

Arthur Conan Doyle

The Great Boer War



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It may come as a surprise that the creator of Sherlock Holmes wrote a history of the Boer War. The then 40-year-old novelist wanted to see the war first hand as a soldier, but the Victorian army balked at having popular author wielding a pen in its ranks. The army did accept him as a doctor and Doyle was knighted in 1902 for his work with a field hospital in Bloemfontein. Doyle's vivid description of the battles are probably thanks to the eye-witness accounts he got from his patients.

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The great Boer war

By Arthur Conan Doyle

Preface to the final edition

During the course of the war some sixteen Editions of this work have appeared, each of which was, I hope, a little more full and accurate than that which preceded it. I may fairly claim, however, that the absolute mistakes made have been few in number, and that I have never had occasion to reverse, and seldom to modify, the judgments which I have formed. In this final edition the early text has been carefully revised and all fresh available knowledge has been added within the limits of a single volume narrative. Of the various episodes in the latter half of the war it is impossible to say that the material is available for a complete and final chronicle. By the aid, however, of the official dispatches, of the newspapers, and of many private letters, I have done my best to give an intelligible and accurate account of the matter. The treatment may occasionally seem too brief but some proportion must be observed between the battles of 1899–1900 and the skirmishes of 1901–1902.

My private informants are so numerous that it would be hardly possible, even if it were desirable, that I should quote their names. Of the correspondents upon whose work I have drawn for my materials, I would acknowledge my obligations to Messrs. Burleigh, Nevinston, Battersby, Stuart, Amery, Atkins, Baillie, Kinneir, Churchill, James, Ralph, Barnes, Maxwell, Pearce, Hamilton, and others. Especially I would mention the gentleman who represented the 'Standard' in the last year of the war, whose accounts of Vlaktefontein, Von Donop's Convoy, and Tweebosch were the only reliable ones which reached the public.

Arthur Conan Doyle, Undershaw, Hindhead: September 1902.

Chapter 1. The Boer nations

Take a community of Dutchmen of the type of those who defended themselves for fifty years against all the power of Spain at a time when Spain was the greatest power in the world. Intermix with them a strain of those inflexible French Huguenots who gave up home and fortune and left their country for ever at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The product must obviously be one of the most rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen upon earth. Take this formidable people and train them for seven generations in constant warfare against savage men and ferocious beasts, in circumstances under which no weakling could survive, place them so that they acquire exceptional skill with weapons and in horsemanship, give them a country which is eminently suited to the tactics of the huntsman, the marksman, and the rider. Then, finally, put a finer temper upon their military qualities by a dour fatalistic Old Testament religion and an ardent and consuming patriotism. Combine all these qualities and all these impulses in one individual, and you have the modern Boer – the most formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain. Our military history has largely consisted in our conflicts with France, but Napoleon and all his veterans have never treated us so roughly as these hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology and their inconveniently modern rifles.

Look at the map of South Africa, and there, in the very centre of the British possessions, like the stone in a peach, lies the great stretch of the two republics, a mighty domain for so small a people. How came they there? Who are these Teutonic folk who have burrowed so deeply into Africa? It is a twice-told tale, and yet it must be told once again if this story is to have even the most superficial of introductions. No one can know or appreciate the Boer who does not know his past, for he is what his past has made him.

It was about the time when Oliver Cromwell was at his zenith – in 1652, to be pedantically accurate – that the Dutch made their first lodgment at the Cape of Good Hope. The Portuguese had been there before them, but, repelled by the evil weather, and lured forwards by rumours of gold, they had passed the true seat of empire and had voyaged further to settle along the eastern coast. Some gold there was, but not much, and the Portuguese settlements have never been sources of wealth to the mother country, and never will be until the day when Great Britain signs her huge cheque for Delagoa Bay. The coast upon which they settled reeked with malaria. A hundred miles of poisonous marsh separated it from the healthy inland plateau. For centuries these pioneers of South African colonisation strove to obtain some further footing, but save along the courses of the rivers they made little progress. Fierce natives and an enervating climate barred their way.

But it was different with the Dutch. That very rudeness of climate which had so impressed the Portuguese adventurer was the source of their success. Cold and poverty and storm are the nurses of the qualities which make for empire. It is the men from the bleak and barren lands who master the children of the light and the heat. And so the Dutchmen at the Cape prospered and grew stronger in that robust climate. They did not penetrate far inland, for they were few in number and all they wanted was to be found close at hand. But they built themselves houses, and they supplied the Dutch East India Company with food and water, gradually budding off little townlets, Wynberg, Stellenbosch, and pushing their settlements up the long slopes which lead to that great central plateau which extends for fifteen hundred miles from the edge of the Karoo to the Valley of the Zambesi. Then came the additional Huguenot emigrants – the best blood of France three hundred of them, a handful of the choicest seed thrown in to give a touch of grace and soul to the solid Teutonic strain. Again and again in the course of history, with the Normans, the Huguenots, the Emigres, one can see the great hand dipping into that storehouse and sprinkling the nations with the same splendid seed. France has not founded other countries, like her great rival, but she has made every other country the richer by the

mixture with her choicest and best. The Rouxs, Du Toits, Jouberts, Du Plessis, Villiers, and a score of other French names are among the most familiar in South Africa.

For a hundred more years the history of the colony was a record of the gradual spreading of the Afrikaners over the huge expanse of veld which lay to the north of them. Cattle raising became an industry, but in a country where six acres can hardly support a sheep, large farms are necessary for even small herds. Six thousand acres was the usual size, and five pounds a year the rent payable to Government. The diseases which follow the white man had in Africa, as in America and Australia, been fatal to the natives, and an epidemic of smallpox cleared the country for the newcomers. Further and further north they pushed, founding little towns here and there, such as Graaf-Reinet and Swellendam, where a Dutch Reformed Church and a store for the sale of the bare necessities of life formed a nucleus for a few scattered dwellings. Already the settlers were showing that independence of control and that detachment from Europe which has been their most prominent characteristic. Even the sway of the Dutch Company (an older but weaker brother of John Company in India) had caused them to revolt. The local rising, however, was hardly noticed in the universal cataclysm which followed the French Revolution. After twenty years, during which the world was shaken by the Titanic struggle between England and France in the final counting up of the game and paying of the stakes, the Cape Colony was added in 1814 to the British Empire.

In all our vast collection of States there is probably not one the title-deeds to which are more incontestable than to this one. We had it by two rights, the right of conquest and the right of purchase. In 1806 our troops landed, defeated the local forces, and took possession of Cape Town. In 1814 we paid the large sum of six million pounds to the Stadholder for the transference of this and some South American land. It was a bargain which was probably made rapidly and carelessly in that general redistribution which was going on. As a house of call upon the way to India the place was seen to be of value, but the country itself was looked upon as unprofitable and desert. What would Castlereagh or Liverpool have thought could they have seen the items which we were buying for our six million pounds? The inventory would have been a mixed one of good and of evil; nine fierce Kaffir wars, the greatest diamond mines in the world, the wealthiest gold mines, two costly and humiliating campaigns with men whom we respected even when we fought with them, and now at last, we hope, a South Africa of peace and prosperity, with equal rights and equal duties for all men. The future should hold something very good for us in that land, for if we merely count the past we should be compelled to say that we should have been stronger, richer, and higher in the world's esteem had our possessions there never passed beyond the range of the guns of our men-of-war. But surely the most arduous is the most honourable, and, looking back from the end of their journey, our descendants may see that our long record of struggle, with its mixture of disaster and success, its outpouring of blood and of treasure, has always tended to some great and enduring goal.

The title-deeds to the estate are, as I have said, good ones, but there is one singular and ominous flaw in their provisions. The ocean has marked three boundaries to it, but the fourth is undefined. There is no word of the 'Hinterland;' for neither the term nor the idea had then been thought of. Had Great Britain bought those vast regions which extended beyond the settlements? Or were the discontented Dutch at liberty to pass onwards and found fresh nations to bar the path of the Anglo-Celtic colonists? In that question lay the germ of all the trouble to come. An American would realise the point at issue if he could conceive that after the founding of the United States the Dutch inhabitants of the State of New York had trekked to the westward and established fresh communities under a new flag. Then, when the American population overtook these western States, they would be face to face with the problem which this country has had to solve. If they found these new States fiercely anti-American and extremely unprogressive, they would experience that aggravation of their difficulties with which our statesmen have had to deal.

At the time of their transference to the British flag the colonists – Dutch, French, and German – numbered some thirty thousand. They were slaveholders, and the slaves were about as numerous

as themselves. The prospect of complete amalgamation between the British and the original settlers would have seemed to be a good one, since they were of much the same stock, and their creeds could only be distinguished by their varying degrees of bigotry and intolerance. Five thousand British emigrants were landed in 1820, settling on the Eastern borders of the colony, and from that time onwards there was a slow but steady influx of English speaking colonists. The Government had the historical faults and the historical virtues of British rule. It was mild, clean, honest, tactless, and inconsistent. On the whole, it might have done very well had it been content to leave things as it found them. But to change the habits of the most conservative of Teutonic races was a dangerous venture, and one which has led to a long series of complications, making up the troubled history of South Africa. The Imperial Government has always taken an honourable and philanthropic view of the rights of the native and the claim which he has to the protection of the law. We hold and rightly, that British justice, if not blind, should at least be colour-blind. The view is irreproachable in theory and incontestable in argument, but it is apt to be irritating when urged by a Boston moralist or a London philanthropist upon men whose whole society has been built upon the assumption that the black is the inferior race. Such a people like to find the higher morality for themselves, not to have it imposed upon them by those who live under entirely different conditions. They feel – and with some reason – that it is a cheap form of virtue which, from the serenity of a well-ordered household in Beacon Street or Belgrave Square, prescribes what the relation shall be between a white employer and his half-savage, half-childish retainers. Both branches of the Anglo-Celtic race have grappled with the question, and in each it has led to trouble.

The British Government in South Africa has always played the unpopular part of the friend and protector of the native servants. It was upon this very point that the first friction appeared between the old settlers and the new administration. A rising with bloodshed followed the arrest of a Dutch farmer who had maltreated his slave. It was suppressed, and five of the participants were hanged. This punishment was unduly severe and exceedingly injudicious. A brave race can forget the victims of the field of battle, but never those of the scaffold. The making of political martyrs is the last insanity of statesmanship. It is true that both the man who arrested and the judge who condemned the prisoners were Dutch, and that the British Governor interfered on the side of mercy; but all this was forgotten afterwards in the desire to make racial capital out of the incident. It is typical of the enduring resentment which was left behind that when, after the Jameson raid, it seemed that the leaders of that ill-fated venture might be hanged, the beam was actually brought from a farmhouse at Cookhouse Drift to Pretoria, that the Englishmen might die as the Dutchmen had died in 1816. Slagter's Nek marked the dividing of the ways between the British Government and the Afrikaners.

And the separation soon became more marked. There were injudicious tamperings with the local government and the local ways, with a substitution of English for Dutch in the law courts. With vicarious generosity, the English Government gave very lenient terms to the Kaffir tribes who in 1834 had raided the border farmers. And then, finally, in this same year there came the emancipation of the slaves throughout the British Empire, which fanned all smouldering discontents into an active flame.

It must be confessed that on this occasion the British philanthropist was willing to pay for what he thought was right. It was a noble national action, and one the morality of which was in advance of its time, that the British Parliament should vote the enormous sum of twenty million pounds to pay compensation to the slaveholders, and so to remove an evil with which the mother country had no immediate connection. It was as well that the thing should have been done when it was, for had we waited till the colonies affected had governments of their own it could never have been done by constitutional methods. With many a grumble the good British householder drew his purse from his fob, and he paid for what he thought to be right. If any special grace attends the virtuous action which brings nothing but tribulation in this world, then we may hope for it over this emancipation. We spent our money, we ruined our West Indian colonies, and we started a disaffection in South Africa, the

end of which we have not seen. Yet if it were to be done again we should doubtless do it. The highest morality may prove also to be the highest wisdom when the half-told story comes to be finished.

