

THE LIFE
OF
SIR GEORGE POMEROY-COLLEY



CHAPTER I

THE COLLEYS

The Plover-taker—Parentage—Early days—Enters army

THE death of the last Plantagenet on the field of Bosworth may be said to have marked the opening of a fresh chapter in the evolution of social life in England. The old order of the sword as the regulator of property and winner of possession gave place to the new dispensation of legal surety, and henceforth deed, covenant, and indenture, with all their accompanying sleights of word, and cunningly contrived forms of attack and defence, became the basis of human society.

In the earlier order, possession and property rested frankly upon force, upon decrees maintained by the knight, the man-at-arms, and the archer; in the newer system the ready writer, the fluent speaker, the man apt in council and versed in intrigue, became the instruments by which property could be acquired or retained; and though the object under each order

remained the same, a totally new set of human agencies were demanded to keep or change the fact of possession.

Thus, in the reign of the first Tudor, we become conscious in Ireland of a novel factor introduced into the life and surroundings of the feudal lords. It is the 'counsel'—the man who advised, who wrote, who was sent on confidential missions to the court and council in England whenever his master had a suit to press, a rival to discredit, a manor, 'pardon,' or gift to obtain. Among the names of these legal advisers and trusty messengers which figure in the records of this transition time, there was one Robert Cowley, Coule, Cooley, or Colley, as it is variously written, of Kilkenny, who appears to have been born in the latter half of the fifteenth century. At what time the first of the name appeared in Ireland is now impossible to determine, but certain is it that there was a Colley portreeve or sheriff in Kilkenny as early as 1407, and that others of the name held offices connected with the prisage of wine in Ireland in that century.

That Robert Cowley was a man of parts, endowed with excellent abilities as adviser and agent, is made clear in the records of the time, and there is a letter of his extant addressed to Thomas Cromwell upon the necessity of still retaining intact amid all the changing land tenures of the time 'the men of warre that should defende the countrey.' That he was fully versed in the intrigues of his age is also evident. Indeed, his conduct on one occasion seems to have given rise to an expression which held the field for generations as the definition of a successful politician. It was the term 'plover-taker.' The story is worth

repeating as it is told in the Book of Howth, that quaint old record, still preserved in the Lambeth Library.

Cowley had been councillor to the Earl of Kildare, prior to holding the same position under the Earl of Ormonde. The two earls were deadly enemies, and the councillor appears to have carried into the hostile camp of the Ormondes a large store of hatred towards his former master. The chronicler writes :

This Cowly wrought as much agaynste the Eyerle of Kildare as he could or was abulle. This Coule beinge in Englande afor the Cosall coplayninge apon the Eyrle, the teerres fell frome his eyes ; the Eyrle asked him why he so did. He sayd it was for pittie and contemplacio that he had apon his father's sone ; but my duty to my princ, infosith me thus to do to you. Sayd the Eyrle he is like the pluer taker in setting his snares and waiting for his desired purpos, his eyes being agaynste the wind, and the water droppinge out. So many pluers as he takithe, he neepythe ther braynes out with his thombe, notwithstanding his watrye teres of contemplacio ; even so does Mr. Coule with me, his teres cometh downe as he laythe matters or articles to my charge.

This discourse of the earl before the English Privy Council was termed at the time ' a mery tale of ye Eyrle,' but it had a sorrowful ending for the Geraldine. A few years later, Earl Gerald died miserably in the Tower ; his son, Lord Thomas, and his five brothers, though they had surrendered to Lord Deputy Grey under positive guarantees of safety, were executed at Tyburn. Whether the ' matters or articles ' laid to his charge by Master Robert Cowley had been the cause of this wholesale family ruin cannot now be traced, but there is some significance in the fact that many of the manors and townships

of Carbery and Dangan, all old Geraldine possessions, are to-day in the hands of the descendants of the 'pluer-taker.'

In 1538 we find Robert Cowley Master of the Rolls, and two years later commissioner for selling the lands of the abbeys and monasteries in Ireland. Despite a serious reverse of fortune, he appears to have transmitted to his son Walter, who became Solicitor-General, a goodly share of the land and possessions of Carbery. Dying in 1551, this Walter Cowley left two sons, Henry and Walter. Henry, the elder, became a captain in the Irish wars of Queen Elizabeth, was knighted by Sidney, and left many children; one of these was the ancestor of a later Sir Henry Colley, father of Richard Colley, first Baron Mornington, who, in 1728, assumed the name of Wellesley, and whose grandson was the Duke of Wellington.

Sir Henry Colley had also two daughters, who shared between them the Castle Carbery estate; but the whole ultimately fell to the descendants of the younger daughter, Mary, who married Arthur Pomeroy, afterwards first Viscount Harberton. Three of her sons succeeded to the title, and between her two grandsons the Colley property was still divided—the elder brother inheriting his grand-aunt's moiety, while Mary's share went to the younger son, George, on condition of his taking the name of Colley.

This George Pomeroy, afterwards Colley, entered the royal navy, but left it in a few years, when his prospects of succeeding to the property became assured. He married, in 1825, Frances Trench, daughter of the Dean of Kildare, and niece of the first Lord Ashtown. By this marriage he had five children.

The third son, George Pomeroy-Colley, born in Dublin, November 1, 1835, is the subject of this memoir.

Mr. George Colley, after his marriage in 1825, resided at Rathangan, in the County Kildare, some thirty miles west of Dublin. The house stood at one end of the village, not far from the Bog of Allen, which spread away in an immense sweep of brown peat land until it was lost in a horizon as flat as that of the ocean. The surrounding region had originally formed part of the Geraldine property, and the Castle of Rathangan had been one of the chief fortresses which held the borders of the Pale against the incursions of the tribes and sects that ruled from the Barrow to the western ocean; but in the seventeenth century a hamlet had grown up near the ruined castle, and when the canal—'Grand,' of course—came to unite the waters of the Barrow with the sea at Dublin, the hamlet grew into a village, a clean tidy little post town where a Quaker settlement took root and flourished.

This quiet village, with its Quaker colony, remained for many years the home of the George Colleys. Seven miles west across the moorland was the estate, and twice a week, come rain or storm or sun, Mr. George Colley drove over the long stretch of country to visit it, coming back in the winter's twilight to the old-fashioned home, 'somewhat back from the village street,' at the outskirts of Rathangan.

Before he was two years old, little George Pomeroy was taken abroad on what, even so late as 1837, was called the 'grand tour.' In the first carriage the father and mother with two children; servants and luggage in a second; a year in Paris, two in

Germany, one in Switzerland, and then again in Paris; the children getting to speak French and German, seeing mountains, lakes, and art galleries. It would be difficult to find a wider groundwork for education.

After this six years' foreign wandering, George came back to go to school at Cheam, in Surrey, where the master, a well-known teacher of his day, Dr. Mayo, finds the boy 'swift to take offence, prompt and vigorous in resenting it,' to the astonishment of the parents who had hitherto regarded him as being exceptionally gentle and quiet.

During the six years at Cheam, George acquitted himself well. He was very fond of reading, studied hard, and always brought prizes home when the holidays came. The family were again back at Rathangan, and all the wonders of the Alps and the glories of the Rhine paled before the delights of the Irish home—the old garden with the river below the wall, the moorland beyond. 'Oh, the delight of a home,' wrote one of them in after years when recalling that earlier period, 'instead of some "campagne" where we stayed a year or two, and where no dogs, cats, or gardens could be permanent!'

Of the old days of the Geraldines, not one story lingered in the village mind. Yet Rathangan had witnessed many wild scenes of war and foray, when 'Kildare' was in his glory, and his Castle of Rathangan, by the Little Barrow, looked over the land which still owned the dominion of the O'Moores and the O'Conors of Leix, Offaly, and Glynmalire.

Beyond the river, ten minutes' walk from the house in which Mr. Colley lived, was the residence of his brother, Lord Harberton, 'Spencer Farm,' on

the stairs of which the great-grandfather, Mr. Spencer, had been shot by the rebels in 1798. So there was no lack of later tradition among the young people.

At Cheam School George Colley remained till he was thirteen. Another head-master had succeeded Dr. Mayo—a change which developed among some at least of the scholars an ardent desire for the sea, but whether as a suitable profession for life, or only as an escape from the rule of the new master, is not clear. The army was, however, deemed by the boy's parents to be a better profession for him, and at the age of thirteen and a half he entered Sandhurst as a cadet.

