

## GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA

wounded burghers and prisoners for a chat, after a fight had taken place. Years afterward a dinner was given him in a Free State township; when it was over mine host inquired whether he had enjoyed the affair. Botha at once recognized him as one of those wounded prisoners-of-war, correctly recalling all the facts in connexion with the incident. Dr Bok relates that once, at his office, a man asked for an interview with the Premier. The visitor was extremely genial, and even cordial; the private secretary could not place him, but did not dare to ask his name, and allowed him to enter Botha's room without an introduction. After the interview, the Premier said: "Has it escaped your memory that, four years ago, in such-and-such a district, our car broke down, and this man took us into town?" Botha remembered his name and that of his farm, colour of his horses, and other details.

Botha's motive in leaving Pretoria immediately after his appointment as Prime Minister cannot be better set out than was done in a letter from President Steyn to Merriman, dated on the day after the Conference opened, *i.e.*, April 16, 1907. Steyn wrote:

With you I agree that it would be better if Botha did not lay the loyalty butter on so very thick; I daresay he is afraid to be misjudged. I am sorry he went to London. No good will come out of it for us. He told me he is only going to listen, and will not bind us to anything. Still I am sorry he went. He consulted me, and I told him that I consider that there are many reasons for him not to go, but he must in this matter allow himself to be governed by the decision of his colleagues. In justice to him I must say that he was most anxious to go. Their main object to let him go is to get money for a land bank. Will they get it? I wonder.

This pessimism proved unjustified. Botha returned to his Colony with the promise of £5,000,000 by way of a loan, capital and interest to be guaranteed by the British Government. In other ways, too, Steyn incorrectly predicted that "no good would come out of it for us," for the visit to London greatly facilitated the unification that followed not long after.

## BOTHA AND THE 1907 CONFERENCE

*Laurier and Botha.*—It is not necessary to dwell on the Conference itself. Lord Elgin, who, as Colonial Secretary, presided, was rusted fast in the groove of a routine of antiquated 'colonial' policy, having but faint idea of the aspirations of the autonomous oversea states. Deakin of Australia, on the other hand, was the protagonist of an



BOTHA'S RETURN FROM THE CONFERENCE

(General Smuts, H. C. Hull, Johann Rissik, J. de Villiers, and E. P. Solomon)

A cartoon by A. W. Lloyd in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*

imperialism that meant the freedom and equality of all the Dominions—a term dating from this particular Conference. At the same time, he wanted them to undertake clearly formulated obligations, arising from joint responsibility for Imperial interests. Dr Jameson, the Cape Premier, endorsed the Australian view. Between Lord Elgin and Deakin stood Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who insisted on Crown authority, but refused to countenance the abandonment of

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even the slightest Dominion autonomous rights. He preferred a "union of hearts" to any system of preference or military subsidies. The ardent Australian dubbed the sober Canadian "anti-imperialist." Botha during the debates consistently supported Laurier, keeping his promise to Steyn not to commit South Africa in any way.

On one point Botha and Jameson together opposed Deakin, who wanted an Imperial Court of Appeal. The former two pleaded for a combined South African Supreme Court as a precursor to unification. Botha and Jameson had never met before. Their present contact led to a measure of mutual consideration and understanding of each other's intentions from which shortly many benefits for South Africa were destined to flow.

*Selborne and Swaziland.*—During his stay in London Botha did his utmost to obtain a retrocession of Swaziland on behalf of the successors to the South African Republic (of which the territory had been a protectorate). On several occasions he made strong representations to the Colonial Office on the subject, but without avail. Lord Selborne, who was High Commissioner for South Africa, considered a semi-independent status, on the Basutoland model, the most suitable for Swaziland. In this he was supported by Liberal negrophilists. In the Transvaal Parliament no unanimity was obtainable, the Opposition refusing to support the Government on this point; and so Botha realized the uselessness of bringing further pressure to bear. It appears, by the way, that Lord Selborne did not oppose the prospect of all native protectorates eventually being transferred to a United South Africa.

During his stay, which lasted barely a couple of weeks, Botha kept in touch with the representatives of the gold-mining interest. He undertook not to repatriate a single Chinaman without replacement by a native labourer—beyond that he refused to commit himself. In Fleet Street they made it known that he had evaded the financiers as cleverly as he had formerly kept out of Lord Kitchener's meshes. Shortly before his return home, he—together

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with Sir Starr Jameson, Sir Joseph Ward (New Zealand), and Sir Frederick Moor (Natal)—was made a privy councillor. Botha had several other honours showered on him, *e.g.*, an honorary doctor's degree at Dublin, and the freedom of Manchester as well as of Edinburgh.

As soon as the guaranteed loan arrangement was published, the Transvaal Opposition in its surprise notified its conclusion to the effect that Botha had allowed himself to be "bribed" by the Liberals in order to repatriate the Chinese immediately. They had imagined that Pretoria would only be able to find money with the aid of the financiers who were interested in the Rand. In order to be able to come to such a bribery conclusion, however, one required to be completely ignorant of the recent political struggle in the Transvaal. This reproach, repeatedly levelled at Botha in English newspapers, nevertheless continued to be heard in South Africa, in a modified form. More than once I met people who positively averred that Botha was bribed in London with a considerable sum in cash in order to promote specifically English interests! It is a sad reflection to think that the greater a libel flung at a statesman, the more easily does it find credence. Botha got full measure of slander.

## XVIII

### BOTHA AS A PRACTICAL STATESMAN

UNDENIABLY, Botha's three years as Transvaal Premier constituted a brilliant accomplishment. There had been no publicly controlled administration since 1899, the year of the Boer war—not to mention a responsible cabinet. Crown Colony government had followed the military *régime*; the bureaucracy that occupied public offices had been well-meaning but largely inefficient. The entire weight of proconsular authority had descended on the side of magnate interest. Forlorn attempts had been made to bolster up the country's condition with large amounts of borrowed money which, though meant for post-war reparation, had but seldom been spent judiciously. In the rest of South Africa as well as in the Transvaal a pall as of despair was hanging over the country in consequence of the omnipresent depression, caused by gradual reduction of the costly military system and the slow recovery of agriculture.

When, however, in 1910 the Transvaal Premier became Prime Minister of the Union, his own colony had meanwhile developed into the predominant factor in the political as well as economic position of the whole of the sub-continent. It would be childish to attribute this *tour de force* exclusively to the magic wand of Botha and his capable colleagues. Yet it was generally realized before very long that their determination—the outcome of common sense and calm deliberation—had saved the country from a dangerous pass, despite their lack of experience in administration or of high politics.

*Exit Magnate Power.*—The Pretoria Government was not slow in taking steps for the better organization of

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native recruiting for the mines. This enabled the Chinese, at the expiration of their indentures, to be repatriated without damage to the gold industry. From March 1907 until August 1910 the number of mine natives employed rose from 81,500 to 185,500. This proved Botha's contention to the effect that there was no real shortage in South Africa of unskilled labour. For the leaders of the industry the Het Volk victory meant the end of their five years' supremacy in South Africa. Most of the gold shares were held in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The shareholders' representatives were foreigners to South Africa, no less than those people themselves. It was therefore unthinkable that the gold magnates should have any goal beyond the highest possible dividends. It would be wrong to look on them as an inferior type of man, or to think that their public ethics differed from those of their compeers abroad. The violence of recent elections, both in England and the Transvaal, however, coupled with the dejection of "vote British" circles at their results, created all kinds of personal feeling between the new bosses at Pretoria and the managers of financial houses at Johannesburg, whose wings had been clipped.

Tension between the two groups was extreme. In reply to Merriman's congratulations on the political programme which had just been laid before the Transvaal Assembly Botha wrote, toward the middle of 1907: "It appears that the magnates intend taking up a very hostile attitude, and will do their best to bring about an acute crisis. Sooner or later the struggle has to come, and we desire to have the question decided once for all. If we are to have the crisis, the sooner we get through with it the better; as you say, it is no easy task to clear the moral cesspool of Johannesburg; but we intend doing our best to obtain that end. . . . The future promises well, and we have every hope of placing this sorely tried country on the road to prosperity and peace again."

That Botha's anxiety was not without good cause appears from Sir Lionel Phillips' *Reminiscences*, in which it is

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recorded that, as a result of the Transvaal elections, the Boers were jubilant, the Britishers dejected. The latter's annoyance, Sir Lionel states, was so intense that his Opposition friends in Parliament scarcely, if at all, had any social intercourse with Government members. Serious difficulties, he felt, appeared inescapable, unless a *modus vivendi* could be reached.

Merriman's "cesspool" denouncement of the Golden City was probably exaggerated; the level of post-war culture in the Transvaal does not, however, appear to have been very high. General Smuts, at least, wrote to Merriman in 1906, referring to Pretoria: "One lives here in an atmosphere which is entirely devoid of all culture, and is frankly materialistic in the worst sense."

But is not materialism the inevitable by-product of war? The goldfields did not get off any better. Toward the end of the same year Merriman received a letter from Smuts, containing the plaint: "The cosmopolitan population of the Rand, with its political apathy and want of principles, and its sordid absorption in material things, make me despair sometimes."

