

natives of Basutoland were soon to rise in revolt against the law of disarmament enforced by order of Sir Bartle Frere. Natal, however, satiated by the prodigious expenditure of the recent war, was politically tranquil. The Transvaal, too, was quiet, although from after events it would seem that the slowly generated forces of Dutch discontent must already have approached a stage which only wanted a spark of accident to raise the people in revolt.

Three years had passed since the annexation in April 1877. Much had happened since. The Zulu power, which had been a menace to the Transvaal, was broken for ever, the native troubles in other directions were settled at British expense, the finances were in a better condition, and the experience as yet obtained of English administration had not been such as to allay natural antipathy to an alien rule. There had been deputations of Boer leaders to England protesting against the annexation; assemblages *en masse* of the people at various places for the same purpose; petitions to the Administrator, to Sir Bartle Frere, to the Government of England, and to the Throne. To all these remonstrances there had come but one response: the annexation was an accomplished fact—it could not be undone. But other results had followed upon the attitude so doggedly maintained by the Boers. Their cause had found countenance and support outside the ranks of the Home Government, and many thinking men besides Mr. Froude were inclined to sympathise with them. Events, too, had been fighting for them. The Liberal party in opposition had not been slow to champion a cause damaging to their political opponents, and apparently safe to themselves. If the Dutch

people throughout South Africa believed that the advent to power of the Liberal party in 1880 meant the return to the Boers of the independence taken from them in 1877, such belief had the justification that censure of the annexation was a notable plank in the 'platform' upon which the general election had been fought and won.

We can judge, then, the feelings with which the Dutch population, not only of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, but throughout South Africa, received the intelligence that the Liberal Government, on assuming the reins of authority, had deliberately resolved to maintain the annexation—a decision which at once placed them in a position infinitely more difficult than that of their predecessors in office, who had at least pretended to regard the annexation as an act approved by a majority of the white inhabitants of the Transvaal; while the present possessors of power had long repudiated any such pretension, and had openly avowed their belief in the injustice of that measure. The feelings of the Boers became more than ever exasperated at finding themselves the dupes of the new Government, as before they had considered themselves the victims of the old.

This situation produced difficulties of another kind, almost as serious as the increased discontent it had awakened. To justify in some sense their continuation of a policy they had so often denounced in their predecessors, the Government had at least to show that they ruled the Transvaal by the wish of the people, and that it was not a costly possession held by force alone. They had, in fact, to make it pay. Military expenditure must be reduced, taxes collected.

And this necessity to produce for home consumption a contented taxpaying Transvaal pressed still more heavily upon the officials on the spot.

It was unfortunate for Colley that his arrival in Natal to assume the duties of High Commissioner of the Transvaal should have synchronised with renewed exasperation of the Boers' feelings, and with the other complicating elements here so briefly sketched. Unfortunate, too, were the number of the offices to which he had been appointed, and the conflicting duties they imposed upon him. Natal and Zululand were directly under his charge; the Transvaal—at the moment by far the most important spot in all the dominions of the Empire—was his only in a secondary degree; everything that came to him thence, or went from him thither, had to pass through another officer, Sir Owen Lanyon, the Administrator of that territory.

In this duality and division of directing authority lay the chief danger of the situation, and doubly was it dangerous when the contrasted characters of the two men, High Commissioner and Administrator, were taken into account. The vital want in the condition of affairs then existing in the Transvaal was, in one word, sympathy. The Boers were being goaded into desperation by an absence of that essential quality between them and their rulers. When Sir Bartle Frere had met the Boers at the mass meeting in 1879, it was said that he told them that their grievances were groundless and that their desire for independence was only 'tall talk.' Far more contemptuous epithets were daily thrown at them in the market-places or village centres, where they came in contact with the 'Uitlanders' of those days; and over and over again the

taunt was flung at them that, speak sedition as they might, they were nevertheless afraid to appeal to arms. This was the real explanation of all that optimist belief which is now so puzzling to read of. The Boers would not fight. It is a satire upon our civilisation that the old-fashioned ordeal of arms should still be required as a test of the sincerity and justice of a cause.

Sir George Colley, on the other hand, possessed many qualities of that higher order of human sympathy which is essential to the ruler of men. The Boers already knew him by name and character, they counted upon his friendship, and were deeply disappointed when they found that it bore no immediate fruit.

Not only were Transvaal matters to come to Colley at second hand, but his time and attention had, under the Home Government instructions, to be devoted to half a dozen other pressing questions. A new constitution for Natal, the native question in Zululand, the affairs of Griqualand East, the settlement of the long-standing dispute in Bechuanaland, known as the Keate award, the Delagoa Bay question, and many others, were cast into a sort of promiscuous portfolio of instruction to be sorted, arranged, solved, and settled at the earliest opportunity. When we look through the voluminous papers in which the several subjects were set forth, and turn from them to the few words written by Lady Colley in her notebook describing the day of arrival at Maritzburg, the brief entry acquires fresh significance: 'Thursday, July 1, Durban to Maritzburg—entered our home there—a plunge into chaos.' Chaos indeed it was to prove. It took about a month to get the several lines of labour disentangled and set out. That when they

were all laid bare the prospect was not encouraging may be gathered from the following letter :

I can see that I have plenty of hard work cut out for me, and plenty of difficult nuts to crack. Whether I shall be able to extricate myself fairly, or shall find that South Africa is to me, as it has been said to be in general, 'the grave of all good reputations,' remains to be seen. The people here are civil to me personally as far as I can judge, and well disposed, but bitterly hostile to Downing Street. Just now I am a little anxious about the Basuto disarmament, which seems likely to create a disturbance, but I sincerely trust we are not going to have more wars here.

I am off in a few days to visit the Transvaal and inspect our posts there, and thence on to the Keate award territory—the difficulties connected with which have for my sins been put upon my shoulders—returning through Kimberley and the Free State in time to meet my new council, which assembles about the end of September. I 'dissolved' a few days ago, and sincerely trust my dissolution may not be as fatal a one as was Lord Beaconsfield's!<sup>1</sup>

Just before starting news reached him of the disaster at Maiwand ; it was the beginning of the last act of the Afghan drama. The march from Kabul to Kandahar and the defeat of Ayub Khan had yet to be, and then the columns would move back to the Indus, bringing as trophy of toil and battle the name of one soldier made famous—Lord Roberts of Kandahar.

In the rapid journey just referred to, and undertaken six weeks after Colley's arrival in Natal, time did not allow of any close observation of the political situation in the Transvaal. He had to return to meet the new council in Natal in the latter part of September, and meanwhile the long-standing dispute of the Keate award must be closed, the Diamond fields

<sup>1</sup> Natal, July 25, 1880, to Major Macgregor.

and Orange Free State visited. One of the main objects of his inspection was to see how far the strongly expressed wishes of the Home Government relative to a reduction of the troops in the Transvaal could be carried into effect. Before setting out, he wrote to the Secretary of State for War :

I have been giving my best attention since my arrival here to the question of the reduction of the large military expenditure in the Transvaal, which I regret to say is even heavier than I had anticipated. I have already taken some steps towards the reduction of the transport, and of the large reserves of supplies which it was thought necessary to maintain in face of the threatened Boer combinations, and hope thereby to give our military chest some immediate relief. I am obliged to you, however, for not pressing me too much in this matter, and allowing me till September to consider my future arrangements, as by that time I hope to have personally visited the country, and shall be consequently in a much better position than I am now in to judge of the political condition of the country, and of its military requirements.<sup>2</sup>

Another letter, written from Pretoria six weeks later, speaks of his 'hurried tour of military inspection,' and reports his 'impressions of matters military and political in this country.'<sup>3</sup> Already the King's Dragoon Guards had, under orders from home, begun their march to Durban for embarkation to India ; three battalions of infantry and a battery of artillery still remained in the Transvaal, and were to be dealt with as described below. The state of the garrisons was not satisfactory ; desertion and discontent had reached an unprecedented height. The immediate result of his visit had been to bring these evils prominently before him.

<sup>2</sup> July 19, 1880, to Mr. Childers.

<sup>3</sup> August 26 1880, to the Duke.

The multiplicity of detachments and extreme dispersion of the artillery, interfering to a certain extent with the discipline, comfort, and efficiency of the troops, and entailing heavy additional expenditure in transport and establishments, seemed to me evils which it was desirable to correct as soon as the political condition of the country admitted of doing so. I am glad to say that since my arrival here I have been able, with the entire concurrence of Sir Owen Lanyon (the Administrator) and of Colonel Bellairs, commanding the troops, to arrange for the abandonment of three of these detachments—viz., Heidelberg, Middelberg, and Fort Albert. By this five companies will be set free to join the headquarters of their respective regiments. I have also ordered up the division R.A. now at Wakkerstroom to Pretoria, so that the headquarters and four guns of the battery will in future be here.