Some letters of that time still extant already indicate the care and exactness which in after life were so characteristic of the man, and a passage in one of them is typical of the future soldier. He is describing a severe accident he had just met with :

I think that we ought to be all glad now, for I am glad that my arm is getting well, and so are you I am sure. We are like the ship's captain, who boasted that he left his crew the happiest men in the service, for he had just flogged twenty of them and they were glad it was over, and the remainder were equally happy at not being flogged; so they were all happy. When he (the doctor) was setting my arm, I did not even give myself leave to groan; I set myself back in the chair, drew a long breath, shut my teeth fast, and waited till it was over; and then I asked him a few questions about it, and walked away quite comfortably, for it no longer hurt me.¹

At the Royal Military College he spent three years, leaving it in May 1852 with a brilliant record :

¹ April 8, 1851, to his elder sister.

first in general merit and good conduct, and first on the list for commissions. On the 28th of the same month he was gazetted ensign without purchase in the 2nd 'Queen's' Regiment, then quartered in South Africa, and having its depôt at Kinsale, Ireland.

CHAPTER II

THE 'QUEEN'S'

Irish stations—Early friends—Embarks for South Africa—
A prayer at sea

PERHAPS no event leaves a more lasting impression on the memory than that which a young officer experiences when he joins the army. The entrance to all professions is like passing through the door of life, but the army door strikes the imagination more than any other. The barrack-gate localises the feeling into a distinct tangible reality; the sentinel without, the armed guard within, the austere buildings, the bugle calls ringing through the squares, the evidences of order and discipline—these things impress the mind with the sense of some great step forward into that vague and vast world which the boy-imagination has been unconsciously endeavouring to pierce and realise.

The 2nd 'Queen's,' the corps to which young Colley had been gazetted, quartered at the time in South Africa, was from every point of view a regiment calculated to strike the mind of a newcomer with reverential enthusiasm. It had of course a history, and it was a very proud history. It had been originally named after the Princess of Portugal, the wife of Charles II., a queen who, if she gave no heir to her husband, brought to England, in her dower, the island of Bombay, that foothold in the

east from which so much dominion has sprung. The 'Queen's' was the first regiment that ever crossed the seas, and its history (since the time it went to fight the Moors at Tangier) has been linked with the history of the Greater Britain beyond our shores.

Joining the depôt of his regiment at Kinsale, the life of the young subaltern ran the usual course of drill and duty. Many letters written by him at the time are still in existence, and, as we read them, the hopes and anxieties of youth, its perturbation over some trifling shortcoming in the present, its gay acceptance of indefinite difficulties in the future, are made very evident. But other things are to be traced in these early letters—a habit of close and accurate reasoning, a deep determination to succeed, a quiet consciousness that there is within him a reserve of physical and moral strength, and that he is quite a match for scores of the more practised and fluent youths with whom he is thrown in contact. At the end of this year (1852) he writes to his sister an amusing confession of boyish shyness, and thus describes his first ball at country quarters :

As for your question of whether I could dance yet, do you imagine there is a dancing academy in Kinsale? At first I did not intend to go to the ball; but, as there were only very few of us and we were all wanted, if only to make a good show of red coats, I went, but not till after twelve. Before I consented, however, to go down at all, I made a bargain that I should not be introduced to anybody unless at my special request. Accordingly, as I did not know a single lady in the room, I got on pretty well, for I amused myself by looking on and making remarks, and chatting sometimes with some of ours, when they were not engaged dancing, and sometimes with some of the 'natives' whom I knew. I got on very well this way till after four, and might

have remained the whole time had not our major set his heart apparently on making me dance with his wife ; and as I did not wish to offend him, while at the same time I had not the smallest idea of trying my dancing powers, though it was only a quadrille, I took the first opportunity when he happened to look away, and, slipping out, bolted !

It is not improbable that at the moment he would have bartered his knowledge of languages and his rare power in drawing for the trick of whirling a partner round a ballroom, or entertaining her with the very smallest of small talk.

‘ It should perhaps be explained,’ says the writer of some notes on Colley’s life from which I shall quote occasionally, ‘ that when Mr. George Colley left the navy he was, and remained during his whole life, under a strong religious impression, and it was somewhat against the grain that he consented to his third boy entering so worldly a profession as the army. Mr. Colley was a man of resolute character, not untinged with austerity. The pervading influence at home was the intense spirituality distinctive of Evangelicism at its best, tempered in this case by the mental vigour of the father and the more artistic and imaginative gifts of his wife. The household life is spoken of by those who remember it as having been one of unusual dignity as well as happiness—well ordered, full of interest, full, too, of courtesy and charm. But it was not a home in which the dancing-master was recognised.

‘ George Colley at this time has been described to me by one who remembers him well in his seventeenth year. He was slight and well proportioned, but with a look of great physical strength. The features

possessed the strongly moulded type noticeable in several branches of the Colley race; the brown hair fell upon a forehead already suggesting intellectual power. His chief interests at this time were the artistic and literary pursuits which always held their own, notwithstanding an arduous professional life, until in the stress of the last few years they were necessarily laid aside. On such topics he was, I am told, often full of talk—at other times silent and dreamy. Though finished in manner even as a lad, he himself seems in his boyish years to have suffered from a quite disproportionate sense of shyness. I can well imagine a boy conscious of considerable power feeling solitary and at a disadvantage amongst others, not from too little manner in the common sense, but from too much ability—gifts beyond what his social practice as yet enables him to express.¹

A letter on New Year's Day, 1853, shows the boy to have a steady head and stout constitution. 'Many happy returns to the New Year,' he writes to his sister:

The mess bugle last night saved you from a long lecture about drawing and painting, and called me away to a merry party, who had assembled to see the New Year in. A pleasant party we had. We did not go to bed till four o'clock, but I am up as usual, and as happy as Punch which I always am, as this letter ought to testify, seeing that I am writing it at eight o'clock previous to getting my breakfast, while most of my worthy comrades are in bed, from which they are not likely to arise before 11 o'clock.

At this period the depôt of a regiment was a little regiment in itself; one major, four captains,

¹ 'Biographical Notes,' E. P. C.

and some eight subalterns, mostly very young, formed what was called the establishment of officers. It was the pre-Crimean time ; work was light, there was plenty of leisure for reading if one cared to improve the mind, for shooting or fishing if muscle or nerve were to be developed, and also for loafing and billiards and idling if the walk of life was to be taken backwards.

That Ensign Colley read, wrote, walked, sketched, and worked hard to improve mind and body, is made clear in his many letters from Kinsale, Shannon Bridge, Templemore, and other Irish stations during the couple of years of his depôt life. From Templemore he writes to his mother :

I did not pay my intended visit to Kenmare after all, not for want of money, but because I could not get leave, so I don't consider myself entitled to keep your kind present when it arrives. However, to make up for not seeing Killarney, I have been visiting some beautiful ruins of old abbeys near this, and have been doing a good deal in the way of sketching. There is a most beautiful ruin at Cashel which I have paid several visits to ; it contains one chapel considerably older than the rest which I am sure would delight you. It is in the old Norman or Saxon style, I don't know which (but indeed wiser heads than mine differ about it), but I will show you a tolerably accurate sketch which I made of it, and you will be able to judge for yourself. Then there is another ruin, Holy Cross, about fourteen miles from this, of which I have also made some sketches. It is full of fine windows, the stone cut in the most beautiful patterns, and no two alike. I have tried to sketch some of them.

Between sketching and taking tremendous walks (generally between twenty and thirty miles long) I amuse myself very well here.²

² September 24, 1853.