Merriman was able to mention in reply that Capetown's political apathy sometimes made him, too, despair. And nowhere in the world could one expect a soul-stirring epoch of refined culture as the sequel to a long and bitter war. The truth is that all those who had to live through the years immediately following the peace of 1902 in South Africa will never look back to them except with aversion.

Soon it became evident that Botha had selected the right kind of colleagues, and had been happy in the apportionment of portfolios. The Government gained the public's confidence, and relations between the capital and the Golden City began to assume a peaceful character. President Steyn, after a visit to Pretoria, wrote to Mr Merriman in August 1907:

I would just like to mention that I have come away from the Transvaal very pleased with the spirit prevailing there. . . . Notwith-

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standing their difficulties the Transvaal Ministry is doing exceedingly well. By their broad policy they have succeeded in knitting closely together all those who really have the country's interest at heart.

The same letter regretted the retention by Downing Street, now that the two colonies had autonomy, of the governors that had administered Crown colonies; these governors would, of course, tend to defend their own tradition and their own *protégés*. Merriman, the Nestor of South African politicians, judged the new Cabinet as favourably after a visit to Pretoria in November of the same year. On his return to the Cape he did not conceal the good impression made on him by Botha and his colleagues. He had a conversation with Botha, lasting the whole of a forenoon, which left him "immensely impressed with" the Transvaal Premier.

In those days Merriman, who was sixty-six years old, was rather friendly with Botha, who was twenty years his junior. They had only recently met, but appeared to be on terms of intimacy. A few months previously, Botha had acknowledged a message of congratulation from Capetown—on the Het Volk victory—by commencing his letter: "My dear Merriman." This *rapprochement* was, alas, not destined to be of a permanent nature. For years the older man continued to doubt the sincerity of Botha's doctrine to the effect that the maintenance of the Imperial connexion was in South Africa's interest for the time being. In May 1927 General Smuts made the following statement in the Union Assembly, during the flag debate:

Mr Merriman, in later years, admitted to me that he had doubted General Botha and myself. He used to think that, in the hour of trial, we should not stand by the policy preached by us before the Great War. Well, the test came in 1914, and the great majority of Dutch-speaking South Africans remained staunch.

A striking example, this, of the almost hopeless prospects of Botha's fellowship gospel—even with people of the intellectual Merriman type.

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President Steyn's criticism of the ill-advised retention of Crown Colony governors was well founded. Lord Selborne, though without his predecessor's autocratic manner, had the mental attitude of one upholding superior authority in a vanquished country. He found it hard to identify himself with his new status of coadjutor in a 'responsible' system of government. It has already been recorded that he conferred an Upper House majority on the party that had won scarcely one-third of the Assembly seats. In the beginning it required all Botha's tact to reconcile his Governor to the changed condition of affairs. When the Cabinet resolved to reduce the, extremely expensive, constabulary—instituted in order to cow the countryside—to an ordinary police body of a size commensurate with its duties, Lord Selborne showed himself disinclined to assent. The Premier was forced formally to hint at the possibility of his resignation, before the Governor changed his mind.

*Education Act and Land Bank.*—Educationally, the Transvaal of 1907 was behindhand. General Smuts undertook the duty of reorganizing elementary education. Within a short period he had an Act on the statute book introducing free primary schools, and embracing at the same time equal rights for both official languages. Unlike Switzerland, the Transvaal is not inhabited by compact linguistic groups. English-speaking people all over the country are next-door neighbours to Dutch Afrikaners. These vie with each other as regards sensitiveness on the subject of their own particular language rights. It was consequently a highly delicate task to elaborate a system that combined practicability with an absence of offensive compulsion. The Education Act of 1907 is generally regarded as a fine piece of legislation; to the Transvaal it proved a blessing. General Smuts once told me that the inspiration had been Botha's; he deserved an equal share of the credit with Smuts, who emphasized that Botha, though not a scholar and ignorant of technical aspects of education, was all for good and cheap schooling. The older genera-

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tion, he used to say, could only be saved by tremendous efforts, and therefore everything should be done in order to educate the children at least.

In charge of Agriculture, Botha in 1907 sent a number of young men to Europe and America so that the knowledge gained in those countries might enable them to become instructors to their own people. In the year following the National Convention agreed to Botha's proposal that, on Union taking effect, elementary education should provisionally remain in the hands of provincial authorities.

The country districts needed two other things: a credit system, superior to the one available in our part of the world then, and liquidation of Repatriation debts, by which the efforts of many farmers to rehabilitate themselves were handicapped. Botha's offer of assistance to the Milner *régime* in connexion with the organization of relief in the districts ruined by the war had not been accepted. Although started with the best of intentions, Repatriation had ended in dismal and costly failure. Many people had been debited with the price of cattle that had either never reached them or had proved quite useless. The new Government was able, without much difficulty, to induce Parliament at Pretoria to ratify a liberal policy of writing-off.

More numerous were the objections to the Land Bank Bill, the Opposition urging that it was inspired solely by party considerations. As long ago as during the final stages of the Boer war Botha had frequently discussed with his staff officers the desirability of providing better facilities for agricultural credit. The Transvaal Land Bank, which afterward was enlarged to a Union institution, became a complete and great success; to-day it is an important and salutary factor in our public economy. A further measure for the encouragement of husbandry was the fixing of a flat rate by rail and sea—*i.e.*, between any Transvaal railway station and Western European ports—of 2s. 6d. per ton for mealies, which had the effect of soon making this cereal into one of the chief exports.

The Sheep Division—called into being by Botha—of

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the Department of Agriculture soon did good work; Transvaal wool made a name for itself on the world market. Botha was heart and soul with Dr (Sir Arnold) Theiler in his veterinary research, which made the Onderstepoort Laboratory famous in every civilized country. The investigation of irrigation schemes was encouraged. After Union he retained his interest in State initiative regarding agricultural matters, putting through a national botanical survey.

In 1909, on the eve of amalgamation, the Transvaal was the only British South African colony with a surplus in the Exchequer. By concluding a contract, binding themselves to pay for the erection of a vast and palatial complex of government offices, destined for Union departments, the Botha Cabinet wisely ensured that the compromise by which Pretoria became the administrative capital should become a living reality, without undue delay.

Was the Transvaal satisfied with its Botha *régime*? It would be almost foolish to ask such a question. And yet we got, by degrees, a class of people who were not yet prepared to appreciate the departure of the Chinese, or the fact that the incubus of Repatriation debts had been taken from round their necks! They began to crave the complete restoration of pre-war conditions, wondering why Botha, who prided himself on taking the bull by the horns, took so much notice of the "English." Men who did not bear his burdens, and could not fathom his political ideals, invented the word *papbroek* (invertebrate; cowardly indifferentist) for the express purpose of underlining their own superior brand of patriotism, whenever they used the epithet.

## XIX

### BOTHA AND KING EDWARD

THE most spectacular incident during the three years of Botha's *régime* in the Transvaal was undoubtedly the presentation to the Crown of the gems cut from the famous Cullinan diamond. Found on January 26, 1905, in the Premier Mine, the stone belonged, as to more than one-half its proceeds, to the State in accordance with statute. Its tremendous size, originally 3025 carats, made it unsaleable. Experts put its insurable value at £250,000, and the Crown Colony Government did not know what to do with it. In England it was suggested that a public subscription should be opened throughout the Empire, so that the gem might be offered to the King-Emperor. The Botha Cabinet decided to offer the unique find to Edward VII. His Majesty was no friend of the Boers. He had never disguised his sympathies with Mr Rhodes. Afterward he favoured Lord Milner. It was known that Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman's post-war policy in South Africa was far from inspiring him with enthusiasm. One must admit that many influential circles in England shared his views in that respect. Hence there was every prospect that an early unification of South Africa under Dutch control would prove even more unpopular. Mr Balfour had 'fashed himself' at the very idea of Botha's promise, made in 1907, of returning to London within five years in such a cause!

In Pretoria it was realized that the King should at least be without any occasion for suspecting the loyalty of the Transvaal. Moreover, a pleasant surprise for the British nation was considered desirable, seeing that Westminster would shortly be asked to provide that Transvaal, which was rather hard up at the time, with a development loan. When

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the Opposition in the Assembly was informally sounded, not the slightest joy at this overwhelming proof of tangible devotion was manifested! In fact, its members did not feel called upon to lend support. They asked that the presentation should be delayed, under the pretence that the country was suffering an economic depression and many redundant officials were being retrenched.

On August 16, 1907, however, the Premier gave notice in the Assembly of a motion to offer the diamond as a gift to King Edward VII, his heirs and successors, "as an expression of the sentiment of loyalty and affection on the part of the people of the Transvaal toward his Majesty's person and throne."

The debate began on August 19. On behalf of the Progressive Party, Sir George Farrar and Sir Percy Fitzpatrick opposed on the ground of "inexpediency." Labour members, as well as Generals De la Rey and Smuts, supported the motion. Adv. Beyers (the present Minister of Mines for the Union) also spoke in favour. Mr Henry Lindsay, an Opposition whip, did likewise. Nor did Sir Abe Bailey and Sir W. Van Hulsteyn, prominent Progressives, support their party's hostile attitude.

The motion was agreed to, the voting being forty-two to nineteen. Botha's reasonable anticipation of a unanimous resolution was thwarted by the defiance of the very men who, in South Africa as well as overseas, posed as the guardians of British prestige in our country, *partibus infidelium*.

