

leading to the plateau, where, from the cover of every rock and grass patch, they opened a rapid and most accurate fire on the guns and skirmishers now in action. This bold movement practically sealed the fortunes of the day; but it did more than that. It showed the mind of the Boer leaders, and the Boer farmers, in this business of war they had now entered upon. They no longer feared the mere presence of artillery. Get within rifle range, and their straight shooting would do the rest. This day at the Ingogo heights was the third occasion on which they had met our troops in the open. Bronkerspruit was a field of Boer choosing; there they had all the advantage which selection of position, knowledge of ground, and initiative in attack give. At Lang's Nek they were acting on the defensive, in ground they had previously selected and partly prepared; but here, at Ingogo, was a fight brought about on the spur of the moment by a movement of our force from Mount Prospect, upon which they could not have reckoned four hours earlier. It was only at Ingogo that their readiness to meet our troops on any ground was made manifest. But had that first shell burst a few feet lower, the fortunes of this little war might easily have been changed.

It was now half-past 12 o'clock. The plateau, more or less triangular in shape, and having a level surface of about four acres at top, was held by four companies of the 60th Rifles, two guns, and some thirty-eight mounted troops, numbering in all about 300 men; the infantry in extended order were dotted along the edges of the level ground, or slightly advanced downhill; one of the guns was in action towards the right, the other to the left in the direction

of the road to Newcastle; the artillery teams and mounted troops were disposed as much as possible in the centre of the level space, where the Boer bullets did not come so thickly. For in the lower ground, where the terraces descending from the plateau sloped down into the boulder-strewn dongas and long-grassed ravines that encircled the position, the Boer marksmen were now in force, and a ceaseless stream of bullets swept the edges of the plateau, and crossed the level ground a few feet above its surface. Terribly fatal was the fire to the men who served the guns, and to the teams and drivers who could not get shelter. The guns became the especial object of fire. Captain Greer, the artillery officer in command, was soon shot, and the casualties among his men grew so numerous that riflemen had to be temporarily used as gunners. Captain MacGregor, the senior staff officer and military secretary, fell early in the action. It was evident that in the rifle duel now going on our men could not do more than hold their own: they were unable to subdue the fire of their enemies. Shot for shot they might return, but while every Boer bullet came with unerring accuracy of direction and elevation, the fire on our side was much less effective. Many of the horses were shot early in the action, and some of the artillery teams lay dead in their harness in the order in which they had stood when alive.

For three hours the action continued on the lines upon which it had begun. The firing line of the Boers more and more enveloped the plateau; only on one side, that by which the column had moved when advancing from the drift to the position, was there no enemy; and at times a couple of Boer marksmen would

open fire even there, having crept along some depression to a spot from which the little plateau could be searched in some new direction. About 3 o'clock a few Boers pushed closer to the edge of the plateau near its eastern end, whence they were able to take in flank that part of the defending line which was engaged with the Boer centre and left. If the enemy was reinforced here, nothing could prevent his fire searching every portion of the position, and eventually clearing our troops from it.

This advance of the Boers necessitated the only movement made during the day on our part, after the first dispositions had been effected. A company of rifles was ordered to move towards the eastern angle, to prevent the Boers establishing themselves at that vital point. But the intervening space had to be crossed under the enemy's fire. In diminished strength, they reached the ground, a slight outcrop of rock on the bare edge of the ridge. For more than three hours these men lay in this position, shot at from two sides. They themselves shot steadily down the slope. Of the entire company, only some sixteen men were unwounded at the end of the day; but their heroic action achieved its object, and prevented the Boers from occupying this point of vantage. It would be difficult to picture a scene in which the conditions of modern fighting could be more fully exemplified than in the prolonged rifle duel at this point of the field of Ingogo. Many years ago, the author of that celebrated brochure, 'The Battle of Dorking,' wrote a sort of supplementary pamphlet, which he called 'The New Ordeal.' But little noticed at the time, it prefigured in a remarkable manner the actual scenes called forth in this fight at the foot

of the Drakensberg in Natal—scenes bound to be repeated wherever a contest is carried on between bodies of infantry of somewhat equal numbers—a long, dull, deadly duel, in which precision in shooting and aptitude in taking cover must tell over all other military aptitudes and trainings. To the casual observer of ground, the position on the ridge might seem to command the ground below it, and so, no doubt, in one sense it did, but the men firing uphill from behind the rocks below were far better shots than those who were firing downhill from behind the rocks above.

‘The plateau,’ wrote Colley a few days later, ‘though in some respects very favourable for defence, had the disadvantage, on the south side, of a round slope, with rocks dotted about it, so that whatever position the troops occupied, the Boers by retreating a little down the hill could get nearly as good cover.’⁷

After the first couple of hours the Boer fire had slackened. Figures showing above the crest line still drew instant and accurate fire, but the earlier energy of the fight had abated. Notwithstanding the severity of our loss, the resolute front maintained by our troops prevented the enemy’s design of clearing the position and capturing the guns. Despite their cover the Boers had suffered loss. About 4 o’clock they could be seen removing wounded from the field. Their total casualties were afterwards reported to amount to twenty, of whom ten were killed.⁸ It is probable that, checked by this loss, and by the attitude of resistance so

⁷ Mount Prospect, February 12, 1881, to the Duke.

but the British thought that the Boer losses were heavier.

⁸ This was the Boer statement,

steadily maintained on the ridge, the enemy ceased to press the attack.

When the action had developed, Colley sent two mounted men to Mount Prospect, directing three companies of the 58th to move out to the Ingogo. These reinforcements reached the ridge above the river in the evening, and their presence secured the passage of the double drift. As the sun dropped slowly towards the Drakensberg, clouds began to rise in the west, and thunder growled upon the mountains, presaging a night of storm and rain. Between 5 and 6 o'clock rain descended in torrents. To the wounded men the heavy drops gave some relief, for the afternoon had been intensely hot, and the fever of wounds rapidly produced thirst in its worst form. The South African day is long in the month of February, and it was past seven before the night had closed sufficiently to prevent the Boer marksmen from sending an occasional bullet along the plateau. When darkness quite set in, it became possible to count the losses and collect the wounded. The plateau, however, had still to be held, as the position and intentions of the enemy were uncertain. At last their continued inaction seemed to show they had abandoned the attack. The troops were then formed up preparatory to withdrawing to the camp at Mount Prospect. The distance was not more than eight miles, but the river must now have risen many feet; the rain was still descending, and every hour's delay meant a greater height of water at the double drift. In the last half-hour of daylight, a movement of Boers was observed in the direction of the drift. It seemed probable that they had gathered towards the river with the object of intercepting any attempt to

withdraw from the battlefield. But the reinforcements ordered to cross the Ingogo earlier in the afternoon discontinued their movement owing to darkness, and, recrossing the river, had concentrated on the hill commanding the double drift.

Then the guns had to be thought of. How were they to be brought away? All the artillery officers and most of the gun detachments were either killed or disabled; the loss in horses had been still more severe. When the surviving animals of all kinds were counted, it was found that the two guns and one waggon could still be horsed. It took a long while to get the little force together in a hollow square, the guns in the centre, the infantry in loose formation on the four sides, all the officers on foot; no lights were struck. The darkness was intense; orders were given in whispers; the ammunition was removed from the pouches of the wounded men; surplus rifles were bent and broken; even the few remaining rounds of gun ammunition were broken up and buried; and then, leaving the wounded covered with whatever blanket and waterproof-sheeting could be found, the little band marched off from the hard-held field of Ingogo. The route followed to gain the river was not the same as that by which the column had marched in the morning. A line across the hills was taken. At times direction was lost in the darkness, and halts were made till the proper track was recovered. 'On approaching the double drift,' wrote Colley in his despatch—

The column halted, and a patrol was sent out to ascertain that the drift was clear, and the column then filed across. A heavy thunderstorm had now come on; the darkness was intense, and the river, swollen by the rains, was deep and

rapid. Some of the first men trying to cross were swept down, but saved by a projecting sandbank ; the rest were got over in detachments, holding hands.

It is seldom that an official document brings a scene so vividly before the reader's mind. In the account of the only correspondent on the field,⁹ the night march is described in detail. As the column drew near the river, it halted while the scouts went forward to search the drift and discover if the enemy was near it, and if any tidings could be had of the companies of the 58th which had marched from camp in the afternoon, and before nightfall had been seen near the river. The scouts were absent for more than an hour, and during that long interval the rain poured down in torrents ; the darkness of the midnight was rent every now and then by vivid flashes of lightning, and the thunder rolled and crashed unceasingly.