He is just eighteen years old, and of course he is writing poetry. To his mother he says :

I enclose you a small specimen of my poetical productions. I send it because it is simple (for it is not much in the style of my usual productions), but I request you will criticise it as severely as you please, and not spare it, for I know your criticism will not be ridicule, as Henry's and a great many persons' would be, but you will show me the real faults.³

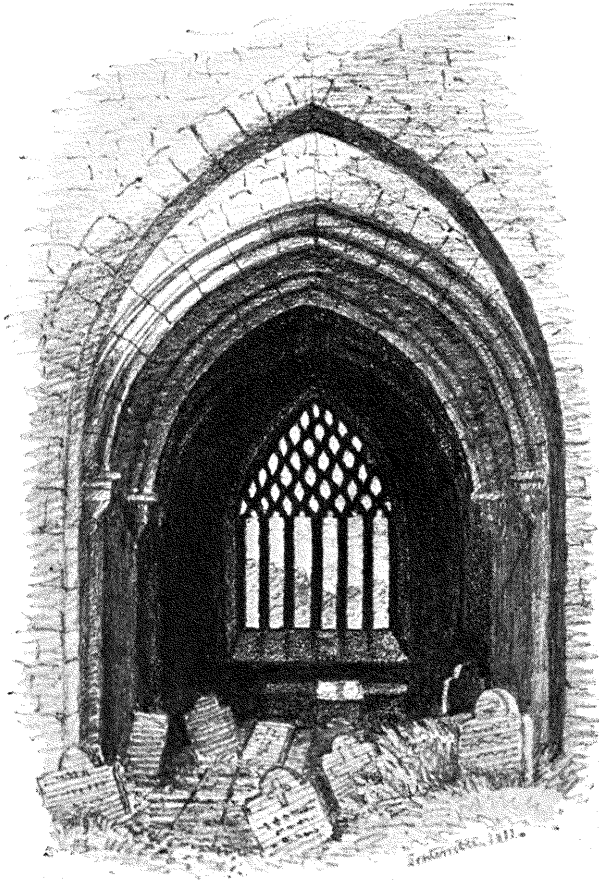
After a short tour of duty in Carlow, Ensign Colley was ordered on detachment to Shannon Bridge, and the early spring of 1854 finds him, as before, busy at his books.

Since I came here I have been reading from three to four hours regularly every day. I have read Ruskin's 'Modern Painters,' his 'Seven Lamps,' the first and second volume of Carlyle, one volume of 'Cosmos,' and a good deal of Locke, which I like very much. . . . Ruskin's book has given me twice the pleasure in Nature in the sky, in the water, in ugly landscapes as well as in pretty ones, which I had never dreamt of before, and when I take a stroll now I feel something like the old story of eyes and no eyes. This place is completely surrounded by bog for about five miles, and is infinitely the flattest place I ever saw. The Bog of Allen is a mountainous district compared to it, and yet I have got to like it very much ; in spite of all its flatness it looks very pretty when the sun is shining, for the Shannon looks so blue, and the strip of bright green grass which borders it on each side forms such a contrast, and even the bog beyond has a rich warm reddish hue which makes it a most pleasant thing to look at ; and then I have got a nice yacht in which I sail up and down the river.⁴

There was another pleasure which the young

³ November 1853.

⁴ March 1854, to his elder sister.



HOLY CROSS

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officer was enjoying at this time in a measure the fulness of which he was only able to realise when it was lost to him—real friendship. At Sandhurst he had formed a very close intimacy with a boy of his own age named Lea Birch; they were chums, classmates, friends; they wrote long letters to each other, had most tastes in common, and were both extremely fond of scenery and sketching. The depôt of the 55th, the regiment to which Birch belonged, was stationed in Ireland in 1854; and the two friends came together again on the Shannon in the early half of that year. How exactly their minds were attuned to each other the following little picture of the ruins of Clonmacnoise will show. Birch is writing in February from Shannon Bridge to his friend, then on leave in Dublin :

There are miles of bog on every side of us and no trees. Five miles up the river is Clonmacnoise, with its seven churches, two round towers, castle, &c., the most curious and interesting mass of ruin I ever saw. Cure and I walked out to it one day, and saw it certainly in its most imposing aspect. There was blowing a hurricane, a snow-storm had just passed. It was one of those wild cloudy and sunshiny days which of all others suits its exposed situation, most certainly I think one of the grandest scenes imaginable.

And then comes a sentence to which subsequent history has given interest :

‘War with Russia to the knife,’ the ‘Times’ says, ‘is the cry of the whole country.’ Shut up in Shannon Bridge, we are obliged to take everything the ‘Times’ and ‘Illustrated London News’ says for Gospel. But whether war is so very much the cry of the nation you are much better able to say than I. It is evident they will have to increase the force now going, to double its numbers.

Clearly this boy officer had a truer notion of the coming trouble than had many older heads nearer to the centre of government.

At the end of March 1854, the two friends were together in Athlone, and on the 7th of the following month Birch started for the war. On the evening of that day Colley writes to his sister :

When your letter came, I was rather low, for I saw Birch off for the Eastern war this morning, and you know how different it is working in good or bad spirits ; and just as I had finished everything, and was going to my room without energy enough to do anything, even read, your letter came in and did me so much good. I had no idea I was so fond of Birch until he went, but now I miss him so. We were so pleasant together here ; we had a house between us rather separate from the other quarters, and we were incessantly together ; or if we were reading in our own rooms, every time either came across anything that he liked particularly he immediately ran to show it to the other, and we always passed our evenings so pleasantly together. Oh, I feel *so* lonely ! X, much as I liked him, was not a companion to me ; Birch was, having almost exactly the same tastes, with just enough difference to prevent monotony.

But enough of this—I was very fond of Birch and we have parted—perhaps for ever. But does not that happen every day ?

It was for ever. A few months later Lea Birch was destined to add his few spadefuls of dust to the daily growing mounds that covered the slopes of the wintry ridges before Sevastopol. There is no detailed record of his death among the papers from which this life is written, but allusions to him are frequent. A letter from Colonel Colley, written on his voyage to the Gold Coast in 1873, shows that the recollection of the friend who had perished in

the Crimea eighteen years before was still strong in the memory of the survivor.

While Lea Birch in the Crimea was writing his last letter to his old schoolmate, the latter was already *en route* for the Cape of Good Hope. In early August 1854 Colley embarked at Queenstown in the freight troopship 'Punjaub,' carrying some 300 men of various regiments to South Africa; and after a 'most prosperous voyage of fifty-nine days' reached Table Bay on the 30th of September. Great events had been happening in these two months. While the 'Punjaub' was ploughing her slow way through the Atlantic the Allies had embarked at Varna, landed at Old Fort, fought the battle of the Alma, and advanced upon Sevastopol. There stagnation had already supervened, the forward tide of victory stopped, and the only course of action which could have justified coming to the Crimea at that late season of the year was deliberately abandoned.

But of these events the exiles just landed in remote South Africa knew nothing. What a change in the transmission of news during the forty odd years that have since gone by! In the letters of that period we find all the freshness of strange scenes looked at for the first time, the details of march and 'campment related with the zest of youth quite satisfied with the novelty of its experiences. No allusion to the serious work going on in the Crimea, but plans for ascending Table Mountain, or little pen-and-ink sketches of Kaffir head-dresses, and Cape tiger lilies. How dwarfed would have seemed the loftiest pinnacle of Table Mountain, how tame the outlook to these

sea-weary soldiers, had they been greeted on arrival by the morning's message from the heights that looked down upon 'Sevastopol at bay'!

In a little pocket-book, kept partly in Ireland and continued on the voyage to the Cape and during the first year of his stay there, George Colley was wont to jot down a random thought, to sketch some ruined Irish church, a distant sail at sea, or the outline of a Kaffrarian mountain. This little book survived the toil and travel of a busy life, and in its faded pages I have been able to decipher imperfectly the following verses, which, from the pencil tracings of bits of ship-life close to them, appear to have been written at sea. The alterations and interlineations in the original text suggest a probability that the verses are his own. They run as follows :

Oh ! be it mine, when Death must strike,
 A soldier's death to die ;
 One gasp * * and then * *
 From this poor dwelling fly.
 Lord, ere I join the deadly strife
 And battle's terrors dare,
 First would I render soul and life
 To Thine Almighty care.
 And when grim Death in smoke-wreaths robed
 Comes thundering o'er the scene,
 What fear can reach the soldier's heart
 Whose trust in Thee has been ?
 And if 'tis Thine immortal will
 My spirit hence to call,
 'Thy Will be done' I'll whisper still,
 And ever trusting fall.

Many years afterwards, when he led the little column of troops to disaster on the dark summit of

the Majuba Hill, the babble and chatter of the time was hushed as men read how the deserted leader had stood before 'grim Death in smoke-wreaths robed,' waiting for the message from the rifle-muzzles of his enemies which was to answer the prayer sent up at sea twenty-seven years earlier.

CHAPTER III

SOUTH AFRICA

Life in Kaffraria—Sir George Grey—Engineering appointment—Wish to go to the Crimea—History and Napoleon—Habits of thinking

WE may summarise the condition of South Africa in 1854 as follows.

The armed strength of the colony was massed on the eastern frontier to keep in check the Kaffir tribes beyond the Kei River. The northern frontier of the colony had been set at the Orange River, and extensive regions to the north of that boundary had been given up to the Dutch. In fact, we were about to begin a policy which practically amounted to the entire subjugation of the native races, and at the same moment we had planted the tree of separate Dutch sovereignty in a soil most congenial to its growth.