But the details of the measure were less honourable than the principle. It was carried out suddenly, so that the country had no time to adjust itself to the new conditions. Three million pounds were ear-marked for South Africa, which gives a price per slave of from sixty to seventy pounds, a sum considerably below the current local rates. Finally, the compensation was made payable in London, so that the farmers sold their claims at reduced prices to middlemen. Indignation meetings were held in every little townlet and cattle camp on the Karoo. The old Dutch spirit was up – the spirit of the men who cut the dykes. Rebellion was useless. But a vast untenanted land stretched to the north of them. The nomad life was congenial to them, and in their huge ox-drawn wagons – like those bullock-carts in which some of their old kinsmen came to Gaul – they had vehicles and homes and forts all in one. One by one they were loaded up, the huge teams were inspanned, the women were seated inside, the men, with their long-barrelled guns, walked alongside, and the great exodus was begun. Their herds and flocks accompanied the migration, and the children helped to round them in and drive them. One tattered little boy of ten cracked his sjambok whip behind the bullocks. He was a small item in that singular crowd, but he was of interest to us, for his name was Paul Stephanus Kruger.

It was a strange exodus, only comparable in modern times to the sallying forth of the Mormons from Nauvoo upon their search for the promised land of Utah. The country was known and sparsely settled as far north as the Orange River, but beyond there was a great region which had never been penetrated save by some daring hunter or adventurous pioneer. It chanced – if there be indeed such an element as chance in the graver affairs of man – that a Zulu conqueror had swept over this land and left it untenanted, save by the dwarf bushmen, the hideous aborigines, lowest of the human race. There were fine grazing and good soil for the emigrants. They traveled in small detached parties, but their total numbers were considerable, from six to ten thousand according to their historian, or nearly a quarter of the whole population of the colony. Some of the early bands perished miserably. A large number made a trysting-place at a high peak to the east of Bloemfontein in what was lately the Orange Free State. One party of the emigrants was cut off by the formidable Matabeli, a branch of the great Zulu nation. The survivors declared war upon them, and showed in this, their first campaign, the extraordinary ingenuity in adapting their tactics to their adversary which has been their greatest military characteristic. The commando which rode out to do battle with the Matabeli numbered, it is said, a hundred and thirty-five farmers. Their adversaries were twelve thousand spearmen. They met at the Marico River, near Mafeking. The Boers combined the use of their horses and of their rifles so cleverly that they slaughtered a third of their antagonists without any loss to themselves. Their tactics were to gallop up within range of the enemy, to fire a volley, and then to ride away again before the spearmen could reach them. When the savages pursued the Boers fled. When the pursuit halted the Boers halted and the rifle fire began anew. The strategy was simple but most effective. When one remembers how often since then our own horsemen have been pitted against savages in all parts of the world, one deplores that ignorance of all military traditions save our own which is characteristic of our service.

This victory of the 'voortrekkers' cleared all the country between the Orange River and the Limpopo, the sites of what has been known as the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In the meantime another body of the emigrants had descended into what is now known as Natal, and had defeated Dingaan, the great Chief of the Zulus. Being unable, owing to the presence of their families, to employ the cavalry tactics which had been so effective against the Matabeli, they again used their ingenuity to meet this new situation, and received the Zulu warriors in a square of laagered wagons, the men firing while the women loaded. Six burghers were killed and three thousand Zulus. Had such a formation been used forty years afterwards against these very Zulus, we should not have had to mourn the disaster of Isandhlwana.

And now at the end of their great journey, after overcoming the difficulties of distance, of nature, and of savage enemies, the Boers saw at the end of their travels the very thing which they desired least – that which they had come so far to avoid – the flag of Great Britain. The Boers had occupied Natal from within, but England had previously done the same by sea, and a small colony of Englishmen had settled at Port Natal, now known as Durban. The home Government, however, had acted in a vacillating way, and it was only the conquest of Natal by the Boers which caused them to claim it as a British colony. At the same time they asserted the unwelcome doctrine that a British subject could not at will throw off his allegiance, and that, go where they might, the wandering farmers were still only the pioneers of British colonies. To emphasise the fact three companies of soldiers were sent in 1842 to what is now Durban – the usual Corporal's guard with which Great Britain starts a new empire. This handful of men was waylaid by the Boers and cut up, as their successors have been so often since. The survivors, however, fortified themselves, and held a defensive position – as also their successors have done so many times since – until reinforcements arrived and the farmers dispersed. It is singular how in history the same factors will always give the same result. Here in this first skirmish is an epitome of all our military relations with these people. The blundering headstrong attack, the defeat, the powerlessness of the farmer against the weakest fortifications – it is the same tale over and over again in different scales of importance. Natal from this time onward became a British colony, and the majority of the Boers trekked north and east with bitter hearts to tell their wrongs to their brethren of the Orange Free State and of the Transvaal.

Had they any wrongs to tell? It is difficult to reach that height of philosophic detachment which enables the historian to deal absolutely impartially where his own country is a party to the quarrel. But at least we may allow that there is a case for our adversary. Our annexation of Natal had been by no means definite, and it was they and not we who first broke that bloodthirsty Zulu power which threw its shadow across the country. It was hard after such trials and such exploits to turn their back upon the fertile land which they had conquered, and to return to the bare pastures of the upland veld. They carried out of Natal a heavy sense of injury, which has helped to poison our relations with them ever since. It was, in a way, a momentous episode, this little skirmish of soldiers and emigrants, for it was the heading off of the Boer from the sea and the confinement of his ambition to the land. Had it gone the other way, a new and possibly formidable flag would have been added to the maritime nations.

The emigrants who had settled in the huge tract of country between the Orange River in the south and the Limpopo in the north had been recruited by newcomers from the Cape Colony until they numbered some fifteen thousand souls. This population was scattered over a space as large as Germany, and larger than Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. Their form of government was individualistic and democratic to the last degree compatible with any sort of cohesion. Their wars with the Kaffirs and their fear and dislike of the British Government appear to have been the only ties which held them together. They divided and subdivided within their own borders, like a germinating egg. The Transvaal was full of lusty little high-mettled communities, who quarreled among themselves as fiercely as they had done with the authorities at the Cape. Lydenburg, Zoutpansberg, and Potchefstroom were on the point of turning their rifles against each other. In the south, between the Orange River and the Vaal, there was no form of government at all, but a welter of Dutch farmers, Basutos, Hottentots, and halfbreeds living in a chronic state of turbulence, recognising neither the British authority to the south of them nor the Transvaal republics to the north. The chaos became at last unendurable, and in 1848 a garrison was placed in Bloemfontein and the district incorporated in the British Empire. The emigrants made a futile resistance at Boomplaats, and after a single defeat allowed themselves to be drawn into the settled order of civilised rule.

At this period the Transvaal, where most of the Boers had settled, desired a formal acknowledgment of their independence, which the British authorities determined once and for all to give them. The great barren country, which produced little save marksmen, had no attractions for a Colonial Office which was bent upon the limitation of its liabilities. A Convention was concluded

between the two parties, known as the Sand River Convention, which is one of the fixed points in South African history. By it the British Government guaranteed to the Boer farmers the right to manage their own affairs, and to govern themselves by their own laws without any interference upon the part of the British. It stipulated that there should be no slavery, and with that single reservation washed its hands finally, as it imagined, of the whole question. So the South African Republic came formally into existence.

In the very year after the Sand River Convention a second republic, the Orange Free State, was created by the deliberate withdrawal of Great Britain from the territory which she had for eight years occupied. The Eastern Question was already becoming acute, and the cloud of a great war was drifting up, visible to all men. British statesmen felt that their commitments were very heavy in every part of the world, and the South African annexations had always been a doubtful value and an undoubted trouble. Against the will of a large part of the inhabitants, whether a majority or not it is impossible to say, we withdrew our troops as amicably as the Romans withdrew from Britain, and the new republic was left with absolute and unfettered independence. On a petition being presented against the withdrawal, the Home Government actually voted forty-eight thousand pounds to compensate those who had suffered from the change. Whatever historical grievance the Transvaal may have against Great Britain, we can at least, save perhaps in one matter, claim to have a very clear conscience concerning our dealings with the Orange Free State. Thus in 1852 and in 1854 were born those sturdy States who were able for a time to hold at bay the united forces of the empire.

In the meantime Cape Colony, in spite of these secessions, had prospered exceedingly, and her population – English, German, and Dutch – had grown by 1870 to over two hundred thousand souls, the Dutch still slightly predominating. According to the Liberal colonial policy of Great Britain, the time had come to cut the cord and let the young nation conduct its own affairs. In 1872 complete self-government was given to it, the Governor, as the representative of the Queen, retaining a nominal unexercised veto upon legislation. According to this system the Dutch majority of the colony could, and did, put their own representatives into power and run the government upon Dutch lines. Already Dutch law had been restored, and Dutch put on the same footing as English as the official language of the country. The extreme liberality of such measures, and the uncompromising way in which they have been carried out, however distasteful the legislation might seem to English ideas, are among the chief reasons which made the illiberal treatment of British settlers in the Transvaal so keenly resented at the Cape. A Dutch Government was ruling the British in a British colony, at a moment when the Boers would not give an Englishman a vote upon a municipal council in a city which he had built himself. Unfortunately, however, 'the evil that men do lives after them,' and the ignorant Boer farmer continued to imagine that his southern relatives were in bondage, just as the descendant of the Irish emigrant still pictures an Ireland of penal laws and an alien Church.

For twenty-five years after the Sand River Convention the burghers of the South African Republic had pursued a strenuous and violent existence, fighting incessantly with the natives and sometimes with each other, with an occasional fling at the little Dutch republic to the south. The semi-tropical sun was waking strange ferments in the placid Friesland blood, and producing a race who added the turbulence and restlessness of the south to the formidable tenacity of the north. Strong vitality and violent ambitions produced feuds and rivalries worthy of medieval Italy, and the story of the factious little communities is like a chapter out of Guicciardini. Disorganisation ensued. The burghers would not pay taxes and the treasury was empty. One fierce Kaffir tribe threatened them from the north, and the Zulus on the east. It is an exaggeration of English partisans to pretend that our intervention saved the Boers, for no one can read their military history without seeing that they were a match for Zulus and Sekukuni combined. But certainly a formidable invasion was pending, and the scattered farmhouses were as open to the Kaffirs as our farmers' homesteads were in the American colonies when the Indians were on the warpath. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, the British Commissioner, after an inquiry of three months, solved all questions by the formal annexation of the country. The

fact that he took possession of it with a force of some twenty-five men showed the honesty of his belief that no armed resistance was to be feared. This, then, in 1877 was a complete reversal of the Sand River Convention and the opening of a new chapter in the history of South Africa.

There did not appear to be any strong feeling at the time against the annexation. The people were depressed with their troubles and weary of contention. Burgers, the President, put in a formal protest, and took up his abode in Cape Colony, where he had a pension from the British Government. A memorial against the measure received the signatures of a majority of the Boer inhabitants, but there was a fair minority who took the other view. Kruger himself accepted a paid office under Government. There was every sign that the people, if judiciously handled, would settle down under the British flag. It is even asserted that they would themselves have petitioned for annexation had it been longer withheld. With immediate constitutional government it is possible that even the most recalcitrant of them might have been induced to lodge their protests in the ballot boxes rather than in the bodies of our soldiers.

But the empire has always had poor luck in South Africa, and never worse than on that occasion. Through no bad faith, but simply through preoccupation and delay, the promises made were not instantly fulfilled. Simple primitive men do not understand the ways of our circumlocution offices, and they ascribe to duplicity what is really red tape and stupidity. If the Transvaalers had waited they would have had their Volksraad and all that they wanted. But the British Government had some other local matters to set right, the rooting out of Sekukuni and the breaking of the Zulus, before they would fulfill their pledges. The delay was keenly resented. And we were unfortunate in our choice of Governor. The burghers are a homely folk, and they like an occasional cup of coffee with the anxious man who tries to rule them. The three hundred pounds a year of coffee money allowed by the Transvaal to its President is by no means a mere form. A wise administrator would fall into the sociable and democratic habits of the people. Sir Theophilus Shepstone did so. Sir Owen Lanyon did not. There was no Volksraad and no coffee, and the popular discontent grew rapidly. In three years the British had broken up the two savage hordes which had been threatening the land. The finances, too, had been restored. The reasons which had made so many favour the annexation were weakened by the very power which had every interest in preserving them.