At last the scouts returned, saying that they could find no trace of enemy or friend at the drift, but that the river was in flood and was still rising. The little column then continued its march and reached the river ; the water, though very high, was still passable. How short was the time during which the ford could be crossed with any hope of safety was shown by the washing away of several of the men who first made the attempt. Most of these, however, were carried against a sandbank a short way lower down stream and saved. The sections of men were then made to lock arms together, and in this manner the passage was accomplished, the water reaching almost to the

⁹ Mr. Carter.

shoulders How Colley worked at the ford, a passage in a letter of a few days later tells.

At the drift there was some difficulty in crossing, for the river, flooded by the heavy rain, was deep and foaming. Some men were washed down, but got out again, and by making the men hold hands and cross in detachments I got them across, some hanging on to 'Peacock's' [his horse's] tail.¹

Of course he makes the least of it, as he always did in every difficulty; but we can put the scene together from little bits which are to be found both in his own letters and in those of others.

The passage of the flooded river in a wild night, alternately pelting rain with dazzling flashes and gleams of moonlight through ragged clouds, was something to remain in one's memory. We expected to be attacked every minute.²

Why no attack was made by the Boers during the passage of the troops at the drift has often been discussed. Doubtless they had had enough of it for one day. It has since been said, too, that as the storm increased in violence, the younger Boers refused to remain out on such a night. They declared the English troops could not cross the flooded river, that the horses had all been killed. General Smidt's account of the affair, given afterwards to an English officer, told the temper of his men. 'They (the young Boers) said, "What the h—ll" to me, and when my young men say that to me, I know I have got all there is to be got out of them.'

It was past midnight when the last man was

¹ February 9, 1881, to his wife.

² *Ibid.*

across the drift. The river had demanded its toll of life and got it. Out of that shrunken little column, eight men perished in the flood. But the worst was over, and honour had not been lost. The guns were across. Six long miles of uphill road had still to be covered before the camp was gained. Of the soldiers who had crossed the Ingogo fourteen hours earlier, about three in every five recrossed the river. Of the horses, one in every four came back. On the long hill leading from the Ingogo to the camp, slippery as ice, filled with rocks and mud holes, the tired men and horses often slipped and fell. At last the horses could no longer draw the guns. Must the guns be left on the hillside to bear, when morning came, mute testimony, like stranded ships, to the leaden storm of the fight of yesterday? No; the men, tired though they were, 'readily and cheerfully attached themselves to the guns,' so ran the official report, 'and dragged them up the long hill from the Ingogo, when the horses were unable to do so.' When the artillery horses began to fall, Colley had hurried on to the camp to get assistance.

The moon went down, steady rain set in, and it became so pitchy dark that we lost the road repeatedly. I pushed on a little ahead to get lanterns, and food ready for the men, and fresh horses for the artillery, reached camp about 3 o'clock, and immediately returned to the men, and to see after the pickets that I had put out to cover the march. Wilkinson [his former A.D.C. and then adjutant of the 60th Rifles] rode out part of the way with me, and then left me, as I understood, to go and look after poor Mr. Pixley, who had been left badly wounded at a house near the drift.³ It appears he was very keen about doing something for the

³ But on the Mount Prospect side of the Ingogo; Wilkinson's crossing the river was not contemplated.

wounded, and had taken out some brandy, &c. After leaving me he crossed the river and rode up to where the wounded were on the hill, then returned, and tried to re-cross the river, which by this time had risen to a dangerous height, and in doing so was swept down and drowned, his pony scrambling out and making its way to Newcastle. It is altogether too sad—every personal friend I have made here gone.⁴

By the time this gallant officer reached the drift from his errand of mercy to the wounded, the dawn must have broken well over the dreary scene. No one can ever know what happened when he tried to cross for the fourth time that fatal river. Probably, worn out by prolonged efforts, which then had been continued through twenty-three hours, he was unable to cope with the flood by that time foaming down the channel. Of all those who fell on that day none gave his life more heroically than this last victim to the waters of the Ingogo.

It was daylight when the column reached camp. For all, save one man, there was rest in some form or other, but for the General there could be no rest. The dead had still to be buried; the wounded relieved; messages and telegrams sent; letters and despatches written; and who was there now left to do all this work, or even to help in doing it? Only one staff officer to look after the column, and one very young aide-de-camp. 'It is wonderful,' wrote the latter, two days after the return, 'to see how he the General gets through everything himself, and I only wish I could be of more use to him than I am. . . . I don't know how he manages to get on.'⁵

⁴ February 9, 1881, to his wife.

⁵ From Lieutenant Bruce Hamilton.

Nor do I—looking back at the realities of that time as the papers around me give them, and seeing the mass of writing which had to be done in these two days—know how he managed to get on during the days following Ingogo. The gravity of his task was now evident. The mobility of the enemy; the extraordinary accuracy of their rifle fire; their coolness, courage, and instinctive knowledge of war, the inbred results of free country life in these stern uplands which had taught them in many a hard fight with man and nature all they knew of war. Then he had these terrible losses to think of. It was only a fortnight since he left Newcastle, and already one in every three of the force had been killed or wounded. What is called the ‘fortune of war,’ or the advantages of position, could no longer account for all that had happened. His little force was not able to prevail against the Boers. Willing enough were the soldiers to do his bidding; to die if they could do nothing more, but that only made the hard fact of their inequality more painful to think of. Every hope of his life was being laid low by these Boer bullets, even as his friends and comrades had been stricken down by them. Of all who at first had sat round the little mess table he alone remained. And he has to bear it bravely all the time. ‘I am more cheery than usual to people generally,’ he writes to his wife, ‘but . . . I feel as if I could not stand another day like these last. Every one I care for taken.’ It was February 12, and he had just come back from the funeral of the officers killed at the Ingogo. Those who were near him in these days were never tired of speaking of his kind thoughtfulness; his quiet acceptance of the mis-

fortune war had brought him ; his manly, undaunted, reliant bearing. Their enthusiasm in his service seemed, indeed, to increase as disasters thickened. 'So far as I am concerned,' wrote Mr. Ritchie, the Church of England chaplain, as brave and devoted a man as ever faced danger to alleviate suffering, 'I would undertake anything for him. He certainly has a wonderful faculty of attaching men to him. He is as brave as a lion, and as strong too. . . . After knowing him I should not care to serve under any other general.'

It is the same story wherever I turn to the correspondence of the time. He is just as cool and quiet during these days as he had been the month, the year, or twenty years earlier. His official letters to the Secretaries of State for War and the Colonies, and his private letters to these and other people at home, are as fully and carefully expressed, and enter into as many questions of South African politics, as though they had been written in his office at Maritzburg, under the most peaceful conditions of ordinary life. He seems to forget no one through all this time, nor to be confused or hurried in any portion of his work. The docketing of letters received is done as neatly and in as firm handwriting as ever. One who did not know him might easily have thought him hard and callous, so little did action or manner betray his feelings. A letter written on February 16 to his sister will show in some degree what was going on in his mind all this time.

Dearest Lily,—I ought to have written to you sooner, but when I turn away from my actual work I find it difficult to take up my pen. I have suffered terribly in these two actions. Every single officer who was immediately on my

staff, and with whom I and Edith had become intimate, is gone. Of the party of five who lived and messed together, I am the only one left. Colonel Deane, Major Poole, Captain MacGregor, Mr. Elwes, Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. Stuart—all gone. I wish now I had not brought up young Bruce Hamilton, for there seems a fatality about every one connected with me, and if he goes it will utterly break down poor Edith, whose favourite brother he is. I have to look cheerful, and I dare say am thought callous, and to-day am presiding at some races and sports, but sometimes it is very hard not to break down. However, reinforcements are now arriving, and I hope it will not be long before I have force enough to terminate this hateful war. I am glad to think I have succeeded so far in humanising it as far as it is possible to do so, and the wounded receive attention on both sides. . . I suppose Edith keeps you pretty well informed of personal matters, and the papers of my public actions, and I am afraid you will have to put up with seeing me well abused and run down. The Queen, however, was good enough to telegraph out her confidence, and the papers here are, on the whole, wonderfully moderate in their criticisms. . . . I could hardly have imagined how callous to public approbation or the reverse the terrible realities of the last few days have made me.