In October 1854 Colley landed at East London, a small village at the mouth of the Buffalo River; and, moving with his draft up country, reached Fort Hare in British Kaffraria in a week of easy marching. A line of fortified posts held the road from the sea to this advanced fort, and in one of these posts, named Middledrift, Colley settled down to the frontier life of the land. At first his letters are filled with descriptions of the scenery, the natives, and the adventures of the new life. He is delighted with everything.

I find plenty of amusement here. I sketch a great deal, and etch a little, carpenter and carve, and practise my flutina. I have also dug myself a small garden in which I am collecting bulbs. You can form no idea of the flowers of this country; one beautiful flower succeeds another, and they spring up in the most wonderful manner. You go out one day and the whole country is covered with some beautiful flower; two days later it is covered with a perfectly different but no less beautiful one, and all traces of the first have disappeared. A man who has any tastes whatever cannot fail to find plenty of means of gratifying them, provided there is no war. At present the country is quiet enough, but, still, it is advisable to be armed if you are going any distance by yourself, especially if on foot. I find so much employment that I have read but very little: only Ockley's 'History of the Saracens,' Addison's 'Knights Templars,' a little of Locke, a little of Madame de Staël, and enough mathematics to keep up most of my Sandhurst learning.¹

In the same letter there is an account of a storm in the Amatola Mountains, where he had made an excursion to bring out some wood suitable for turnery work:

When I require an unusually large piece of timber I take a party of soldiers and go to a 'kloof' in the mountains, about seven miles from this, where I can get any sized wood. The last time I was there a tremendous thunderstorm came on; we soon had the lightning playing almost incessantly over us, and the thunder, confined by the sides of the kloof, was far beyond anything I had ever conceived. I stood a long time enjoying the scene, until a flash shivered a bush within fifteen yards of me, and going down into the ground threw the earth right over me as if a small mine had been exploded, and then I confess I thought it time to make the best of my way out of that. As we left the rain came down, and I never understood what rain was till that day; you could scarcely see twenty yards in front; it was like trying to look through a waterfall.

¹ November 7, 1854, to his elder sister.

And in another letter written to his mother in February 1855 we find a description of scenery in the Amatolas which brings vividly to the reader's mind the picture of these still secluded fastnesses :

When you get about halfway to the Hoek the road begins to get beautiful ; you are entering a defile, the mountains gradually closing in on you. At first the road passes along a gently undulating country, covered with turf and interspersed with clumps. It is like an English park, only not so many fine trees, but more flowering shrubs. As the mountains close in, the ground becomes more uneven, the bush closer and more continuous, and the river winds so much that you cross it almost every mile. You go on this way for a mile or two, only able to see the upper parts of the mountains on each side ; most of them are thickly wooded to the very tops, except where an occasional precipice shows its red face, a beautiful contrast to the green ; suddenly you turn a corner and before you is the Boomah Pass, the road through which might rival any road for beauty. To the left rises a precipice about 1,000 feet in height. The road winds along 200 yards from the foot, the interval being filled by huge masses of rocks of a rich red which have fallen from above, and are almost hidden by small trees and luxuriant flowering creepers. Here and there you can follow the tracks of some gigantic mass lately fallen down, which has cleared every tree and bush and left a bare track behind.

To the right of the road there is a steep descent of about 300 feet, thickly covered with bush, and at the bottom of this dashes the river, so thickly hemmed in with trees that only now and then can you get a glimpse of it, though you can hear it roaring loud enough. On the other side of the river the mountains rise more regularly, presenting a magnificent mass of forest.

It was in this pass that the 6th suffered such loss at the beginning of the last war.

Two years prior to this time the last Kaffir War, which had begun in the close of 1850 with the attack in the Boomah Pass mentioned in the letter just quoted, had been brought to a close by Sir George Cathcart. The chiefs Sandili and Macomo, driven across the Kei, sued for peace; the paramount chief Kreli also submitted; the Amatolas and the Waterkloof had been cleared, forts and blockhouses erected, and the way opened for a permanent settlement of the country.

When, early in 1854, Sir George Cathcart quitted the Cape to take up those military duties which were in a few months to end in a soldier's death on the field of Inkerman, he left behind him in British Kaffraria a settled system of government. 'Her Majesty's Government,' wrote the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 'are actuated by an earnest desire to lay the foundations of institutions which may carry the blessings and privileges as well as the wealth and power of the British nation into South Africa, and, whilst appeasing the jealousies of sometimes conflicting races, to promote the security and prosperity, not only of those of British origin, but of all the Queen's subjects.'

Sir George Grey, who was selected to be the representative of the Home Government in the accomplishment of this new era of peace and progress, and to succeed Sir George Cathcart as Governor and High Commissioner in South Africa, was perhaps of all men the one best suited to the work. He had tact, immense ability, purpose, energy; he possessed the power of winning the love of those who worked under him. He gave his masters such straight and single-hearted service that

he told them even of their error ; and when he left the Cape, six years after the date we have reached, it was under the shadow of official censure.

It was fortunate for young Colley, buried in a small post in Kaffraria, that the new Governor was not content to sit at the centre, but wished to see with his own eyes the condition of things at the circumference. Early in 1855 he arrived at Fort Hare, the headquarters of the 2nd 'Queen's.' Writing on February 25, Colley describes the visit and the impression left on his mind by a meeting with Sir George Grey :

Since I wrote we have had great goings on here ; for the Governor, General Jackson, and their staffs to the number of fifteen have been going round the outposts. After many changes of the day they finally arrived at Fort Hare on a Friday.

Sir George Grey is excessively gentlemanly and civil (rather overwhelmingly so), speaks very little, but listens most attentively ; with at the same time a little sly look in the eye, which gives him a very wide-awake expression.²

Then, we are told, the Governor walked round the fort, 'which he admired very much, and looked at my collection of birds, which he also admired (he is a great ornithologist, and I have one or two very rare birds).' Finally, it turned out that the silent little man, the good listener with the knowing look in his eye, had not been looking and listening for nothing, for only a few months after the date of his visit we find Lieutenant Colley appointed to lay out and build a large village near Kingwilliamstown, where Sir George Grey had decided to establish a body of pensioned military settlers, for which and other work he had just obtained a grant from the

² To his mother.

Home Government. The offer of this appointment came as a surprise to Colley :

I have been surveying a little. But I am afraid the day for surveying out here has rather gone by—a good survey, or even a good sketch or drawing, was sure to get one on when General Cathcart commanded ; and several officers got appointments by surveys that were only so-so. At the same time Sir George Grey ought to have a great respect for surveying, for he owes his rise in life to it. When a captain in an infantry regiment he was sent to survey part of Australia, and that first brought him into notice and got him his present appointment.³

No doubt when Sir George was looking at the collection of birds in Lieutenant Colley's hut, he had also noticed sundry signs of survey work lying around. A later letter speaks of these prospects in connection with the young officer's great desire to get to the Crimea :

I am daily expecting to hear more about my engineering appointment. I look to the advantage it will be to me when I get to the Crimea. If I get on active service anywhere, the fact of having been selected for such an appointment among the 100 or 150 officers out here will be of immense service to me.⁴

In October 1855 Colley was hard at work at the 'Pensioners' Village. Writing from Kingwilliamstown, he gives an account of the work and how he entered upon it. The rivers just then were in high flood :

While I was writing to you at Middledrift, I heard that they were getting the post-bag across the river by means of ropes, so I went down to see it ; and when it was opened I found letters from Maclean⁵ requesting me to come to

³ February 26, 1855, to his brother.

⁴ August 20, 1855, to his mother.

⁵ Colonel Maclean, British Commissioner for Kaffraria.

Kingwilliamstown as soon as the rivers would permit it as he was in a great hurry to have the Pensioners' Village begun. Accordingly, as I thought a little zeal would please him, I determined to cross the river as it was, and two hours later I swam it on my pony. It was the first time I had tried him in the water, or, indeed, swimming a horse at all, and I did not much like it; but my pony carried me manfully across. I found it rather difficult to sit on, for when first he found himself out of his depth he began making the most tremendous bounds, and the water seemed to lift my legs off his back; but he soon settled into a regular swim. I arrived here late that evening, and I have now regularly begun work. I have drawn out the plan, also sections and plans for the houses, and made estimates, and a pretty penny it will cost, I expect. It is no joke having to build 100 houses of brick and stone at a moment's notice, when the only artificers are to be found among the troops, and I believe the Governor expects it to be done within two months. I have just sent him up my plan, which I hope may please him.