One can easily understand that among the Premier's own people there were those who, not understanding his action, traduced it, and went about wagging their heads about the gift. As far as one can gauge, the presentation produced the germ of the suspicion engendered among the people—and afterward growing rapidly—to the effect that Botha was on the high road to anglicization. What amazed the average person, however, was that the leading Johannesburg loyalists opposed the step almost to a man.

An unexpectedly early reward awaited Botha's gracious gesture. On the evening of the same day, August 19, the

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Commons approved (by a vote of 199 against 62) the guaranteed loan of £5,000,000 to the Transvaal, where the amount was urgently required. In the course of his speech on the Bill Mr Asquith, on behalf of the Government, disarmed invidious criticism by stating that the Transvaal was nowise bound to repatriate the Chinese. The Commons Opposition had insinuated that Botha had allowed



THE TRANSVAAL LOAN GUARANTEED BY GREAT BRITAIN

A cartoon by A. W. Lloyd in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*

himself to be bribed by this generous financial treatment into adopting an implacable anti-Chinese policy; Mr Asquith laid stress on the fact that the General remained as free as ever.

The incident led to considerable discord and many repercussions in South Africa, but King Edward no longer regarded the wise Imperial statesmanship of his Liberal advisers with aversion. A large slice of the £5,000,000 loan was earmarked for Land Bank capital. It is a rather remarkable fact that several ardent 'patriots,' who took no

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pains to hide their disgust at Botha's demonstration of 'English' loyalty, never hesitated for a moment in applying for a Land Bank loan.

The King was graciously pleased to accept the uncommon present. In January 1908 the Cullinan was handed to the well-known Amsterdam firm of diamond cutters, Asscher Brothers, in the presence of the Colonial Secretary. The stone as an undivided whole, it appeared, was unsuitable for the polishing process. On February 10 the exciting operation of 'cleaving' took place. Experts as well as a representative of his Majesty attended. The result was a splendid success. The largest fragment was one of nearly 2000 carats; the next one weighed over 1000 carats, not to mention the smaller fry. In November of the same year the whole parcel was delivered in London as polished gems, there to be finely handled by jewellers. The 'pendeloque,' Cullinan I, weighs 516 carats, and the square brilliant, Cullinan II, 309 carats. The next heaviest gem, the Nizam, weighs 277 carats.

During 1909 several prominent Transvaal politicians visited London in connexion with the passage of the South Africa Act through Parliament. They were invited to lunch at Buckingham Palace. The Cullinan diamonds had been handed over only recently in their final ornamentation of Crown jewels. After lunch the King and Queen called General Botha, General Smuts, and Mr H. C. Hull aside for a view of the gems. After these had been duly admired Mr Hull (who stood well with King Edward) suggested that the other Transvaal guests—Sir George Farrar and Sir Percy Fitzpatrick—should be asked in as well. The King knew that these two gentlemen had acted as Opposition spokesmen against the presentation. His Majesty keenly enjoyed Mr Hull's mischievous fun, and so both oppositionists were summoned to witness the success of Botha's *beau geste*. They bore up as best they could against their rather awkward situation!

*Unforeseen Expenditure.*—The cleaving, polishing, and setting of the stones had cost as much as £35,000, for which

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no appropriation existed. Neither the King nor Mr Lloyd George, as representing his Majesty's Government, was keen on paying the amount. A position of painful uncertainty arose; fortunately the Transvaal Parliament voted the amount under the heading of unforeseen expenditure. This time the Opposition forgot to criticize; hon. members even refrained from insisting on detailed information!

It would be possible to pen a piquant tale about the vicissitudes of the Cullinan diamond.

## XX

### BOTHA AND UNIFICATION

**T**HANKS to the change of government in England toward the end of 1905, the constitutional assimilation of the four British autonomous territories in South Africa had become a question of practical politics. The new order revived an old dream: the sub-continent under one single government! All previous attempts had been the work of amateurs. Now, for the first time, the portents appeared auspicious. Until the moment when all four colonies were self-governing, closer union was out of the question, as Botha had pointed out to Chamberlain in 1902. Hardly had Campbell-Bannerman taken over in London when Merriman wrote Steyn for his opinion on the scheme to hold a "National Convention." Steyn was not in a hurry. Early in January 1906 he replied:

The leaders are all so busy that they cannot go about to wake up the country. I have seriously thought to go round myself, but my health is poor; and a wrong construction will be placed upon it, and may hamper our friends in England.

Obviously, no initiative was to be looked for from that direction. Shortly after his return from England, and after the repeal of the Lyttelton constitution, Smuts wrote, in April 1906, to Merriman—then leader of the Opposition in the Cape—after having consulted Botha:

There are great questions ahead of us, and we are anxious to have the advantage of your experience and insight in public affairs. And more and more in future those who mean well by South Africa will have to consult for the common good, and try to save the country from its new friends.

In May, when the grant of responsible government to

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the new colonies was no longer in doubt, Smuts wrote to Merriman: "It seems to me that in federation or unification lies the solution of our and your troubles." He saw in it the best means of countering the forces that were ignoring South African interests. Unexpectedly, help came from another quarter. Toward the end of 1906 Sir Starr Jameson, Cape Premier, sent a minute to his Governor, recommending an attempt at mutual *rapprochement*. This was the first open move on the new road to unification. Lord Selborne received a copy of the document and published, in January 1907, an able memorandum—by Messrs Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr—strongly praising closer union on the ground that, without it, South Africa would not lend itself to efficient administration. This memorandum greatly impressed the country, forcing the problem into the arena of public discussion. Lord Selborne's enthusiasm undoubtedly promoted speedy unification and has caused lasting gratitude for his valuable help.

Obviously, the new governments at Pretoria and Bloemfontein would have to be in the saddle before anything could be done. The exact nature of the tie that was to be established between the four colonies continued to be highly problematical; Rhodesia was not forgotten either. Natal and the Free State were shy, and usually referred to federation. Jameson did the same on his return from England to Capetown in June 1907. A month later, when Botha had returned as well, Smuts—who, in those days, was in constant touch with his Premier—wrote to Merriman:

The problem of federation is a great thing for our political intellects to wrestle with, and will lift South Africa out of the rut of selfish commercialism, in which it is now stagnating.

*Unification, Pure and Simple.*—He opposed "a custom and railway parliament; it won't work," for the four parliaments would never give up the control of their own railroads and customs. This was the first indication that Pretoria had resolved to aim at nothing less than union, without qualification. It felt, nevertheless, that initiative

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ought to be left to the oldest South African legislature. So it happened that on July 23, 1907, Mr F. S. Malan, on behalf of the Afrikaner Bond, moved in Parliament at Capetown that Government should approach the Governments of the other autonomous British colonies with a view to considering the desirability of provisional steps for the promotion of the Union of South Africa. Jameson seconded, and the motion was carried *nem. con.*

In London Jameson had learned to know and appreciate Botha's views. President Steyn during his visit to Pretoria in August 1907 realized the success of the young Cabinet's administrative methods; he wrote to Merriman:

Botha and Smuts seem to favour unification. In fact, the more one thinks about it, the more you become convinced that that is the only kind of Union we ought to accept.

Steyn's adherence to the unification doctrine was a precious gain to Pretoria. The Free State generally remained 'lukewarm' and *difficile* for a long time; these are Merriman's terms. General Smuts made hay while the sun was shining. He circulated among legislators a "strictly confidential" memorandum in favour of a Union constitution, placing local administrations under the authority of a central legislature. He was averse to amateur tinkering, and was quite abreast of up-to-date imperial as well as colonial relations. While these preparations were going on without fuss, Smuts informed Merriman that an "ugly spirit of separatism," resembling the pre-war one, was manifesting itself in the Transvaal; he wanted more speed in the unification movement. In Johannesburg, moreover, there were those who feared that thorough amalgamation of the four Dominions would reduce the mining leaders to political insignificance. At Pretoria a group of junior politicians, found especially among legal practitioners, agitated for the heightened independence of every colony. Their argument was that this would be the best means of defeating England's alleged schemes for the further exploitation of South Africa. Apart from these

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groups public interest was limited, but in the main it was agreed that while inverting political power in the Afrikaners, unification would secure prosperity to the country in general.

Smuts found Merriman sympathetic to his desire for making a move. In February 1908 the latter became Prime Minister of the Cape as successor to Jameson; on the 24th he wrote to Smuts:

I quite agree as to the necessity of pushing this question of Union. If we three States—Transvaal, Orange River Colony, and Cape—insist, we can carry the thing by a *coup de main*, while, if we wait, I can quite foresee that it may be a very long business; in the interval we may be crushed by the financial situation.

A few weeks later he wrote to Steyn: "I endorse the Transvaal feeling that it is now or never." The merit, or otherwise, of preferring unification to federation therefore belongs to the Transvaal, whose attitude precipitated a decision.

*The Question of £ s. d.*—Merriman's alarm regarding finance was due to uncertainty regarding his railway revenue—from the paying through-traffic to the Transvaal—and the future of the customs union that had existed between the four Dominions since 1903. Cape statesmen wanted the carrying trade *via* their ports to yield such profits as would compensate for the deficit on non-paying branch lines. During the 1908 election Jameson did not scruple to boast that he had induced Botha not only to maintain the customs union—which was disliked in the Transvaal—but to give him a proper share of the carrying trade, so that the low rates on Cape agricultural lines might be kept in force, at the expense of the interior!