The political situation is still somewhat uncertain. Messrs. Joubert and Kruger, the Transvaal delegates, were very proud of the share they had in causing the failure of the confederation conference proposals at the Cape, but I think they are already beginning to be sorry for themselves; and though there is doubtless a bitterly hostile party, who care for nothing so much as to oppose and embarrass the British Government, there is also a much larger moderate party, who are beginning to see they have only injured their cause by the line taken about confederation. The Boer committee are again talking of mass meetings, &c., but I think the country generally is becoming rather tired of this agitation; and many who at first held aloof from us are now becoming friendly. The officers generally report that they find themselves well received by the Boers when they have occasion to visit them, and though there is a little 'shake hands to-day and fight to-morrow' style of talk, it seems rather put on for swagger than in earnest. In the course of the next two or three months we ought to be able to gauge more definitely the real power of the agitator, now that Joubert and Kruger have returned from their Cape mission, and should that power not turn out greater than I anticipate, I hope, in accordance with what I understand to be

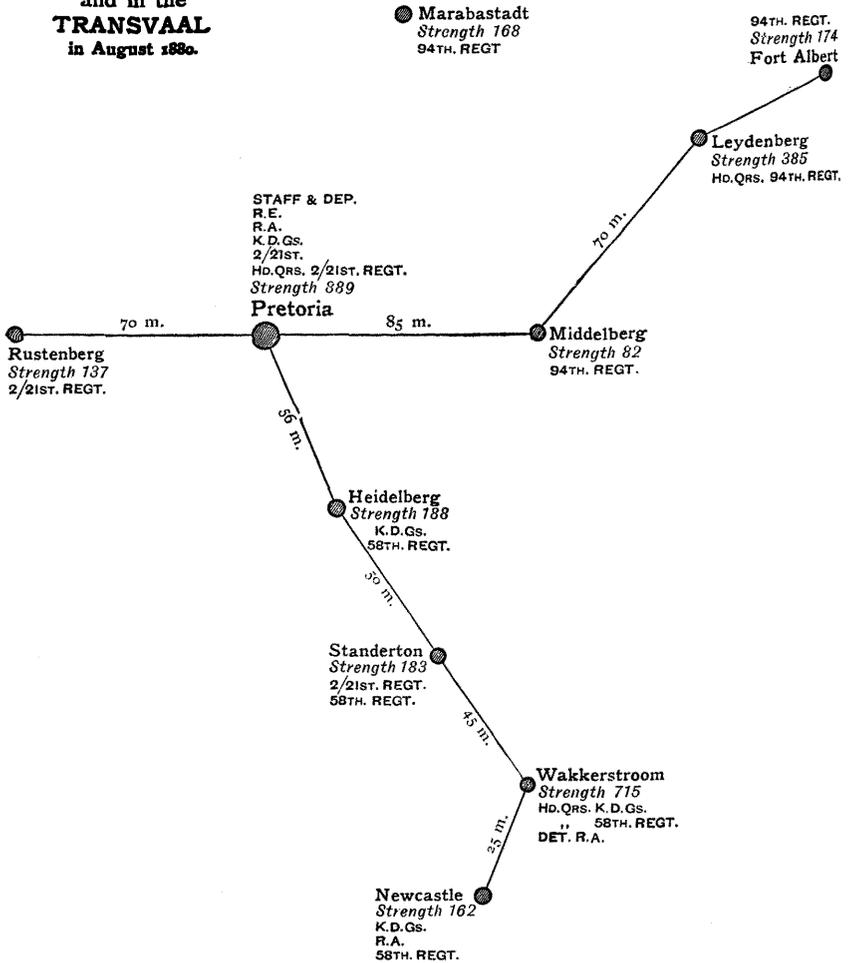
the wishes of . . . , to effect a further reduction of one regiment in the Transvaal.

My views are that under any circumstances it will be necessary for some time to come to maintain at Pretoria a full regiment of infantry, a detachment of mounted men, and four guns R.A., so that a column of all arms, with not less than 500 infantry, can be formed and moved out if necessary. Besides this there are certain out-stations, such as Wakkerstroom, Leydenberg, and Marabastadt, &c., which must be held by detachments, and these will require a second regiment.<sup>4</sup>

A diagram giving the distribution and strength of the Transvaal garrisons at the moment of Colley's inspection will serve to show their scattered and far extended nature. Strong at no point, they were weak all along the line, which, taken from north to south, and east to west, was more than 600 miles in length. But weakness was not the only characteristic. The cost was excessive. The food supplies which were copper on the coast, or in Natal, had become gold by the time they had reached the distant posts of Leydenberg and Marabastadt. More fatal still was the effect which this dispersed situation, the aimlessness of existence in these remote stations, and the whole nature of the life there had upon the morale of the troops—their spirit, discipline, and efficiency as soldiers. If the Boers really held the ideas which we shall find imputed to them later on by Sir Owen Lanyon, as to the probable defection of the troops to their side, there was certainly some reason for their opinion. Desertion was rife in the Transvaal. The High Commissioner's letters are full of reference to this crime. He speaks of its excessive prevalence as one of the principal reasons for

<sup>4</sup> August 26, 1880, to the Duke.

**Distribution of Troops  
at  
NEWCASTLE  
and in the  
TRANSVAAL  
in August 1880.**



reducing the strength of the garrison. 'I am sorry to say,' he writes to the Secretary of State for War on August 25, 'they (the troops) are deserting very largely.' Again, writing to a high military personage, he says:

The principal offence is desertion, to which the proximity of the Free State offers a strong inducement. . . . The desertions among the King's Dragoon Guards have been exceptionally heavy, especially since the regiment was put under orders for India. . . . One sergeant went away with about 200*l.* of troop and canteen money.

Again, in October, after his return to Natal, he wrote to the Secretary for War: 'I am writing officially on the subject of the desertions in the Transvaal, which have reached an alarming number, and add to my anxiety to reduce the garrisons as much as possible. I have made recommendations for small additions to the soldiers' ration, which will be money well spent if it reduces the desertion to any appreciable extent.' And to the Secretary for the Colonies he again mentions 'the terrible amount of desertion' going on in the Transvaal. Little wonder if, in face of such a state of things, the Boers held sanguine ideas of being able successfully to meet in the field those dispersed and discontented garrisons.

With regard to all these facts, opinions, and recommendations, we must bear in mind that Colley's hurried tour could enable him to judge only in a very limited degree of the real feelings of the Dutch Boers. The chief centres of their power lay far removed from his route—he had still to hear them through other ears, and see them with other eyes. Time appeared to him to be on the side of peace. Above all he was

meditating a new scheme by which a large measure of representative government would be given to the Boers, and he had determined upon making, before the year closed, a second visit to the Transvaal, when, after thoroughly examining the political situation in all its bearings, he would announce to the Boers their new constitution. It is very certain that in August 1880, the outward aspect of the Transvaal gave no indication of the deep and strong forces then moving below the surface. The rapid military tour presented no feature throughout its progress that seemed to justify a reversal of the decision already arrived at in England, that the King's Dragoon Guards should quit the country.

The concentration of isolated infantry detachments improved the military situation, and the withdrawal to Natal of part of one infantry battalion, the 58th, was also an advantage. We shall see later on that the question in relation to infantry was not their numbers but their mobility. By withdrawing a portion of the 58th from the Transvaal and retaining it as he did in Natal, Colley's position was the stronger when the moment came for protecting the colony and attempting the relief of the beleaguered posts. In the immense area of the Transvaal, with long and almost trackless spaces separating the military positions from each other, stronger infantry garrisons would have added to the difficulties of the situation. Their supplies and, above all, their power of movement would only have been the more defective.

In the private letters which Colley wrote during his Transvaal visit he constantly recurs to the physical difficulties presented by the country and the climate. These bring before us many of the obstacles which

had to be encountered in the progress of the military operations so soon to be undertaken over these same desolate expanses. From Biggarsberg he writes :

Our journey so far has been rather under difficulties from the weather. Each night we have failed to reach our destination, and been benighted and obliged to put up in some wretched wayside shanty. We started yesterday with the promise of rather a specially fine day, but it soon turned into a gale, blowing straight behind us, and which raised such clouds of dust round us that we had several times to pull up to see where we were going. Often we could not see the leaders' heads. About 5 o'clock the wind had brought up a driving mist, but we pushed on after dinner ; as the mist seemed to clear and we thought we should have a little moon. However, a mile outside Estecourt we lost our road and the mist came on thicker than ever, making it pitch dark. After various attempts to arrange lights, and very often getting off the road, the only way we could get on at all was by Wilkinson and Palmer walking in front of the horses' heads with a lamp ; even so we often got astray, and had great difficulty in making six miles, which brought us to a small wayside store where we got a cup of tea and slept very sound. . . .

To-day it came on a regular heavy fall of snow, sufficient soon to cover the whole country some inches deep, and we worked with difficulty through it to this place. By the way, it is a curious coincidence that this is the same day as the heavy storm we had last year, near Ulundi, which blew down so many tents and killed so many oxen.<sup>5</sup>

The adventures related in a letter written from Fort Albert a week later give a further insight into the difficulties of Transvaal travelling, and show how little accustomed to the rough ways of the veldt were the soldiers then stationed in that country.