I am nominally assistant surveyor, but in reality I work independently of every one and am quite a 'swell'! A captain, subaltern, and 100 men of the 45th, all the artificers that can be collected from the regiments out here, and 200 Fingoes under some police-officers, have been placed at my disposal; and I have also an almost unlimited command of money. Should this village succeed, others will be formed on the same plan. I now consider (for the first time in my life, I am afraid) that I am fairly earning my 14s. a day. I am glad to see that Sir William Molesworth has carried in Parliament a grant of 40,000*l.* for ten years, to be employed in this country, in whatever way Sir George Grey thinks most likely to prevent war.⁶

As the master builder was not yet quite twenty years of age, the work assumed proportionate importance, but, vigorously though he threw himself into it, his thoughts were often far away in the

⁶ October 8, 1855, to his brother.

Crimea. His friend Birch was dead. How deeply he felt the loss of this early and devoted friend the letters of his lifetime tell.

We have just received the news of the affair of June 7, and I see another of my few old Sandhurst friends is gone. Lieutenant Stone of the 55th was at Sandhurst with me, and I took a great fancy to him there. Birch somehow did not like him much and used often to laugh at me for being so fond of him, and after we left Sandhurst we used often to have great arguments about him. Singularly enough he got his ensigncy in the 55th the same day Birch and I got our lieutenancies; in fact, he got the vacancy made by Birch's promotion, and I wrote from this country, little thinking poor Birch would never receive my letter, asking him to be kind to Stone for my sake, even if he still disliked him. My schoolboy friends are now nearly all gone, and I don't find somehow that I make any such friendships now. Of my Sandhurst friends one was killed in the Burmese War, and two in this war.⁷

After these reflections, he enters at length into his wish to get to the Crimea, a subject he has been writing about for months:

I cannot conceive why, with all this talk of the difficulties of getting soldiers, they do not send the regiments from this; they would get about 5,000 men, for the most part hardy well-seasoned soldiers accustomed to rough it, who would be worth three times their numbers of the boys they are getting out from England, while this would be just the country to send young recruits to—the climate is so healthy and invigorating. It was remarked in the Crimea that regiments that had been out here hardly lost any men by sickness, while others were fast melting away. One would have thought that would have been enough to open their eyes to the advantage of employing this fine body of men, instead of leaving them here doing nothing. I am almost afraid I wrote too late about getting a transfer to a

⁷ Middledrift, August 20, 1855, to his mother.

Crimean regiment, and, if so, good-bye to all promotion for me.

The idea of going to the Crimea did not find favour with his relations, and in November 1855, writing to his mother, he returns to the subject :

With regard to the Crimea, I assure you I have looked at both sides of the question. It is not merely military advancement or honour, it is a case of success in life or entire failure. I don't think you let that weigh sufficiently. I am strong and healthy, and I believe this country strengthens one very much, and for the rest I must take the fortune of war. You don't seem to approve of my plan for the future as an old major. No more do I, I can assure you, but I don't see any alternative unless I go to the Crimea, for it is but a very vague hope that 'something will turn up.' If I did not think still that there was a very good chance of the regiment being ordered to the seat of war, fond as I am of my profession, I would really rather leave it, and while still young begin again at some other profession. I should be ashamed to go home as an officer and meet men, all of whom had been well earning their pay and position while I have been idling out here. I dare say you will think all this very foolish, but if I have succeeded in anything, it has always been owing to that pride of being able to keep my place, and that dread and shame of being passed, which often has overcome a boy's natural idleness. At Sandhurst and at Cheam I was never beat by a boy younger than myself, or passed by any one with whom I had a fair start.⁸

But the war with Russia was practically over when he wrote this letter, although the fact was not to be known in South Africa for months to come ; and when finally the prospects of peace put an end to all chance of service in the field, he turns his thoughts to the Staff College, then just established, and urges his claims to be allowed to compete for entrance :

⁸ Kingwilliamstown, November 20. 1855.

I have now got another plan to submit to my father. It is that he should write to the Horse Guards for permission for me to come home and go to the Senior Department, stating as his reasons that at Sandhurst I passed the best examination by three steps of my half, that before I had been out here a year I had obtained a good appointment, that I am willing to throw up this good appointment for the benefits I may derive from studying at the Senior Department, and that I am willing to undertake to go through the course in a year instead of eighteen months, the time allowed an old Sandhurst cadet. I know all this sounds very bragging, but it is, as it were, my last chance.⁹

This project was not to be carried out for some years, and the work of building and surveying went on at Kingwilliamstown through the whole of 1856. The necessities of village construction had been much increased by the decision of the home Government to send a large portion of the German Legion, disbanded at the close of the Crimean War, to the Cape of Good Hope as military settlers. An unfortunate and shortsighted policy, it may here be remarked, which has resulted not only in strengthening the whole fabric of Dutch settlement in South Africa, but also may be said to have begun the friendly intercourse between the old Dutch colonists and their Teutonic cousins, the last fruit of which was a famous telegram from Berlin.

Preparation for the Germans gives Colley plenty to do, and he writes to his brother in the latter months of 1856 :

I take advantage of a comparatively idle day, afforded me by the steady rain, to write as long a letter as I have time for. I say comparative idleness, for I have ridden thirty miles through a storm of rain, and done four hours'

⁹ Kingwilliamstown, December 28, 1855.

office work besides, but that is nothing to what I have been doing, and am likely to do for the next month or two. First of all I went out to Fort Grey to survey the military *rayon* around it in preparation for the Germans, some of whom they propose locating there. I got news that the Germans might be out very soon, and accordingly I went at it thirteen hours a day to try and get ready in time.

I have charge of a line of country about sixty miles long, with six posts, at each of which a village is to be laid out, surveyed, and the ground each man is to be given pegged out, the numbers at each place varying from one to five hundred. The selection of the site, the form of the village, and the numbers at each post are left to me. The total number I have to locate will be about 1,500. What I object to is the time I shall have to waste in the saddle, for while I am laying out villages at Fort Grey and East London, I have also to superintend the building of huts at the Yellow Woods fifty miles away, and I am expected to get it all done in three weeks. But though it will be severe work I rather like it, because I am to be entirely independent.¹

Nor in this great pressure of active work is reading given up; the letters are filled with references to his books:

Many thanks for getting me the other volumes of Alison. I should like you to get, if I am not troubling you with too many commissions, the index volume which I see is published, the first four volumes of Dugald Stewart's collected works, and Alison's 'Marlborough.'

Some results of his reading of history are given in a letter to his mother:

I am a bit of a 'hero-worshipper,' and Napoleon is one of my peculiar objects of worship. Reading Alison first attracted my attention to his almost superhuman genius, and since then my military studies, in which it is generally

¹ Kingwilliamstown, October 9, 1856.

sufficient to prove anything good or bad by saying Napoleon did or did not do it, have made me look on him as a sort of superior being, so far removed in genius from all the rest of mankind that his decision sets any disputed subject at rest for ever. There are so many striking points about him too: the extraordinary ascendancy he acquired over men, so that he even won over the crew of the ship that conveyed him to St. Helena; the universality of his genius, which enabled him to command an army, to frame laws, to write, to win men by his conversation, even to appear as a judge of the fine arts (the design for the Madeleine was, if I remember right, his choosing) with equal success. And so I can feel the enthusiastic attachment, almost adoration, of the old veteran when the idea of what may happen to his family falls to nothing at the idea:

‘Mein Kaiser, mein Kaiser gefangen.’²

Such opinions seemed rather heretical to his people at home, and in a subsequent letter we find him defending his hero from attack. He has been advised to read Madame de Staël’s ‘French Revolution’ and Constant’s Memoirs, and this is his reply:

I have not read De Staël’s ‘*Considérations*’ on the French Revolution, but I should have thought it was not a subject adapted to a woman’s mind. Such a subject requires the most powerful, far-seeing, and reasoning mind; and, besides, she must be so *very* prejudiced, her father, whom she so admired, having been an important actor in the commencement of it. I have never read Constant’s Memoirs, but I certainly will, for I delight in anything about Napoleon. But are they not written in rather a backbiting style? I fancy I remember reading some notice of them which abused Constant for following Napoleon and crying him up as long as anything was to be got from him, and then deserting him and abusing him as soon as he fell.