I search in vain among these papers for a single sentence of fault-finding with others, of censure upon subordinates, of ungenerous language towards his enemies. After the fight at the Ingogo, he writes to the Secretary of State: 'There can be no doubt that the Boers have some good and determined leaders, and their "Field Commandant General" Smidt seems an intelligent and fine man, courteous and humane in everything connected with the wounded, and gallant in action.'⁶ And this calm mind and even balance of judgment he preserved up

⁶ February 10, 1881, to Lord Kimberley.

to the last, never seeking excuse for failure in even the hint or the hesitation of a doubt upon other men. I believe, nay, I feel certain, that had it been his fate to survive the day of Majuba, no reproach to others would have marred the eloquence of his silence. Wherever his picture is given in the utterances of contemporary actors, or in his own correspondence, we see him fixed in purpose, unshaken in resolve, generous to all, bearing upon his shoulders many loads, and striving manfully for the honour of his country and the reputation of her soldiers.

The action of the Ingogo was the natural result of the repulse at Lang's Nek. The Boers were only novices in the business of tactics, but they were apt students, and the interruption of communication, which sooner or later they were bound to attempt, was certain, whenever it occurred, to bring on another action.

I was bound not to submit to be blockaded without an effort to open the road, otherwise fifty men might blockade an army, and having no sufficient cavalry force—my cruel want in these last few days—could only move as I did with a fairly strong infantry and artillery force. My information did not lead me to expect more than a small force—of 200 men at the outside—sent just to harass me, but it would now appear that the Boer movement was really part of a larger one directed against our reinforcements. Once engaged, it was difficult with my small force and want of cavalry to draw off, especially as they were constantly receiving reinforcements; and I took the decision within ten minutes, almost, after we were seriously engaged, to hold the plateau till night, trusting that the losses the Boers would suffer in attacking would sicken them of it.

The Boers all hurried down from the Nek to help their friends, and then when they found that I had returned to camp hurried back again in still greater haste, fearing I

might attack there in their absence. Practically, I believe the losses they suffered there had much to say to their not attacking the reinforcements as they had intended to do, and the road has been almost unmolested since.

Ritchie behaved right well again. He was in the Boer camp and saw Joubert and other Boer leaders. The Boers had made all preparations for renewing the attack with overwhelming forces the next morning, and when Ritchie asked leave to send away the wounded, said, Yes, the wounded might go, but nothing else—and 'Mr. Colley' and the guns must remain. Their surprise and disappointment when informed that 'Mr. Colley' and the guns were safe back in camp was amusing.⁷

In a few letters of the time, omitted in this memoir through want of space, I have found reference to many matters connected with the actions at Lang's Nek and the Ingogo which are still interesting evidences of the mind and character of their writer. Some of these letters relate to certain incidents in the campaign—inevitable *contretemps* occurring in the progress of all military action in the field—which throw light upon the non-success of the first attempt upon Lang's Nek. Alluding to a particular episode in that action, the General added: 'Something of this will doubtless leak out, for I have heard men and officers discussing it. But I would ten thousand times rather any amount of criticism were heaped on me than one word cast at him. I can retrieve myself, he cannot.' And again, replying to a letter in which a correspondent had warmly resented certain criticisms that had appeared in a Natal newspaper upon his action, he wrote: 'I do not see what there is in the "Witness" criticisms that has so excited your wrath. . . . If you believe in me, believe that I can

⁷ February 9-19, 1881, to his wife.

live them down, and don't read them if they worry you !'

Alas ! the fortune of war, which in this campaign had always set persistently against him, was soon destined to deny him the chance of living down criticism or retrieving failure.⁸

⁸ Major Brownlow wrote to General Newdigate June 10, 1881, as follows :

' I was most fortunate in serving under a man like Sir George Colley, who, whatever his misfortunes, gave every one credit for doing his best, unless he found out to the contrary.

' I think it is not generally known

here that if his orders had been carried out at Lang's Nek, there is little doubt we should have won the day.'

Colley's despatch after the Ingogo affair, and a letter from Lieutenant Bruce Hamilton, are given in Appendix.

CHAPTER XV

NEGOTIATION

The lesson of Ingogo—Diplomatic position—The reinforcements—Kruger's letter—Colley meets Wood at Newcastle—Proposals for settlement of Transvaal—Colley's reply to Boer leaders.—Return to Mount Prospect—Amajuba.

ALTHOUGH in a purely technical sense the fight on the plateau might be regarded as a drawn battle, still there can be little doubt that that action did more to discourage our troops and to elate the Boers than anything that had yet happened in this campaign. A new power had been developed in war—the mounted rifleman—and a new method of tactics had been found. Military science had heretofore imagined that the rifle was the peculiar adjunct of modern armies, the special prerogative of civilisation as applied to the battlefield. But no soldier, scientific or otherwise, had gone the length of supposing that the rifle, unaided by artillery, could do what it had done at the Ingogo. Still less was it imagined that it could achieve such results in the hands of men untrained in any of the formations, movements, and tactical exercises of the field. Ingogo had shown once more that power in war depends not alone upon the weapon, but on the man who uses it; that muscle and sinew, soundness of wind and keenness of sight, have just as much to say to victory as in the old Plantagenet days when the yeomen and peasant soldiers of England

had brought to confusion all the trained and expert intelligence of military mediævalism. This new weapon which science had imagined was always to be on the side of collective intelligence had suddenly gone over to individual effort, backed by the old-world forces of bodily strength and muscular fibre.

But there was yet another lesson which this action was destined to teach the two little armies fronting each other within the borders of Natal—a lesson taught before on many fields from Marathon to Morat. No man understands so well as the individual actors in a battle what are the exact points between them in the game they are waging. They do not argue it out on principles of schools or theories of tactics—they know it. These two guns, spotted all over with the bullet splashes of the Boer rifles, needed no lecturer to point their moral to the men who saw them. Nor did the Boers require to be told what their skill of straight shooting and their power of adapting tactics to terrain really meant. After the battle of Ingogo the balance of belief in themselves, which means so much to soldiers in war, swung as dangerously low on one side as it rose high on the other.

While Colley had naturally to make the best of the situation to his troops, his letters to the authorities at home indicate the effect upon his own views of the Ingogo. He writes to the Secretary of State for War eight days afterwards :

I find that my despatches intended for the last steamer have missed it, owing to temporary interruptions in our communications, so that they will go with this letter. I cannot add much to what I have said in them. No soldiers could possibly fight more steadily than the men of the 58th and 60th have done in these two engagements and they

are as cheery and confident as ever—but the want of good mounted troops told very heavily against us, and our soldiers are not as trained skirmishers and shots as the majority of these Boers, who from their childhood have lived in the country, and to a great extent by their guns, and are used to stalking and shooting deer.

Our artillery does not at all compensate for our want of mounted troops, for the Boers keep cover too well, and when exposed move too rapidly and in too loose order, to give artillery much chance. . . . I have not much faith in mounted infantry for this work. They are excellent as against Kaffirs, but they are no match for the Boers, being worse riders and worse shots. The Boers think little of them, and they themselves acquire a sense of inferiority and a want of confidence in themselves which is fatal.¹

This remark, though it referred particularly to mounted infantry, really applied to every soldier who had fought at Lang's Nek and the Ingogo.

By February 12, parties of Boers had moved south towards the ridge of the Biggarsberg, a range of steep but narrow hills which lies about midway between Newcastle and Ladysmith, and nearly sixty miles distant from Mount Prospect. For some days it appeared probable this movement meant an attack upon the reinforcements which were now moving up country from Durban to Newcastle. But they were strong reinforcements, sent from India and from England as soon as the first intimation of the Boer revolt had reached home—two regiments of infantry, one of cavalry, Naval Brigade with two guns. In view of the possibility of Boer opposition south of Newcastle, Colley directed these reinforcements to concentrate at the Biggarsberg, in a strong position which he had already occupied with the Natal

¹ Mount Prospect, February 16, 1881, to Mr. Childers.

Mounted Police. Thence the troops were to continue their advance in one column, under an officer whose name as a successful leader had already become well known throughout South Africa—Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood. Behind these foremost troops, but a good way further back, other regiments of infantry and cavalry were moving up the long road from Maritzburg; but progress was much retarded by bad roads and swollen streams, and another three or four weeks must elapse before a really effective force, unshaken in morale, could be concentrated at Newcastle.