Natal was jealous of Portuguese Delagoa Bay, which did its best to increase its through-traffic to the goldfields, giving in exchange its Mozambique natives for the Rand mines. The intensity with which many Cape and Natal patriots abhorred, and still abhor, that 'foreign' harbour for being the nearest to the Witwatersrand cannot be ignored as an important element in South African politics. Trans-

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vaal, as a matter of fact, was the bullock, pulling the entire assets of the South African family, every member of which claimed a huge slice for himself. Botha was well on the way toward an arrangement with the Portuguese, ensuring the proper working of the harbour at Lourenço Marques. The consummation of a Transvaal-Portuguese *rapprochement*, with Delagoa Bay as the pivot, was prevented by the tragic death of Don Carlos at Lisbon, and the speed with which the preparations for South African union progressed.

The doctrine of sublimated selfishness, a very tempting one to the Transvaal—which had disposal of ample revenue from a prosperous mining industry—was rejected by the Botha Cabinet, imbued as it was with Pan-South African sentiment. In order to expose more clearly the administrative skein, which became worse tangled as time went on, the four Governments called an Intercolonial Conference. It was assured from the first that this would prove a failure, and would therefore recommend unification as the last way out of an untenable situation. Deliberations began on May 4, 1908. On the very next day members recorded their anticipated *non possumus* on the subject of the establishment of a customs and railway agreement, acceptable to the four parties concerned. With a fine gesture of despair they resolved to recommend a “National Convention,” in order to push through the only remedy: closer union.

The collapse of the Conference created such a profound impression in legislative circles that the four parliaments fell over one another in their eagerness to approve the proposed convention, and to elect delegates, aggregating thirty. Botha had every reason to be satisfied. So had Merriman, for, although a parliamentarian to the backbone, he was not the man to shy at a *coup de main*! Steyn gradually converted his Free Staters to the doctrine of unification, and worked himself up to such a pitch of enthusiasm that, in a speech, he said: “Union must be as close, as economical and as beneficial as it can be made; it must leave as little loophole as possible for secession at any time.” With the

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eye of faith he saw "all frontiers wiped out within a few years, all division melt away, all races amalgamate into one great nation."

One of Steyn's motives in recommending unconditional unity was the threat of an Anglo-German conflict. These were his own words: "I realized that, if we perpetuated the division into separate colonies, serious results might easily follow." In his transports, Steyn forgot that other leading Free Staters persisted in the dogma that an isolated Free State was predestined to maintain a North-South equilibrium, and therefore to act the part of *tertius gaudens*.

*Off to Durban.*—In Natal it could not be said that everything in the garden was lovely. Public servants and the highbrows were opposed to union; a federal drawing-together was the limit to which they were prepared to go. The Premier, Sir Frederick Moor, who was not only a farmer himself, but had the rural bias in politics, was *persona grata* at Pretoria. Botha appreciated him as a "good South African," despite the anxiety caused by the Zulu rebellion in 1906. Sir Frederick's management on that occasion had been such as to threaten not only Natal but the whole of South Africa with widespread revolt. Because the Natalians required a great deal of galvanizing into sympathy with the closer union movement, it was decided to hold the first sittings of the Convention in Durban, their charming port. The whole of official South Africa lived in optimistic anticipation. As the national poet, Jan Celliers, sang:

Strong voices roar,  
A song resounds,  
from South to farthest North;  
from East to West, from shore to shore:  
We meet and shake each other's hand,  
our strength will forge a common land,  
and, steeled, we venture forth.

The Press, too, stirred, but with exceeding caution. The common people remained rather coy: closer union had been talked about so often; and reality was not yet!

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A few weeks before the Convention opened, Botha sat down at Rusthof, and wrote to Merriman:

“The difficulties with which we shall have to contend at the Convention will certainly be very great, but I do not think that they will prove unsurmountable. This I am convinced of, however, that before we attain closer union, we shall have a great number of ‘Handsappers.’ I am building on the manliness and broadmindedness of the majority of those who will sit on the Convention, to save us from petty and narrow-minded political principles. I think that we should all do our utmost now to inspire the people of South Africa with a South African spirit. I am afraid that our work at Durban will be hampered by the heat, but I suppose that we shall be able to ‘make a plan,’ as the hotnot said.”

For once, Botha’s presentiment was unduly pessimistic.

## XXI

### BOTHA AS A FATHER OF THE CONSTITUTION

SIR HENRY DE VILLIERS, Chief Justice of Cape Colony, presided over the thirty-two delegates (including a couple of Rhodesians) who met in Durban Town Hall on October 12, 1908. It was a hot, oppressive summer. Britain, in order to mark its sympathetic interest in the proceedings, had sent a couple of warships; with minute guns and fireworks these added lustre to the event. Some of the delegates—it could hardly be otherwise—had been selected because their co-operation was indispensable in shaping public opinion the right way, although they lacked administrative experience, and had never worried their heads much about economic or constitutional problems.

The Transvaalers soon proved to be better equipped than any other delegation: theirs were the ablest experts, and they brought the most accurate statistics. General Smuts was an easy first as an expert on older as well as modern imperial constitutional questions, also in regard to intercolonial legislation and jurisprudence. Mr H. C. Hull overwhelmingly mastered the financial and transport questions affecting amalgamation of the four existing systems.

Botha was not a specialist in any particular legislative or administrative branch. He had, however, reflected deeply and carefully on the best working method of making the Convention into a human as well as business success. Before very long he gave a welcome lead to the Assembly, many of whose members barely knew each other by sight.

No good purpose would be served by any calculation as to the respective contributions made by each of the thirty-three to the final result. Botha, while carefully abstaining from enforcing his own desires—once or twice a motion

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introduced by him was negatived—managed to make his influence felt all the time. Originally he applied himself to the elimination of mutual suspicion and parochial obstinacy; afterward he was busy removing the few remaining, seemingly insuperable, obstacles in the way of unity, *e.g.*, the choice of a capital. Among all the members he was one of the few who could think and feel perfectly on the South African plane.

“*Like Doves.*”—The sittings had lasted a few weeks when Jameson, chief champion of ‘English’ interests, wrote to his brother Sam:

Generally we are going better than I expected. All crooning like doves. Botha is the great factor, and plays a capital game of bridge. He, Steyn, and I are great pals—so the world wags. . . . Beastly, smuggy, wet weather all the time we have been there. Probably won’t get home till next year.

And on November 6:

Botha continues the most satisfactory and far the biggest of the lot. Of course there is the slimness to look out for, but he has less of it than any of his *confrères*, and far less than our pseudo-English. . . . Steyn, too, is quite a surprise, and he and Botha are the two factors for a decent British settlement. Strange but true. Funny that my main pals to get things are Botha, Steyn, and perhaps Christian De Wet.

Talking of “slimness,” it was by no means curious that members who were strangers to each other should at first have been filled with suspicion as soon as a man opened his mouth in order to state a view or propose a resolution. Botha knew how to dispel mistrust, and even to suggest approval, by his enviable charm of manner and his way of putting a proposition. One of the delegates once said to me: “He has a disarming personality.” If union was to come off, it certainly was necessary to “disarm” Natal and the Free State.

Durban’s summer climate did not prevent the materialization of the right Convention atmosphere, as by magic. No one but Botha was the good fairy. He not only preached moderation, but practised it consistently. He assisted the gradual victory of the principle of unqualified unification,

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which was made acceptable largely thanks to the Transvaalers' accommodating attitude. It was they who, owing to the economic importance of their country, carried the key to the position in their pockets. Even the phlegmatic Durbanites were fascinated by Botha. Nearly all the Natal delegates lived in the country. The Premier, Moor, who owed his reputation to his knowledge of native affairs and his debating powers, was not among Durban's darlings. Botha, on the other hand, succeeded in winning the town's affection with Cæsarian speed. At a municipal banquet in honour of the delegates he related how, less than ten years ago, he had ridden at the head of his commando to the outskirts of Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, and how Commandant-General Piet Joubert had with difficulty restrained his (Botha's) ambition to "eat bananas by the seaside!" This reminiscence of the Boer war did not offend the guests at all; on the contrary, they were greatly amused. Durban is the first city that erected a statue to the memory of Botha, the peacemaker *par excellence*.

On the second day of the Convention, October 13, Merriman moved a resolution affirming that in the interests of South Africa's prosperity and progress it was desirable to unite the several British colonies under one Government into a legislative Union under the British Crown, the existing Dominions to become Provinces. The discussion lasted two days; the motion passed unanimously. Unification had easily gained the day, notwithstanding the federalist proclivities of Rhodes, Hofmeyr, Jameson, and (originally) Steyn—not even to mention the Natalians. Botha did not intervene in the debate until late. The Transvaal, he said, possessed great wealth, but longed for one flag, one people, one God. It was the duty of delegates to give a lead, instead of sniffing round for any indication that might come their way as to the trend of public opinion. The gold industry as well as all other Transvaal assets would be pooled. The Transvaal was prepared to trust the rest of South Africa, satisfied to depend for its future on a parliament representative of the whole of the sub-continent.