It is not so much as a military man I admire Napoleon as on account of the wonderful genius he shows in every-

² Kingwilliamstown, December 2, 1856.

thing. I have read some of his St. Helena memoirs, and there is hardly a single sentence of his conversation, excepting when speaking about personal matters or his imaginary grievances, which does not afford food for many an hour's thought.

When he was framing the Code Napoléon, the lawyers admitted that none of them took so generally a clear and correct view of the most knotty points, and even with all their practice could not with such a clear and sure eye unravel the intricacies of the old laws, and at once perceive their drift. It has often been brought against him that he rejected Fulton's invention of the steam engine; but I was glad to see that set at rest, and in his favour, by a letter of his to the Minister of the Interior, after seeing Fulton's plans, desiring him to lay them immediately before the Institute, as he discerns in them the germs of what may effect incalculable changes in the world. The letter is in the correspondence of Napoleon, now being published by the French Government. If it is not too immense, I shall certainly get that work; but I am afraid a hundred volumes would hardly hold it all.

I think what gives me the greatest idea of the *gigantic* power of his mind was on the occasion of his proposed invasion of England—when, after years of preparation, and just as the moment seemed at last to have arrived, he heard of the retreat of the French fleet before Sir R. Calder, which rendered necessary the total abandonment of the expedition. He sat down immediately and dictated the orders which conducted the whole French army from Boulogne to the centre of Austria, and produced the capitulation of Ulm—a set of orders the most able and perfect, down to the most minute details on record, begun ten minutes after the stunning news of the total failure of one of the most gigantic expeditions ever attempted! ³

These extracts will strike the reader with a sense of the breadth, capacity, and penetrating nature of this young officer's mind. In this remote part of

³ July 10, 1857, to his mother.

the world, and while working with extraordinary physical energy, he has still contrived to build up within himself the mental strength that comes of knowledge. As we read deeper into the letters of this life the same characteristic meets us. Later in the career, when other forces come into play and the currents of strong ambitions are sweeping him forward, there will still be found always present in his judgment of men and affairs this power of independent thought. Now, in the midst of his labours in preparing for the German settlers, he begins to lay down for himself a clear system of thought, already looking forward to a time when he might possibly be called to wider fields of action and enterprise. In the last days of 1856 he writes :

I am becoming more and more attached to the army every day ; every moment I can spare is devoted to military works, until even the dry regimental details which I used to think so stupid and uninteresting are beginning to appear in a new light to me. If I can get even moderate promotion now, I don't think I would leave the army whatever prospects might open to me in another direction.

I am young, ambitious, and confident—three things which ought to enable one to work out something.

I was very much amused with your account of your visit to Crom and your tour in general : and all the grand company and the prodigy clergyman ! I can quite understand a man of great memory, but not much mind, not a great thinker, who has read every book in the world and knows everything that can be said on any subject, but has really never sufficiently thought it over to come to a clear idea on the subject himself. I was very much struck by coming across this in some book, 'It is not by reading but by thinking that an educated man is formed ;' and immediately afterwards a passage in that kind letter of Uncle Stuart's⁴ which you copied for me, 'There are so few

⁴ Mr. Stuart Trench, author of 'Realities of Irish Life.'

really working, or rather thinking, men.' This opened my eyes and made me think a bit, and it very soon struck me that many men of great talents do so little because in their leisure they don't think, and when a subject is suddenly brought before them, they haven't time to form an opinion; while if a man is always thinking there are very few subjects likely to come before him that he has not thought over, and to a certain extent formed an opinion on already. So I have determined to *make* myself think—I have lots of *that* sort of leisure while I am riding from place to place; and latterly, instead of conjuring up my 'Feilounlands'—imagining impossibilities, and building castles in the air on them as I used to be very apt to do when I had not anything immediately connected with my work to engross my attention—I have given myself some subject to think over and (if it is a debatable one) come to a conclusion one way or the other. I dare say you will laugh at my idea and put it down among good resolutions in general, but I already feel it coming more natural to me, and find the advantage of it.⁵

To this habit of deep and earnest thinking first begun in the long lonely rides among the wilds of Kaffraria, he undoubtedly owed the quick, unprejudiced judgment, the clear and lucid power of expression, which made him a force in the India of twenty years later, when he was brought suddenly into contact with men whose previous lives had made them experts in the working and management of great Asiatic communities.

⁵ Kingwilliamstown, December 18, 1856, to his elder sister.

CHAPTER IV

KAFFRARIA

The false prophetess—The Kaffirs—Gawler's expedition—Kreli—Magistracy—Death of Tola—Good-bye to the Kaffirs.

WHILE the work of German colonisation was progressing in that part of Kaffraria which had been declared British, unexpected events were developing in the regions north of the Kei River, where the natives still held nominal possession of the land.

A prophetess had arisen among the followers of the paramount chief, Kreli—a prophetess whom, unfortunately for themselves, the people delighted to honour. It was the season of the year when the green slopes around the kraals were always dotted with patches of freshly turned red earth; when the sowing of the Indian corn was to be done, the crop which, together with milk, and occasionally the flesh of oxen, forms the staple food of the Kaffir people. But this year there was to be no hoeing of the ground, no planting of seed. The prophetess had solemnly decreed that food would be no longer necessary; and not only were the prospects of the coming year's harvest to be sacrificed, but all existing stores of corn were to be destroyed, all cattle and other live stock were to be killed, and the land was to be left a hungry waste. And then? Well, then

there would be seen such things as had never been seen in the world before. The ancestors of the tribes, the heroes whose deeds song and tradition still told of, were to rise from their graves, bringing with them abundant supplies of the choicest food; cattle would come, too, in countless numbers; and this wonderful resurrection of man and beast was to be quickly followed by the triumph of the black race, and the disappearance of the white from the soil of South Africa. Considerably more than half the entire population of Kaffirland, both without and within the British boundary, believed this monstrous tissue of absurdity, left their lands untilled, slew their cattle, destroyed their stores of grain, and then sat down to await the resurrection of their ancestors. The prophetess had fixed the full moon of February, 1857, as the day upon which the grand cataclysm was to take place. The sun would rise that morning, she said, only to wander a little while above the horizon; it would then set in the east, and its disappearance would be the signal for a hurricane of surpassing fury to rise and sweep the white man from the land.

But, on the morning of February 17, the full moon set and the sun rose, only to find thousands of foodless people wandering over the hills of Kaffraria. Then began a terrible famine among the deluded Kaffirs. There was no food in all the land, save such as the forests afforded in wild roots and berries. Ten months had to elapse before another harvest could bring relief. The tribes broke up in despair; thousands flocked into the colony in search of work and food. It was calculated that fully 25,000 natives perished in the year 1857, and 100,000 fled from the

land. No war had ever brought upon them such havoc as their own fatuity had caused.

And here we may devote a few words to the singular people who, under the general denomination of Kaffirs, have figured so largely in the annals of our colonial wars during the past seventy or eighty years. Some five or six centuries ago, a vast host of black men moved south from the interior swamps of equatorial Africa. They bore the name of Guigas; they marched under rigid rules of military discipline; wherever they encountered tribes of the aboriginal inhabitants, these had to retire before the greater strength and ferocity of the newcomers. We read of these conquering savages in the early records of the Portuguese missionaries, and in the narrative, published in 'Hakluyt,' of an English sailor named Battel, who, escaping from a ship on the coast of Angola, joined these savages and became a chief among them. For the next two hundred years the Guigas are lost sight of.

Their rate of advance southward was slow, and in the vast expanses between the Vaal River and the Zambesi there was room for delay. The arid character of the Atlantic seaboard, as the continent narrows towards the Cape of Good Hope, doubtless forced this migrating horde to the eastern or Indian Ocean shore; there, in the innumerable glens and fastnesses of the Drakensburg, and by the green pastures of the Amatolas, the human wave rested at last in comparative quiet. The Hottentots and the Bushmen were driven out, and the coast region which lies between the Alagoa and Delagoa Bays became the home of the Kaffir—a name given by the Arab traders, and adopted by the Portuguese settlers

at Mozambique, and covering generally the subdivisions since named Gaikas, Galegas, Zulus, Ampondas, &c.

Thus when the early Dutch settlers first came in contact with the Kaffir tribes on the eastern frontier of the colony they found a race of warriors very different from the Hottentot tribes previously encountered. They were pure blacks, of stalwart muscular frames ; they had ceremonies for marriage, laws for the chase, and rules for the division of spoil in war ; they understood how to smelt iron and to work copper ; they practised the rite of circumcision, believed in witchcraft, had codes of fines and punishments. They used the spear and shield, took snuff, and made a beer from millet which was palatable and refreshing. The men milked the cows, built the kraals, and followed the chase ; the women tilled the ground and attended to the household duties.

