

PREFACE

The passing away of Mr. Max van der Stoep, earlier this year, dashed hopes in the hearts of the Dutch, who for a century have been waiting for a second Nobel Peace Prize laureate. For some time to come, it would seem, Tobias Asser will maintain his unique status in the Netherlands.

‘The Hague Tradition’ of international law cannot be explained by Dutch circumstance alone. From the first, it was emphatically an international endeavour and an interdisciplinary aspiration, in which politicians and diplomats, lawyers and pacifists all had their say. Men like Bourgeois and Renault of France, Scott and Carnegie of the USA, Martens of Russia and Stead of the UK. Each in his own way played a critical role in the founding, nurturing, and expanding of this great tradition.

What these men shared, for their varying expertise and outlook, was an infinite respect and unwavering support for the legal acumen, diplomatic genius and level-headed pragmatism of that trim, elegant Dutchman, Tobias Asser, whose eyes and words thrilled them and whose tactical adroitness bridged their differences. Against a backdrop of lethargy and isolation at home, which spelled out to the world what a century of neutrality had done to those once so dynamic Dutch, Tobias Asser stood out as a magnet attracting all forces of progress and internationalism. To him, more than anyone, The Hague owed the new lease on life it was offered in 1900. Tobias Asser was the facilitator, and his work the premise for The Hague Tradition.

Within the small compass of this publication, the prelude to a full biography which I hope to publish in 2013, I have sampled highlights of Tobias’ Asser’s fascinating personality, versatile mind and myriad endeavours. I am indebted to the Royal Netherlands Society of International Law and its President, Prof. Nico Schrijver, for offering me this opportunity; to various members of the Asser family for their ready and expert help; to Mr. J.H.A. van Loon for his kind suggestions; and to the Asser Press for its meticulous care.

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