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Sir George Farrar, leader of the Transvaal Opposition, mentioned the fact that Briton and Boer had come together thanks to the sensible, tolerant attitude of Generals Botha and Smuts. On this occasion they and he stood shoulder to shoulder, working for the unification of the country. Mr F. S. Malan, leader of the Cape Afrikanders, drew attention to the remarkable feature of the movement for closer union, consisting in the fact that it had originated in both new colonies.

This was encouraging; thus were soothed the fears of mighty Transvaal, as entertained by other members of the Convention, and their former predilection in favour of federation vanished. It was recognized that circumstances differed from those in America and Australia, in that only two among the South African States had a seaboard, the others being cut off from the ocean. This factor, even apart from other considerations, rendered it imperative that amalgamation should take the form of absolute union.

*Convention and Compromise.*—The Convention succeeded in finishing its task within three months and a half. The session was transferred to Capetown in November, and lasted till February 1909. The legislative result was necessarily a compromise between the divergent, innate convictions of the two races. The first bone of contention had been the franchise which, outside Cape Colony, belonged to whites only. Several motions were tabled; after a long debate Botha managed to get them referred to a sub-committee, which was instructed to produce a draft resolution. The deliberations that followed were fruitless, until on November 4 the Convention adopted Botha's scheme, maintaining the general principle of a purely white franchise (although existing rights of non-whites in Cape Colony were guaranteed). This was a victory for the Afrikaner view. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon ideas won, in that party government was decided upon as against the Boer tradition of an executive elected by popular vote and independent of a parliamentary majority.

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The choice of a capital city produced the greatest difficulty of all. The national interest demanded that it should be situated in the interior. South Africa well knew by experience that a prosperous interior is a *sine qua non* to the economic health of the entire sub-continent. Capetown, however, was in the throes of commercial depression in 1908; desperate interested parties wrung from Cape delegates the promise that the irreducible minimum on which they would insist was the establishment of Parliament at the foot of Table Mountain. This was at first not an acceptable solution to the other delegates. It looked as if British South Africa's closer union would unexpectedly be shipwrecked on the humiliating rock of the capital *impasse*. On December 9, 1908, Botha formally moved in the plenary sitting of the Convention: "It is desirable to agree on a capital."

The motion was carried, and the next day Abraham Fischer, of the Orange Free State, moved that the procedure to be followed in the choice of a capital be reported upon by a Commission, to consist of the President and one member from each delegation nominated by the respective Premiers.

This motion was also carried, and the Commission was composed of Sir Henry de Villiers, General Hertzog (Orange Free State), Mr J. W. Sauer (Cape), Mr Hyslop (Natal), and General Botha. It did not carry the matter any further, and the end of January was approaching. Everything had been settled, except the capital wrangle, which appeared to remain stationary. It was almost a tragi-comedy!

On January 30 Merriman put forward the idea of a dual capital. Botha supported. Mr Hyslop, in the course of debate, moved that Maritzburg be selected. This was negatived. Mr Hull suggested they should build a brand-new city somewhere on the banks of the Vaal. Mr Jagger wanted to let the electorate pick one of the existing capitals by referendum. President Steyn's solution was to saddle the first Union Parliament with the problem.

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Finally, on February 2, 1909, General Smuts—in consultation with Botha—moved to insert in the Constitution that Capetown would be the legislative, and Pretoria the administrative, capital, and this was agreed.

This compromise was the price the country paid for obtaining unification without being faced at the outset with a hopeless problem. The next day the Convention adjourned, and very soon the results were published, to be finally dealt with, first by the four parliaments in South Africa and definitely by the Parliament at Westminster.

Convention members were bound to secrecy, and until the last they faithfully observed this. More than once I had tried, as a journalist, to get something out of Botha on some special point or other. Always in vain! On February 2, however, when the final, decisive deliberation had run its course, and the obligation of silence no longer existed, Botha wrote me a hasty note from Capetown:

“To-morrow, after signing the draft Constitution, we break up. The eight Transvaal delegates have done their best, and were unanimous all along the line. We did not approve of everything, but, taking all things together, are satisfied. I think the Constitution is a workable one; it will soon be published. We ask your help in order to explain, and recommend, it to the public. If you do not see your way to support us, do not commit yourself until you have spoken to either Smuts or myself. I feel convinced, however, that you will back us up in order to have Union, and to establish a South African nationality. The work was hard; we are feeling done up. After a lot of trouble we decided to make Pretoria the seat of a united government, with Parliament sitting at Capetown. You will see, therefore, that Pretoria and the Transvaal are greatly privileged. This compromise is as much as we could obtain. Let us honestly support the covenant; it is an honourable understanding.”

In order to understand this letter fully one has to remember that the Convention consisted of five groups of delegates from five independent Dominions, including Rhodesia.

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Often the private opinions of some member had to be made to fit in with those of his Dominion colleagues. On some cardinal point, as, for instance, language equality, the English-speaking delegates as a body (without respect of Dominion) were animated by the same feeling; this also applies to the Dutch-speaking members. The eight Transvaal delegates, after a while, stood together on all points, thanks to Botha inspiring them with confidence in the absolute reliability of his political friends in connexion with the latter's intention never to abuse the probable control by the Dutch of the political development of United South Africa. Mr Henry Lindsay, one of the eight, wrote a letter to *The Volkstem* in 1927 in the course of which he says:

It soon became plain that, unless English- and Dutch-speaking members mutually agreed to trust each other implicitly, making equal rights in every way and respect for each other's traditions and national feeling the basis of negotiation, it would be mere waste of time to proceed. I was one of the English-speaking members, and did not belong to the Government party. Sir G. Farrar and Sir P. Fitzpatrick were the other Transvaal Opposition delegates. Several times, when negotiations were on the point of breaking down, owing to the lack of guarantees for the rights, traditions, and feelings of the English section, Generals Botha and Smuts appealed to me, as an Afrikaner born, to move my fellow-delegates from the Transvaal regarding these matters, so that they might be satisfied with the honourable promises and good faith of the Afrikaans-speaking section of the people. To those appeals I responded. I persuaded them, and not against their own inclination either, but cheerfully they assured me of their confidence. From that moment mutual faith was the basis of further negotiation and of the successful result.

This valuable information explains Botha's meaning in his letter of February 2 in referring to the draft Constitution as an "honourable understanding." The satisfaction it radiates compares favourably with Botha's pessimistic mood just prior to the Convention. He called the document a "covenant" and an "honourable understanding." It is clear that he saw in it the ardently desired instrument

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for the success of his endeavour, since Vereeniging, to promote British-Dutch co-operation. In 1907 he was able to boast of the Transvaal and Free State autonomy. To Balfour's rather tart, "Well, Botha, you have done it. What will come of it?" he had replied with the almost arrogant assurance that, in five years' time, he would return to England in order to put through South African Union. Balfour then exclaimed curtly, "The thing is impossible, is incredible." In less than two years' time the incredible and impossible had come to pass.

Formal completion of the political unification, over which so many statesmen had racked their brains, was a matter of but a few months now! Is it, then, too much to suppose that February 2 was perhaps one of the most beautiful days in Botha's life?

The Constitution was the child of sincere co-operation between the representatives of both sections of the people. The Dutch in those days predominated numerically and were likely to predominate politically, if keeping together. The British section was impoverished, as far as political power goes. It had lost its privileged position of some half a dozen years previously with remarkable quickness, once the gold magnates had been driven from their commanding citadel. The English section, by joining with their eyes open, and working together in obtaining a settlement that apparently conferred the power of government on Dutch-speaking South Africa in perpetuity, showed an amount of South African spirit that no one has a right ever to forget.

*Public Opinion.*—As far as the draft Constitution itself is concerned, this, it is true, was the product of a hole-and-corner meeting of a couple of dozen politicians—Merriman had spoken of a *coup de main*—rather than the outcome of a clearly formulated popular aspiration. The ordinary, average individual must work hard for a living; not for him the academic speculations on fiscal or constitutional dogma, however interesting these might be! The public at large did not prefer union to federation, any more than it



THE UNION BUILDINGS, PRETORIA

*Photo E. N. A.*

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languished for large provincial or municipal entities, rather than for small ones. People felt grateful to the Convention for having given South Africa a pleasant surprise in the shape of the mutual forbearance and determination of its members.

With childlike faith the nation began to hope for the early disappearance of red-tape of officialdom and the abolition of so many flashy legislatures; consequently it felt sanguine as to the coming reduction in public expenditure and in taxation! Delegates' neglect of the opportunity to get Rhodesia to join the Union was hardly noticed. This failure, however, is not least among the reproaches to which the thirty-three prominent South Africans exposed themselves, A.D. 1909.

Nevertheless, everyone, except a small group of politicians—who had made up their minds not to allow themselves to be convinced—was pleased with the prospect of the coming change. It was regarded as, and turned out to be, an improvement. Botha without delay visited almost the whole of the Transvaal. Practically everywhere he evoked unanimous endorsement of the draft Constitution. The journey fatigued him so much that he had to recuperate at Rusthof for a few weeks. In April the parliaments of the Cape, Free State, and the Transvaal met. The draft was ratified; Natal held a referendum, of which the upshot was the same. Only the legislators of Cape Colony formulated a few amendments, to be discussed without delay by another Convention meeting.