Towards the close of the year 1857 the full effects of the Kaffir famine had become terribly apparent. Scattered through Colley's letters we come frequently upon references to this famine, and to the strange delusion that had produced it. It was believed that the prophetess was only a tool in the hands of the paramount chief, Kreli, and his advisers, and that the whole purpose of the destruction of food was to bring about a state of national destitution which would oblige the Kaffirs to go to war with the English. That the chiefs looked to conflict as the result of the fulfilment of the prophecy was doubtless true ; but they believed it was the promised resurrection, not the preliminary killing of the cattle, which, literally as well as figuratively, would give them the sinews of war.

Before the middle of 1857 any danger of hostilities was over. The tribes were utterly broken in spirit and powerless through physical weakness, and when later in the year the news of the mutiny in India reached the Cape it was easy to spare 5,000 seasoned soldiers for Indian service. The 'Queen's' Regiment was not destined to proceed on active service to India. 'Delhi has fallen,'¹ writes Colley in November, 'so I presume the principal bloodshed will have ceased. They are sending on more troops from this, but I think it is pretty definitely settled that we remain here. The General cannot afford to lose his quartermaster-general, his butler, groom, servants, and escort, all of whom come from our regiment.'

Besides this extract, which shows upon what trifles the careers of men may turn, there are passages that tell how the writer's mind is busy in hammering out its tracks of thought, one of which leads him to insist that the motto 'Noblesse oblige' applies with equal truth to the aristocracy of talent :

I have often heard of the Archbishop's [Whately's] dinner parties, and that he is exceedingly eccentric and amusing, but apt to be disagreeable and rude, so I suppose you should look on it as a great compliment his having been civil to you. I have rather a dread of those clever rude men ; nothing is more amusing than to hear a civil skirmish between two men clever at repartee ; but a rude retort, no matter how clever or how well deserved, always makes me inclined to take the other person's part. It often occurred to me, in reading Johnson's sayings, that it was fortunate he was such a big man or he might have been kicked out of the house for some of them—and serve him right.²

¹ November 25, 1857, to his elder sister (now Mrs. Vernon).

² November 25, 1857, to Mrs. Vernon.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny it was decided to add second battalions to twenty-six regiments of the line. To Colley's great disappointment, this measure brought no regimental promotion:

They have not given a single step in the regiment, and, what is harder to bear, half the captains who are brought in are junior to me! It is a very heavy blow to one ambitious to rise.³

Two months later his letters show how keenly his thoughts are running ahead of this check:

I am gradually coming to look upon Sandhurst as my last resource, and if that fails and they will not allow a man any possible opening by which to work his way up, why, I must either resign myself to an indolent objectless life; or (an idea which has several times presented itself to me) try and enter the Prussian service, where, I believe, every one is allowed a fair chance, and, indeed, encouraged to show what he has in him.⁴

And now, just when professional prospects appeared at their worst, an opportunity opened most unexpectedly of 'showing what was in him.' This 'opening' is described by Colley in a letter written from Kingwilliamstown to his brother in February 1858. The letter shows, too, how completely the writer had now acquired the habit of easy description and analysis of cause and effect, even under the pressure of sudden emergency and rapid action:

As I am just ordered off on an expedition, during which I may not have any opportunity of writing, I take advantage of the few spare minutes I can find between the cares of providing horses, camp equipage, food, &c., for the journey,

³ East London, November 25, 1857, to Mrs. Vernon.

⁴ Kingwilliamstown, January 16, 1858, to Mrs. Vernon.

to write a few lines to set people's minds at ease at home, if they do not hear from me by next mail.

I am going up with Major Gawler, on an expedition to the Bashee, a river about 120 miles from this, to take possession of the country between the Kei and the Bashee. I have to make a rough survey of the country, and report on its capabilities for agriculture, sheep farming, &c., the direction in which roads should be made, and whether any of the mouths of the rivers could be made into harbours. But, of course, as long as there is any prospect of fighting I remain with Gawler. I think it is hardly likely the present inhabitants will give up the country without a few scimmages—and if they do show any inclination for fighting, Gawler is the man to gratify them to their hearts' content. He is one of the Kaffir resident magistrates, and a most able and indefatigable one. His only fault is an over contempt of danger, which makes him run his head into places he has no business to go into.

We have already noticed Sir George Grey's policy of frontier colonisation, frontier roads and forts. A later development, and one of which the methods were more open to question, was the subversion of the power of the native chiefs. The Transkei expedition on which Colley was now starting sprang out of this policy. His letter goes on to describe its causes and objects.

The tribe against which all our wars have been, and which embraces all the Kaffirs who occupy British Kaffraria, is the Galekas. Their country extends from the Bashee (about sixty miles beyond the Kei) to the Keiskama. On the other side of the Bashee come the Amapondas, under Faku, who extend to near Natal. The Governor now aims at entirely destroying the Galekas as a nation. Thanks to the famine, he has done that pretty effectually, by transporting all the chiefs who were most to be dreaded, and scattering their people as servants all over the colony. But Kreli, the paramount chief, still remains living between the

Kei and the Bashee, and, although his people were also scattered by the famine, they have begun to reassemble round him since this year's crop has ripened.

The object of our expedition is either to capture him, or to drive him beyond the Bashee. If we catch him, he will be transported; and if we drive him across the Bashee he will cease to be an independent chief, and become subject to Faku; in either case, the last remnants of the nationality of the Galekas, our inveterate and obstinate enemies, will be extinguished. The country between the Kei and Bashee will be annexed and occupied by Gawler's faithful Kaffirs until such time as it may be filled up by English colonists. You may wonder why a regiment should not be sent instead. But a regiment marching in that direction would be looked upon as an open declaration of war, and would bring every Kaffir in the country about our ears, which would be unpleasant just when our forces are so much required for India; while our expedition merely wears the colour of one party of Kaffirs going to chastise another for some depredation which Kreli's men have been committing.

It certainly bears a little the aspect of a 'filibustering' expedition, as the country we are invading is at peace with us, and does not in any way owe allegiance to us; our rule is only supposed to extend to the Kei. But I leave all that on the Governor's conscience, and for my own part I think it is the most delightful expedition any one could have proposed—surveying an entirely new country hardly known to us, with a little excitement to give it zest, and I believe splendid shooting in some parts. I have got four horses, and expect to have plenty of work for them all, as I have about a thousand square miles to survey.

The Governor was exceedingly civil about it; told me he gave me the offer, as he thought it was an expedition I should like, and more of an 'opening' than any other I was likely to find in Kaffraria; but did not wish me to go if I did not like the expedition or preferred the work I was employed on down here. Of course I accepted the offer most thankfully.

A few days later they started, and the 'surveyor-general to the expedition' writes from the Bashee River :

You have no idea what a funny procession we made, we four riding at the head, followed by all the chiefs and great men on horseback, and then the main body, 400 Kaffirs, on foot (armed in the most various manner with guns of all shapes, assegais, &c., and singing a war song), and a drove of cattle which was to feed us.⁵

The Bashee was reached without any opposition. 'We marched ready for a scrimmage at any moment, but Krelī had been too much taken by surprise, and his people too much weakened and scattered by the cattle-killing and subsequent famine, to make any stand.'⁶ From that time, February 1858, the unfortunate Krelī was an exile and wanderer in various parts of Kaffraria. In one letter we find him thus described :

Poor Krelī! He has had rather a sudden fall. Two years ago he was the greatest chief in South Africa. Now he is an outlaw with no country or cattle—barely able to muster 200 followers, and obliged to keep shifting his hiding-place to avoid being discovered by us. I foresee endless trouble from him if we cannot succeed in capturing him or driving him entirely away from this neighbourhood. I have a great fancy, though, to see him; he is the only Kaffir chief who seems to have any of the grandeur of the savage. It is astonishing the influence he exerts over the Kaffirs, and even over Englishmen who have been brought much into contact with him. Mr. Fynn, our interpreter, who was brought up almost at his kraal, quite reveres him, and constantly says, 'Oh, but you should see him; you could not help admiring him and liking him if you saw him.' But I am afraid, however much I might admire or like him, it would not prevent

⁵ March 25, 1858, to his younger sister.