We must turn now from the military events which had so rapidly developed in the northern angle of Natal, to consider the diplomatic position which the Transvaal question had meanwhile assumed. It has already been stated that the final straw on the back of Boer discontent had been the refusal of the Liberal Government to reverse in office that act of annexation which out of office they had so trenchantly denounced. There can be little doubt that this refusal had not been the unanimous decision of the Cabinet. The Cabinet tail, in the matter of the retention of the Transvaal, had wagged the Government dog. The bursting of the Boer storm, and the complete collapse of British authority from one end of the country to the other, gave immediate strength to those in the Government and among the outside Liberal party who had previously been in favour of arrangement with the Boers. Meantime the attitude taken up by the whole Dutch people throughout South Africa was very significant. Meetings were held in every part of the Cape Colony, and resolutions were passed, without dissenting voice, expressing sympathy with the Transvaal Boers, and urging the

immediate adoption of peaceful measures in the settlement of the dispute.

In a diplomatic sense, as well as in their military measures, the Boers were showing considerable aptitude. Each post from the Transvaal brought powerful appeals from the leaders, detailing the efforts made in the past to obtain a hearing for their grievances; the neglect with which these efforts had been met; and the perverted views regarding themselves and their cause which had been sent out by their enemies to the world. As everybody was now listening where nobody had listened before, the effect of these Boer manifestoes on public opinion was marked and rapid. That the English Government had from the first inception of the strife made up its mind to grant some redress is certain. The man who most of all had been the champion of the Transvaal Dutch, Mr. Courtney, had now joined the Government, and as it was an open secret that he had already, when the Liberal Ministry was first formed, declined to take office, because the Government would not agree to give back independence to the Transvaal, this appointment was looked upon as strong indication of change in the councils of the Empire. So, indeed, Colley read it on January 23, five days before Lang's Nek. His remark on reading the appointment was significant :

X. tells me the tone [at home] is determined, not violent; that Russell has written to the papers in favour of the Boers; and that Courtney, the Liberal member who has always supported the Boers and encouraged them to resist if not to revolt, has been taken into the Ministry. This looks curious. Either they are shutting his mouth or mean

to adopt his views. I have not had a word of any kind from either Colonial or War Secretaries, and am thus left entirely unfettered and to my own discretion. Whether this is confidence in me, or timidity and fear of incurring responsibility on their part, I do not know; but in any case it is an arrangement that suits me perfectly—and if I do make a mess I hope I shall know how to bear failure.’²

The truth was, the Government found themselves beset with difficulties. The sin of their neglect to face the situation in the Transvaal when they assumed office ten months earlier had been brought quickly home to them. They could, of course, point to the continued receipt of optimistic opinion from the Administrator of the Transvaal, and other sources of South African intelligence; but looking the whole question fairly in the face, it cannot be denied that Ministers had received warning that the condition of affairs in the Transvaal was a source of constant danger. No doubt the exigencies of party government made the position a difficult one; but if it be said that they had decided to wait upon events—to watch, as it is commonly called, how the cat was going to jump—then it is very clear that the danger of the dilemma was in no way lessened.

Nothing connected with the Transvaal revolt has been more discussed than the negotiations which, after much vicissitude and interruption, ultimately resulted in the peace of Mount Prospect, or, as its opponents called it, the capitulation of Downing Street. I propose to enter here a *résumé* of matters relating to the inception of these negotiations, and their progress up to the day of Majuba, giving to

² Newcastle, January 23, 1881, to his wife.

the official documents which have already been published in blue-books the light and explanation afforded by private documents in my possession.

The earliest indication of a readiness on the part of the Government to come to terms with the Boers appears to have been conveyed in a telegraphic message from Lord Kimberley to Mr. Blyth, the London agent of Mr. Brand (President of the Orange Free State), whose efforts in the cause of peace had been unceasing, from the earliest symptoms of active resistance on the part of the Boers in December. The letter ran as follows :

Downing Street: January 10.

In returning to you the telegram which you left here this morning for the Earl of Kimberley's perusal, I am desired by his lordship to request that you will inform President Brand that Her Majesty's Government have received with pleasure this expression of his friendly sentiments, and that, provided only the Boers will desist from their armed opposition to the Queen's authority, Her Majesty's Government do not despair of making a satisfactory arrangement.

This message was telegraphed the same day to Mr. Brand. He telegraphed in reply to Mr. Blyth :

January 11.

Give my thanks to Government for kind expression, and communicate to them that I think not a moment should be lost, and some one, say Chief Justice de Villiers of Cape-town, be sent to the Transvaal burghers by the Government with a view of stopping further collision, and with a clear and definite proposal for the settlement. Moments are precious. . . .

On this being communicated to the Colonial

Office, the following letter was sent to the Consul for the Orange Free State :

January 14.

. . . I am desired to state that if the condition mentioned in my previous letters to you as to the cessation of armed opposition to the Queen's authority were complied with, H.M.G. would consider whether the settlement of present difficulties could be brought about by the appointment of a Special Commissioner.

President Brand replies :

January 16.

The only way in which I believe further bloodshed and the great calamities to South Africa which I dread to contemplate can be prevented is, in my opinion, that the British Government make a clear and distinct proposal to the Transvaal people without delay.

On January 21 Lord Kimberley informs President Brand, through the Consul, that he can add nothing to his previous communication. On January 26 Lord Kimberley telegraphs to Sir Hercules Robinson, who had now arrived at the Cape as Governor :

. . . Following telegram from President Brand. . .

'Is it not possible to offer to the people of Transvaal through the High Commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson, who is now in Capetown, certain terms and conditions, provided they cease from armed opposition, making it clear to them how this is to be understood?'

I have to instruct you to inform President Brand that if armed opposition should at once cease, H.M.G. would thereupon endeavour to frame such a scheme as in their belief would satisfy all enlightened friends of the Transvaal community.

This message is telegraphed by the Cape Governor to President Brand on January 27. On the 28th

President Brand telegraphs to the Governor at Capetown :

I read your Excellency's telegram. . . . Don't your Excellency think it will be good to inform the Transvaal people without delay of the contents, explaining to them what is meant by forthwith ceasing armed opposition? From the telegram published yesterday and dated Pietermaritzburg, it would appear that Sir G. Pomeroy-Colley was preparing to move forward into the Transvaal, and I am afraid that unless some effort is made to explain to the Transvaal people the contents of your Excellency's telegram, and upon what terms they are forthwith to cease armed opposition, a further collision will take place, and the satisfactory arrangements which H.M.G. contemplates may become more difficult. If your Excellency can devise some means by which the object which your Excellency hopes to attain can be effected at once, and the armed opposition cease, so that there is time and opportunity to make the scheme mentioned . . . known to them, much perhaps may be effected. I think every moment is precious. . . . Forgive the urgency with which I express myself, but no time can now be lost.

On the same day Sir Hercules Robinson replies that with the receipt of above message a telegram had also come from Natal, reporting that a battle was taking place at Lang's Nek. He suggests that the President should give immediate and widespread publicity to the message of Government. Here then, for the moment, all peaceful effort ceased, and it will be well at this point to examine this first series of messages more closely before taking up a few days later the suspended thread of negotiations.

What the English Government most feared at this time was the complication of the question by the open adherence to the Boer cause of the Orange Free State, and even of the Dutch burghers in the Cape Colony. To prevent or even to delay co-operation

which might bring a mass of Boers from the Free State down upon Newcastle and Natal in rear of Colley's force, and on the flank of reinforcements marching to join him from Maritzburg, was an object of pressing necessity. The position of Lang's Nek once won, matters, they thought, would become easier. Thus we find that of all these messages and proposals from and to Mr. Brand not one was sent or repeated to Colley, nor is he informed of them at all. His letters written during the period covered by these messages of negotiation are all significant of complete freedom of action in the absence of any instructions from Government at home. On January 17, he writes :

As to what you say of the political situation, I have had nothing from home to indicate any intention of interference. Lord K. has simply sent me his replies to various deputations without comment, and I understand them as a civil way of telling people that it rests with the Boers to avoid bloodshed by not fighting but caving in.³

Five days later, on the 23rd, we have already seen how 'entirely unfettered' he considered himself in all respects to be in the movement he was about to begin against Lang's Nek. We shall now resume the record of negotiations which the fight of January 28 for the moment stopped.

After Lang's Nek there was a pause. The bolt had been shot and the mark missed. It is inevitable that when the unforeseen occurs it takes some time to reset the political pieces, and to begin anew the game of diplomacy. This time the beginning was between Colley and the President of the Free State,

³ Newcastle, to his wife.