South Africa, constitutionally, was one at last. It took years before the Union welded its fragments into a vital whole. This process proved a much more painful one than most people in 1909 had any idea of. And at the time of writing it has not yet been completed by any means.

At the conclusion of the Boer war it was stated that, after the struggle of a century between the Boers and the Empire, the first real peace treaty had been signed at Vereeniging, and not before. The 1909 Constitution is the first spontaneous act of real political identification as

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between Dutch- and English-speaking South Africa. To render this consummation possible the transcendent inspiration of a great man was necessary. Our country was fortunate in the possession of such a man in the person of Louis Botha, and at the exact moment.

When it was all over, he did his best in order that the British nation might share the satisfaction South Africa was experiencing at the time. To the *Times* he gave a message for publication, expressing the desire that King and country might realize that the people of South Africa had shown themselves worthy of the trust reposed in them on the grant of responsible government, and trusting that they would give their goodwill to the young nation that had just come into being.

## XXII

### BOTHA AND ASQUITH

THE birth in February 1909 of a Union Constitution did not call forth any jubilation among those for whom it was destined. The parliaments of South Africa and Westminster ratified it without any show of enthusiasm. The Natal referendum ended in a three-to-one majority in favour. It was only in Capetown that serious bickering arose in Government circles, Jan Hofmeyr blocking the passing of the draft. Merriman, supported by Mr F. S. Malan and Sir Starr Jameson, worked for ratification. Hofmeyr managed to get some of the amendments he advocated passed for submission to a final Convention, fixed for May in Bloemfontein. His agitation was specially concerned with the provision of small, one-member constituencies, instead of large, three-member ones.

In view of these difficulties, Botha wrote Merriman a letter from Rusthof in the middle of April; except the first three words it was in Afrikaans, which the Cape Premier understood, and ran as follows:

MY DEAR MERRIMAN,

I notice your upper lip has been sweating hard, hasn't it? I fancy your whole body will sweat at the next Convention, if so be that you are going to father the Cape amendments. One thing is certain, Fitz (Sir Percy Fitzpatrick) is so angry that he is leading the assault even now. I agree with you it is a pity that he and Chaplin are not rather keeping silent, for we must exercise all the forbearance we can muster, and have patience with each other. As I see things, we are living in a period that is more critical than any in the past. We shall have to be very careful, otherwise I can see clearly that, instead of union, we are in for an amount of division that will be fatal to us. Sometimes I feel anxious, but fortunately I shall never say die, but continue to do my best.

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South Africa having finally given its blessing, the baby was taken to Great Britain, in July, for its christening, under the care of Sir Henry de Villiers and a couple of dozen delegates. The United Kingdom happened to be suffering from tremendous commotion, caused by Lloyd George's sensational budget. In addition, one of those crises in the Lords, to which people in those days were more or less accustomed, occurred. What with all this effervescence the little fledgling from overseas was hardly taken any notice of. After a few conversations between the delegates and the Colonial Secretary, the Bill was introduced in the Lords. It passed its third reading in the Commons on August 19, and on September 20, 1909, was assented to by the King.

Among those appointed to assist Sir Henry de Villiers in London, if necessary, was Botha. On various occasions he met Mr Asquith, then Prime Minister; at Downing Street he was treated with the consideration due to one who would most likely be the first Union Prime Minister. President Steyn, who also came over, was strongly advised by his doctor to abstain from active participation in politics during the next three years. The tactful medico gave his patient hopes of a complete cure in the long run; Steyn had no difficulty in believing him. Without a murmur the great, patient Free Stater—looked upon by many as the favourite among candidates—resigned himself to his fate. Shortly afterward he refused the offer of a senatorship.

*The Union's Governor-General.*—Those were busy days in London, particularly toward the end of July. On the 24th Botha was present as a privy councillor, together with Lord Selborne, Sir Starr Jameson, and Sir F. Moor, at the ceremony of swearing-in Merriman. Two days later the South African Premiers met at the Colonial Office, where official instructions for the Union's Governor-General were being prepared. It was decided that this distinguished intermediary between the British Government and the authorities at Pretoria—the Governor-General's status has since undergone a change—was at the same time to be High

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Commissioner for the native territories adjoining the Union. To-day the Governor-General represents the King only. It was arranged that in his Excellency's absence the Chief Justice of the Union (not, as hitherto, the senior officer commanding) was to act. As High Commissioner his Excellency remains in direct touch with his Minister of oversea territories at Westminster.

On July 30 the British Government gave an evening reception at the Foreign Office in honour of the delegates. South African circles in London were well represented; President Steyn on this occasion made the acquaintance of Lord Roberts. The lunch at Buckingham Palace, where the Cullinan diamonds were so much admired, has been described in another chapter.

Botha has told me that Asquith sounded him as to the personality of the Governor-General who had to be appointed. "Give us the best man in your Cabinet," Botha said. Laughingly, Asquith replied that he could not quite spare his best men! At a subsequent interview Asquith mentioned Lord Gladstone and Lord Buxton. Botha then stated that the Boers' respect for the late Mr Gladstone made the appointment of the latter's son a *desideratum*. And so Lord Gladstone became the first Governor-General of South Africa, Lord Buxton being second on the list. A further subject of discussion was the usual honours list; fourteen out of thirty-three members of the Convention were willing to accept. In proportion to their number, the Transvaalers showed the greater modesty. Botha was strongly urged to take a peerage. Neither he, nor his wife, however, at any time contemplated the acceptance of distinctions of this kind. So as not to offend, he took, in August 1912, an honorary generalship in the British army.

It was arranged that Union would start on May 31, 1910. A cabinet would be formed, in a provisional way and pending the result of the first parliamentary elections. Botha's health was not of the very best in those days. His digestion was out of order, and during August he had to

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take the waters at Kissingen. His cure over, Botha made a short stay at Paris in order to purchase at Rambouillet, the famous merino stud farm, rams for his Department of Agriculture.

*A First-rate Sheep Expert!*—While in London, I was asked to assist, and therefore saw to it that a formal introduction was obtained for General Louis Botha, Prime Minister of the Transvaal, to the manager of the farm. On our arrival, Botha requested to be allowed to choose from among the three-year-olds. Accompanied by a foreman, we went in among a herd of some 150. After a careful inspection, Botha separated about a dozen rams from the rest. These he once more inspected with extra care, finally selecting three for purchase. The numbers, burnt into their horns, were then reported to the manager, who consulted his stud book and, visibly perturbed, stated that two out of the three could not possibly be sold; they were the pick of the whole bunch!

Botha, annoyed, asked for an explanation. "Tell your Minister," the excited manager said, "that when I was notified of the coming visit of the famous Boer general, I never dreamt that he was such an exceptionally clever sheep expert. On such occasions I always have our very best rams kept out; I apologise, and hope General Botha will not mind the inconvenience I have caused him."

Botha then asked for leave to make a selection from the two-year-old rams. "Never!" the worried manager exclaimed. "I shall never be allowed to permit such a capable expert as your Premier to take the pick of my two-year-olds. We have to keep them for our own use."

The end of the matter was that the manager, after a long consultation with his foreman, and on receiving a higher offer from Botha, reluctantly surrendered the three animals originally selected. When I complimented Botha on his skill in judging sheep, he replied that whatever occupations he had followed, that of a farmer came nearest to his heart.

On our way back to Paris we used one of those monumental military routes known to everyone who has done

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France. I thought the chauffeur would know his way about, but Botha insisted with increasing emphasis that we were off the track, although he had only once before visited Paris. At last we met a cyclist who confirmed Botha's diagnosis and showed us the way. This shows how keen was Botha's sense of locality.

After a visit to Holland in order to buy Friesland cattle, the General returned to South Africa. A great deal of spade-work was awaiting him in connexion with unification of the four Dominions. It was not an easy task: there were four heterogeneous public services, whereas the component parts of the Union-to-be were in a state of flux, economically and politically. The public debt, inherited by the Union from its Dominions, required to be treated with care, and so did the reorganization of the general finances.

No wonder that Merriman, in wishing Abraham Fischer the compliments of the season at the end of 1909, warned him: "The next year will be one of stress and strain."

## XXIII

### BOTHA AND DR JAMESON

WHEREAS our Constitution is bound up with the party system, there did not exist in the year of Union any community of economic or other interests suitable for crystallization into large party groups. Every Province had its own parties, which had originated in parochial issues. Under Union there was no longer any *raison d'être* for them. The Chinese invasion had not caused Free Staters or Cape people any sleepless nights, any more than the financial difficulties of Western Province wine farmers had disturbed the Witwatersrand or Natal. One found neither widely varying platforms nor predominating slogans. A general election could hardly divide the nation to any extent.

Race feeling, it is true, continued as an asset that could easily be exploited by stump orators. The South Africa Act, however, was inspired by the very desire to eliminate enmity between Boer and Briton. What, then, would have been more blissful than to hold the first Assembly election in a paradisaical atmosphere? "Fresh start" and "Best man government" became the cries, and were intended to obliterate old party divisions in order to provide a clean slate for the first Union Cabinet.