We started from Leydenberg with very nice horses and

<sup>5</sup> August 1, 1880, to his wife.

over an excellent road. A sergeant had been detailed to accompany and guide us. After riding about fifteen miles, it struck me that the road was growing very unlike what I had been led to expect, and that we were plunging into a very deep and broken valley, while the direction seemed wrong. I called up the sergeant, who then placidly admitted that for the last few miles he had felt afraid we were off the road. He evidently had absolutely no eye for country, although he had travelled the road before, so I was afraid to try any line across the country, which was rough and broken, and set to work to retrace our steps. After a time we came to a man wood-cutting, who pointed out a track which would take us in the direction of the right road. After another mile or two this brought us to a farm which the sergeant declared to be the one he was to take us to, where we should find the change of horses, but which of course turned out to be a totally different one, about ten miles from the right one. Here we struck a track which clearly led in the right direction, and did ultimately lead into the right road. Then we cantered along gaily for a time, congratulating ourselves on not having lost more by the mistake, when suddenly we discovered that the sergeant, who was following us with our led horse and all our little comforts and supplies, was missing. We accordingly started off the road again to search for him, and ultimately discovered him wandering round and round a small hill immediately overlooking the farm which we had left an hour or two ago, and trying to find a path down, under the impression that this time he had really hit off the right farm! I could not have believed it possible for a man to be such an idiot!<sup>6</sup>

Shift the scene here described to one which took place four months later on this same Leydenberg-Pretoria road, and it is not difficult to forecast the result of an encounter between adepts in every trick of the wilderness, and a couple of hundred soldiers as

<sup>6</sup> To his wife.

little versed in wild warfare as was this specially selected sergeant.

By September 15, Colley was back at Maritzburg again. He had seen the Transvaal garrisons, visited Bechuanaland, pronounced on the Keate award, met the President of the Orange Free State at Bloemfontein, and written many official despatches *en route*. 'I have been doing a fearful amount of writing during these last two days,' he had written from Bloemhof, 'and have worked my A.D.C. nearly stupid with copying.'<sup>7</sup> And in another letter about the same date: 'Just at present I am listening to the rival claims of Bloemhof and Christiana to be recognised as the capital—Bloemhof having fifteen houses and having once had a resident doctor, while Christiana has eleven houses and a watercourse; both are about as wretched-looking places as can well be conceived, swept by every wind and buried in dust storms!'

During this tour news had reached him of the change of Governors at the Cape.

I was very sorry to hear of Sir Bartle Frere's recall. I had seen much of him and met with much kindness from him during our stay at Capetown, and though I might not agree with him on all points, I think we should have worked together very pleasantly; while his wide knowledge of things and people in South Africa was always at my service and very useful. I was sorry for his hit at the Zulu settlement in his closing speech, but he has no more love for that than Sir Garnet has for the Basuto disarmament! . . . The thoughtful courtesy of himself and his family, coupled with the boundless hospitality of Government House, had given him a popularity which will rather handicap his successor.<sup>8</sup>

And now at Maritzburg there came a brief period

<sup>7</sup> August 30, 1880, to his wife.

<sup>8</sup> August 9, 1880, to Lord Kimberley.

of comparative quiet. It was very pleasant to get back from these wind- and dust-swept wastes to the home in Natal, which had now been made bright and comfortable. The following reference to this time of calm before the storm occurs in a note written by Lady Colley :

I think it was on September 15 that he returned from the Transvaal, and the three succeeding months were, I think, on the whole the happiest of our married life—we often said they were—but perhaps that was only because they were the present. For with us the past seemed to pale continually in the ever growing brightness of our daily life. Still there was much in our circumstances to make us extra happy then. To George the change was a welcome one from the often trying position of an irresponsible adviser to that of a responsible ruler, with power—or at all events such semblance of power as is allowed to man—of working out what he planned. He possessed that attribute of rulers, a gift of influencing men, which can effect so much in positions where authority is at once considerable and yet limited. Though far too modest to think much about any of his faculties, yet he could not be insensible to the pleasure of exercising, for the first time freely, this power of swaying his fellow men—a power justified by the exceptional calibre of his mind, but telling just as strongly in quarters where mere intellectual force might have passed unperceived. The outcome it was of his whole nature. In the minds of the men immediately about him there grew up an unquestioning trust alike in his judgment and in his character—a feeling that with him mistake or failure was impossible.

His mind was one on which former interests left indelible traces, and it was partly from association with his early years in South Africa that the climate, the country, the flowers, drew the special charm they had for him. Often now do I recall, with self-reproach and vain regret, some occasion when he would be a little disappointed at failing to make me join in high appreciation of one or other of these ;

for at first I had some odd unaccountable dislike to Maritzburg, which now seems to me an unconscious foreshadowing of trouble ; but soon, when we had made our home nice and cosy, and the earlier difficulties had subsided, as the dust did with the first rain, I grew very fond of the place. It became part of our life, the scenery of our happiness, and we praised it together many a time.

So ran these pleasant home days all through October and November, till in December the rapidly darkening cloud of Transvaal trouble began to break over South Africa.

As October and November 1880 ran their course, the Transvaal note is more frequently sounded in the long refrain of South African administration. But it is still far from being a note of alarm. So little apprehension exists in the governing mind at Pretoria that the Administrator there is writing about his success in raising the taxes, about raising a corps for service in Basutoland, about his own prospects of getting leave of absence to England, all through the month of October. On the 25th of that month he refers, indeed, to the political feeling of the Boers, but it is only to emphasise still more strongly the opinion that there is no real cause for apprehension. The sentence is worth quoting :

Some of the good folk here are beginning to cry out 'Wolf, wolf,' about the coming mass meeting, but they have done so on every similar occasion. I don't feel any anxiety about it, and if the people will only let them alone, they [the Boers] will do nothing. Several have come to me and said, 'Oh, you must not allow it and you must put your foot down!' Nothing would play their game better than if we made any martyrs, and all that the movers want is to get the Government to do something which 'would make some

heart indignant break, to show that still she (Transvaal, not Erin) lives.' . . .

To-day we are in the midst of our first municipal elections, and there is great excitement in town. These local self-governing bodies are useful counter-irritants and assist in bringing about the principle of easy government, which is here more strongly than elsewhere *Divide et impera.*'<sup>9</sup>

On November 7, he reported the departure of 285 volunteers for the Basuto War, whither, too, a couple of Whitworth guns had been despatched from Pretoria. Not until November 27 did the letters of the Administrator give any indication of coming trouble. The first disturbance at Potchefstroom had then occurred, and a very significant one it had been; but still it did not appear to the Administrator to be more than a passing cloud.

The leaders are keeping carefully in the background, but they are not, as heretofore, prominent in advising the people to wait. The fact is they don't know what to advise now that they have had the final reply that neither Conservatives nor Liberals will give them back the country; and if they say 'Accept the situation' they feel that their names will be blackened all round, for none are more ready to brand others as cowards than cowards. If they say 'Fight' they know they will ruin themselves and put a rope round their necks, so they are in a regular fix. . . . But there is a danger in all this, and it is certainly greater than any that we have yet had to deal with. If 4,000 or 5,000 excited men get together without any visible force to keep them in order, they may in a moment of worked-up passion do what would cause irreparable damage. For these reasons I think it is very necessary that the force in the Transvaal should be increased.<sup>1</sup>

A week later we find the following very important

<sup>9</sup> Lanyon to Colley.

<sup>1</sup> Lanyon to Colley.

indication of Government opinion at that moment in the Transvaal :

December 4. Hudson returned on Thursday from Potchefstroom, where he had an interview with Paul Kruger and some others of the malcontents. The whole affair is one of disinclination to pay taxes, or to be subordinate to any form of government. The committee have a hazy idea that they are the arbiters of the Transvaal, and that so long as the Government keeps quiet and does not worry them for taxes, so long will they let matters slide, leaving John Bull to pay the piper and keep the natives in order. But they become insulted if asked to contribute anything towards supporting the State. At the same time they readily avail themselves of every Government institution when it suits their purpose to do so. In fact it is only when it comes to *l.s.d.* that they cry out. . . .

The whole of the present agitation may be summed up in one word—Taxes ; and till the people see that they must be paid, there will be trouble.<sup>2</sup>

In this letter of December 4 occur also some strange statements about the Boers. ‘The young men seem to think that going on the shoot with soldiers is like going out buck-shooting.’ And again :

The most absurd reports have been spread amongst them regarding the soldiers, who (they say) will go over to their side when they offer them each a farm for doing so. There is of course a chance of a row when a lot of excited men get together, and they may try conclusions, so it is well to be prepared. But I shall be very much surprised if they do anything openly. . . . They cannot do much, for their commissariat will be limited, as the greater part will have to come on horseback on account of the short notice.<sup>3</sup>

These extracts, written on the very eve of the general rising, need no comment. As the sands in

<sup>2</sup> Lanyon to Colley.

<sup>3</sup> Lanyon to Colley

the hourglass of peace are running shorter, we find no change on the part of the Administrator. If anything, his optimism increases. On December 11 he writes :

At the present time the game is one of brag on both sides, and the Boers are trying to intimidate by getting together a lot of men about two-thirds of whom are pressed and brought together against their will. The most shameful coercion is being employed on every side. . . . I don't think we shall have to do much more than show that we are ready, and sit quiet and allow matters to settle themselves. . . . They (the Boers) are incapable of any united action, and they are mortal cowards, so anything they may do will be but a spark in the pan.<sup>4</sup>

Another week went by, and then the storm broke. On December 18 the Administrator wrote from Pretoria :

Yesterday evening I received an express from Heidelberg to say that the Boers had gone there, hoisted their flag, and proclaimed the Republic. . . . At present it is almost impossible to arrive at any estimate of their numbers, as they are put down in an absurdly exaggerated manner, but I should think that 4,000 is about the total force which they have in the field, and a number of them are pressed men and won't fight. . . . I cannot conceive what can have so suddenly caused the Boers to act as they have, for it is certainly the result of an impulse, and could not have been premeditated. . . . I do not feel anxious, for I know that these people cannot be united, nor can they stay in the field. I presume that you will move up as soon as you hear the news.<sup>5</sup>

A couple of days later came news that at last seemed to bring home to the Government circle in Pretoria a faint conception of the real state of affairs. The Administrator wrote on December 21 :

<sup>4</sup> Lanyon to Colley.