It cannot be too often pointed out that in this annexation, the starting-point of our troubles, Great Britain, however mistaken she may have been, had no obvious selfish interest in view. There were no Rand mines in those days, nor was there anything in the country to tempt the most covetous. An empty treasury and two native wars were the reversion which we took over. It was honestly considered that the country was in too distracted a state to govern itself, and had, by its weakness, become a scandal and a danger to its neighbours. There was nothing sordid in our action, though it may have been both injudicious and high-handed.

In December 1880 the Boers rose. Every farmhouse sent out its riflemen, and the trysting-place was the outside of the nearest British fort. All through the country small detachments were surrounded and besieged by the farmers. Standerton, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Lydenburg, Wakkerstroom, Rustenberg, and Marabastad were all invested and all held out until the end of the war. In the open country we were less fortunate. At Bronkhorst Spruit a small British force was taken by surprise and shot down without harm to their antagonists. The surgeon who treated them has left it on record that the average number of wounds was five per man. At Laing's Nek an inferior force of British endeavoured to rush a hill which was held by Boer riflemen. Half of our men were killed and wounded. Ingogo may be called a drawn battle, though our loss was more heavy than that of the enemy. Finally came the defeat of Majuba Hill, where four hundred infantry upon a mountain were defeated and driven off by a swarm of sharpshooters who advanced under the cover of boulders. Of all these actions there was not one which was more than a skirmish, and had they been followed by a final British victory they would now be hardly remembered. It is the fact that they were skirmishes which succeeded in their object which has given them an importance which is exaggerated. At the

same time they may mark the beginning of a new military era, for they drove home the fact – only too badly learned by us – that it is the rifle and not the drill which makes the soldier. It is bewildering that after such an experience the British military authorities continued to serve out only three hundred cartridges a year for rifle practice, and that they still encouraged that mechanical volley firing which destroys all individual aim. With the experience of the first Boer war behind them, little was done, either in tactics or in musketry, to prepare the soldier for the second. The value of the mounted rifleman, the shooting with accuracy at unknown ranges, the art of taking cover – all were equally neglected.

The defeat at Majuba Hill was followed by the complete surrender of the Gladstonian Government, an act which was either the most pusillanimous or the most magnanimous in recent history. It is hard for the big man to draw away from the small before blows are struck but when the big man has been knocked down three times it is harder still. An overwhelming British force was in the field, and the General declared that he held the enemy in the hollow of his hand. Our military calculations have been falsified before now by these farmers, and it may be that the task of Wood and Roberts would have been harder than they imagined; but on paper, at least, it looked as if the enemy could be crushed without difficulty. So the public thought, and yet they consented to the upraised sword being stayed. With them, as apart from the politicians, the motive was undoubtedly a moral and Christian one. They considered that the annexation of the Transvaal had evidently been an injustice, that the farmers had a right to the freedom for which they fought, and that it was an unworthy thing for a great nation to continue an unjust war for the sake of a military revenge. It was the height of idealism, and the result has not been such as to encourage its repetition.

An armistice was concluded on March 5th, 1881, which led up to a peace on the 23rd of the same month. The Government, after yielding to force what it had repeatedly refused to friendly representations, made a clumsy compromise in their settlement. A policy of idealism and Christian morality should have been thorough if it were to be tried at all. It was obvious that if the annexation were unjust, then the Transvaal should have reverted to the condition in which it was before the annexation, as defined by the Sand River Convention. But the Government for some reason would not go so far as this. They niggled and quibbled and bargained until the State was left as a curious hybrid thing such as the world has never seen. It was a republic which was part of the system of a monarchy, dealt with by the Colonial Office, and included under the heading of 'Colonies' in the news columns of the 'Times.' It was autonomous, and yet subject to some vague suzerainty, the limits of which no one has ever been able to define. Altogether, in its provisions and in its omissions, the Convention of Pretoria appears to prove that our political affairs were as badly conducted as our military in this unfortunate year of 1881.

It was evident from the first that so illogical and contentious an agreement could not possibly prove to be a final settlement, and indeed the ink of the signatures was hardly dry before an agitation was on foot for its revision. The Boers considered, and with justice, that if they were to be left as undisputed victors in the war then they should have the full fruits of victory. On the other hand, the English-speaking colonies had their allegiance tested to the uttermost. The proud Anglo-Celtic stock is not accustomed to be humbled, and yet they found themselves through the action of the home Government converted into members of a beaten race. It was very well for the citizen of London to console his wounded pride by the thought that he had done a magnanimous action, but it was different with the British colonist of Durban or Cape Town, who by no act of his own, and without any voice in the settlement, found himself humiliated before his Dutch neighbour. An ugly feeling of resentment was left behind, which might perhaps have passed away had the Transvaal accepted the settlement in the spirit in which it was meant, but which grew more and more dangerous as during eighteen years our people saw, or thought that they saw, that one concession led always to a fresh demand, and that the Dutch republics aimed not merely at equality, but at dominance in South Africa. Professor Bryce, a friendly critic, after a personal examination of the country and the question, has left it upon record

that the Boers saw neither generosity nor humanity in our conduct, but only fear. An outspoken race, they conveyed their feelings to their neighbours. Can it be wondered at that South Africa has been in a ferment ever since, and that the British Africander has yearned with an intensity of feeling unknown in England for the hour of revenge?

The Government of the Transvaal after the war was left in the hands of a triumvirate, but after one year Kruger became President, an office which he continued to hold for eighteen years. His career as ruler vindicates the wisdom of that wise but unwritten provision of the American Constitution by which there is a limit to the tenure of this office. Continued rule for half a generation must turn a man into an autocrat. The old President has said himself, in his homely but shrewd way, that when one gets a good ox to lead the team it is a pity to change him. If a good ox, however, is left to choose his own direction without guidance, he may draw his wagon into trouble.

During three years the little State showed signs of a tumultuous activity. Considering that it was as large as France and that the population could not have been more than 50,000, one would have thought that they might have found room without any inconvenient crowding. But the burghers passed beyond their borders in every direction. The President cried aloud that he had been shut up in a kraal, and he proceeded to find ways out of it. A great trek was projected for the north, but fortunately it miscarried. To the east they raided Zululand, and succeeded, in defiance of the British settlement of that country, in tearing away one third of it and adding it to the Transvaal. To the west, with no regard to the three-year-old treaty, they invaded Bechuanaland, and set up the two new republics of Goshen and Stellaland. So outrageous were these proceedings that Great Britain was forced to fit out in 1884 a new expedition under Sir Charles Warren for the purpose of turning these freebooters out of the country. It may be asked, why should these men be called freebooters if the founders of Rhodesia were pioneers? The answer is that the Transvaal was limited by treaty to certain boundaries which these men transgressed, while no pledges were broken when the British power expanded to the north. The upshot of these trespasses was the scene upon which every drama of South Africa rings down. Once more the purse was drawn from the pocket of the unhappy taxpayer, and a million or so was paid out to defray the expenses of the police force necessary to keep these treaty-breakers in order. Let this be borne in mind when we assess the moral and material damage done to the Transvaal by that ill-conceived and foolish enterprise, the Jameson Raid.

In 1884 a deputation from the Transvaal visited England, and at their solicitation the clumsy Treaty of Pretoria was altered into the still more clumsy Convention of London. The changes in the provisions were all in favour of the Boers, and a second successful war could hardly have given them more than Lord Derby handed them in time of peace. Their style was altered from the Transvaal to the South African Republic, a change which was ominously suggestive of expansion in the future. The control of Great Britain over their foreign policy was also relaxed, though a power of veto was retained. But the most important thing of all, and the fruitful cause of future trouble, lay in an omission. A suzerainty is a vague term, but in politics, as in theology, the more nebulous a thing is the more does it excite the imagination and the passions of men. This suzerainty was declared in the preamble of the first treaty, and no mention of it was made in the second. Was it thereby abrogated or was it not? The British contention was that only the articles were changed, and that the preamble continued to hold good for both treaties. They pointed out that not only the suzerainty, but also the independence, of the Transvaal was proclaimed in that preamble, and that if one lapsed the other must do so also. On the other hand, the Boers pointed to the fact that there was actually a preamble to the second Convention, which would seem, therefore, to have taken the place of the first. The point is so technical that it appears to be eminently one of those questions which might with propriety have been submitted to the decision of a board of foreign jurists – or possibly to the Supreme Court of the United States. If the decision had been given against Great Britain, we might have accepted it in a chastened spirit as a fitting punishment for the carelessness of the representative who failed to make our meaning intelligible. Carlyle has said that a political mistake always ends in a broken head

for somebody. Unfortunately the somebody is usually somebody else. We have read the story of the political mistakes. Only too soon we shall come to the broken heads.

This, then, is a synopsis of what had occurred up to the signing of the Convention, which finally established, or failed to establish, the position of the South African Republic. We must now leave the larger questions, and descend to the internal affairs of that small State, and especially to that train of events which has stirred the mind of our people more than anything since the Indian Mutiny.

Chapter 2. The cause of quarrel

There might almost seem to be some subtle connection between the barrenness and worthlessness of a surface and the value of the minerals which lie beneath it. The craggy mountains of Western America, the arid plains of West Australia, the ice-bound gorges of the Klondyke, and the bare slopes of the Witwatersrand veld – these are the lids which cover the great treasure chests of the world.

Gold had been known to exist in the Transvaal before, but it was only in 1886 that it was realised that the deposits which lie some thirty miles south of the capital are of a very extraordinary and valuable nature. The proportion of gold in the quartz is not particularly high, nor are the veins of a remarkable thickness, but the peculiarity of the Rand mines lies in the fact that throughout this 'banket' formation the metal is so uniformly distributed that the enterprise can claim a certainty which is not usually associated with the industry. It is quarrying rather than mining. Add to this that the reefs which were originally worked as outcrops have now been traced to enormous depths, and present the same features as those at the surface. A conservative estimate of the value of the gold has placed it at seven hundred millions of pounds.

Such a discovery produced the inevitable effect. A great number of adventurers flocked into the country, some desirable and some very much the reverse. There were circumstances, however, which kept away the rowdy and desperado element who usually make for a newly opened goldfield. It was not a class of mining which encouraged the individual adventurer. There were none of those nuggets which gleamed through the mud of the dollies at Ballarat, or recompensed the forty-niners in California for all their travels and their toils. It was a field for elaborate machinery, which could only be provided by capital. Managers, engineers, miners, technical experts, and the tradesmen and middlemen who live upon them, these were the Uitlanders, drawn from all the races under the sun, but with the Anglo-Celtic vastly predominant. The best engineers were American, the best miners were Cornish, the best managers were English, the money to run the mines was largely subscribed in England. As time went on, however, the German and French interests became more extensive, until their joint holdings are now probably as heavy as those of the British. Soon the population of the mining centres became greater than that of the whole Boer community, and consisted mainly of men in the prime of life – men, too, of exceptional intelligence and energy.

The situation was an extraordinary one. I have already attempted to bring the problem home to an American by suggesting that the Dutch of New York had trekked west and founded an anti-American and highly unprogressive State. To carry out the analogy we will now suppose that that State was California, that the gold of that State attracted a large inrush of American citizens, who came to outnumber the original inhabitants, that these citizens were heavily taxed and badly used, and that they deafened Washington with their outcry about their injuries. That would be a fair parallel to the relations between the Transvaal, the Uitlanders, and the British Government.