⁶ *Ibid.*

my packing him off a prisoner if I ever got him into my clutches.⁷

Major Gawler, the leader of the expedition, was no ordinary officer. His portrait is thus sketched in the correspondence :

He is a small and very unremarkable-looking man, the only good feature about him being a very high forehead; silent, shy, and rather *gauche* in society, but talkative enough and very amusing when among those he is intimate with; very fiery-tempered, though to me he is always most courteous, even if I happen to speak to him in the middle of a burst of temper; brave to rashness when his own life only is concerned, though careful enough where others are involved; energetic, determined, and persevering, even to obstinacy. He is a man to get on wherever he goes, and if he only has opportunity will make himself a name, I think. He is the most extraordinary mixture of gravity and fun I ever came across—a very thinking man, owing the success of his schemes more to having thought everything over in every possible way than to any ‘inspirations of genius’—in fact, always thinking.

He is very well informed and a great lover of poetry. I never discovered it till one morning as we were lying in my patrol tent he jumped up with :

‘The antlered monarch of the waste
Sprang from his heathery couch in haste.’

I took him up with :

‘But ere his fleet career he took,
The sandflies from his flanks he shook.’

He carried on the quotation, and I took him up again, till between us we ran right through ‘The Lady of the Lake,’ Fynn (who was outside) in intense astonishment to know what in the world we were talking of!⁸

⁷ Camp on the Bashee River, June 28, 1858, to his younger sister.

⁸ Camp on the Umgwali River, April 23, 1858, to his sister, Mrs. Vernon.

Colley remained on the Bashee River 'doing Viceroy' in Major Gawler's absence, surveying, travelling, hearing Kaffir lawsuits, and studying the manners and customs of the native races. He was now in his twenty-third year, and in the month of May a choice of two widely different careers was open to him. His brother-in-law, Mr. John Vernon, a gentleman holding large land agencies in Ireland, invited him to enter as a partner in the business, retiring of course from the army. Had this offer been made a few months earlier, when lack of promotion and dearth of outlook had caused the young officer to take a despondent view of his professional future, it might possibly have met with a favourable response.

Almost simultaneously Colonel Maclean (Commissioner for Kaffraria) recommended him (in succession to Major Gawler, now ordered to India) for the post of 'Special Magistrate' in charge of Kreli's country, the portion of the Transkei recently annexed by Gawler's expedition. In a letter dated July 25 he writes :

I have already spoken of the favourable change in my army prospects which various things (the Staff College, &c.) have lately effected, independently of this magistracy ; and without being very sanguine as to what the magistracy may lead to, it certainly places me in a different position from what I previously occupied, and is no small encouragement, as showing that despite adverse circumstances some opening is almost sure to turn up for any one who is willing to think and work.⁹

Later on he writes to his sister :

I do enjoy this life uncommonly, despite the want of companionship.

⁹ Camp on the Bashee, July 25, 1858, to his mother.

Whether it is from my beard or not, I can't say; but I am generally taken to be about twenty-eight, and a police officer only two days ago guessed me at thirty. I seldom deceive people, for it would require greater efforts to gain and maintain my influence over my people, if they knew they had only a boy to deal with. I am glad, however, to find that I am steadily gaining influence, especially with the chiefs across the Bashee. At first those in the immediate neighbourhood were humble and abject, being in momentary dread lest the 'commando' should cross the river and attack them, while those at a distance were impertinent and wished to know 'who was this Englishman who had come into Krel's country and called himself a chief?' But now I am consulted by the chiefs both near and far, although the fear of being attacked has worn off.

I have tried to make it a rule never to undertake anything till I have thought it well over, and then never to allow anything to prevent its being carried out. And now you mustn't laugh at all my grave discourses, as if I had suddenly had the responsibility of a Prime Minister thrown on my shoulders. Although I generally wrote laughingly, I had many a serious thought as to whether I was old and experienced enough for this appointment—but that invaluable bump of self-esteem carried me through! ¹

And then, after pictures of the wild life he is leading, and bits from 'the only books up here, some small editions of the poets,' come comments upon his refusal to accept Mr. Vernon's offer. He writes of his own 'stirring and exciting profession, with the stimulus of something constantly to look forward to,' and contrasts it with the sedentary and monotonous life of a civilian at home. His 'numerous pursuits' and adventurous life make up to him for a certain sense of social isolation which during his last year or two in Kaffraria seems now and then to have

¹ Idutsha, September 28, 1858, to Mrs. Vernon.

pressed upon him. Not that he at all looks upon himself as a 'lone spirit.' 'All such Byronic ideas,' he writes, 'are soon knocked out of one's head by a little hard and active work. But it adds to my ambition and desire of distinction—naturally strong.'

At all events he will not give up his independent and varied life. 'You know,'² he says (alluding to Audley Egerton in Bulwer Lytton's 'My Novel'), 'I am but half a domestic animal myself, and should prefer the exciting rivalry of the race of life to sitting down quietly at home with my wife and children.'

The September letter already quoted announces the ratification by Sir George Grey of his appointment. He was now border magistrate and 'Chief' on the Bashee River—a position of independence and responsibility such as has seldom fallen to the lot of one so young. His control extended over a region of 5,000 square miles. He held the frontier post, the outwork of civilisation. Between him and the line of frontier forts held by regular troops lay forty miles of rugged country peopled only by Kaffirs. Beyond, to the north, for more than 200 miles, spread independent Kaffraria. It was all a land of rich and varied scenery—crag, kloof, and precipice, undulating plain and broad valley, forests of flowering trees, foaming rivers, and streams that wind through valleys deep in grass and lustrous in the fervid bloom of semi-tropical shrubs—a land of perpetual verdure, of pure and health-giving breezes, and for nine months out of the year of climate unsurpassed on the globe.

² November 25, 1857, to Mrs. Vernon.

Hitherto George Colley had held in this region a subordinate position, but now he was supreme. If superabundant energy, a mind trained to think and decide for itself, great determination, and physical hardihood of no common order could achieve distinction, it would be his. The state of the frontier gave ample scope for enterprise. After the famine troubles Sir George Grey determined, as we have seen, to break the power of the Kaffir chiefs, and many of the leaders had now been captured and imprisoned on irrelevant charges such as cattle-stealing. Amongst others Macomo, the greatest politician and best warrior in Kaffraria, was undergoing a sentence of twenty years' imprisonment at Capetown.

Of course where cattle-stealing is so universal as it is among the Kaffirs, the Governor has only to say that he wishes any particular man out of the way, and if you can only catch him, there is no difficulty in raking up evidence to show that he was once engaged in a theft of cattle, and he is transported accordingly.³

This plan of the Governor's, and still more the famine, had rendered any combined action on the part of the tribes impossible. But there were still small bands of desperate men who, hiding in some of the thickly wooded fastnesses of the mountains or equally impenetrable districts by the sea-shore, maintained a hopeless state of hostility, issuing at times from their retreats and waylaying transport wagons or cutting off some small patrol of friendly natives. These men preferred their chances of freedom in the bush to the probability of finding themselves, sooner or later, inmates of the dreaded and dreary Robbin Island amid the waves of Table Bay. Among these bold

³ February 8, 1858, to his brother.

outlaws there was one, Tola by name, who in past wars had given much trouble. A year or two prior to the time we are dealing with, he had been imprisoned, but he had escaped, and was at large in some of the fastnesses between the Buffalo and Kei Rivers. Shortly before Christmas 1858, Colley determined to make another attempt to capture this chief. Twice he had been out after him, under Gawler's command, each time without success; now he was to try it alone. He believed Tola to be the chief who in a previous Kaffir war had 'killed so many of our Grenadiers in the Fish River Bush and roasted alive those he caught,' and, as he says in one of his letters, he had a kind of personal quarrel with him on that score :

About a fortnight ago I heard that a man had been attacked and wounded at the Kei drift (about halfway between my place and Kingwilliamstown), and had recognised Tola among his attackers. Without telling any one of my intentions, I fell in about sixty of my police at daylight the next morning, marched sixty miles in two days, halting in the afternoon about ten miles from the Kei. As soon as it was dark I pushed on, descended into the valley of the Kei, and, dividing my men, crossed the river at three points, trusting to find him by the light of his fires, as, the night being cold and rainy, they would be sure to light some. Two of my detachments reached the rendezvous at daylight the next morning without having seen anything; the third discovered his fires in the bush and made for them, but found him there with twenty-five men instead of eight as I had expected. My police, though only sixteen strong, attacked them, but Tola, who was considered to be the best fighting man in Kaffirland, soon rallied his men and drove my police back, following them back until they arrived near the rendezvous. The alarm having been given, we came up with some fresh men to their rescue, and a smart hand-to-