Mr. Brand. Rumours of Boer movement from the Free State in the direction of Newcastle had been prevalent for some days past. On February 3, Colley telegraphed Mr. Brand referring to these rumours, and received on the same day a message denying the truth of the alleged invasion from the Orange Free State. The President then added :

I once more would implore your Excellency to endeavour to prevent further bloodshed. . . . Now that you have a large force, your Excellency can, with the generosity which such a powerful nation as Great Britain can well afford, inform the Transvaal people of the contents of the telegrams which Lord Kimberley sent through H.E. Sir Hercules Robinson, and do your best to bring the question to an amicable termination. You will never regret it. May God move the hearts of all to prevent the great calamities which will happen if some means is not found to avert them.

The same day, February 3, Colley telegraphed Sir Hercules Robinson that Brand had asked him to make known certain telegrams sent by Lord Kimberley to the Transvaal people; that he, Colley, had no knowledge of such telegrams; and he begs they may be sent to him if they exist.

On February 4 Robinson sends Colley a copy of Lord Kimberley's message beginning, 'Inform President that if armed opposition cease,' &c.; and on the same day Colley, replying to President Brand, thanks him for his message, and tells him that before he had advanced to Lang's Nek he had made an earnest appeal to the Boer leaders to prevent useless bloodshed, by ceasing armed opposition and not prolonging hopeless resistance; that he will probably make another effort before again advancing. Meanwhile, he trusts the President will give every publicity to the

message which the Secretary of State had sent to him.

On February 5, Brand thanks Colley for his message; begs him to continue efforts towards peaceful settlement; says that Colley has better means of letting the Transvaal people know the intentions of the British Government, and adds this pertinent observation:

Besides, I do not see what I can communicate to the people unless something definite is known to me. Show me what I can do, and I shall be most willing to assist.

. . . Your telegram gives me hope that you will consider whether what I suggest cannot be tried. Lord Kimberley's telegram says that provided they cease armed opposition he has a scheme which will give satisfaction to all enlightened friends of the Transvaal. It cannot be expected that after they have gone so far they will cease armed opposition unless some guarantee is given them that they will not be treated as rebels. If that assurance is given them, and the scheme which Her Majesty's Government has in contemplation is made known to them, I venture to hope that our prayers may be heard. If your Excellency agrees with what I state let me know, and I shall communicate it at once by express to Paul Kruger. In the meantime do not move into the Transvaal. . . .

Colley replied on the same day, February 5:

I fear I can give no such assurance as your Honour proposes, and can add nothing to Lord Kimberley's words, 'Cessation of armed resistance must precede everything.'

On the same date Colley telegraphed Lord Kimberley:

Have received two long telegrams from Brand earnestly urging that I should communicate your reply to him to Boers, state nature of scheme, and guarantee their not being

treated as rebels if they submit. I have replied that I can give no such assurance, and can add nothing to your words, but suggested he may do good by making your reply known through Transvaal.

Again on February 5, Brand telegraphed Colley, and urged that if the Boers are to be treated as rebels or insurgents they will be driven to desperation, and fight to the bitter end. He thinks that if a guarantee be given them on that head there is every hope of the question being solved.

On the same day Lord Kimberley telegraphed Colley :

I think it right to intimate to you, as you have instructions to assume the functions of Governor when you are able to enter the Transvaal, that whenever you may succeed in re-establishing the Queen's authority there, all questions affecting the future administration and settlement of the country, as well as questions as to dealing with those who have taken part against the Government, should be reserved by you for the consideration of Her Majesty's Government.

On February 7, Colley telegraphs Kimberley :

I have received your telegram of 5th instant, which shall be attended to. I have purposed, with a view to the speedy pacification of the country, to publish, on entering the country, through the landdrost of each district which the investing army occupies, a promise of amnesty to all people of the district (with certain few names excepted) who shall return to their homes and will sign a declaration of loyalty to the Queen; issuing, however, no proclamation until the Queen's authority has been re-established throughout the country and I shall have received your instructions. I further propose to appoint a day for the inhabitants of the occupied districts to attend before their magistrates and sign such declaration, and then to let them choose two of their number to represent to me their views and their alleged griev-

ances for the consideration of H.M. Government. I would take care to see the spokesman of each district separately, and to avoid giving the representatives any status as a body, but I think that I might thus both sound the general feeling and test the practicability and probable character of an elected body, should any such be hereafter considered desirable. Do you approve this, or must all questions of amnesty be deferred until the Queen's authority is re-established throughout the country?

On February 8, Kimberley telegraphs Colley :

Have received your telegram of 5th inst. Inform President Brand that H.M. Government will be ready to give all reasonable guarantees as to treatment of Boers after submission, if they cease from armed opposition, and that a scheme will be framed for the permanent friendly settlement of difficulties. Add also that H.M. Government will be glad if President will communicate to leaders of Boers this as well as former messages addressed to him.

On February 9, this message was transmitted to Brand by Colley. On the same day Kimberley telegraphed Colley, in answer to his inquiry about an amnesty :

In reply to your telegram of the 7th inst. You should confine yourself to promising protection to the inhabitants of the districts occupied, as long as they behave peaceably, reserving all further questions for instructions from home.

And here again came the stern voice of war into the question. The last message reached Colley on the day following the Ingogo engagement. The result of that fight had by no means modified the opinion held by Colley as to the lines upon which policy should move to the solution of the Transvaal difficulty. On February 12 he thus writes to the Secretary of State for the Colonies :

President Brand seems very hopeful that your last telegram and message sent through him (see p. 329) will bring about some settlement. I imagine the question will be what your lordship means by 'reasonable guarantees' for their treatment. I take it the Boer leaders will not submit unless they are assured they will not be singled out for punishment, and on the other hand I imagine that no settlement of the Transvaal can be safe or permanent which leaves them there as the recognised and successful leaders of the revolt. So long as they retain any position of influence in the country, so long, I fear, will the loyal and moderate parties be afraid to come forward.⁴

This was the real crux. If the Transvaal was to be retained, the influence and position of the successful leaders presented a serious difficulty. And a decision on the part of the Government as to the future of the country appeared to be a necessary preliminary to further negotiation.

On February 12 a letter of considerable importance was addressed to Colley by the Boer Provisional Government in the Transvaal. It appears in the blue-book as under :

Translation.

Headquarters : February 12, 1881.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,—Having arrived here at headquarters, and having examined the several positions taken by the Honourable P. J. Joubert, Commandant-General of the Burghers of the South African Republic, I have found that we are compelled against our will to proceed in a bloody combat, and that our positions as taken are of that nature that we cannot cease to persevere in the way of self-defence as once adopted by us so far as our God will give us strength to do so.

Your Excellency, we know that all our intentions, letters, or whatever else, have failed to attain the true object because

⁴ Mount Prospect, February 12, 1881, to Lord Kimberley.

they have been erroneously represented and wrongly understood by the Government of the people of England. It is for this reason that we fear to forward to your Excellency these lines. But, your Excellency, I should not be able to be answerable before my God if I did not attempt once more to make known to your Excellency our meaning, knowing that it is in your power to enable us to withdraw from the positions taken up by us. The people have repeatedly declared their will, upon the cancellation of the Act of Annexation, to co-operate with Her Majesty's Government in everything which can tend to the welfare of South Africa. Unhappily the people were not in a position to accomplish their good intentions, because they were unlawfully attacked and forced to self-defence. We do not wish to seek a quarrel with the Imperial Government, but cannot do otherwise than offer our last drop of blood for our just rights, as every Englishman would do. We know that the noble English nation, when once truth and justice reach them, will stand on our side. We are so firmly assured of this that we should not hesitate to submit to a Royal Commission of Inquiry, who we know will place us in our just rights; and, therefore, we are prepared, whenever your Excellency commands that Her Majesty's troops be immediately withdrawn from our country, to allow them to retire with all honours, and we ourselves will leave the positions as taken up by us. Should, however, the annexation be persevered in, and the spilling of blood be proceeded with by you, we, subject to the will of God, will bow to our fate, and to the last man combat against the injustice and violence done to us, and throw entirely on your shoulders the responsibility of all the miseries which will befall this country.

S. J. P. KRUGER,
Vice-President.

W. EDUARD BOK,
State Secretary.

To

His Excellency,

SIR GEORGE POMEROY-COLLEY, &c., &c.
Headquarters, Lang's Nek.