That these Uitlanders had very real and pressing grievances no one could possibly deny. To recount them all would be a formidable task, for their whole lives were darkened by injustice. There was not a wrong which had driven the Boer from Cape Colony which he did not now practise himself upon others – and a wrong may be excusable in 1885 which is monstrous in 1895. The primitive virtue which had characterised the farmers broke down in the face of temptation. The country Boers were little affected, some of them not at all, but the Pretoria Government became a most corrupt oligarchy, venal and incompetent to the last degree. Officials and imported Hollanders handled the stream of gold which came in from the mines, while the unfortunate Uitlander who paid nine-tenths of the taxation was fleeced at every turn, and met with laughter and taunts when he endeavoured to win the franchise by which he might peaceably set right the wrongs from which he suffered. He was not an unreasonable person. On the contrary, he was patient to the verge of meekness, as capital is

likely to be when it is surrounded by rifles. But his situation was intolerable, and after successive attempts at peaceful agitation, and numerous humble petitions to the Volksraad, he began at last to realise that he would never obtain redress unless he could find some way of winning it for himself.

Without attempting to enumerate all the wrongs which embittered the Uitlanders, the more serious of them may be summed up in this way.

1. That they were heavily taxed and provided about seven-eighths of the revenue of the country. The revenue of the South African Republic – which had been 154,000 pounds in 1886, when the gold fields were opened – had grown in 1899 to four million pounds, and the country through the industry of the newcomers had changed from one of the poorest to the richest in the whole world (per head of population).

2. That in spite of this prosperity which they had brought, they, the majority of the inhabitants of the country, were left without a vote, and could by no means influence the disposal of the great sums which they were providing. Such a case of taxation without representation has never been known.

3. That they had no voice in the choice or payment of officials. Men of the worst private character might be placed with complete authority over valuable interests. Upon one occasion the Minister of Mines attempted himself to jump a mine, having officially learned some flaw in its title. The total official salaries had risen in 1899 to a sum sufficient to pay 40 pounds per head to the entire male Boer population.

4. That they had no control over education. Mr. John Robinson, the Director General of the Johannesburg Educational Council, has reckoned the sum spent on Uitlander schools as 650 pounds out of 63,000 pounds allotted for education, making one shilling and tenpence per head per annum on Uitlander children, and eight pounds six shillings per head on Boer children – the Uitlander, as always, paying seven-eighths of the original sum.

5. No power of municipal government. Watercarts instead of pipes, filthy buckets instead of drains, a corrupt and violent police, a high death-rate in what should be a health resort – all this in a city which they had built themselves.

6. Despotism in the matter of the press and of the right of public meeting.

7. Disability from service upon a jury.

8. Continual harassing of the mining interest by vexatious legislation. Under this head came many grievances, some special to the mines and some affecting all Uitlanders. The dynamite monopoly, by which the miners had to pay 600,000 pounds extra per annum in order to get a worse quality of dynamite; the liquor laws, by which one-third of the Kaffirs were allowed to be habitually drunk; the incompetence and extortions of the State-owned railway; the granting of concessions for numerous articles of ordinary consumption to individuals, by which high prices were maintained; the surrounding of Johannesburg by tolls from which the town had no profit – these were among the economical grievances, some large, some petty, which ramified through every transaction of life.

And outside and beyond all these definite wrongs imagine to a free born progressive man, an American or a Briton, the constant irritation of being absolutely ruled by a body of twenty-five men, twenty-one of whom had in the case of the Selati Railway Company been publicly and circumstantially accused of bribery, with full details of the bribes received, while to their corruption they added such crass ignorance that they argue in the published reports of the Volksraad debates that using dynamite bombs to bring down rain was firing at God, that it is impious to destroy locusts, that the word 'participate' should not be used because it is not in the Bible, and that postal pillar boxes are extravagant and effeminate. Such obiter dicta may be amusing at a distance, but they are less entertaining when they come from an autocrat who has complete power over the conditions of your life.

From the fact that they were a community extremely preoccupied by their own business, it followed that the Uitlanders were not ardent politicians, and that they desired to have a share in the government of the State for the purpose of making the conditions of their own industry and of their

own daily lives more endurable. How far there was need of such an interference may be judged by any fair-minded man who reads the list of their complaints. A superficial view may recognise the Boers as the champions of liberty, but a deeper insight must see that they (as represented by their elected rulers) have in truth stood for all that history has shown to be odious in the form of exclusiveness and oppression. Their conception of liberty has been a selfish one, and they have consistently inflicted upon others far heavier wrongs than those against which they had themselves rebelled.

As the mines increased in importance and the miners in numbers, it was found that these political disabilities affected some of that cosmopolitan crowd far more than others, in proportion to the amount of freedom to which their home institutions had made them accustomed. The continental Uitlanders were more patient of that which was unendurable to the American and the Briton. The Americans, however, were in so great a minority that it was upon the British that the brunt of the struggle for freedom fell. Apart from the fact that the British were more numerous than all the other Uitlanders combined, there were special reasons why they should feel their humiliating position more than the members of any other race. In the first place, many of the British were British South Africans, who knew that in the neighbouring countries which gave them birth the most liberal possible institutions had been given to the kinsmen of these very Boers who were refusing them the management of their own drains and water supply. And again, every Briton knew that Great Britain claimed to be the paramount power in South Africa, and so he felt as if his own land, to which he might have looked for protection, was conniving at and acquiescing in his ill treatment. As citizens of the paramount power, it was peculiarly galling that they should be held in political subjection. The British, therefore, were the most persistent and energetic of the agitators.

But it is a poor cause which cannot bear to fairly state and honestly consider the case of its opponents. The Boers had made, as has been briefly shown, great efforts to establish a country of their own. They had travelled far, worked hard, and fought bravely. After all their efforts they were fated to see an influx of strangers into their country, some of them men of questionable character, who outnumbered the original inhabitants. If the franchise were granted to these, there could be no doubt that though at first the Boers might control a majority of the votes, it was only a question of time before the newcomers would dominate the Raad and elect their own President, who might adopt a policy abhorrent to the original owners of the land. Were the Boers to lose by the ballot-box the victory which they had won by their rifles? Was it fair to expect it? These newcomers came for gold. They got their gold. Their companies paid a hundred per cent. Was not that enough to satisfy them? If they did not like the country why did they not leave it? No one compelled them to stay there. But if they stayed, let them be thankful that they were tolerated at all, and not presume to interfere with the laws of those by whose courtesy they were allowed to enter the country.

That is a fair statement of the Boer position, and at first sight an impartial man might say that there was a good deal to say for it; but a closer examination would show that, though it might be tenable in theory, it is unjust and impossible in practice.

In the present crowded state of the world a policy of Thibet may be carried out in some obscure corner, but it cannot be done in a great tract of country which lies right across the main line of industrial progress. The position is too absolutely artificial. A handful of people by the right of conquest take possession of an enormous country over which they are dotted at such intervals that it is their boast that one farmhouse cannot see the smoke of another, and yet, though their numbers are so disproportionate to the area which they cover, they refuse to admit any other people upon equal terms, but claim to be a privileged class who shall dominate the newcomers completely. They are outnumbered in their own land by immigrants who are far more highly educated and progressive, and yet they hold them down in a way which exists nowhere else upon earth. What is their right? The right of conquest. Then the same right may be justly invoked to reverse so intolerable a situation. This they would themselves acknowledge. 'Come on and fight! Come on!' cried a member of the Volksraad when the franchise petition of the Uitlanders was presented. 'Protest! Protest! What is the good of

protesting?' said Kruger to Mr. W. Y. Campbell; 'you have not got the guns, I have.' There was always the final court of appeal. Judge Creusot and Judge Mauser were always behind the President.

Again, the argument of the Boers would be more valid had they received no benefit from these immigrants. If they had ignored them they might fairly have stated that they did not desire their presence. But even while they protested they grew rich at the Uitlander's expense. They could not have it both ways. It would be consistent to discourage him and not profit by him, or to make him comfortable and build the State upon his money; but to ill-treat him and at the same time to grow strong by his taxation must surely be an injustice.

And again, the whole argument is based upon the narrow racial supposition that every naturalised citizen not of Boer extraction must necessarily be unpatriotic. This is not borne out by the examples of history. The newcomer soon becomes as proud of his country and as jealous of her liberty as the old. Had President Kruger given the franchise generously to the Uitlander, his pyramid would have been firm upon its base and not balanced upon its apex. It is true that the corrupt oligarchy would have vanished, and the spirit of a broader more tolerant freedom influenced the counsels of the State. But the republic would have become stronger and more permanent, with a population who, if they differed in details, were united in essentials. Whether such a solution would have been to the advantage of British interests in South Africa is quite another question. In more ways than one President Kruger has been a good friend to the empire.

So much upon the general question of the reason why the Uitlander should agitate and why the Boer was obdurate. The details of the long struggle between the seekers for the franchise and the refusers of it may be quickly sketched, but they cannot be entirely ignored by any one who desires to understand the inception of that great contest which was the outcome of the dispute.

At the time of the Convention of Pretoria (1881) the rights of burghership might be obtained by one year's residence. In 1882 it was raised to five years, the reasonable limit which obtains both in Great Britain and in the United States. Had it remained so, it is safe to say that there would never have been either an Uitlander question or a great Boer war. Grievances would have been righted from the inside without external interference.

In 1890 the inrush of outsiders alarmed the Boers, and the franchise was raised so as to be only attainable by those who had lived fourteen years in the country. The Uitlanders, who were increasing rapidly in numbers and were suffering from the formidable list of grievances already enumerated, perceived that their wrongs were so numerous that it was hopeless to have them set right seriatim, and that only by obtaining the leverage of the franchise could they hope to move the heavy burden which weighed them down. In 1893 a petition of 13,000 Uitlanders, couched in most respectful terms, was submitted to the Raad, but met with contemptuous neglect. Undeterred, however, by this failure, the National Reform Union, an association which organised the agitation, came back to the attack in 1894. They drew up a petition which was signed by 35,000 adult male Uitlanders, a greater number than the total Boer male population of the country. A small liberal body in the Raad supported this memorial and endeavoured in vain to obtain some justice for the newcomers. Mr. Jeppe was the mouthpiece of this select band. 'They own half the soil, they pay at least three quarters of the taxes,' said he. 'They are men who in capital, energy, and education are at least our equals.'

What will become of us or our children on that day when we may find ourselves in a minority of one in twenty without a single friend among the other nineteen, among those who will then tell us that they wished to be brothers, but that we by our own act have made them strangers to the republic?' Such reasonable and liberal sentiments were combated by members who asserted that the signatures could not belong to law-abiding citizens, since they were actually agitating against the law of the franchise, and others whose intolerance was expressed by the defiance of the member already quoted, who challenged the Uitlanders to come out and fight. The champions of exclusiveness and racial hatred won the day. The memorial was rejected by sixteen votes to eight, and the franchise law was, on the initiative of the President, actually made more stringent than ever, being framed in such a

way that during the fourteen years of probation the applicant should give up his previous nationality, so that for that period he would really belong to no country at all. No hopes were held out that any possible attitude upon the part of the Uitlanders would soften the determination of the President and his burghers. One who remonstrated was led outside the State buildings by the President, who pointed up at the national flag. 'You see that flag?' said he. 'If I grant the franchise, I may as well pull it down.' His animosity against the immigrants was bitter. 'Burghers, friends, thieves, murderers, newcomers, and others,' is the conciliatory opening of one of his public addresses. Though Johannesburg is only thirty-two miles from Pretoria, and though the State of which he was the head depended for its revenue upon the gold fields, he paid it only three visits in nine years.

This settled animosity was deplorable, but not unnatural. A man imbued with the idea of a chosen people, and unread in any book save the one which cultivates this very idea, could not be expected to have learned the historical lessons of the advantages which a State reaps from a liberal policy. To him it was as if the Ammonites and Moabites had demanded admission into the twelve tribes. He mistook an agitation against the exclusive policy of the State for one against the existence of the State itself. A wide franchise would have made his republic firm-based and permanent. It was a small minority of the Uitlanders who had any desire to come into the British system. They were a cosmopolitan crowd, only united by the bond of a common injustice. But when every other method had failed, and their petition for the rights of freemen had been flung back at them, it was natural that their eyes should turn to that flag which waved to the north, the west, and the south of them – the flag which means purity of government with equal rights and equal duties for all men. Constitutional agitation was laid aside, arms were smuggled in, and everything prepared for an organised rising.