<sup>5</sup> Lanyon to Colley.

This morning we received very bad news of the 94th. They had been ordered to concentrate on here, but through the want of transport they were unable to leave till the 3rd instant. . . . Owing to the wet weather they got on very slowly, and so Colonel Bellairs sent a second time to warn him (the Colonel of the 94th) to be careful in guarding against a surprise. This letter he acknowledged, but unfortunately he did not take action thereon, for he was attacked by the Boers under Piet Joubert, when his men were scattered over half a mile. . . . Every officer was at once shot down, and also all the sergeants, so that the men had no one to lead them. Had they charged, I believe they would have driven the Boers back. One hundred and twenty were killed and wounded, and the rest taken prisoners. I fear our men shot infamously, for the Boers were only 200 yards away, and yet they only killed one and wounded three, I believe. . . .

I must confess the situation is a most puzzling one, both to me and to every one else who should know the Boer character, for I know that, even up to the day when they suddenly left their camp and went to Heidelberg, the two leaders, Kruger and Pretorius, were most anxious to come to a settlement. But it seems as if the young men, headed by Piet Joubert, suddenly forced their hands by taking overt action. Even now it seems as if they cannot trust the greater number of their followers, for the bands which are attacking places are small, but are composed of their best men. If they were in bigger numbers they would not stand so well, and a bolt would be more likely. The 'Natal Witness' had something to do with it, for it pointed out that the military force was weak, and that England had her hands full in Ireland and Afghanistan, and this was greedily devoured by the Boers in camp, I am told. I do not think you would have to contend against nearly so many as Bellairs anticipates, for very many of those in camp have been forced there, and will not fight.

When this letter was written, communication with Natal had been interrupted. The headquarters of the 94th Regiment had been annihilated at Bronker-

spruit; Potchefstroom was besieged; every English garrison in the Transvaal was cooped within its fort or improvised defences; and the whole administration, the executive, the civil and social life of the Government and English party, had collapsed throughout the entire country.

Before going back to Natal, it will be well to specify the precise position of the troops at that moment. The King's Dragoon Guards had gone to India; the 58th Regiment had been partly withdrawn to Natal; the remaining two infantry battalions were in process of concentration at Pretoria; the Artillery (four guns) had reached the last-named place; Fort Albert, Leydenberg (with the exception of a small detachment), Middelberg, and Heidelberg had been evacuated; the remote post at Marabastadt still held troops.

We have already seen in the letters of the Administrator allusion to the opening moves of the Boers during the middle of December, but these require more detailed reference before the main struggle is reached. In the middle of November had occurred at Potchefstroom the first spark of open revolt. By a strange coincidence, the name of the man who set the long-smouldering mass of material aflame was Bezhuidenout, a grandson of that other Bezhuidenout whose resistance more than fifty years earlier in the old colony had produced the abortive rising of the Dutch, and led to the first 'trek' of the Boers into the Northern wilds. On the present occasion Bezhuidenout refused to pay a heavy bill of costs which the Government had formulated against him on account of a claim for taxes, admittedly made in error. The demand was persisted in, was again refused; then

followed the seizure of a waggon to cover the alleged debt, and the attempted sale of the distrained vehicle. Nothing more was wanting to bring things to a crisis. When the waggon was put up for auction, the sheriff-auctioneer was kicked from his vantage-point by a mob of Boers, oxen were yoked in, and it was carried off in triumph.

Then a small military force was ordered from Pretoria to assist the civil power at Potchefstroom in the execution of its office. How little the Government at Pretoria gauged the necessities of the occasion may be gleaned from the wording of the letter in which Sir O. Lanyon conveyed to the military commander at Pretoria his demand for assistance. 'In the event of the ringleaders being convicted,' so ran the letter, 'it appears to me desirable that the men should be removed to Pretoria, there to undergo their term of imprisonment; and in that case, should the landdrost request it, I shall be glad if an escort can be told off to assist in conveying the prisoners to Pretoria.' Now the entire military force sent to Potchefstroom amounted to 140 infantry and two field guns. Between Potchefstroom and Pretoria lived the most determined Dutch Boers in the Transvaal, and yet it was supposed that the little force detailed to occupy Potchefstroom, seize perhaps a dozen or more ringleaders, and hold all this wild district in check, would also be able to give an escort to convey to Pretoria—more than 100 miles distant—the prisoners whom the law might select to undergo exemplary punishment at that place. In the then temper of the whole Dutch people, not twice the total British force in the Transvaal would have sufficed to escort these people to the gaol at Pretoria.

Then followed, on December 17, the proclamation

of the Republic, and close upon it the attack at Bronkerspruit already related. We have seen the absolute ease with which on that occasion a body of Boer rifle horsemen had put *hors de combat* in twenty minutes some 250 infantry. In the astonishment with which that disastrous affair was first received, assertions of treachery were put forward, to account in some degree for a result so much at variance with the ideas of men still ignorant of the surprises which the perfected use of the rifle had in store. The trained mind of the High Commissioner realised at once the importance of avoiding the useless bitterness of such accusations, and amid the clamour of the crowd he would not countenance pleas of which a smaller man might readily have availed himself. He had at the first mention of the Transvaal trouble clearly indicated the very danger that had happened. Writing to the Colonial Secretary on the morning following the receipt of the news that the Boers had occupied Heidelberg and proclaimed the Republic, he said :

There are two detachments that I am a little uneasy about. *One* marching from Leydenberg to reinforce the Pretoria garrison, and which ought to arrive about to-day, if not attacked *en route* ; the other marching from Wakkerstroom similarly to reinforce Pretoria. This I know to be still on this side of Standerton, and I have ordered it to halt at Standerton and reinforce that post, which is naturally a strong one. If these two detachments reach their destinations unmolested, I shall feel, as regards military arrangements, 'all snug' until it suits us to move out against the Boers.<sup>6</sup>

How accurately this sentence gauged the military situation another few hours sufficed to tell. At the

<sup>6</sup> December 20, 1880, to Lord Kimberley.

moment Colley was writing these words, the detachment *en route* from Leydenberg to Pretoria was attacked and overwhelmed at Bronkerspruit, thirty miles from its destination. The other detachment mentioned succeeded in reaching Standerton without being attacked. But the point I would desire to emphasise is not the sagacity of the forecast, but rather the humanity, and the sense of justice, which characterised his judgment after the event he feared had occurred. Writing to the Colonial Secretary on the same day on which the news of Bronkerspruit reached him, Colley used these words :

I am issuing a general order to try and check the violent revengeful feeling which, unfortunately, is almost sure to spring up in such a war. I know 'war cannot be made with rosewater,' and I am not much troubled with sentiment when the safety of the troops is at stake, but I hate this 'atrocious manufacturing' and its effects on the men, tending to make them either cowards or butchers.<sup>7</sup>

A noble sentence, with which this chapter may fitly conclude.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> December 26, 1880, to Lord Kimberley.

<sup>8</sup> The general order to which it refers will be found in the Appendix.

## CHAPTER XIV

*THE ACTIONS AT LANG'S NEK AND THE INGOGO*

Preparations for war—A scratch force—The Transvaal garrisons—The attack on Lang's Nek—Letter to Sir E. Wood—The Ingogo Heights.

ALL was now preparation for the coming struggle. Every day that passed, as the end of the year drew on, brought, either in its news or absence of news from the Transvaal, convincing proof that the whole fabric of British rule in that region had crumbled hopelessly to pieces at the first vibration of the Boer revolt. The garrisons were locked up as if by magic; communication was everywhere interrupted. The so-called friendly element in the country was now as silent as before it had been obtrusively demonstrative. On December 26, Colley wrote :

I am afraid my news by this mail is bad—how bad I cannot tell till I can judge better than I yet can of the full effect of the 94th disaster, and of the amount of active sympathy and assistance which the Transvaal Boers will receive from elsewhere. The wildest rumours are of course afloat, and it is difficult to find any one who can give an opinion worth having on the situation. Three weeks ago a loyal Boer from Utrecht came to see me, and the earnestness of his convictions that there was real danger abroad made such an impression on me that I asked Sir T. Shepstone to meet him and talk it over with me; but, after hearing what he had to say, Sir T. only laughed, and his perfect conviction that nothing but tall talk was meant, and that they had

practised on the timidity of the well-meaning old Boer, went far to prevent my attaching importance to his warnings. Now, Sir Theophilus takes the extreme danger view, and warns me seriously that this is not a struggle with the Transvaal Boers, but with the Dutch population of South Africa, who, he says, have never ceased to hate the English people and the English rule, and see in the Basuto War, which has drawn away most of the fighting strength of the English colonists, their opportunity to get rid of both. These views are not uncommon here, and the best of our volunteer officers told me yesterday he would very much have liked to accompany me to the Transvaal, but he did not think it was right in this contingency for any one of them to leave Natal, where their services might at any moment be required to resist a Boer invasion. . . . I cannot say I am much influenced by any of these views, though I think I was led to take too sanguine a view of the Boer difficulty ; but between Basutos, Boers, Pondos, and our own natives it is not easy to steer truly always. I see no reason to regret, but on the contrary every reason to congratulate myself, that I drew in so many of the Transvaal detachments and concentrated the regiments ; but it might have been better if I had kept the 58th concentrated at Ladysmith or Newcastle, according to my original intention, instead of moving some of them down country, as I was led to do by the East Griqualand outbreak and the Pondo alarms. . . . The old Boer burgher organisation seems to have more vitality than we were aware of, and to have been most successfully applied on this occasion. The men had apparently all been regularly summoned as in the old commando days, and many of them told my informant that they had no wish to be there, but were 'commandirt,' and what could they do? What no one, however, seems to be able in the least to explain is how so large an assemblage, drawn from every corner of the Transvaal, and from places which are nearly a month's waggon journey distant, were got together at such short notice. . . . I am still inclined to believe that the actual resolute fighting element is small, composed of an inconsiderable faction, and of the young bloods of the

country. I am afraid, however, the party will have been strengthened by the success gained over the 94th.<sup>1</sup>

The next letter is addressed to Mr. Brand, the President of the Orange Free State. It is dated December 30.