This letter, written evidently at Lang's Nek, reached Colley on the following day, February 13. It was the first tangible proposal which in the existing military situation could possibly have been made a basis of a pacific settlement. There can be little doubt that it was the outcome of the prayers and proposals for peaceful arrangement made by President Brand to Lord Kimberley, and that it was the immediate result of the message sent by Lord Kimberley to Colley on February 8, received by him on the 9th, and transmitted same day to President Brand. We can further trace the matter by means of a telegram addressed to Mr. Donald Currie by Mr. Brand, dated

February 14, 1.40 P.M.

On Wednesday night I sent off an express to Kruger, Pretorius, and Joubert, informing them of Lord Kimberley's telegram of the 8th through Sir George Colley. They will have received my letter only yesterday (13th), and I hope they will have written to Sir George Colley. That letter cannot reach His Excellency before to-day or to-morrow, and I cannot expect answer before Wednesday or Thursday.

Mr. Brand's express would appear to have reached the Boer Government one day earlier, for on February 13, Kruger's letter referring to the Royal Commission was in Colley's hands at Mount Prospect, and on the same day its purport was telegraphed to Lord Kimberley, and received at the Colonial Office next day, February 14.

On that night Colley attempted to ride from Mount Prospect to Newcastle, under cover of a thick mist which hung on the ground, although there was a moon almost at its full overhead. It was his intention to cross the Buffalo River in rear of Mount

Prospect, and thence by a shorter line, but one only practicable for horses and footmen, to Newcastle, recrossing the river near the latter place. This movement was of course kept a profound secret, and the party slipped away from camp almost unperceived. When, however, the lower ground of the Buffalo valley was reached, it was found that the fog did not hang in the valley, and the party turned back to camp. That Colley was desirous of getting to Newcastle is evident. The telegraph had now been cut by the Boers, who were reported to be in force between that place and the Biggarsberg. The reinforcements had been ordered to concentrate south of that mountain. Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood was hurrying up from Maritzburg to join them there, and a fight at that ridge might take place any day. For the moment, at least, it looked as though the prospect of fighting lay on the Natal side, and not on the Lang's Nek side, of Newcastle.

In a letter written to Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood on February 16, Colley thus describes the situation, and discusses the probable course of events :

I hope you have reached the Biggarsberg all right, and found the Indian reinforcements concentrated there. You were quite right to push up as you did, and I was just about to telegraph to you when I got your message. I never believed either the Landsman's Drift or Van Reenan's Pass shaves—the former because the Buffalo is too uncertain just now for them to risk crossing it in force, and, secondly, because since my advance they have cleared out of Utrecht and those parts, and everything I have seen of their strategy indicates that they cling nervously to their communications with the Free State and with Heidelberg. The latter rumour I equally disbelieved, because I think President Brand and the moderate party in the Free State, although

not strong enough to prevent large numbers of individual Boers joining the Transvaal forces, are strong enough to prevent such a violation of territory as would almost inevitably involve them in the war. . . .

But the attempt to intercept the communications somewhere on the Ingegane, working round Newcastle and keeping the Free State mountains at their back, seemed a likely one enough. . . .

I may warn you that you will find them very fairly drilled and in hand, with some excellent leaders; not at all wanting in courage, either in galloping boldly under fire to seize an advantageous position, or in creeping close up to our skirmishing line wherever the ground gives any chance; and very accurate shooters. However, you have the advantage of two first-class regiments, one of which has probably done more fighting and rough skirmishing than any in the Service, and of some cavalry—which has been my terrible want; and with yourself to direct them I have no fear of the result. I don't think you will miss artillery much; they generally keep too good cover or move too rapidly and in too loose order to give it much chance. I believe some of our shells killed a few horses in the valley the first day, but I doubt if any damage to speak of was inflicted by them on the men, and I fear the Boers are beginning to discover this.

I shall be very anxious now to hear something of your proposed movements, and I trust you will be able to communicate with me. If you propose to advance with the force you now have, I shall probably await you here or at Newcastle, but if you think further reinforcement necessary, and your advance is likely to be delayed in consequence, I shall probably try and find means of joining you. We are amply supplied here, so you need not let anxiety on that account hasten you; but at the same time I shall, of course, be glad to receive reinforcements which will enable us to do something more than just hold our camp, and long-continued inaction gives more time and opportunity for mischief in the Free State, Zululand, &c.

You will probably have better information than I have of the Boer force before you, but I hear it variously estimated

at from 800 to 1,500. About 200 Boers left this two days ago, apparently to join it. . . .

Good-bye, and wishing you all luck, I remain

Ever yours,

G. POMEROY-COLLEY.⁵

On the night following the despatch of this letter Colley rode into Newcastle, arriving early on the morning of the 17th, and meeting there Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood, who arrived from the Biggarsberg without having seen any sign of the enemy either on the mountain or at the River Ingegane, where opposition had been most expected.

At this point it will be well to pause and look around at the various factors, national and individual, concerned in the subsequent course of events. Turning to the political situation generally existing throughout South Africa, it could not be regarded as otherwise than extremely grave. The Free State was giving ominous warnings of increasing restiveness under the moderating influence of Mr. Brand, and everywhere through the Cape Colony, up to Capetown itself, the expressions of sympathy with the Transvaal Boers, and protests against their coercion, were gaining in force and friendliness every day. That civil war throughout South Africa might be the result of protracted operations was a contingency which the Government could not neglect.

On the side of the Boers the situation was a very simple one. They could not be expected to consent to withdraw from a struggle for their independence, which after three years of unavailing protest they had deliberately entered upon, except under guarantees for the recognition of that independence, and assur-

⁵ Mount Prospect, February 16, 1881, to Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood.

ances of personal immunity from any punishment for their revolt. The extraordinary success that had hitherto marked all their efforts in this war made it all the more unlikely that the leaders would agree to enter upon negotiations under any other conditions.

But when we turn to the side of the English Government, it is clear that the whole development of the military situation from Bronkerspruit to Ingogo had made even the approach to peaceful arrangement a most difficult undertaking. It was not the shutting up of the Transvaal garrisons that had really made negotiation so impossible, it was the defeat of British troops; and particularly had the opening encounter at Bronkerspruit that effect. This was regarded as an affront upon national honour which nothing but submission could atone for. A single victory on our side would have made compromise easy, but every defeat barred the diplomatic roadway as completely as in a military sense it blocked the movement into the Transvaal. That this was felt by the Government there can be no doubt. Much more, then, must it have impressed the military authorities on the spot, and particularly the man on whose shoulders rested all the burden of military responsibility, Sir George Pomeroy-Colley. Before everything else he was a soldier. No soldier living carried further or rated higher the necessities of military honour, considerations which it was his belief no State could afford to disregard.

The military situation was as follows: Entrenched at Mount Prospect were about 800 troops—the original column of invasion, less the losses at Lang's Nek and the Ingogo; at Newcastle two complete battalions

of infantry, a regiment of cavalry, a reinforcement for the Naval Brigade with two guns, and some infantry drafts. On the road from Durban were two more infantry battalions, a regiment of cavalry, a force of mounted infantry, and a battery of artillery destined to form the second column of invasion under Sir Evelyn Wood. In addition to these troops, two regiments of cavalry and 1,500 infantry were about to leave England and India for Natal. In the Transvaal no change had taken place. The garrisons at Wakkerstroom, Standerton, Rustenberg, Leydenberg, Pretoria, and Potchefstroom were still closely invested. With the exception of Potchefstroom all were well supplied with food. That place, however, was known to be already short of supplies. On the Boer side the position at Lang's Nek had been strengthened, both in defences and in numbers of men. The forces sent south of Newcastle had been ordered back to the Nek. It was evident the Boer leaders had determined to resist to the utmost at that point.

Bearing these matters in mind, we will now take up the narrative again on the morning of February 17, when, as we have already seen, Sir George Colley met and had a long interview with Sir Evelyn Wood at Newcastle. For the first time Colley heard what the 'scheme' or Government proposal for the settlement of the Transvaal really meant. It was on lines which he had not contemplated and did not approve. On the 18th he wrote to the Secretary of State, going into the reasons that seemed to him to render the proposed scheme impossible. The letter shows his mind so fully at the moment that it is worthy of attention.

Newcastle : February 18.