The events which followed at the beginning of 1896 have been so thrashed out that there is, perhaps, nothing left to tell – except the truth. So far as the Uitlanders themselves are concerned, their action was most natural and justifiable, and they have no reason to exculpate themselves for rising against such oppression as no men of our race have ever been submitted to. Had they trusted only to themselves and the justice of their cause, their moral and even their material position would have been infinitely stronger. But unfortunately there were forces behind them which were more questionable, the nature and extent of which have never yet, in spite of two commissions of investigation, been properly revealed. That there should have been any attempt at misleading inquiry, or suppressing documents in order to shelter individuals, is deplorable, for the impression left – I believe an entirely false one – must be that the British Government connived at an expedition which was as immoral as it was disastrous.

It had been arranged that the town was to rise upon a certain night, that Pretoria should be attacked, the fort seized, and the rifles and ammunition used to arm the Uitlanders. It was a feasible device, though it must seem to us, who have had such an experience of the military virtues of the burghers, a very desperate one. But it is conceivable that the rebels might have held Johannesburg until the universal sympathy which their cause excited throughout South Africa would have caused Great Britain to intervene. Unfortunately they had complicated matters by asking for outside help. Mr. Cecil Rhodes was Premier of the Cape, a man of immense energy, and one who had rendered great services to the empire. The motives of his action are obscure – certainly, we may say that they were not sordid, for he has always been a man whose thoughts were large and whose habits were simple. But whatever they may have been – whether an ill-regulated desire to consolidate South Africa under British rule, or a burning sympathy with the Uitlanders in their fight against injustice – it is certain that he allowed his lieutenant, Dr. Jameson, to assemble the mounted police of the Chartered Company, of which Rhodes was founder and director, for the purpose of co-operating with the rebels at Johannesburg. Moreover, when the revolt at Johannesburg was postponed, on account of a disagreement as to which flag they were to rise under, it appears that Jameson (with or without the orders of Rhodes) forced the hand of the conspirators by invading the country with a force absurdly inadequate to the work which he had taken in hand. Five hundred policemen and three field guns made up the forlorn hope

who started from near Mafeking and crossed the Transvaal border upon December 29th, 1895. On January 2nd they were surrounded by the Boers amid the broken country near Dornkop, and after losing many of their number killed and wounded, without food and with spent horses, they were compelled to lay down their arms. Six burghers lost their lives in the skirmish.

The Uitlanders have been severely criticised for not having sent out a force to help Jameson in his difficulties, but it is impossible to see how they could have acted in any other manner. They had done all they could to prevent Jameson coming to their relief, and now it was rather unreasonable to suppose that they should relieve their reliever. Indeed, they had an entirely exaggerated idea of the strength of the force which he was bringing, and received the news of his capture with incredulity. When it became confirmed they rose, but in a halfhearted fashion which was not due to want of courage, but to the difficulties of their position. On the one hand, the British Government disowned Jameson entirely, and did all it could to discourage the rising; on the other, the President had the raiders in his keeping at Pretoria, and let it be understood that their fate depended upon the behaviour of the Uitlanders. They were led to believe that Jameson would be shot unless they laid down their arms, though, as a matter of fact, Jameson and his people had surrendered upon a promise of quarter. So skillfully did Kruger use his hostages that he succeeded, with the help of the British Commissioner, in getting the thousands of excited Johannesburgers to lay down their arms without bloodshed. Completely out-manoeuvred by the astute old President, the leaders of the reform movement used all their influence in the direction of peace, thinking that a general amnesty would follow; but the moment that they and their people were helpless the detectives and armed burghers occupied the town, and sixty of their number were hurried to Pretoria Gaol.

To the raiders themselves the President behaved with great generosity. Perhaps he could not find it in his heart to be harsh to the men who had managed to put him in the right and won for him the sympathy of the world. His own illiberal and oppressive treatment of the newcomers was forgotten in the face of this illegal inroad of filibusters. The true issues were so obscured by this intrusion that it has taken years to clear them, and perhaps they will never be wholly cleared. It was forgotten that it was the bad government of the country which was the real cause of the unfortunate raid. From then onwards the government might grow worse and worse, but it was always possible to point to the raid as justifying everything. Were the Uitlanders to have the franchise? How could they expect it after the raid? Would Britain object to the enormous importation of arms and obvious preparations for war? They were only precautions against a second raid. For years the raid stood in the way, not only of all progress, but of all remonstrance. Through an action over which they had no control, and which they had done their best to prevent, the British Government was left with a bad case and a weakened moral authority.

The raiders were sent home, where the rank and file were very properly released, and the chief officers were condemned to terms of imprisonment which certainly did not err upon the side of severity. Cecil Rhodes was left unpunished, he retained his place in the Privy Council, and his Chartered Company continued to have a corporate existence. This was illogical and inconclusive. As Kruger said, 'It is not the dog which should be beaten, but the man who set him on to me.' Public opinion – in spite of, or on account of, a crowd of witnesses – was ill informed upon the exact bearings of the question, and it was obvious that as Dutch sentiment at the Cape appeared already to be thoroughly hostile to us, it would be dangerous to alienate the British Afrianders also by making a martyr of their favourite leader. But whatever arguments may be founded upon expediency, it is clear that the Boers bitterly resented, and with justice, the immunity of Rhodes.

In the meantime, both President Kruger and his burghers had shown a greater severity to the political prisoners from Johannesburg than to the armed followers of Jameson. The nationality of these prisoners is interesting and suggestive. There were twenty-three Englishmen, sixteen South Africans, nine Scotchmen, six Americans, two Welshmen, one Irishman, one Australian, one Hollander, one Bavarian, one Canadian, one Swiss, and one Turk. The prisoners were arrested

in January, but the trial did not take place until the end of April. All were found guilty of high treason. Mr. Lionel Phillips, Colonel Rhodes (brother of Mr. Cecil Rhodes), George Farrar, and Mr. Hammond, the American engineer, were condemned to death, a sentence which was afterwards commuted to the payment of an enormous fine. The other prisoners were condemned to two years' imprisonment, with a fine of 2000 pounds each. The imprisonment was of the most arduous and trying sort, and was embittered by the harshness of the gaoler, Du Plessis. One of the unfortunate men cut his throat, and several fell seriously ill, the diet and the sanitary conditions being equally unhealthy. At last at the end of May all the prisoners but six were released. Four of the six soon followed, two stalwarts, Sampson and Davies, refusing to sign any petition and remaining in prison until they were set free in 1897. Altogether the Transvaal Government received in fines from the reform prisoners the enormous sum of 212,000 pounds. A certain comic relief was immediately afterwards given to so grave an episode by the presentation of a bill to Great Britain for 1,677, 938 pounds 3 shillings and 3 pence – the greater part of which was under the heading of moral and intellectual damage.

The raid was past and the reform movement was past, but the causes which produced them both remained. It is hardly conceivable that a statesman who loved his country would have refrained from making some effort to remove a state of things which had already caused such grave dangers, and which must obviously become more serious with every year that passed. But Paul Kruger had hardened his heart, and was not to be moved. The grievances of the Uitlanders became heavier than ever. The one power in the land to which they had been able to appeal for some sort of redress amid their grievances was the law courts. Now it was decreed that the courts should be dependent on the Volksraad. The Chief Justice protested against such a degradation of his high office, and he was dismissed in consequence without a pension. The judge who had condemned the reformers was chosen to fill the vacancy, and the protection of a fixed law was withdrawn from the Uitlanders.

A commission appointed by the State was sent to examine into the condition of the mining industry and the grievances from which the newcomers suffered. The chairman was Mr. Schalk Burger, one of the most liberal of the Boers, and the proceedings were thorough and impartial. The result was a report which amply vindicated the reformers, and suggested remedies which would have gone a long way towards satisfying the Uitlanders. With such enlightened legislation their motives for seeking the franchise would have been less pressing. But the President and his Raad would have none of the recommendations of the commission. The rugged old autocrat declared that Schalk Burger was a traitor to his country for having signed such a document, and a new reactionary committee was chosen to report upon the report. Words and papers were the only outcome of the affair. No amelioration came to the newcomers. But at least they had again put their case publicly upon record, and it had been endorsed by the most respected of the burghers. Gradually in the press of the English-speaking countries the raid was ceasing to obscure the issue. More and more clearly it was coming out that no permanent settlement was possible where the majority of the population was oppressed by the minority. They had tried peaceful means and failed. They had tried warlike means and failed. What was there left for them to do? Their own country, the paramount power of South Africa, had never helped them. Perhaps if it were directly appealed to it might do so. It could not, if only for the sake of its own imperial prestige, leave its children for ever in a state of subjection. The Uitlanders determined upon a petition to the Queen, and in doing so they brought their grievances out of the limits of a local controversy into the broader field of international politics. Great Britain must either protect them or acknowledge that their protection was beyond her power. A direct petition to the Queen praying for protection was signed in April 1899 by twenty-one thousand Uitlanders. From that time events moved inevitably towards the one end. Sometimes the surface was troubled and sometimes smooth, but the stream always ran swiftly and the roar of the fall sounded ever louder in the ears.

Chapter 3. The negotiations

The British Government and the British people do not desire any direct authority in South Africa. Their one supreme interest is that the various States there should live in concord and prosperity, and that there should be no need for the presence of a British redcoat within the whole great peninsula. Our foreign critics, with their misapprehension of the British colonial system, can never realise that whether the four-coloured flag of the Transvaal or the Union Jack of a self-governing colony waved over the gold mines would not make the difference of one shilling to the revenue of Great Britain. The Transvaal as a British province would have its own legislature, its own revenue, its own expenditure, and its own tariff against the mother country, as well as against the rest of the world, and England be none the richer for the change. This is so obvious to a Briton that he has ceased to insist upon it, and it is for that reason perhaps that it is so universally misunderstood abroad. On the other hand, while she is no gainer by the change, most of the expense of it in blood and in money falls upon the home country. On the face of it, therefore, Great Britain had every reason to avoid so formidable a task as the conquest of the South African Republic. At the best she had nothing to gain, and at the worst she had an immense deal to lose. There was no room for ambition or aggression. It was a case of shirking or fulfilling a most arduous duty.

There could be no question of a plot for the annexation of the Transvaal. In a free country the Government cannot move in advance of public opinion, and public opinion is influenced by and reflected in the newspapers. One may examine the files of the press during all the months of negotiations and never find one reputable opinion in favour of such a course, nor did one in society ever meet an advocate of such a measure. But a great wrong was being done, and all that was asked was the minimum change which would set it right, and restore equality between the white races in Africa. 'Let Kruger only be liberal in the extension of the franchise,' said the paper which is most representative of the sanest British opinion, 'and he will find that the power of the republic will become not weaker, but infinitely more secure. Let him once give the majority of the resident males of full age the full vote, and he will have given the republic a stability and power which nothing else can. If he rejects all pleas of this kind, and persists in his present policy, he may possibly stave off the evil day, and preserve his cherished oligarchy for another few years; but the end will be the same.' The extract reflects the tone of all of the British press, with the exception of one or two papers which considered that even the persistent ill usage of our people, and the fact that we were peculiarly responsible for them in this State, did not justify us in interfering in the internal affairs of the republic. It cannot be denied that the Jameson raid and the incomplete manner in which the circumstances connected with it had been investigated had weakened the force of those who wished to interfere energetically on behalf of British subjects. There was a vague but widespread feeling that perhaps the capitalists were engineering the situation for their own ends. It is difficult to imagine how a state of unrest and insecurity, to say nothing of a state of war, can ever be to the advantage of capital, and surely it is obvious that if some arch-schemer were using the grievances of the Uitlanders for his own ends the best way to checkmate him would be to remove those grievances. The suspicion, however, did exist among those who like to ignore the obvious and magnify the remote, and throughout the negotiations the hand of Great Britain was weakened, as her adversary had doubtless calculated that it would be, by an earnest but fussy and faddy minority. Idealism and a morbid, restless conscientiousness are two of the most dangerous evils from which a modern progressive State has to suffer.