I have written and telegraphed officially in reply to yours, but I wish also to write privately to tell you how deeply distressed I am at what has occurred in the Transvaal, and how grateful I shall be to you for any advice or assistance you can afford me in endeavouring to bring about a settlement. . . .

The sudden outbreak and attack on our troops has been a heavy blow to me, for our troops had strict orders to avoid bringing on a collision, and to act only on the defensive, and I had still hoped that a collision could have been avoided until I had had the opportunity of personally endeavouring to effect a settlement. Now such a settlement is made ten times more difficult. . . . How hopeless the contest the Boers are now entering on is, you must be well aware. There are now, I believe, two cavalry regiments, two infantry regiments, and two batteries of artillery on their way to reinforce me, and twice that number more would reach here within a month if only I telegraph home the wish. What I most fear, and what I am striving most to check, is this extraordinary fever spreading beyond the Transvaal.

From these two letters and a third, written to his sister on New Year's Day, 1881, we shall be able to form an idea of the mental attitude of Sir George Colley at the moment he was about to begin this campaign against the Boers.

This is a sad and anxious New Year for us all here, as you may imagine. The last of the troops I have available, including some drafts only three days arrived from England, marched this morning, and I start in a few days to take

<sup>1</sup> Natal, December 26, 1880, to Lord Kimberley.

command and try and bring the Boers to battle, and relieve our garrisons at Potchefstroom and Pretoria. The disaster to the 94th has not only been a painful loss to us of many good officers and men, but has changed the whole aspect of affairs—a sort of Isandhlwana on a smaller scale. Had the 94th beaten off their assailants, as I still think they should have done if proper precautions had been taken on the march, the garrison of Pretoria would have been so far reinforced, and the Boers discouraged, that I doubt if Colonel Bellairs would have allowed himself to be invested at all, but think he would probably have taken the field at once, and very likely dispersed the Boers. Now I feel considerable doubts whether the force I am taking up is sufficient, and it is possible I may have to wait further for the reinforcements coming from India and England. As usual, there is a general panic spreading over the country, and an idea abroad that this is a long-nursed plot of the whole Dutch population of South Africa, who intend to rise against the English Government and population and drive them into the sea. You could hardly imagine the extent of the wild rumours and panic about. I am fortunately rather stolid by nature, and I don't think my face or words tell much that I don't mean them to. My impassiveness has, I think, a good quieting effect, and I play lawn tennis and hold receptions and visit schools and hospitals just as usual, and Edith seconds me splendidly, and rows or laughs at the people who come to her with long faces or absurd stories. . . . It is a peculiarly unpleasant kind of war to be engaged in also, and there is a bitter feeling of hatred and revenge springing up, which I have tried to check by a general order. I have had various offers of assistance in the way of raising volunteer forces, here and in the old colony; but though I shall want every man I can get, I am so impressed with the desirability of restricting the war, and not letting it become a race struggle between the Dutch and English throughout the colony, that I have refused every offer which could in any way tend to extend the area of the struggle, or array the civil population of the country against one another. I know the responsibility I am incurring by refusing such assistance

and the weight of blame that will be thrown upon me if I fail in consequence, but I shall stick to what I think is right and wise.

It is curious how completely deceived all those who were supposed to be most conversant with Dutch ideas and character have been. Two months ago, when the troops in the Transvaal were being reduced, Sir O. Lanyon, the Administrator, wrote a long mem. to the effect that he felt no anxiety whatever regarding the Boers, who had never been so quiet and settled, but that he thought it undesirable to reduce the troops, as they might be required against the Basutos. . . . I shall be curious to see what the home opinion on the matter is. I suppose I shall be blamed for having reduced the force, and that I must accept, although it was an error shared with me by many persons who had far better opportunities of judging. . . .

One or two things are very noticeable in these extracts. In no vain or foolhardy spirit is he about to move against the Transvaal Boers, but as one who has carefully weighed every chance, thought out every contingency, and made his decision accordingly. He hates the duty which events have cast upon him. His protest against the atrocity cry in his letter to the Colonial Secretary, given at the close of the last chapter, and the letter to his sister, tell plainly how his thoughts were tending. The veil that had hidden the Transvaal from him was now lifted, at least in part, and he realised, with the bitterness of knowledge known too late, that he had been listening to false prophets, and following false guides as to the state of feeling in the Transvaal.

What but a belief in the right and justice of their cause could have induced the Boers to enter upon this 'hopeless contest'? At that moment the terrible accuracy of Boer rifle fire could only have been sus-

pected by Colley in a limited degree, and the pluck and determination he was soon to see proved on the battlefield must have been wholly unknown to him. Thus the action of the Boers in electing to appeal to the ordeal of arms, where ninety-nine out of one hundred chances must ultimately be against them, could not fail to arouse, in such a nature as his, a feeling of respect for the enemy he was about to fight. Nor is this inconsistent with the fact that later on, when committed to the struggle, and having learnt the power in war of these straight-shooting farmers, we shall find him opposed to any arrangement with them until the honour of his country's arms had been vindicated.

In the letter to President Brand, the allusion to the hope he had cherished that 'a collision might have been avoided until I had the opportunity of personally endeavouring to effect a settlement' had a more definite meaning than might at first appear. During the months following his return from the Transvaal in August, Colley had given much thought to the question of restoring to the Boers some form of representative government. 'As free a constitution as might be consistent with continued connection with the English crown' was his expression. My authority for this statement is the following letter :

Hotel Cecil : July 1, 1897.

DEAR LORD WOLSELEY,—As asked by you, I now write the substance of what I told you last evening.

Sir George Pomeroy-Colley, shortly before the Bronkerspruit affair, asked me to form one of a committee of three to go to the Transvaal, as he wanted to give to the Transvaal 'as free a constitution as might be consistent with continued connection with the English crown.' I agreed. Montagu,

afterwards in charge at Standerton, was to be another of the three. The third was not named. On receipt of the news of Bronkerspruit, Sir George told me that there was an end to his proposal, as he must go up to punish the Boers, who have fired on the troops.

Yours faithfully,

HENRY ESCOMBE.<sup>3</sup>

Such peaceful settlement was not to be. It has been said that revolutions cannot be made with rose-water, and neither, would it seem, can they be saved with ink.

Colley left Maritzburg for the front on January 10. The troops, such as they were, had preceded him on the road to Newcastle. The South African summer was at its worst; the roads were quagmires; the rivers were in flood; progress by men on horseback or on foot was slow; progress on wheels was slower still. Natal is a land of contradictions. Its summer is wet; its winter is dry. When the dry weather has hardened the clay tracks which are called roads, there is no forage for transport animals. When the wet and warm weather has covered the hillsides with grass the tracks have become quivering sloughs, the brooks are deep and rushing rivers. The road from Maritzburg to the Transvaal border is carried over a succession of plateaux, separated from each other by rivers, which, descending from the mountain range of the Drakensberg, have worn out for themselves deep valleys in their course to the sea. When the highest plateau is gained, at a point about 200 miles from Maritzburg, the Transvaal has been reached. In shape the northern part of Natal somewhat resembles

<sup>3</sup> For many years holding office in Natal, and recently the Premier of the Colony.

a leg of mutton, if that familiar household joint had a flat instead of a rounded surface. The end of the leg-bone might represent the northern extremity of the colony, narrowing to a point, the mountains of the Drakensberg on the left, the Buffalo River on the right. Where it narrows so much as to leave but a mile or two between the mountain and the river, is the point at which Natal ends and the Transvaal begins. Five or six miles on the Natal side of this boundary, the last of the ground-waves already mentioned is reached, and the saddle, or lowest part of the ridge across which the road runs into the Transvaal, bears the name of Lang's Nek.

The descent from Lang's Nek, on the Natal side, is steep. The ridges on either side of the waggon road curve forward, somewhat enveloping the road to Newcastle, until on the west they merge into the steeper slopes of the Majuba Mountain; while to the east, the curve rests on the Buffalo River in rugged and lofty altitudes. Thus from the Majuba Mountain to the Buffalo, a position of great natural strength intersected the road by which access to the Transvaal could be gained from Newcastle. This position within Natal the Boers had already occupied before Colley's little force had reached Newcastle.