The protagonist of this political idyll was the late Sir Starr Jameson—Dr Jameson and "Dr Jim," as he is remembered by his contemporaries. His reasoning was of so convincing a nature that he was able to persuade Botha to adopt an attitude of benevolent neutrality to the scheme. During the Raid, in December 1895, Field-Cornet Botha had been one of the first to respond to the call of his country. The burghers of Vryheid were ordered by

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Pretoria to guard the south-eastern border against any invasion from Natal or Zululand. Ever since those days Jameson had represented, to at least half the people of South Africa, the personification of flagrant breach of faith, oversea acquisitiveness, and cynical violation of the most elementary principles of law. Despite his subsequent actions as a Cape Minister and a member of the Convention, and notwithstanding the years during which he systematically studied the aspirations of his Dutch fellow-countrymen, he never succeeded in entirely removing the self-imposed blot on his escutcheon. In fact, the circumstance that this political felon was allowed to boss the show at Capetown within ten years of the Raid merely increased the intensity of some people's ire. Jameson never succeeded in shaking off either his indiscreet admirers or his irreconcilable persecutors.

Owing to his predilection for frequent and lengthy trips to Europe Jameson was practically a stranger to South Africa, except the Cape and Rhodesia. He had never come into contact much with leaders of public opinion. In 1903, in order to curry favour with the non-white vote in the Cape, he indignantly opposed Botha's alleged desire to abolish the Protectorates in order to force the natives to work in the mines—thus rendering the Chinese superfluous. Backed by but a small majority he accepted the Cape Premiership in 1904. He did so without the slightest vestige of enthusiasm. His immediate party friends he describes as "the most awful crew," and hon. members as "this beastly House." Nostalgia for golf courses in England never left him.

Botha, who was ten years his junior, did not meet him until the Imperial Conference in 1907. At once he realized how useful it would be for the whole of South Africa if friendly relations could be established between Pretoria and Groote Schuur, the Cape Premier's official residence. Botha had ceased to trouble about Jameson's misdeeds of eleven years before. Later in the year they again met at Bloemfontein, where an ocean freight confer-

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ence was being held. The Convention days of 1908 heightened the desire on both sides for closer intercourse. A couple of weeks after the adjournment of the Convention, Jameson visited the Transvaal. On March 15, 1909, he wrote to his brother Sam: "Have just been up to Pretoria to get Botha to squeeze Moor, which he will try to do." Probably the intention was to move the Natal Premier to join the deputation that went to London in order to see the South Africa Act through the Westminster Parliament. Or was it to make Natal change its dangerous policy toward the Zulus?

*The Union Cabinet.*—Not long afterward people began to discuss the formation of the first Union Cabinet. Jameson's brain-wave was to form a "fresh start" combination. He did not mean a coalition between existing groups. What he wanted was to remove the existing party organizations in order to obtain a completely new orientation. A purely business Government would take over for the time being; fresh party cleavage would result from economic considerations.

During the deputation's stay in England, about the middle of 1909, Botha openly announced his objection to coalition. Jameson, however, did not relinquish his "best man" idea. During a considerable portion of 1909 I was in Europe—frequently in London. One fine day in September Botha told me he was going to Scotland. I proposed a comfortable meal near the terminus (he was never a friend of casual meals). He enlightened me on the scheme that Jameson was going to lay before him. "You'll see the Doctor just now," he said; "he, too, is going to Scotland. We shall be able to talk at our ease there." While we were sauntering along the brilliantly lit train on the station platform, Jameson's squat figure appeared. With unwonted liveliness he greeted Botha, who by this time had become a rather big and heavy man. The prospect of a holiday, accompanied by Botha, evidently braced Jameson up. He actually succeeded in getting Botha not to offer active opposition to the scheme. Other

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politicians, however, refused to bite. On December 7 Jameson wrote to his brother from Capetown: "Botha writes me that he is anxious to go the lines we talked over in Scotland. I shall see him shortly, and then will know what to believe."

At the end of the year the two met again at Pretoria. Botha agreed to give the idea a chance, provided Jameson was able to convert the other men who counted. Without delay Jameson sounded President Steyn, Frederick Moor, Merriman, Sauer, and Schreiner. All his efforts were in vain. In January 1910 he wrote to Sam: "Merriman was mulish."

Mr Merriman on January 22 made a public speech in which he condemned the scheme. This was two days before Botha was due to visit Capetown. Jameson wrote once more: "Botha has behaved perfectly straightly with me all through, but in the end, I should say, he will go with his own people."

*The Death-blow.*—A few days later, a final discussion between Merriman, Fischer, and Botha gave the idea its death-blow. Jameson, who had awaited that decision with exemplary patience, spoke at the birth of the Unionist Party, which took place toward the end of February at Bloemfontein, and became leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

Botha's aloofness from the agitation is quite intelligible. He gained the conviction that South Africa at that time was not capable of viewing its politics in the light of cold reason. Logically the "fresh start" doctrine was unassailable, but it did not fit in with the human element in the average South African.

Moreover, Jameson was no longer a suitable person for figuring prominently among the select few "best men." For ministerial work, for constant activity in Parliament, in the country, and over a desk, he lacked the necessary 'vim.' His health left much to be desired. His ambition had dwindled to microscopic proportions. In the middle of 1910, while the whole sub-continent was racked by election

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fever, he opened his heart to his brother: "My hope is to get out of the whole thing decently, and carry out my original plan of Rhodesia and London." Disheartened by the failure of his *idée fixe*, he wanted to go to London and devote all his time to the interests of the Chartered Company. In the depths of his being he had never identified himself with South Africa. In 1907 he jokingly threatened Sam: "I shall beat you at golf when I come back." For this ex-Premier of the Cape, England was the country to which he "came back." It was his real home, for all his sensational thirty years' career, from Kimberley *via* Doornkop to Groote Schuur. The time was past when the fate of a Dominion could be considered safe in the keeping of one whose heart and soul longed for an oversea country 6000 miles away.

*The South African National Party.*—In the middle of June 1910 Botha held his first public meeting at Pretoria. A manifesto set out the platform of the "South Africa National Party," with which was incorporated Het Volk. His attitude to Jameson was elucidated, because people were still talking of these things.

"The first point I had to decide when I was asked to form a Government," Botha explained, "was the principle on which to do so. Was it to be a coalition or to consist of men from the four existing Cabinets? The latter was the only practicable way. Any other step would have been fatal to South Africa. Even while in England, I pronounced clearly against coalition. Subsequently, my friend Dr Jameson broached the subject to me. Later, we discussed the matter in South Africa. I must candidly confess that he was able to make out a very strong case. He impressed me. He came nearer my heart. If a public for such a scheme could have been found in South Africa, I should not have persisted in my attitude taken up in England. South Africa, however, is unwilling. Talk of coalition, to our people, is as a red rag to a bull! Nothing then remains but to select the Cabinet from the four existing ones. How otherwise could you get together

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ten men from any category? Just try it! We have had trouble enough, even without going beyond existing Governments."

For convenience sake Botha always referred to "coalition," although Jameson's "best man" scheme contemplated a clean slate. Botha's unequivocal refusal still left both President Steyn and Mr Merriman full of suspicions. The former feared that with Jameson in the Cabinet, Rhodesia's amalgamation with the Union would be forced through. Many another politician kept his ears to the ground. Botha's prestige suffered when he was seen in the company of Jameson—that unpardoned miscreant! President Steyn later interpreted the feelings of thousands when, in 1911, he wrote to Mr Merriman: "Some persons seem to forget so easily. . . . I cannot understand this sudden friendship for Jameson. Though I am quite willing to credit Jameson with his moderation, in the Convention and since, I yet feel I dare not forget that to him and the cosmopolitan horde behind him we owe all the suffering. . . ."

"*My Friend Jameson.*"—Botha's defiant words "my friend Jameson" undoubtedly painfully impressed many of his followers. Even in the glorious year 1911, when the South Africa Party was established by the aid of all four Provinces by both sections of the population at the historical Bloemfontein Congress, "eternal yesteryear" continued to play a predominant part among the masses.

The fiasco of the "fresh start" notion left Botha and Jameson quite friendly. They continued to offend people by their unchanged relations. In June 1910 during the general election, which kept them apart on different platforms, an observant politician wrote to a Capetown friend with reference to the fight between Botha and Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, who were wooing the same Pretoria constituency:

Perhaps we shall, in the course of events, be able to form some idea of the real inwardness of the negotiations between the Premier and Dr Jim. They were lunching together at the Pretoria Club

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the other day. I went up to the table, and said, "Which is the lion, and which the lamb?" Jameson tapped his chest, and replied, "Lamb, lamb!" Many a true word is spoken in jest.

The letter-writer forgot that coalition was no longer practical politics to Botha from the day when it became clear that his supporters would have none of it. It is quite probable that he continued to advertise his personal friendship with Jameson in order to please the English-speaking electorate of Pretoria East. He knew the prejudices that stood in his way, and was childishly eager to top the poll.

Jameson's version of the meeting at the club to his brother was:

I lunched with Botha last week, and talked the whole thing out with him. It is the old story; he funk'd splitting up his own people at the start; hates most of his colleagues, but talks of getting rid of the old gang in a couple of years. He has been a much weaker vessel than I suspected.

While nervous followers accused Botha of 'English' tendencies, Jameson was upset because Botha feared a rupture among his own people! Sir Lionel Phillips, a political sympathizer of Jameson's, in his *Memoirs* concludes that Botha's was the correct attitude, and that 'the best-man' notion "was premature." He attributes its failure to "natural appetite for the loaves and fishes of office among Botha's political followers; and he yielded."