It was in April 1899 that the British Uitlanders sent their petition praying for protection to their native country. Since the April previous a correspondence had been going on between Dr. Leyds, Secretary of State for the South African Republic, and Mr. Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, upon the existence or non-existence of the suzerainty. On the one hand, it was contended that the substitution

of a second convention had entirely annulled the first; on the other, that the preamble of the first applied also to the second. If the Transvaal contention were correct it is clear that Great Britain had been tricked and jockeyed into such a position, since she had received no quid pro quo in the second convention, and even the most careless of Colonial Secretaries could hardly have been expected to give away a very substantial something for nothing. But the contention throws us back upon the academic question of what a suzerainty is. The Transvaal admitted a power of veto over their foreign policy, and this admission in itself, unless they openly tore up the convention, must deprive them of the position of a sovereign State. On the whole, the question must be acknowledged to have been one which might very well have been referred to trustworthy arbitration.

But now to this debate, which had so little of urgency in it that seven months intervened between statement and reply, there came the bitterly vital question of the wrongs and appeal of the Uitlanders. Sir Alfred Milner, the British Commissioner in South Africa, a man of liberal views who had been appointed by a Conservative Government, commanded the respect and confidence of all parties. His record was that of an able, clear-headed man, too just to be either guilty of or tolerant of injustice. To him the matter was referred, and a conference was arranged between President Kruger and him at Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. They met on May 30th. Kruger had declared that all questions might be discussed except the independence of the Transvaal. 'All, all, all!' he cried emphatically. But in practice it was found that the parties could not agree as to what did or what did not threaten this independence. What was essential to one was inadmissible to the other. Milner contended for a five years' retroactive franchise, with provisions to secure adequate representation for the mining districts. Kruger offered a seven years' franchise, coupled with numerous conditions which whittled down its value very much, promised five members out of thirty-one to represent a majority of the male population, and added a provision that all differences should be subject to arbitration by foreign powers, a condition which is incompatible with any claim to suzerainty. The proposals of each were impossible to the other, and early in June Sir Alfred Milner was back in Cape Town and President Kruger in Pretoria, with nothing settled except the extreme difficulty of a settlement. The current was running swift, and the roar of the fall was already sounding louder in the ear.

On June 12th Sir Alfred Milner received a deputation at Cape Town and reviewed the situation. 'The principle of equality of races was,' he said, essential for South Africa. The one State where inequality existed kept all the others in a fever. Our policy was one not of aggression, but of singular patience, which could not, however, lapse into indifference.' Two days later Kruger addressed the Raad. 'The other side had not conceded one tittle, and I could not give more. God has always stood by us. I do not want war, but I will not give more away. Although our independence has once been taken away, God has restored it.' He spoke with sincerity no doubt, but it is hard to hear God invoked with such confidence for the system which encouraged the liquor traffic to the natives, and bred the most corrupt set of officials that the modern world has seen.

A dispatch from Sir Alfred Milner, giving his views upon the situation, made the British public recognise, as nothing else had done, how serious the position was, and how essential it was that an earnest national effort should be made to set it right. In it he said:

'The case for intervention is overwhelming. The only attempted answer is that things will right themselves if left alone. But, in fact, the policy of leaving things alone has been tried for years, and it has led to their going from bad to worse. It is not true that this is owing to the raid. They were going from bad to worse before the raid. We were on the verge of war before the raid, and the Transvaal was on the verge of revolution. The effect of the raid has been to give the policy of leaving things alone a new lease of life, and with the old consequences.

'The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots, constantly chafing under undoubted grievances, and calling vainly to her Majesty's Government for redress, does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain within the Queen's dominions. A section of the press, not in the Transvaal only, preaches openly and constantly the

doctrine of a republic embracing all South Africa, and supports it by menacing references to the armaments of the Transvaal, its alliance with the Orange Free State, and the active sympathy which, in case of war, it would receive from a section of her Majesty's subjects. I regret to say that this doctrine, supported as it is by a ceaseless stream of malignant lies about the intentions of her Majesty's Government, is producing a great effect on a large number of our Dutch fellow colonists. Language is frequently used which seems to imply that the Dutch have some superior right, even in this colony, to their fellow-citizens of British birth. Thousands of men peaceably disposed, and if left alone perfectly satisfied with their position as British subjects, are being drawn into disaffection, and there is a corresponding exasperation upon the part of the British.

'I can see nothing which will put a stop to this mischievous propaganda but some striking proof of the intention of her Majesty's Government not to be ousted from its position in South Africa.'

Such were the grave and measured words with which the British pro-consul warned his countrymen of what was to come. He saw the storm-cloud piling in the north, but even his eyes had not yet discerned how near and how terrible was the tempest.

Throughout the end of June and the early part of July much was hoped from the mediation of the heads of the Afrikaner Bond, the political union of the Dutch Cape colonists. On the one hand, they were the kinsmen of the Boers; on the other, they were British subjects, and were enjoying the blessings of those liberal institutions which we were anxious to see extended to the Transvaal. 'Only treat our folk as we treat yours! Our whole contention was compressed into that prayer. But nothing came of the mission, though a scheme endorsed by Mr. Hofmeyer and Mr. Herholdt, of the Bond, with Mr. Fischer of the Free State, was introduced into the Raad and applauded by Mr. Schreiner, the Afrikaner Premier of Cape Colony. In its original form the provisions were obscure and complicated, the franchise varying from nine years to seven under different conditions. In debate, however, the terms were amended until the time was reduced to seven years, and the proposed representation of the gold fields placed at five. The concession was not a great one, nor could the representation, five out of thirty-one, be considered a generous provision for the majority of the population; but the reduction of the years of residence was eagerly hailed in England as a sign that a compromise might be effected. A sigh of relief went up from the country. 'If,' said the Colonial Secretary, 'this report is confirmed, this important change in the proposals of President Kruger, coupled with previous amendments, leads Government to hope that the new law may prove to be the basis of a settlement on the lines laid down by Sir Alfred Milner in the Bloemfontein Conference.' He added that there were some vexatious conditions attached, but concluded, 'Her Majesty's Government feel assured that the President, having accepted the principle for which they have contended, will be prepared to reconsider any detail of his scheme which can be shown to be a possible hindrance to the full accomplishment of the object in view, and that he will not allow them to be nullified or reduced in value by any subsequent alterations of the law or acts of administration.' At the same time, the 'Times' declared the crisis to be at an end. 'If the Dutch statesmen of the Cape have induced their brethren in the Transvaal to carry such a Bill, they will have deserved the lasting gratitude, not only of their own countrymen and of the English colonists in South Africa, but of the British Empire and of the civilised world.'

But this fair prospect was soon destined to be overcast. Questions of detail arose which, when closely examined, proved to be matters of very essential importance. The Uitlanders and British South Africans, who had experienced in the past how illusory the promises of the President might be, insisted upon guarantees. The seven years offered were two years more than that which Sir Alfred Milner had declared to be an irreducible minimum. The difference of two years would not have hindered their acceptance, even at the expense of some humiliation to our representative. But there were conditions which excited distrust when drawn up by so wily a diplomatist. One was that the alien who aspired to burghership had to produce a certificate of continuous registration for a certain time. But the law of registration had fallen into disuse in the Transvaal, and consequently this provision might render the whole Bill valueless. Since it was carefully retained, it was certainly meant for use.

The door had been opened, but a stone was placed to block it. Again, the continued burghership of the newcomers was made to depend upon the resolution of the first Raad, so that should the mining members propose any measure of reform, not only their Bill but they also might be swept out of the house by a Boer majority. What could an Opposition do if a vote of the Government might at any moment unseat them all? It was clear that a measure which contained such provisions must be very carefully sifted before a British Government could accept it as a final settlement and a complete concession of justice to its subjects. On the other hand, it naturally felt loth to refuse those clauses which offered some prospect of an amelioration in their condition. It took the course, therefore, of suggesting that each Government should appoint delegates to form a joint commission which should inquire into the working of the proposed Bill before it was put into a final form. The proposal was submitted to the Raad upon August 7th, with the addition that when this was done Sir Alfred Milner was prepared to discuss anything else, including arbitration without the interference of foreign powers.

The suggestion of this joint commission has been criticised as an unwarrantable intrusion into the internal affairs of another country. But then the whole question from the beginning was about the internal affairs of another country, since the internal equality of the white inhabitants was the condition upon which self-government was restored to the Transvaal. It is futile to suggest analogies, and to imagine what France would do if Germany were to interfere in a question of French franchise. Supposing that France contained as many Germans as Frenchmen, and that they were ill-treated, Germany would interfere quickly enough and continue to do so until some fair *modus vivendi* was established. The fact is that the case of the Transvaal stands alone, that such a condition of things has never been known, and that no previous precedent can apply to it, save the general rule that a minority of white men cannot continue indefinitely to tax and govern a majority. Sentiment inclines to the smaller nation, but reason and justice are all on the side of England.

A long delay followed upon the proposal of the Secretary of the Colonies. No reply was forthcoming from Pretoria. But on all sides there came evidence that those preparations for war which had been quietly going on even before the Jameson raid were now being hurriedly perfected. For so small a State enormous sums were being spent upon military equipment. Cases of rifles and boxes of cartridges streamed into the arsenal, not only from Delagoa Bay, but even, to the indignation of the English colonists, through Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Huge packing-cases, marked 'Agricultural Instruments' and 'Mining Machinery,' arrived from Germany and France, to find their places in the forts of Johannesburg or Pretoria. Men of many nations but of a similar type showed their martial faces in the Boer towns. The condottieri of Europe were as ready as ever to sell their blood for gold, and nobly in the end did they fulfill their share of the bargain. For three weeks and more during which Mr. Kruger was silent these eloquent preparations went on. But beyond them, and of infinitely more importance, there was one fact which dominated the situation. A burgher cannot go to war without his horse, his horse cannot move without grass, grass will not come until after rain, and it was still some weeks before the rain would be due. Negotiations, then, must not be unduly hurried while the veld was a bare russet-coloured dust-swept plain. Mr. Chamberlain and the British public waited week after week for their answer. But there was a limit to their patience, and it was reached on August 26th, when the Colonial Secretary showed, with a plainness of speech which is as unusual as it is welcome in diplomacy, that the question could not be hung up for ever. 'The sands are running down in the glass,' said he. 'If they run out, we shall not hold ourselves limited by that which we have already offered, but, having taken the matter in hand, we will not let it go until we have secured conditions which once for all shall establish which is the paramount power in South Africa, and shall secure for our fellow-subjects there those equal rights and equal privileges which were promised them by President Kruger when the independence of the Transvaal was granted by the Queen, and which is the least that in justice ought to be accorded them.' Lord Salisbury, a little time before, had been equally emphatic. 'No one in this country wishes to disturb the conventions so long as it is recognised that

while they guarantee the independence of the Transvaal on the one side, they guarantee equal political and civil rights for settlers of all nationalities upon the other. But these conventions are not like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. They are mortal, they can be destroyed...and once destroyed they can never be reconstructed in the same shape.' The long-enduring patience of Great Britain was beginning to show signs of giving way.

In the meantime a fresh dispatch had arrived from the Transvaal which offered as an alternative proposal to the joint commission that the Boer Government should grant the franchise proposals of Sir Alfred Milner on condition that Great Britain withdrew or dropped her claim to a suzerainty, agreed to arbitration, and promised never again to interfere in the internal affairs of the republic. To this Great Britain answered that she would agree to arbitration, that she hoped never again to have occasion to interfere for the protection of her own subjects, but that with the grant of the franchise all occasion for such interference would pass away, and, finally, that she would never consent to abandon her position as suzerain power. Mr. Chamberlain's dispatch ended by reminding the Government of the Transvaal that there were other matters of dispute open between the two Governments apart from the franchise, and that it would be as well to have them settled at the same time. By these he meant such questions as the position of the native races and the treatment of Anglo-Indians.

On September 2nd the answer of the Transvaal Government was returned. It was short and uncompromising. They withdrew their offer of the franchise. They re-asserted the non-existence of the suzerainty. The negotiations were at a deadlock. It was difficult to see how they could be reopened. In view of the arming of the burghers, the small garrison of Natal had been taking up positions to cover the frontier. The Transvaal asked for an explanation of their presence. Sir Alfred Milner answered that they were guarding British interests, and preparing against contingencies. The roar of the fall was sounding loud and near.