A little force truly it was, and not even compact or homogeneous in its smallness—twelve companies of infantry, taken from four different battalions; 120 mounted troops, half of whom were infantry partly trained to ride; six guns, also composite, and 120 sailors: in all a column from which about 1,200 fighting men could be evolved when the day of action came. Why then, it may be asked, was an advance made with this small force, when by waiting three or

four weeks the same road might be taken with a strong and efficient body of fighting men which would then have arrived in Natal from India and England? <sup>3</sup>

We shall let Colley tell his own story. He writes to Sir G. Wolseley from Newcastle on Jan. 17, 1881:

Here I am, completing the concentration, &c., of the small column with which I propose to enter the Transvaal, and try the Boers' mettle, and I would much like to know whether you at home are blaming my slowness in not moving forward earlier and with a smaller force, or think me rash in attempting to move with so small a one, and without waiting for the reinforcements now coming out. My determination was taken, however, as soon as I felt myself able to form any opinion of the extent of the revolt, and of the effect of that most unfortunate disaster to the 94th.

Then he describes his force, how he had got it together—some portion of it coming from the extreme south of the colony—how he had manned and equipped four guns that were in store, in addition to the two field guns at Maritzburg, how he had made up a mounted force of 120 men from some details of dismounted dragoons, Army Service Corps men, and volunteers from two infantry battalions, how again he had got a naval detachment of another 120 men with a couple of Gatling guns from the 'Commodore,' making for his fighting column 'as queer a mixture as was ever brought together, I think.'

Having enumerated the details of his force, he gives the picture of the Transvaal garrisons as they

<sup>3</sup> Sir George's action was probably to some extent influenced by misgivings as to the treatment which might possibly be extended to the more remote garrisons if they should fall into the hands of the enemy (cf. a memorandum by the Administrator, and Col. Bellairs's

district orders referring to Boer methods of fighting, and to the use of flags of truce for purposes of obtaining better positions, as well as instances of firing on white flags. *S. Afr. Blue Book*, 1881, c. 2866, pp. 109-111.)

were at the moment situated. The story was the same everywhere, except at Potchefstroom : at Pretoria, Standerton, Wakkerstroom, Leydenberg, Rustenberg, Marabastadt, garrisons closely invested, unable to move out from their forts or block-houses, no communication possible between them, but all have food and ammunition sufficient for two to three months. At Potchefstroom, matters were by no means so satisfactory. There the garrison of 120 infantry and artillery, and a small detachment of mounted men, were ill supplied with food ; not more than a month could be counted upon for them. They had, it will be remembered, been hastily moved from Pretoria to aid the civil power a couple of months earlier. It was known that two officers and about twenty men had already been killed or taken prisoners out of the small isolated force, and it was also known that a strong, active, and very energetic body of Boers were closely investing the place. Here was the essentially weak spot in the whole Transvaal situation. Colley's letter continues :

Our weak point, as you will see, is Potchefstroom. From all I can gather it might hold out till the middle of February, but not much later, while no important reinforcements can now reach me here till after that date, and it would take another twenty days to reach Potchefstroom. Unless I can in some way relieve the pressure on Potchefstroom before the middle of next month, I am afraid that garrison and its guns must fall into the Boers' hands. This it is which has determined me to move on without awaiting further reinforcements.

I imagine I shall certainly be attacked when crossing the border, and probably have a stiff fight at the Lang's Nek, the edge of the Berg, about three miles this side of Walker's at Coldstream. If I have bad luck, I must only hold my own and await the reinforcements ; if fair luck, push through to

Standerton, and hold on there till the reinforcements arrive ; if good luck, push on to Standerton, pick up three more companies there, march on Heidelberg, and try to bring them to a decisive battle there. I hear from all sides they are very anxious to try and capture our guns, and I dare say we shall have to look sharp after them. My little force, I am glad to say, is very cheery and confident, but people generally are anxious, and shake their heads gloomily at my venturing on without any regular cavalry.

There the letter broke off. When it was taken up, ten days later, the battle of Lang's Nek had been fought, and another development of the political and military situation had begun. But before entering upon that new chapter in the history of South Africa, a word is required upon the reasons given above for this movement into the Transvaal before the arrival of the reinforcements. Potchefstroom was the determining factor in the question of this first advance. That fact is emphasised over and over again in the correspondence of the time. An officer writing from Newcastle on January 24, thus describes the feeling uppermost in men's minds there :

I lunched yesterday at mess, sitting by Sir George, and took an affectionate parting of them all ; though, good fellows as they all are, I could scarcely keep the tears from my eyes at being obliged to leave them at such a moment. God only knows how affairs may turn. If they get over this first bit of about twenty miles from this, they would be fairly right, and had they only 500 cavalry I would back them. Consummate general as I believe Colley to be—the incarnation of intelligence I find him—but 'tis heavy odds, and with such shots as the Boers are, still heavier. If Colley is killed it will be a national loss.

The arrangements for the march are perfect, but the cavalry arm is weak—a sprinkling of K.D.G.'s, and the rest mounted infantry—a poor lot, for Tommy Atkins cannot shoot well on foot, and on horseback it takes all he knows to

keep his seat. Deane said to me, after marching out the other day: 'What a mouthful it looked!' Of course Sir George knows that, and said to me when sitting on my bed: 'If Potchefstroom could hold out, one might sit and smoke here with advantage, but they cannot last beyond the middle of February.'

Few letters in the correspondence of the time contain more plain truth than this unpretentious document. We see it all: the mouthful of troops; the make-believe mounted men, the untrained soldiers who couldn't hit a haystack, even if they knew one by sight; the brave, devoted staff; the General in whom all believed—who knew well all the weak points, but was bound to attempt the forlorn hope. For there, over the border, is Potchefstroom with its sore-pressed garrison. It is not what they will say in England if the Union Jack has to be pulled down, and the white flag of surrender hauled up—though that will be hard enough; it is what he will say to himself, and what they, the beleaguered in Potchefstroom, will say of him: 'You left us here to undergo the ignominy of surrender when you had men enough to make at least the attempt to save us. You stood, as it were, on the bank while we were drowning, and moved no hand nor foot to save us. You, with regular troops under you, and only rough farmer foreigners against you.'

Keeping before us this view of the question, and remembering that it was then the only view of it, we will go on with Colley's letter to Sir Garnet Wolseley, at the point where he resumed it ten days later, and two days after the repulse at Lang's Nek.

Camp near Lang's Nek: January 30.

I began this letter some time ago, but was too busy then to finish it, and since then I have made my attack and failed,

and I suppose shall be gibbeted accordingly. I don't mind that, but I do care for the good men and personal friends I have lost, and for the effect on the Transvaal garrisons of the consequent delay.

I completed my concentration at Newcastle on the 20th, but bad weather, incomplete equipment, and the delay of the 'Tamar' combined to make me put off my move till the 24th, and I then marched slowly, as my convoy was long and the transport newly put together. I thought it very likely I should be attacked on the road. . . . But the Boers left me unmolested. On the 26th I reached my present position, and established a strong partly entrenched camp on a high ridge about a mile to the right of the road (which here skirts along the spurs of the Drakensberg). I intended to have moved out to attack on the 27th, but rain and thick mist during the early part of that day kept me quiet.

On the 28th I moved out with about 870 infantry, 180 mounted men, six guns, and three rocket tubes, leaving 200 men and two Gatlings to defend the camp and convoy. The annexed rough eye sketch will, I think, give you a fair idea of the fight. I moved forward across open grassy ridges, under cover of my guns, till I got to the foot of, and about 2,000 yards from, the Boer position, where I formed up my force on a favourable ridge.

The Boer right, resting on a great precipitous mountain, intersected with deep kloofs, was practically unassailable, and the centre, fired down upon from both flanks, equally so (the eastern end of the table hill in my sketch should be thrown a little more forward, enveloping the road more); and it was quite clear that the eastern and highest end of the table hill, forming practically the left end of this position, was the key of it. Beyond this a detached conical hill (marked D), connected with the main hill by a low neck with easy slopes, was occupied by a Boer picquet of probably 200 men. Had I had men enough, I should have begun by taking this, but the movement would necessarily have been an extended one, and have taken time, as the hill branches into a number of spreading spurs, terminating in precipitous ravines. I should have had to withdraw all troops to my right for the purpose,

and meanwhile the enemy, whom the central position I had taken up left in doubt as to the point I intended to attack, and who consequently remained extended over several miles of broken ground, would have had time to collect his strength on that side. Accordingly I decided to attack the spur,  $\kappa$ , directly, covering the infantry attack with the mounted men on their flank, and with artillery fire. This spur is very steep, but completely dead ground—that is to say, for the most part entirely covered, except from the ridge on its right rear, which I hoped to clear with the mounted men; and from the top, near  $x$ , is a short rush of comparatively level ground to the crest of the hill.

I formed up my guns at  $c c$ ; pushed a company of rifles, eighty naval brigade, and some rockets into a piece of enclosed ground at  $F$ , where they had cover behind a wall, and commenced shelling different parts of the position until we had the ranges pretty accurately. Then, keeping three companies 60th and 70 mounted police in reserve with the guns, I directed the five companies 58th and Brownlow's mounted squadron to attack.