I rode in yesterday morning to meet Sir E. Wood in case he made his way in, or to be at hand in case Newcastle was seriously threatened, and in the afternoon met Sir Evelyn, who had found no enemy on his road. I gather from him that the scheme to which you refer in your private note, and probably in the telegrams I have lately received, contemplates a subdivision of the Transvaal, leaving the purely Dutch districts under independent rule, but bringing all the native border districts under British rule. This was only the general impression conveyed to me by Sir Evelyn, who did not seem clear about details. But I have ventured to telegraph very earnestly to your lordship against any such scheme, which I fear would lead to endless difficulties. Without some knowledge of detail it is of course impossible to judge, but I cannot imagine any division that would not be open to the gravest inconveniences. . . .

I would most earnestly urge on your lordship that, whatever may be decided regarding the Transvaal, it may be dealt with as a whole, for I am certain that no difficulties you will have to contend against will be so great as those arising from any attempted division. And I would still more earnestly urge on your lordship that you should not commit yourself to any scheme until you have had the opportunity of hearing the wishes and views of the people through other spokesmen than Joubert, Kruger, and his party; for no moderate man, and no loyal man, will dare to speak so long as they are the accepted representatives of the Transvaal people. . . .

Personally I would recommend one of two solutions of the present difficulties. Either accept the Boer programme and give them back the Republic 'under British protection,' and under certain guarantees which would make it almost a British province, or adhere to the annexation but give them a more liberal constitution (the latter being the course I would recommend), and keeping certain districts under the special government of the High Commissioner. But, at the risk of seeming presumptuous, I do most earnestly urge your lordship to try and get at a fairly representative body of

the people, collected *not* under the tyrannical dictatorship of the Triumvirate, and feel their pulse, before you commit yourself to anything.

I can recommend nothing better than I have already suggested in a telegram and letter of about a fortnight back, and I do trust your lordship will give that or something of the kind a trial, not perhaps under me—for I can see many objections to a military governor (though I honestly believe that this war will have strengthened rather than weakened the friendly feeling which Joubert told Mr. Ritchie existed towards myself personally in the country), and your lordship will have no difficulty in laying your hand on trained diplomatists and governors of far higher ability and experience—but under some one who has experience, clear-sightedness, and sympathetic power enough to get at the feeling of the mass of the people underneath the cuckoo notes which they repeat as Jorrissen and Co. pull the strings. I have thought earnestly and deeply over the future of the Transvaal since I have been obliged to take such a painfully active part in its affairs, and that must be my excuse for writing to your lordship as I have done.

I trust, however, I need not add that whatever views your lordship may finally adopt, I will, so long as I retain my present position, do my best to give effect to. If I honestly feel that I cannot make what I am asked to do succeed, I am sure your lordship will not think the worse of me if I tell your lordship so, and ask that it may be entrusted to other and more competent hands.⁷

On the same day he writes to his wife with regard to the allusion as to his possible resignation: 'I don't know if you will think I have written too strongly, but I would rather resign than carry out the scheme I understand to be contemplated. . . . I know that by the time this reaches home I shall have broken the back of the military resistance, and my words may carry more weight than they would just now.'

⁷ To Lord Kimberley.

We have seen that on February 13 Colley telegraphed to Lord Kimberley the purport of the letter he had that day received from Mr. Kruger. On the 14th and 16th telegraphic communication was interrupted between Mount Prospect and Maritzburg; on the 15th it would appear that for a few hours it was open, but it was now uncertain, as the Boers were in strength to the south of Newcastle. But on the 17th Colley was in Newcastle; the Boers had withdrawn from the road, and communication was again restored. On February 16, Lord Kimberley telegraphed Colley as follows:

I have received your telegram of 13th instant. Inform Kruger that if Boers will desist from armed opposition we shall be quite ready to appoint Commissioners with extensive powers, and who may develop the scheme referred to in my telegram to you of the 8th instant. Add that if this proposal is accepted you are authorised to agree to suspension of hostilities.

At the same time the Secretary of State telegraphed the same message to Sir Evelyn Wood, giving also the *précis* of Mr. Kruger's letter received from Colley on the 14th, and directing that if communication with Colley was still interrupted, Wood was to forward this message to the Boer leaders 'by the most expeditious means.' A similar telegram was sent to President Brand through Sir Hercules Robinson. Later on the same day the Minister of War telegraphed Colley:

With reference to Lord Kimberley's telegram as respects the interval before reply from Boers is received, we do not bind your discretion, but we are anxious for your making arrangements to avoid effusion of blood.

On February 17, Colley telegraphed from Newcastle to Lord Kimberley, acknowledged receipt of message to Wood of the previous day (apparently he had not received the one sent to himself), and added that he 'will communicate with Kruger accordingly.' This message reached the Colonial Office at 8 P.M., 17th. On the 18th no message appears to have been received by Colley from the Colonial Office, but he telegraphed a long message dealing with the proposed scheme, and giving the substance of what he considered should be the basis of future settlement—viz., continuance of annexation and more liberal constitution, &c., as set forth in his letter of that date already quoted.

On February 19, Colley sent Lord Kimberley this telegram :

Latter part of your telegram of 16th to Wood not understood. There can be no hostilities if no resistance is made, but am I to leave Lang's Nek in Natal territory in Boer occupation and our garrisons isolated and short of provisions, or occupy former and relieve latter?

The same day Lord Kimberley replied :

It will be essential that garrisons should be free to provision themselves and peaceful intercourse with them allowed, but we do not mean that you should march to the relief of garrisons, or occupy Lang's Nek if arrangement proceeds. Fix reasonable time within which answer must be sent by Boers.

On February 20, no telegrams of importance upon negotiations appear to have passed between London and Newcastle.

Meantime Sir Evelyn Wood, on the 19th, made a reconnaissance with cavalry in the direction of

Wakkerstroom; was absent thirty hours; swam the Buffalo twice and covered more than sixty miles of ground, but saw no sign of Boers; on the 21st he left Newcastle for Maritzburg, to superintend the organisation and movement of the second column now landing at Durban.

We have now reached an important day among the few yet remaining in our record. Here were the reinforcements, strong fighting material, bronzed with the sun and service of Indian frontier war, keen to be led against the enemy, and indignant at the bare rumour of negotiation or suspension of hostilities. There, a few miles distant, were the Boers, entrenched on the soil of Natal, barring the road that led to the garrisons they had surrounded and besieged two months ago. On the morning of the 21st Colley inspected the reinforcements, and after telling them what an honour he felt it to have the command of such a fine body of men, he paid a compliment also to the troops who had already fought under him. 'You must remember,' he is reported to have said, 'that your comrade soldiers who are now at the front have upheld the name of British soldiers.'

The letters that he wrote on this February 21 bear evidence of the conflicting considerations before him, and the grave thought with which he weighed them. Writing to the Secretary of State on this day, he further develops his objections against a settlement with the Boers on the lines suggested by the Colonial Office. After explaining in some detail the difficulties presented by any division of the Transvaal, he adds, 'Even our total withdrawal from the Transvaal would be preferable;' and later events point to the fact that

the Colonial Office ultimately came round to this view. In this letter, too, we see that the past with its failures was ever present to him. 'I cannot but perceive,' he writes, 'that my failure at Lang's Nek has added considerably—I regret to say it—to your lordship's difficulties in effecting a settlement, and that a course which might have been safe had I been successful, may now be full of danger.'⁸

Great as was the difference of mind between the Colonial Office and the Governor with regard to the future settlement of the Transvaal, it must have been still greater upon the military question. A letter on this same day to Sir Garnet Wolseley reiterates this difference :

I am now getting together a force with which I think I could command success, but the Home Government seem so anxious to terminate the contest, that I am daily expecting to find ourselves negotiating with the 'Triumvirate' as the acknowledged rulers of a victorious people; in which case my failure at Lang's Nek will have inflicted a deep and permanent injury on the British name and power in South Africa which it is not pleasant to contemplate.⁹

It was in this frame of mind that he had now to deal with the proposal of Mr. Kruger, which, as we have seen, was received on the 13th, but upon which final instructions had only reached him on the night of the 19th or early on the 20th. Lord Kimberley had telegraphed the general lines upon which the Government was ready to accept that proposal, and Colley was himself to 'fix a reasonable time within which an answer must be sent by the Boers.' He now wrote to Mr. Kruger as follows :

⁸ February 21, 1881, to Lord Kimberley.

⁹ Newcastle, February 21, 1881.

Army Headquarters, Newcastle : February 21, 1881.