On September 8th there was held a Cabinet Council – one of the most important in recent years. A message was sent to Pretoria, which even the opponents of the Government have acknowledged to be temperate, and offering the basis for a peaceful settlement. It begins by repudiating emphatically the claim of the Transvaal to be a sovereign international State in the same sense in which the Orange Free State is one. Any proposal made conditional upon such an acknowledgment could not be entertained.

The British Government, however, was prepared to accept the five years' 'franchise' as stated in the note of August 19th, assuming at the same time that in the Raad each member might talk his own language.

'Acceptance of these terms by the South African Republic would at once remove tension between the two Governments, and would in all probability render unnecessary any future intervention to secure redress for grievances which the Uitlanders themselves would be able to bring to the notice of the Executive Council and the Volksraad.

'Her Majesty's Government are increasingly impressed with the danger of further delay in relieving the strain which has already caused so much injury to the interests of South Africa, and they earnestly press for an immediate and definite reply to the present proposal. If it is acceded to they will be ready to make immediate arrangements...to settle all details of the proposed tribunal of arbitration...If, however, as they most anxiously hope will not be the case, the reply of the South African Republic should be negative or inconclusive, I am to state that her Majesty's Government must reserve to themselves the right to reconsider the situation *de novo*, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.'

Such was the message, and Great Britain waited with strained attention for the answer. But again there was a delay, while the rain came and the grass grew, and the veld was as a mounted rifleman would have it. The burghers were in no humour for concessions. They knew their own power, and they concluded with justice that they were for the time far the strongest military power in South Africa. 'We have beaten England before, but it is nothing to the licking we shall give her now,' cried

a prominent citizen, and he spoke for his country as he said it. So the empire waited and debated, but the sounds of the bugle were already breaking through the wrangles of the politicians, and calling the nation to be tested once more by that hammer of war and adversity by which Providence still fashions us to some nobler and higher end.

Chapter 4. The eve of war

The message sent from the Cabinet Council of September 8th was evidently the precursor either of peace or of war. The cloud must burst or blow over. As the nation waited in hushed expectancy for a reply it spent some portion of its time in examining and speculating upon those military preparations which might be needed. The War Office had for some months been arranging for every contingency, and had made certain dispositions which appeared to them to be adequate, but which our future experience was to demonstrate to be far too small for the very serious matter in hand.

It is curious in turning over the files of such a paper as the 'Times' to observe how at first one or two small paragraphs of military significance might appear in the endless columns of diplomatic and political reports, how gradually they grew and grew, until at last the eclipse was complete, and the diplomacy had been thrust into the tiny paragraphs while the war filled the journal. Under July 7th comes the first glint of arms amid the drab monotony of the state papers. On that date it was announced that two companies of Royal Engineers and departmental corps with reserves of supplies and ammunition were being dispatched. Two companies of engineers! Who could have foreseen that they were the vanguard of the greatest army which ever at any time of the world's history has crossed an ocean, and far the greatest which a British general has commanded in the field?

On August 15th, at a time when the negotiations had already assumed a very serious phase, after the failure of the Bloemfontein conference and the dispatch of Sir Alfred Milner, the British forces in South Africa were absolutely and absurdly inadequate for the purpose of the defence of our own frontier. Surely such a fact must open the eyes of those who, in spite of all the evidence, persist that the war was forced on by the British. A statesman who forces on a war usually prepares for a war, and this is exactly what Mr. Kruger did and the British authorities did not. The overbearing suzerain power had at that date, scattered over a huge frontier, two cavalry regiments, three field batteries, and six and a half infantry battalions – say six thousand men. The innocent pastoral States could put in the field forty or fifty thousand mounted riflemen, whose mobility doubled their numbers, and a most excellent artillery, including the heaviest guns which have ever been seen upon a battlefield. At this time it is most certain that the Boers could have made their way easily either to Durban or to Cape Town. The British force, condemned to act upon the defensive, could have been masked and afterwards destroyed, while the main body of the invaders would have encountered nothing but an irregular local resistance, which would have been neutralised by the apathy or hostility of the Dutch colonists. It is extraordinary that our authorities seem never to have contemplated the possibility of the Boers taking the initiative, or to have understood that in that case our belated reinforcements would certainly have had to land under the fire of the republican guns.

In July Natal had taken alarm, and a strong representation had been sent from the prime minister of the colony to the Governor, Sir W. Hely Hutchinson, and so to the Colonial Office. It was notorious that the Transvaal was armed to the teeth, that the Orange Free State was likely to join her, and that there had been strong attempts made, both privately and through the press, to alienate the loyalty of the Dutch citizens of both the British colonies. Many sinister signs were observed by those upon the spot. The veld had been burned unusually early to ensure a speedy grass-crop after the first rains, there had been a collecting of horses, a distribution of rifles and ammunition. The Free State farmers, who graze their sheep and cattle upon Natal soil during the winter, had driven them off to places of safety behind the line of the Drakensberg. Everything pointed to approaching war, and Natal refused to be satisfied even by the dispatch of another regiment. On September 6th a second message was received at the Colonial Office, which states the case with great clearness and precision.

'The Prime Minister desires me to urge upon you by the unanimous advice of the Ministers that sufficient troops should be dispatched to Natal immediately to enable the colony to be placed in a state of defence against an attack from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. I am informed by the

General Officer Commanding, Natal, that he will not have enough troops, even when the Manchester Regiment arrives, to do more than occupy Newcastle and at the same time protect the colony south of it from raids, while Laing's Nek, Ingogo River and Zululand must be left undefended. My Ministers know that every preparation has been made, both in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which would enable an attack to be made on Natal at short notice. My Ministers believe that the Boers have made up their minds that war will take place almost certainly, and their best chance will be, when it seems unavoidable, to deliver a blow before reinforcements have time to arrive. Information has been received that raids in force will be made by way of Middle Drift and Greytown and by way of Bond's Drift and Stangar, with a view to striking the railway between Pietermaritzburg and Durban and cutting off communications of troops and supplies. Nearly all the Orange Free State farmers in the Klip River division, who stay in the colony usually till October at least, have trekked, at great loss to themselves; their sheep are lambing on the road, and the lambs die or are destroyed. Two at least of the Entonjanani district farmers have trekked with all their belongings into the Transvaal, in the first case attempting to take as hostages the children of the natives on the farm. Reliable reports have been received of attempts to tamper with loyal natives, and to set tribe against tribe in order to create confusion and detail the defensive forces of the colony. Both food and warlike stores in large quantities have been accumulated at Volksrust, Vryheid and Standerton. Persons who are believed to be spies have been seen examining the bridges on the Natal Railway, and it is known that there are spies in all the principal centres of the colony. In the opinion of Ministers, such a catastrophe as the seizure of Laing's Nek and the destruction of the northern portion of the railway, or a successful raid or invasion such as they have reason to believe is contemplated, would produce a most demoralising effect on the natives and on the loyal Europeans in the colony, and would afford great encouragement to the Boers and to their sympathisers in the colonies, who, although armed and prepared, will probably keep quiet unless they receive some encouragement of the sort. They concur in the policy of her Majesty's Government of exhausting all peaceful means to obtain redress of the grievances of the Uitlanders and authoritatively assert the supremacy of Great Britain before resorting to war; but they state that this is a question of defensive precaution, not of making war.'

In answer to these and other remonstrances the garrison of Natal was gradually increased, partly by troops from Europe, and partly by the dispatch of five thousand British troops from India. The 2nd Berkshires, the 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers, the 1st Manchesters, and the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers arrived in succession with reinforcements of artillery. The 5th Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers, and 19th Hussars came from India, with the 1st Devonshires, 1st Gloucesters, 2nd King's Royal Rifles and 2nd Gordon Highlanders. These with the 21st, 42nd, and 53rd batteries of Field Artillery made up the Indian Contingent. Their arrival late in September raised the number of troops in South Africa to 22,000, a force which was inadequate to a contest in the open field with the numerous, mobile, and gallant enemy to whom they were to be opposed, but which proved to be strong enough to stave off that overwhelming disaster which, with our fuller knowledge, we can now see to have been impending.

As to the disposition of these troops a difference of opinion broke out between the ruling powers in Natal and the military chiefs at the spot. Prince Kraft has said, 'Both strategy and tactics may have to yield to politics'; but the political necessity should be very grave and very clear when it is the blood of soldiers which has to pay for it. Whether it arose from our defective intelligence, or from that caste feeling which makes it hard for the professional soldier to recognise (in spite of deplorable past experiences) a serious adversary in the mounted farmer, it is certain that even while our papers were proclaiming that this time, at least, we would not underrate our enemy, we were most seriously underrating him. The northern third of Natal is as vulnerable a military position as a player of kriegspiel could wish to have submitted to him. It runs up into a thin angle, culminating at the apex in a difficult pass, the ill-omened Laing's Nek, dominated by the even more sinister bulk of Majuba. Each side of this angle is open to invasion, the one from the Transvaal and the other from the Orange Free State. A force up at the apex is in a perfect trap, for the mobile enemy can flood into the

country to the south of them, cut the line of supplies, and throw up a series of entrenchments which would make retreat a very difficult matter. Further down the country, at such positions as Ladysmith or Dundee, the danger, though not so imminent, is still an obvious one, unless the defending force is strong enough to hold its own in the open field and mobile enough to prevent a mounted enemy from getting round its flanks. To us, who are endowed with that profound military wisdom which only comes with a knowledge of the event, it is obvious that with a defending force which could not place more than 12,000 men in the fighting line, the true defensible frontier was the line of the Tugela. As a matter of fact, Ladysmith was chosen, a place almost indefensible itself, as it is dominated by high hills in at least two directions.

Such an event as the siege of the town appears never to have been contemplated, as no guns of position were asked for or sent. In spite of this, an amount of stores, which is said to have been valued at more than a million of pounds, was dumped down at this small railway junction, so that the position could not be evacuated without a crippling loss. The place was the point of bifurcation of the main line, which divides at this little town into one branch running to Harrismith in the Orange Free State, and the other leading through the Dundee coal fields and Newcastle to the Laing's Nek tunnel and the Transvaal. An importance, which appears now to have been an exaggerated one, was attached by the Government of Natal to the possession of the coal fields, and it was at their strong suggestion, but with the concurrence of General Penn Symons, that the defending force was divided, and a detachment of between three and four thousand sent to Dundee, about forty miles from the main body, which remained under General Sir George White at Ladysmith. General Symons underrated the power of the invaders, but it is hard to criticise an error of judgment which has been so nobly atoned and so tragically paid for. At the time, then, which our political narrative has reached, the time of suspense which followed the dispatch of the Cabinet message of September 8th, the military situation had ceased to be desperate, but was still precarious. Twenty-two thousand regular troops were on the spot who might hope to be reinforced by some ten thousand colonials, but these forces had to cover a great frontier, the attitude of Cape Colony was by no means whole-hearted and might become hostile, while the black population might conceivably throw in its weight against us. Only half the regulars could be spared to defend Natal, and no reinforcements could reach them in less than a month from the outbreak of hostilities. If Mr. Chamberlain was really playing a game of bluff, it must be confessed that he was bluffing from a very weak hand.