The lines  $c \kappa$  and  $c L$  show the proposed lines of advance for the infantry and cavalry respectively. The neck at  $L$  is low, and it is good going for cavalry to that point, and thence either up to the right to the hill  $D$ , or to  $P$  on the left; and my intention was that as the infantry rose the spur at  $\kappa$ , the cavalry should crest the ridge at  $L$ , and either clear the hill  $D$ , or move up on the flank of the infantry, according to circumstances. During the first part of the march, and until they reached  $\kappa$  and  $L$  respectively, they would be completely under cover.

Brownlow, however, bore more to the right than I had intended, and came under fire, and, drawing up his men facing the steep part of the hill,  $D$ , charged right up it to  $o$  before the infantry had even begun the ascent of  $\kappa$ . Of course, in action, the man on the spot must often decide the ground and the moment for a charge, and Brownlow's was most gallantly made. Brownlow and a part of his leading troop, consisting principally of K.D.G.'s, actually crested the ridge, his sergeant-major and a corporal being shot in doing

so, and Brownlow's horse and that of his subaltern shot dead. Brownlow himself shot the Boer leader with his revolver; the Boers had received the order to retire, and were running to their horses, and the hill was actually won, when the supporting troop, seeing, as they thought, all their leaders down, turned and galloped down the hill—I believe, before a man was shot; and the Boers, seeing them turn, immediately ran forward to the ridge again and slated them. Brownlow, who was on foot, got off by a miracle; the whole lot went headlong down the hill, and although their losses were not very heavy (four killed and thirteen wounded, almost all out of the leading troop) the mounted men were practically out of action for the rest of the day.

Had there been time I would have stopped the infantry attack the moment I saw the result of Brownlow's charge for their flank was now exposed before there was any possibility of making arrangements to cover it; but the infantry were already rising the hill at *k*, and coming into action, and I was afraid of the effect of counter orders at such a moment. All that I could do was to concentrate as much artillery fire as possible to cover them. The men whom Brownlow had partly routed had now galloped down, some to *p*, and some to *p*<sup>4</sup>, whence they fired into the right flank and rear of the 58th as they streamed up the hill, while the Boers actually stationed on the hill collected at *p*<sup>2</sup>, *p*<sup>3</sup>, whence they looked down upon our men scrambling up. The men had pushed too eagerly up a slope requiring almost to be climbed on hands and knees (but on which, had Brownlow's charge succeeded, they would have been completely covered from fire, and could have rested quietly), and when they got near *x*, the crest of the spur, were in a confused mass, and quite beat and breathless. Deane made a gallant and desperate attempt to charge, and fell riddled with bullets as he got on the brow, where his body was found ten yards in advance of any other man's, and Poole, Elwes (whom I had allowed to accompany him), and Inman, his orderly officer, were all shot beside him. A number of men gallantly struggled up after him, but all the mounted officers were down, the men themselves were utterly beat with the rapid climb, and the rear, suffering

heavily from the fire from P and P<sup>4</sup>, began to fall back, so that there was nothing left for it but to retire.

Two companies, directed by Essex (whose horse was shot, but who behaved splendidly throughout), took position behind a ledge at q q to check the Boers, and I sent out some of the 60th to cover the retreat from the ridge v v, and so practically ended the fight.

The naval brigade, who pitched their rockets admirably over the Nek, were fired into pretty heavily from the left, but were well covered by a wall, and only lost two men killed and one wounded. The 58th, who really fought admirably, and lost 160 out of 480 men, re-formed behind the rifles, and came back in perfect order.

I confess I was greatly disappointed at the effect of the artillery fire, which even when the Boers came out of their cover, and crowded the ridge pretty thickly, seemed absolutely nil, and to this, and to the failure of Brownlow's charge, I attribute the loss of the day. But in justice to Brownlow's second troop, it must be remembered they consisted only of mounted infantry very recently organised—it was a steep and bold charge, and some of their horses with little training could not be brought to face the fire, and they had seen, as they believed, nearly all their leaders down. Had I to attack the position again with the same number of men, I think I should attack it in exactly the same manner that I originally intended, and I would feel pretty confident of success.

Meanwhile, I am holding on in my fortified camp until I get some more troops up, when I shall probably go at it again, beginning this time with the hill D. The troops are as cheery and confident as possible, and only keen to go at it again. There is a talk of the Boers attacking *me* here, but I fear I cannot expect such luck as to have my Kambula after Zlobane as Evelyn Wood had. . . Good-bye now, and excuse such a long yarn. I had a difficult game to play, and dare say I should have got lots of kudos if I had succeeded, dispersed this revolt, and relieved the unfortunate Transvaal garrisons. As it is, I have failed, and I shall not whine about luck or injustice, or make long faces if I am superseded

or shelved. All that I wish is that I could have saved those good chaps who have served me so well—Deane, Poole, young Elwes, and others. No one could have been better served by men and officers than I have been, and I could not prevent the poor chaps cheering me wildly when I spoke a few words to them after we had returned to camp.

Ever truly yours,

G. POMEROY-COLLEY.

I don't know what the Boer losses have been, but imagine not very heavy, as they were mostly well covered. I think my original estimate of their numbers—viz., about 2,000 here—was correct. They were very largely armed with Martinis, and I must say were no cowards, exposing themselves freely to artillery fire, and coming boldly down the hill to meet our men.

So ends this characteristic letter, the letter of a soldier of whom any army might be proud, even though he told the story of disaster. Later in the evening of that eventful day, Colley paraded his small force and addressed to them a few words in which, according to a correspondent's account, he exonerated the men from all blame for the repulse, and praised the 58th for the manner in which they had fought. They had lost many gallant soldiers in the day's fight, but they had not lost one atom of the prestige of England. He would now be compelled to await the arrival of reinforcements, but the day would come when that hill before which they had been baffled would be in their possession; and when that time came, he would see that the men who had fought for him to-day would again be beside him.

And then, later still, he sent a few lines to the home at Maritzburg; a few lines in which the heart

gets out through the folds of duty and professional honour, in which he has so carefully enwrapped it, and we see the weight of sorrow that is on him.

I am too tired and too sad to write much. Poor Deane dead—oh, his poor wife!—and Elwes and Poole all killed together, and the ambulances passing me with the wounded every minute; and I, of course, must accept the verdict of failure, as I have always been prepared to, though it seems a very small matter in comparison with the losses and gaps all around me.

The attack did not come off well from the first. The artillery fire seemed to produce *no* effect, even when the enemy were fully exposed; and Major Brownlow's charge, which I had counted upon to support infantry and free their flank, came off too soon, owing to some mistake, and, though splendidly led by himself and his serjeant-major, came to nothing.<sup>4</sup>

We might multiply, if space permitted, these instances of how a brave man takes defeat, cheering his men, and quietly prepared for the usual 'gibbeting' which a free press priding itself on being an expert in military criticism has always in stock for the encouragement of commanders. 'Don't fret about me,' he writes to his wife, two days after the battle. 'About myself I don't care, and I never believed I could have cared so little what people will say or think about me. I am satisfied I was right to advance and attack, and to attack as I did. All that I care for is for the good men gone, and for their poor wives or relatives.'<sup>5</sup> And in the same letter he wrote:

There is only one feeling in camp now—that had Brownlow's second troop supported him the day was ours. Poor Brownlow, who behaved *splendidly*, is quite broken-hearted,

<sup>4</sup> January 28, 1881, to his wife.

<sup>5</sup> Mount Prospect, January 30, 1881.

and when he came down the hill refused to speak to his men or go near them. I have been comforting him, however, and telling him we must make allowances for untrained men with untrained horses, and that it is really wonderful what he has done with them. I feel the loss of poor Deane more and more every day. His knowledge of regimental detail, combined with his charm of manner and chivalrous character, did more than anything else to make the tone of this force what it is; and the men all admired his death so: the men in hospital would lift themselves up to tell me they were close behind him when he fell; I believe he had four wounds in his head. Poole was shot through the throat, and poor Elwes had two bullets in the head, I believe, so that in all cases death must have been instantaneous.

One more passage written a few days later in connection with Lang's Nek may be given: 'As for my being over-confident, I have often said that you may class most men, soldiers especially, as those who see the difficulty of a thing and why it cannot be done—and those who see the way of overcoming difficulties and doing it; and I have certainly always aimed at belonging to the latter class.'<sup>6</sup>

And now there came a few days of quiet, perhaps more difficult to bear after defeat than continued action would have been. Sixty or eighty years ago, such a brief spell of sitting still after a repulse would have mattered little to the general in command. When Wolfe was beaten back from Montmorency, and Wellesley retreated from Talavera, all the details of the killed and of the wounded who fell into the enemy's hands slowly percolated into the home papers long after the occurrences had taken place; but now the electric wire had changed all that, and every breakfast table in the Empire was busy, not only with

<sup>6</sup> February 5, 1881, to his wife.

the news itself, but with a hundred amplifications, and a thousand comments upon it, before the last man killed had been buried. And the wire was busy, too, in other ways than conveying criticisms or condemnations. It was already telling of negotiations, of thoughts entering the Government brain at home, which should have entered it six months earlier.