Sir,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 12th instant.

In reply I am to inform you that on the Boers now in arms against Her Majesty's authority ceasing armed opposition, Her Majesty's Government will be ready to appoint a Commission with large powers who may develop the scheme referred to in Lord Kimberley's telegram of the 8th inst. communicated to you through his Honour, President Brand.

I am to add that upon this proposal being accepted within forty-eight hours, I have authority to agree to a suspension of hostilities on our part.

I have the honour, &c.

G. POMEROY-COLLEY,
Major-General Commanding Forces.

P. KRUGER, Esq.

The history of this letter will be followed in the next chapter. Later on that day I find him writing as under to Lady Colley at Maritzburg :

Sir Evelyn is just about to start down country again and I up country. I don't know if I shall have another fight this time, but at any rate I have a good fighting column and, what I care most for, a fair cavalry force.

I suppose I shall vibrate between this and Mount Prospect for some time, until our forces are more concentrated. I am not inclined to make another move until I have cavalry enough to make it decisive. Whether another move will ever be made, indeed, seems to me questionable, for the Government seem so anxious to come to terms that I expect to hear of their giving in to everything the Boers demand.

The regiments now here are certainly splendid ones, but they won't fight more gallantly than my young soldiers did at the Nek and at the Ingogo.¹

In these few words we get, I think, an exact

¹ Newcastle, February 21, 1881.

picture of Colley's mind at the moment he was about to start on his road back to Mount Prospect. He has no fixed plan for immediate operations; he is doubtful whether another move will ever be possible. At any moment he may expect to hear that the Home Government have settled with the Boers. He had read, while in Newcastle, the criticisms in the Natal newspapers on the Ingogo fight, and they seem to have drawn from him almost the first bitter words he had allowed himself to use.

The Natal papers, with their usual delight in vilifying everything English, and every one in authority, pronounce it [the fight near the Ingogo] a defeat. I wonder what they would have called it if the sides had been reversed, and after six hours' steady fighting with heavy losses I had had to report that I had made no impression on the position, and had given up the attack and drawn off my troops. Defeat would not have been a half strong enough word then. Anyhow the Boers, though they talked very big of attacking our reinforcements, &c., have thought better of any further attacks of the kind, and our communications have practically been open, and I able to come in here at pleasure and directly exercise my command ever since, instead of being in the position of Pearson at Eckowe, or a subject for prayers in churches like Roberts at Kabul. The moral effect of such a position would have been disastrous throughout the country. . . .

I am very glad to have Evelyn here, and am quite sure he will work right well with me, and it is a great comfort to know there is some one on the spot to take up the reins in case of accident, which after my experience of the last day's fighting is decidedly a contingency to be considered.²

The newspapers and his critics could see plainly enough what he had not done. They could measure the failure to take the Nek, and criticise what followed

² Newcastle, February 21, 1881, to Sir Garnet Wolseley.

at Ingogo. But they forgot to take account either of the necessity of the risk he had faced, of the many odds that were against him, or of the heroic manner in which, when these odds had proved too many for him, he had still known how to carve out of misfortune itself fresh footholds for his resolution. Every one knew the impossible that had not been done, but few could realise all that had been done, or see how different the situation might have been had a less firm hand been on the helm. True, he had been checked at Lang's Nek, and had lost many men at the Ingogo, but in no respect had honour of arms suffered, or ground been lost, or tactical position forfeited. If the Boers held him in check at Lang's Nek, his position in their front held them there too. Natal, in rear of that narrow angle between the Drakensberg and the Buffalo, was in complete tranquillity. He had throughout these anxious weeks been able to exercise his command to every purpose in Natal, and had corresponded as freely with the Home Government as though he had never quitted Maritzburg. And, still more important than all else, his action had drawn off from the beleaguered garrisons the extreme force of the Boer fighting element, and kept it concentrated at Lang's Nek for defence and not offence. All this he had done with a mere handful of men, in the face of defeat and difficulty the measure of which he alone could understand.

He had accepted the responsibility of every failure. Now, as he looked back on the record of the past two months, it may well have seemed—and justly seemed—that in their haste to show where he had failed, his critics were blind to all he had dared, and done, and

prevented. Through a long series of extraordinary and discouraging events, he had, as it were, out-marched the forces of his ill-fortune, and had now reached a point whence the promising perspective of success could be seen opening before him.

Amongst the letters written by Lady Colley from Maritzburg to her husband at the front, I find passages which are not without interest in the reflected picture they give of the changing phases of war and prospects of peace, at the moment. Colley had written after Lang's Nek that he had now taken the field force under his personal command, 'appointing no one in Deane's place.' To this his wife replied on February 15 :

. . . Though 'commanding the attack' need not, I am sure, imply anything like what Colonel Deane did, still I have little doubt that it does imply your being in a good deal of danger, and I wonder I don't want to argue against it; but I do not—I do not feel it would be possible for me to stir a finger to keep you from doing anything you think it right as a soldier to do; and as the finger would certainly be quite *inefficacious*, perhaps it is just as well !

Later, on the 24th, when the cipher messages about negotiations were passing fast over the wires, I find the following comment :

. . How these horrid ciphers have been worrying you ! I shouldn't much wonder if you shared my feelings soon, and we cleared out of this place and had our long-dreamt-of 'spree' at last. I know all I think of now is seeing your dear face again, and never as long as I live will I let myself care a rush for any such rubbish as work or success again. I have had a lesson I shall never unlearn; at least I am having it, and the final word will be mastered when the peace-at-any-price folk have gained their way in this matter. It is so nice to read your dear letters

and count, as now I am getting able to count, on having you back again before very long. . . .

Though I have been very angry and bitter at the 'peace party,' still *that* don't lower my spirits at all! And I can't help suspecting that down in uttermost recesses of my feelings into which I don't ever poke, the news of 'peace' at 'any price' would stir a joyous commotion—I should be furious, of course, and mortified, but you would be *safe*, and nothing in this world is worth anything to me in comparison with that.³

Continuing the letter to Sir Garnet Wolseley which he had begun at Newcastle, Colley added a sentence from Mount Prospect after his arrival on the 23rd, which will suffice to carry the narrative to that date and tell what had occurred in the interval.

I have just marched out to my old camp with a squadron of 15th Hussars, the 92nd Regiment, and a large convoy. I have now about six weeks' supplies of everything here, so am well off in that respect. The Boers are busy entrenching.

Things seemed to be brightening a little. He writes to his wife after reaching his old camp :

I have had telegrams a trifle more satisfactory from home. The scheme they keep talking of seems not to exist, but they are waiting for it to be evolved for them. My own impression is that the negotiations will break down on the question of guaranteeing the leaders against punishment for their rebellion. The leaders care chiefly for their own skins, and I doubt their agreeing to any terms which do not secure those, while I think the Home Government is hardly prepared to let them off scot free. However, I suppose I shall know now in a few days.⁴

'The Boers are busy entrenching.' That was the keynote to his mind at the moment. In all the letters

³ From his wife.

⁴ February 28, 1881.

of the 23rd he speaks of this fact. 'The Boers have been busy further strengthening their position during my absence,' he wrote, 'and I see a good many fresh trenches and schantzes thrown up.' These trenches looked more formidable on the sky-line than they were found to be in reality later on. The Boers seemed to be busy at the spot where the first attack had been made, on either side of the Nek itself, and especially on the slopes of the Majuba. What would be the position if, carrying these entrenchments further to the right and left, they should establish themselves permanently on the Majuba summit?

There can be no doubt that in all these days since January 28, that taking of the Nek has been in his mind. There has not been a ravine, kloof, ridge, or contour of ground in that sweep of hills visible to the north and west from the camp at Mount Prospect which over and over again he has not watched and studied. He has spoken of many ways in which it might be effected, but there is one way he has never mentioned. Up aloft to the left front as one looked to the road where it crossed the Nek, a great table-topped hill towered above all other eminences in the landscape. It rose, as the innumerable table-mountains of South Africa rise, in steep and sometimes precipitous ascents from a broad base cumbered with the ruins which earthquake had flung down from above. The summit, 6,500 feet above the level of the sea, and about 2,500 feet higher than Mount Prospect, stood directly over the Boer position at Lang's Nek. The hill, in fact, was a gigantic bastion flanking the Boer lines, but so high and apparently so inaccessible for any body of troops that the Boers, with all their knowledge of ground, had not thought it necessary to do more than place