both to vilify them as the strange, threatening ‘other’, and in the process to purge and purify those who hurled the accusations. Despite this propaganda war of vilification and abuse, it is plain that, for all their proclaimed differences and dislikes, Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking South Africans were often bound together in subtle and complex ways.

They shared the same environment and often faced the same struggles with drought, cattle disease and the vagaries of the climate and the land. They had many common

causes, even if some of them were understated and unacknowledged. Chief among these was the need to keep adequate control of the black majority, and indeed of all 'non-Europeans', and thus to ensure not only their own physical and personal safety but also the success of their various businesses, trades and occupations. Frequently the two groups met at social gatherings, at sporting events, at festivals and fairs. Sometimes they intermarried. Within the Afrikaner elite a significant proportion of young men were sent to Britain for their higher education, often to the universities of Cambridge or Oxford. The demands of a colonial society – and in many ways a rough-and-ready frontier society – meant that reliance upon neighbourly goodwill and assistance often took priority over entrenched or instinctive political, religious or 'national' differences.

In the last resort, moreover, the English-speakers and Afrikaners were both equally committed to the maintenance of a white supremacist South Africa. Even though there were some significant differences in emphasis and ideology when it came to their treatment and perception of the black majority, this should not obscure the fundamentally solid, essentially racist and exclusionist common ground on which both cultures rested.

As a result of this sharing of an overwhelmingly self-interested set of assumptions and hopes for the future regarding relations between whites and blacks, one of the intriguing and paradoxical themes of the confrontation that led to the outbreak of war in October 1899, and of the negotiations that resulted in the peace settlement of May 1902, was the search for compromise rather than an implacable, instinctive hostility.

There is no doubt that strenuous attempts were made to find some way of avoiding war during 1899 and even earlier; well before the final peace there had been other, abortive peace negotiations; and the final Peace of Vereeniging was a remarkably inclusive treaty that sought to minimise the impact of the defeat of the Boer republics and to begin at once the task of binding up the nation's, or at least the white nation's, wounds. Most significant of all perhaps was the decision in May 1902 to abandon the political aspirations of black and brown South Africans for the sake of the white man's peace. As a consequence, the future franchise in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State – and from 1910 in the Union of South Africa – was ruthlessly to exclude non-whites from the electoral process.

Despite these complexities and ambiguities, however, and the search for compromise that had attended the descent into war, at the outbreak of hostilities the British public were simply told by the government that the war was an unavoidable necessity and was being fought primarily to protect the Uitlanders of the Transvaal, most of whom were British citizens, from the tyranny of the Afrikaner government under Paul Kruger. The significance of the economic, financial and strategic implications of the confrontation in South Africa were either underplayed or virtually ignored in the propaganda war that preceded the real conflict. Equally simplistically, the Afrikaners of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, as well as many of their fellow-Afrikaners in the Cape and even Natal, were convinced that a deep-laid and diabolical plot to strip them of their independence and to subordinate them once and for all to imperial rule had been hatched by the British government in close concert with capitalist forces within South Africa, of which Cecil Rhodes was the most vehement and ostentatious representative.

It was therefore understandable that some British liberals and radicals were convinced that the war was simply being fought on behalf of, and at the behest of, national and international capitalism, among whose ranks the manipulative, often ‘faceless’ financiers of the golden city Johannesburg – ‘Jewburg’ as anti-Semites described it – were playing a significant role. Such misgivings were reinforced dramatically as the war progressed, and as protracted Boer resistance compelled the British forces to resort to the ‘methods of barbarism’ so strongly denounced by many British liberals, radicals and socialists, and which included the burning of Afrikaner farms, the eviction of much of the Afrikaner civilian rural population, and the wholesale deaths in the deeply hated and bitterly controversial concentration camps.<sup>2</sup>

Critics of the war also argued that the origins and progress of the conflict clearly demonstrated all that was wrong with British imperialism. They pointed out the apparent contradiction between Britain, the self-proclaimed ‘mother of democracy’, forcing a war upon two minor, independent states, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and chiefly for the purpose of incorporating the booming, gold-based economy of the Transvaal within the British imperial and capitalist systems.

Not only was there a wide range of domestic opinion – conveniently and often inaccurately labelled as ‘pro-Boer’ – that opposed the war, either out of principle or on account of the methods employed by Britain, but some British citizens actually fought on the other side – most notably the volunteers in the Irish unit commonly described as ‘MacBride’s Brigade’. Indeed, after a while, as some Afrikaners noted with pleasure, Irish fighters in the field became difficult to tell apart from their Boer comrades in arms.<sup>3</sup>

That Irishmen should have fought on both sides was, perhaps, predictable. Far more surprising is the fact that some other English-speaking South Africans actually fought for the Boers. A striking example of this can be found by examining the composition of the commando unit formed at Heidelberg, a town some twenty miles south-east of Johannesburg in the Transvaal. Here, as men rallied to the Boer cause in October 1899, sixteen men with British surnames joined them; they included Thomas and George Loversage, Thomas Taylor, Benjamin Russell, Charles Cothill and David Anderson. For good measure, two Russian Jews, Morris Levin and Paul Minski, also volunteered to fight alongside their Afrikaner compatriots.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere in the imperial system, a surprising number of British subjects were either sympathetic to the Afrikaner cause or indifferent to Britain’s success. Australian citizens of Irish origin were unlikely to be fervent supporters of a power that they associated with political oppression and a cynical disregard for generations of Ireland’s rural poor. French-Canadians had a long tradition of at best ambivalence, and at worst downright hostility to the British Empire. Indian nationalists included a growing number who were beginning to show a militancy that envisaged India throwing off British rule and pursuing the goal of self-government, perhaps even outside of the Empire.

As the war progressed a considerable number of British citizens chose to be identified with the pro-Boer side, or to be conspicuously impartial in their responses to the conflict. The example of two British women is enlightening. Emily Hobhouse, coming from a sheltered but deeply liberal English background, emerged as the