The question whether to remain at Mount Prospect, or to withdraw the entire force to Newcastle and there await the arrival of reinforcements, no doubt presented itself, and must have been one of very equal balance. There is no disgrace in retreating from a field of action when the fortune of war has declared against us. Many of the best feats of generalship have been performed in extricating a beaten army from the scene of its disaster. A retreat to Newcastle on the next night following Lang's Nek would have saved the action of the Ingogo and the consequences which followed, and would possibly have afforded some tactical advantages in subsequent operations. On the other hand, the moral effect of withdrawing to Newcastle must undoubtedly have been very serious, both in South Africa and in England. It would have greatly elated the Boers, and probably drawn to their ranks many wavering well-wishers. So long as a British force remained in front of the position at Lang's Nek, the repulse of the 28th could not be regarded as final, but only as a check liable at any moment to be reversed. A retreat must also have adversely influenced the condition of the beleaguered garrisons in the Transvaal; and there was, as we have seen, a hope in Colley's mind that the Boers, in the flush of their success, might venture

upon attacking the camp, now in good state of defence.

Colley at all events decided to remain entrenched at Mount Prospect until his reinforcements had come up, and there are passages in his later letters which indicate the opinion that the Boers had been held in check, and the communications fairly maintained, by the course he adopted. Again, in considering this question we must remember that Lang's Nek had not revealed to him the full strength of the forces that opposed him. His letters for a week following that action show that he was yet far from realising the immense superiority of fire which the Dutch farmers possessed over our men, neither was he at all convinced that the whole body of the Boers were then prepared to fight this quarrel to the end. He still adhered to the opinion that a great number of his enemies had been pressed into the hostile ranks, that they were unwilling fighters, that whenever he succeeded in forcing the ridge above his camp there would ensue an inevitable reaction among the Dutch in the Transvaal.

The plan of campaign which Colley set himself to work out immediately after the repulse of his attack on Lang's Nek is set forth in a letter written to Sir Evelyn Wood on February 4. This letter throws light upon many things besides the military intentions of the writer.

Mount Prospect : February 4.

MY DEAR WOOD,—I was right glad to hear that you were coming out here, and think it very generous of you to be ready to serve under a junior and less experienced officer. However, you can afford to be generous with your reputation. You will have heard of my repulse at Capetown, and Wavell will show you my despatch. . . .

My future plans are as follows. I shall add the 15th Hussars, 2-60th, and 92nd to the field force under my personal command, giving me about 2,200 infantry, 450 cavalry, and eight guns and Gatlings. From the troops remaining in Natal—viz., 83rd, 97th, 6th Inniskillings, and two batteries of artillery—I propose to form a second column, under your command, to be assembled at Newcastle, and used either to co-operate by a flanking movement if the Boers mass such large forces here as to make that necessary, or to support and occupy and pacify Wakkerstroom, Utrecht, &c. If all goes well here, and the troops are not unduly delayed by the rains, I hope to be in a position to move forward about the 20th, about which time your troops will be beginning to assemble at Newcastle; and if we clear the Nek satisfactorily I shall probably leave you one regiment at Wakkerstroom, and push on with a lighter column to Pretoria, leaving you in command of all forces below the Vaal River, to relieve Leydenberg and settle the Swazi border and the Wakkerstroom and Utrecht districts, where you are so well known and popular. I would gladly give you the Pretoria column, but I must push on there myself to assume the government, and the force is hardly large enough for two generals when all the rest of the command is left without one; the more so as there will be three generals when we reach Pretoria, as Bellairs has been given rank of brigadier-general. You will also, I am sure, understand that I mean to take the Nek myself!

What I shall ask you to do, therefore, is as follows:

1st. Take command of all troops in Natal, exclusive of Newcastle, on arrival; see to the landing, equipping, &c., of the reinforcements arriving from England, to the arrangements for their transport and march up country, and to the collection at Newcastle of two months' supplies of all kinds—ordnance, commissariat, &c.—for 5,000 men, 1,500 horses, 1,500 mules, exclusive of the one month's supply which each column on advancing will take with it. I badly want an officer to overlook things for a time at Maritzburg. . . .

2nd. When the forces are all well advanced up country, and supply arrangements sufficiently forward, to proceed to

Newcastle, and there assemble and fit out your column, still retaining command of all Natal. . . .

[Here follow details as regards the forces to be assembled at Newcastle.]

3rd. When an advance takes place, and I cross the Vaal River [you are] to assume command of all forces in the Transvaal east of the Vaal River, including Newcastle in your command, but letting the rest of the troops in Natal revert to the commandant at Maritzburg. You will then settle the Wakkerstroom and Utrecht districts and Swazi border, relieve Leydenberg, and, should it be necessary, send or take a small force round by Marabastadt and Middelberg, while Bellairs from Pretoria will take Potchefstroom, Rustenberg, &c. . . .

I think it is possible, though not probable, that I may have trouble in my rear from the Free State direction, and that is another reason why I am glad to have you in Natal just now. The Free State Boers sympathise very warmly with those of the Transvaal, and have joined them in considerable numbers, and there are strong rumours of Pretorius meditating a descent on Natal, and on the reinforcements on their march through Van Reenan's Pass. If anything serious threatens, you will, of course, call up the 83rd and division of artillery from Richmond camp, and I will, if necessary, spare you an infantry regiment from my column, and with three infantry regiments, a strong cavalry regiment, and eight guns, I think you will be a match for any number of Free Staters. Should Natal be seriously threatened, I would, of course, call out the volunteers and local forces; but I trust such a course will not become necessary. I will not inflict more on you at present, but with a most hearty welcome remain

Ever yours truly,

G. POMEROY-COLLEY.

Four days after this letter was written came the fight at the Ingogo.

In the early days of February, a considerable number of the wounded, and all the surplus stock and

empty waggons, were sent back to Newcastle. A day or two later the road was interrupted by the appearance of a strong Boer patrol near the Ingogo River. The road between Mount Prospect and Newcastle was at this summer season in South Africa at its worst. Floods of tropical rain pour down upon the kloofs of the Drakensberg, which here skirts the track on its western side; the many streams and watercourses quickly rise to dangerous heights, and become in a couple of hours impassable for man or beast. But besides these flooded and dangerous watercourses, the road itself was only a succession of water washes, mud holes, and boulders of rock. Descending for four or five miles a spur of the Inquela Mountain, this water-soaked track reached the Ingogo River at a ford or drift which was about two feet in depth at low water. The river crossed, the road ascended again to a small plateau, and thence wound its rugged and tortuous way towards Newcastle. The high plateau south of the Ingogo bore the name of Schiens Hoogte, and was distant from the river about two miles, its centre nearly marking the midway point between Newcastle and Lang's Nek.

On February 7, the post, carried by mounted natives, was attacked on its way to Newcastle on this plateau, and was only saved from capture by a rapid flight of its bearers back to camp. The line of communications was interrupted. A convoy, too, was expected in from Newcastle, but, convoy or no convoy, interrupted communications mean much in war, unless it be some temporary separation between front and base, which a couple of days' work can restore. This incident brought the situation to an immediate

crisis. At 8 o'clock on the morning of February 8, Colley marched out of Mount Prospect with a small force—thirty-eight cavalry, four guns, and about 280 infantry. He would escort the mail upon which the attack had been made yesterday more than half way on its road to Newcastle, and then return with the convoy expected from that place. The Boers awed by the artillery, it was thought, would not venture to attack, and the whole of the little column might probably be back in camp early in the afternoon. The morning was brilliant with the midsummer sunlight; all were in good spirits; after ten days' inactive life in camp, the prospect of action was pleasant.

The Ingogo was reached without any sign of the enemy. Beyond the double drift which here crossed the river and its tributary stream, the track could be seen for more than a mile, leading up the ascent to the plateau. The keeper of the little roadside inn, near the drift, had not seen any Boers that morning, but on the previous day armed parties had been about, and waggons had been looted. Leaving a couple of mountain guns and a half-company of infantry to hold a spur commanding the river passage, Colley directed his main body to cross the Ingogo. The mounted troops led, then followed the infantry; two guns brought up the rear. In this order, after a short halt between the river and the plateau, the advance was continued south. The scouts and mounted men cresting the plateau soon came in sight of the enemy. The Boers, in a skirmish line with supports in rear, formed a wide semicircle, the left of which flanked the road across the plateau, while the right horn barred the road in front, where it descended into lower ground. Before this sudden

development of the enemy's force, the mounted men fell back, and the infantry companies, followed by the guns, pushed up the incline, until, gaining the ridge, they too came in sight of the Boers. As the successive companies gained the plateau, they were hurriedly posted around the crest line, the Boers opening fire before our men were in position. The summit of the plateau was a fairly level piece of ground, strewn here and there with boulders, but its sides to south and west, where the enemy was seen, were marked with larger outcrops of rock, and between these massive and disjointed boulders, the long grass of the lower valleys offered perfect cover for marksmen.

A movement significant of Boer tactics and intentions now took place in the lower ground. A thousand yards distant on the right a strong body of mounted men were standing close enough together to offer an easy target to artillery. Between this body, which numbered about 100, and our position the ground descended into a 'donga,' rising again to the opposite ridge on which the Boers stood. It was a chance for artillery not to be lost; the gun swung quickly round, unlimbered, and came into action. There was a momentary hesitation on the part of the Boers, and well there might be. Here was the arm whose prowess they had most reason to fear. Would they turn and gallop back to seek shelter behind the ridge on which they stood, or go forward and get within rifle distance of the nine-pounders? There was little time given to choose. The first shell burst high and beyond them, as at full gallop the band descended the hill, gained the lower donga, and, dismounting, began at once to push up the little valleys