For purposes of comparison we may give some idea of the forces which Mr. Kruger and Mr. Steyn could put in the field, for by this time it was evident that the Orange Free State, with which we had had no shadow of a dispute, was going, in a way which some would call wanton and some chivalrous, to throw in its weight against us. The general press estimate of the forces of the two republics varied from 25,000 to 35,000 men. Mr. J. B. Robinson, a personal friend of President Kruger's and a man who had spent much of his life among the Boers, considered the latter estimate to be too high. The calculation had no assured basis to start from. A very scattered and isolated population, among whom large families were the rule, is a most difficult thing to estimate. Some reckoned from the supposed natural increase during eighteen years, but the figure given at that date was itself an assumption. Others took their calculation from the number of voters in the last presidential election: but no one could tell how many abstentions there had been, and the fighting age is five years earlier than the voting age in the republics. We recognise now that all calculations were far below the true figure. It is probable, however, that the information of the British Intelligence Department was not far wrong. According to this the fighting strength of the Transvaal alone was 32,000 men, and of the Orange Free State 22,000. With mercenaries and rebels from the colonies they would amount to 60,000, while a considerable rising of the Cape Dutch would bring them up to 100,000. In artillery they were known to have about a hundred guns, many of them (and the fact will need much explaining) more modern and powerful than any which we could bring against them. Of the quality of this large force there is no need to speak. The men were brave, hardy, and fired with a

strange religious enthusiasm. They were all of the seventeenth century, except their rifles. Mounted upon their hardy little ponies, they possessed a mobility which practically doubled their numbers and made it an impossibility ever to outflank them. As marksmen they were supreme. Add to this that they had the advantage of acting upon internal lines with shorter and safer communications, and one gathers how formidable a task lay before the soldiers of the empire. When we turn from such an enumeration of their strength to contemplate the 12,000 men, split into two detachments, who awaited them in Natal, we may recognise that, far from bewailing our disasters, we should rather congratulate ourselves upon our escape from losing that great province which, situated as it is between Britain, India, and Australia, must be regarded as the very keystone of the imperial arch.

At the risk of a tedious but very essential digression, something must be said here as to the motives with which the Boers had for many years been quietly preparing for war. That the Jameson raid was not the cause is certain, though it probably, by putting the Boer Government into a strong position, had a great effect in accelerating matters. What had been done secretly and slowly could be done more swiftly and openly when so plausible an excuse could be given for it. As a matter of fact, the preparations were long antecedent to the raid. The building of the forts at Pretoria and Johannesburg was begun nearly two years before that wretched incursion, and the importation of arms was going on apace. In that very year, 1895, a considerable sum was spent in military equipment.

But if it was not the raid, and if the Boers had no reason to fear the British Government, with whom the Transvaal might have been as friendly as the Orange Free State had been for forty years, why then should they arm? It was a difficult question, and one in answering which we find ourselves in a region of conjecture and suspicion rather than of ascertained fact. But the fairest and most unbiased of historians must confess that there is a large body of evidence to show that into the heads of some of the Dutch leaders, both in the northern republics and in the Cape, there had entered the conception of a single Dutch commonwealth, extending from Cape Town to the Zambesi, in which flag, speech, and law should all be Dutch. It is in this aspiration that many shrewd and well-informed judges see the true inner meaning of this persistent arming, of the constant hostility, of the forming of ties between the two republics (one of whom had been reconstituted and made a sovereign independent State by our own act), and finally of that intriguing which endeavoured to poison the affection and allegiance of our own Dutch colonists, who had no political grievances whatever. They all aimed at one end, and that end was the final expulsion of British power from South Africa and the formation of a single great Dutch republic. The large sum spent by the Transvaal in secret service money – a larger sum, I believe, than that which is spent by the whole British Empire – would give some idea of the subterranean influences at work. An army of emissaries, agents, and spies, whatever their mission, were certainly spread over the British colonies. Newspapers were subsidised also, and considerable sums spent upon the press in France and Germany.

In the very nature of things a huge conspiracy of this sort to substitute Dutch for British rule in South Africa is not a matter which can be easily and definitely proved. Such questions are not discussed in public documents, and men are sounded before being taken into the confidence of the conspirators. But there is plenty of evidence of the individual ambition of prominent and representative men in this direction, and it is hard to believe that what many wanted individually was not striven for collectively, especially when we see how the course of events did actually work towards the end which they indicated. Mr. J.P. FitzPatrick, in 'The Transvaal from Within' – a book to which all subsequent writers upon the subject must acknowledge their obligations – narrates how in 1896 he was approached by Mr. D.P. Graaff, formerly a member of the Cape Legislative Council and a very prominent Afrikaner Bondsman, with the proposition that Great Britain should be pushed out of South Africa. The same politician made the same proposal to Mr. Beit. Compare with this the following statement of Mr. Theodore Schreiner, the brother of the Prime Minister of the Cape:

'I met Mr. Reitz, then a judge of the Orange Free State, in Bloemfontein between seventeen and eighteen years ago, shortly after the retrocession of the Transvaal, and when he was busy establishing

the Afrikaner Bond. It must be patent to every one that at that time, at all events, England and its Government had no intention of taking away the independence of the Transvaal, for she had just "magnanimously" granted the same; no intention of making war on the republics, for she had just made peace; no intention to seize the Rand gold fields, for they were not yet discovered. At that time, then, I met Mr. Reitz, and he did his best to get me to become a member of his Afrikaner Bond, but, after studying its constitution and programme, I refused to do so, whereupon the following colloquy in substance took place between us, which has been indelibly imprinted on my mind ever since:

'REITZ: Why do you refuse? Is the object of getting the people to take an interest in political matters not a good one?

'MYSELF: Yes, it is; but I seem to see plainly here between the lines of this constitution much more ultimately aimed at than that.

'REITZ: What?

'MYSELF: I see quite clearly that the ultimate object aimed at is the overthrow of the British power and the expulsion of the British flag from South Africa.

'REITZ (with his pleasant conscious smile, as of one whose secret thought and purpose had been discovered, and who was not altogether displeased that such was the case): Well, what if it is so?

'MYSELF: You don't suppose, do you, that that flag is going to disappear from South Africa without a tremendous struggle and fight?

'REITZ (with the same pleasant self-conscious, self satisfied, and yet semi-apologetic smile): Well, I suppose not; but even so, what of that?

'MYSELF: Only this, that when that struggle takes place you and I will be on opposite sides; and what is more, the God who was on the side of the Transvaal in the late war, because it had right on its side will be on the side of England, because He must view with abhorrence any plotting and scheming to overthrow her power and position in South Africa, which have been ordained by Him.

'REITZ: We'll see.

'Thus the conversation ended, but during the seventeen years that have elapsed I have watched the propaganda for the overthrow of British power in South Africa being ceaselessly spread by every possible means – the press, the pulpit, the platform, the schools, the colleges, the Legislature – until it has culminated in the present war, of which Mr. Reitz and his co-workers are the origin and the cause. Believe me, the day on which F.W. Reitz sat down to pen his ultimatum to Great Britain was the proudest and happiest moment of his life, and one which had for long years been looked forward to by him with eager longing and expectation.'

Compare with these utterances of a Dutch politician of the Cape, and of a Dutch politician of the Orange Free State, the following passage from a speech delivered by Kruger at Bloemfontein in the year 1887:

'I think it too soon to speak of a United South Africa under one flag. Which flag was it to be? The Queen of England would object to having her flag hauled down, and we, the burghers of the Transvaal, object to hauling ours down. What is to be done? We are now small and of little importance, but we are growing, and are preparing the way to take our place among the great nations of the world.'

'The dream of our life,' said another, 'is a union of the States of South Africa, and this has to come from within, not from without. When that is accomplished, South Africa will be great.'

Always the same theory from all quarters of Dutch thought, to be followed by many signs that the idea was being prepared for in practice. I repeat that the fairest and most unbiased historian cannot dismiss the conspiracy as a myth.

And to this one may retort, why should they not conspire? Why should they not have their own views as to the future of South Africa? Why should they not endeavour to have one universal flag and one common speech? Why should they not win over our colonists, if they can, and push us into the sea? I see no reason why they should not. Let them try if they will. And let us try to prevent them. But let us have an end of talk about British aggression, of capitalist designs upon the gold fields, of the

wrongs of a pastoral people, and all the other veils which have been used to cover the issue. Let those who talk about British designs upon the republics turn their attention for a moment to the evidence which there is for republican designs upon the colonies. Let them reflect that in the one system all white men are equal, and that on the other the minority of one race has persecuted the majority of the other, and let them consider under which the truest freedom lies, which stands for universal liberty and which for reaction and racial hatred. Let them ponder and answer all this before they determine where their sympathies lie.

Leaving these wider questions of politics, and dismissing for the time those military considerations which were soon to be of such vital moment, we may now return to the course of events in the diplomatic struggle between the Government of the Transvaal and the Colonial Office. On September 8th, as already narrated, a final message was sent to Pretoria, which stated the minimum terms which the British Government could accept as being a fair concession to her subjects in the Transvaal. A definite answer was demanded, and the nation waited with sombre patience for the reply.

There were few illusions in this country as to the difficulties of a Transvaal war. It was clearly seen that little honour and immense vexation were in store for us. The first Boer war still smarted in our minds, and we knew the prowess of the indomitable burghers. But our people, if gloomy, were none the less resolute, for that national instinct which is beyond the wisdom of statesmen had borne it in upon them that this was no local quarrel, but one upon which the whole existence of the empire hung. The cohesion of that empire was to be tested. Men had emptied their glasses to it in time of peace. Was it a meaningless pouring of wine, or were they ready to pour their hearts' blood also in time of war? Had we really founded a series of disconnected nations, with no common sentiment or interest, or was the empire an organic whole, as ready to thrill with one emotion or to harden into one resolve as are the several States of the Union? That was the question at issue, and much of the future history of the world was at stake upon the answer.

Already there were indications that the colonies appreciated the fact that the contention was no affair of the mother country alone, but that she was upholding the rights of the empire as a whole, and might fairly look to them to support her in any quarrel which might arise from it. As early as July 11th, Queensland, the fiery and semitropical, had offered a contingent of mounted infantry with machine guns; New Zealand, Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia followed in the order named. Canada, with the strong but more deliberate spirit of the north, was the last to speak, but spoke the more firmly for the delay. Her citizens were the least concerned of any, for Australians were many in South Africa but Canadians few. None the less, she cheerfully took her share of the common burden, and grew the readier and the cheerier as that burden came to weigh more heavily. From all the men of many hues who make up the British Empire, from Hindoo Rajahs, from West African Houssas, from Malay police, from Western Indians, there came offers of service. But this was to be a white man's war, and if the British could not work out their own salvation then it were well that empire should pass from such a race. The magnificent Indian army of 150,000 soldiers, many of them seasoned veterans, was for the same reason left untouched. England has claimed no credit or consideration for such abstention, but an irresponsible writer may well ask how many of those foreign critics whose respect for our public morality appears to be as limited as their knowledge of our principles and history would have advocated such self denial had their own countries been placed in the same position.

On September 18th the official reply of the Boer Government to the message sent from the Cabinet Council was published in London. In manner it was unbending and unconciliatory; in substance, it was a complete rejection of all the British demands. It refused to recommend or propose to the Raad the five years' franchise and the other measures which had been defined as the minimum which the Home Government could accept as a fair measure of justice towards the Uitlanders. The suggestion that the debates of the Raad should be bilingual, as they have been in the Cape Colony and in Canada, was absolutely waived aside. The British Government had stated in their last dispatch

that if the reply should be negative or inconclusive they reserved to themselves the right to 'reconsider the situation de novo and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.' The reply had been both negative and inconclusive, and on September 22nd a council met to determine what the next message should be. It was short and firm, but so planned as not to shut the door upon peace. Its purport was that the British Government expressed deep regret at the rejection of the moderate proposals which had been submitted in their last dispatch, and that now, in accordance with their promise, they would shortly put forward their own plans for a settlement. The message was not an ultimatum, but it foreshadowed an ultimatum in the future.

In the meantime, upon September 21st the Raad of the Orange Free State had met, and it became more and more evident that this republic, with whom we had no possible quarrel, but, on the contrary, for whom we had a great deal of friendship and admiration, intended to throw in its weight against Great Britain. Some time before, an offensive and defensive alliance had been concluded between the two States, which must, until the secret history of these events comes to be written, appear to have been a singularly rash and unprofitable bargain for the smaller one. She had nothing to fear from Great Britain, since she had been voluntarily turned into an independent republic by her and had lived in peace with her for forty years. Her laws were as liberal as our own. But by this suicidal treaty she agreed to share the fortunes of a State which was deliberately courting war by its persistently unfriendly attitude, and whose reactionary and narrow legislation would, one might imagine, have alienated the sympathy of her progressive neighbour. There may have been ambitions like those already quoted from the report of Dr. Reitz's conversation, or there may have been a complete hallucination as to the comparative strength of the two combatants and the probable future of South Africa; but however that may be, the treaty was made, and the time had come to test how far it would hold.

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