As regards the supposed hatred of colleagues, Botha felt the drawback arising from—often awkward—claims to portfolios. There was an unwritten and foolish idea that no Cabinet would be presentable unless every one of the four Provinces was represented in it by a tacitly fixed number of its very own politicians. As if administrative genius depended on square miles of territory, or on the census figures! Such political conditions, however, reduced the value of his first Cabinet as a body. It correspondingly affected the healthy growth of the youthful Union's organism. Botha was greatly troubled by this aspect of

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the case, even apart from the poor calibre of several individual Ministers.

*Jameson Departs.*—Parliament had not been in session long before it became known that the Opposition leader was anxious to go into well-earned retirement. In August 1911 Jameson wrote from London to his lieutenant, Sir Thomas Smartt, that he wanted to leave politics. On April 10, 1912, he showed emotion in his leave-taking from Botha, who in the Assembly paid a tribute to him. Once again Botha fearlessly called him "my friend," and mentioned his "deep affection" for him.

As Opposition chief Jameson had assisted considerably in rendering the work of Parliament fruitful. It was a strange 'circus' in which Botha originally had to crack the leader's whip, both in regard to the Assembly and the Senate. It was a fortunate thing for the Union that, in the initial period, appreciation of each other's personality by the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition smoothed the way of both the Legislature and the Executive.

Sir Starr Jameson died in London on November 26, 1917.

## XXIV

### BOTHA AND MERRIMAN

WHEN the United States of America made their entry on the world stage, George Washington was the only conceivable President. In United South Africa the position was not quite so simple. But recently a protracted war had driven the two white races and their leaders asunder; healing the wounds caused by that war took time. Apart from this, the country was in the happy position of possessing more than one citizen with a Washington's merits. Small nations, too, have their periods of abundant superior figures, whilst a big community sometimes has to look long, and vainly, for a single political genius. The Dutch, assisted by purposeful allies from the other section—especially once Jameson's "fresh start" chimera had disappeared—were clearly indicated as those who would have to take the lead in politics. This no longer led to heart-searchings, particularly because Natal, which had always been looked upon as the citadel of what passed for British ideals, expected to do well out of such a combination.

President Steyn's delicate health excluded him from the list of candidates for the Premiership. Botha and Merriman remained. The latter could point to his age: he was nearly seventy; in addition to forty years of platform experience he had had a distinguished parliamentary as well as administrative career. High-spirited and intellectual, he stood first among the old guard, not merely in the Cape but throughout South Africa. He moreover enjoyed in peculiar measure the trust of the Dutch. His tongue was sharp, and he had the reputation of being a good custodian of the public purse and posed as a convinced champion of popular government.

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As things were in 1910, no danger threatened the Union either internally or from abroad. The first Union Cabinet's principal task, it seemed, would be to amalgamate the four administrations, push through urgent consolidation of legislation, organize finance and defence, and generally get the new edifice shipshape. Had Botha, with his Transvaal friends, been willing to join a Cabinet under the Cape 'grand old man'—proof to the contrary was never called for—Merriman would have made a first-rate Union premier, even if but for a short period, provided he displayed the knack of keeping together a parliamentary majority.

He himself felt that he could lay claim to the position, the Cape deserving consideration as being the oldest colony, and he being the Nestor of South African premiers. So as to remove any possible uncertainty, he clearly indicated in a public speech, "Barkis is willin'," and his candidature was supported by President Steyn. It was the last named who inspired Free State politicians; he could see no good in a possible premiership of Botha, with his Cullinan diamond affair and his objectionable friendship with Jameson—not to mention sundry further grievances, nurtured by Steyn against Pretoria. For instance, the Free State had got its autonomy six months later than the Transvaal! The Transvaal Government, too, being flush of revenue, threw its money about wholesale! General Hertzog and Mr Abraham Fischer openly acclaimed the Cape candidate. Steyn's 1907 enthusiasm for the energetic men at the helm in Pretoria had shrunk considerably.

*Downing Street Pro-Botha.*—As to Botha's chances, it was the Governor-General whose choice would decide; but all those who in 1909 were in a position to gauge current feeling were able to see that Downing Street favoured the Boer statesman. Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman's successor thought a great deal of Botha, especially after the short but brilliant record as Transvaal Premier—an appreciation that was fully shared by the Witwatersrand Opposition. Botha had freed South Africa from magnate domination, but had always looked after the mines, first as a Volksraad member,

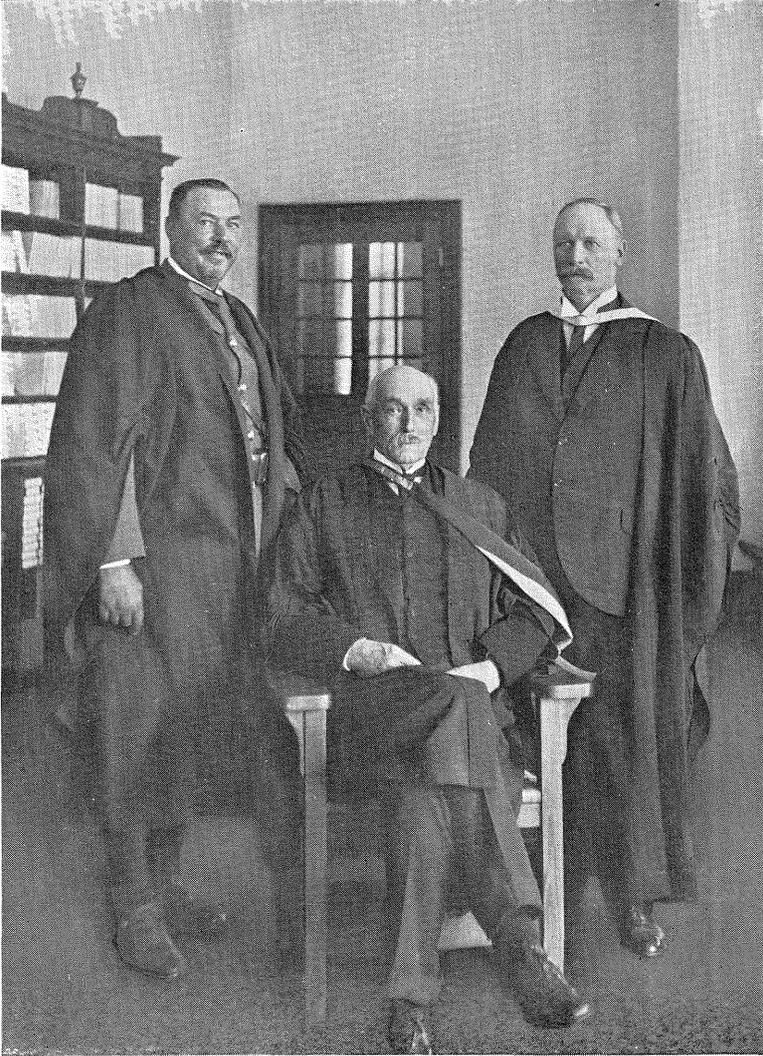
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then as a Commandant-General of the Republic, and finally as the provider of ample native labour.

Merriman, on the other hand, was known to be anti-pathetic to Johannesburg men and things; he delighted in calling the Golden City names. In 1903, when a "formidable" deputation of Afrikander politicians waited on Joseph Chamberlain, as he passed through Capetown on his way back to England—and every word uttered was listened to by two continents—Merriman introduced members as deserving country-people, in contradistinction to "noisier and more busy communities, which would perhaps pass away, when nothing would remain of Kimberley and Johannesburg but chasms and *débris* heaps."

Leading men in England fully realized that the initial vitality of the Union would depend on the prosperity of its mineral industries. And England, in 1910, was able to determine who was to be Union premier. In his own province Botha enjoyed an indisputable prestige. A trustworthy Cape politician who, in May 1910, was travelling about in order to find out what people were thinking, told me that the Transvaal was unanimously pro-Botha. The Free State was lukewarm, without being anti-Botha. Natal favoured Botha; Merriman very recently had called it a "coolie-ridden colony!" In the Cape Botha did not lack sympathizers, especially among wine-farmers, who resented Merriman's having maintained, in the face of their protests, recent unpopular excise measures, under threat of his resignation. Jan Hofmeyr, owing to other causes, had become embroiled with Merriman to such an extent that they were no longer on speaking-terms, and only communicated with each other through the party whip.

This review of the situation was confirmed, as to Natal, by Jameson's letter to his brother of January 1910, in which he vents his spleen at the poor reception of his "best-man government" by Maritzburg and Durban as follows: "I find they are ostensibly British, but really in Botha's pocket as the dispenser of good things." Jameson forgot to remember that Durban had always been at loggerheads



GENERAL BOTHA, MR J. X. MERRIMAN, AND GENERAL SMUTS

From a photograph taken in 1910, when South Africa had become united, and after the bestowal of University honours.

*Photo Arnold Keyzer*

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with Capetown and Port Elizabeth, one port grudging the other its share in the Transvaal carrying trade. Natal felt less safe under the Cape umbrella than under a Botha *régime*, Botha being well acquainted with the Garden Colony's requirements.

Things being as they were in the Cape, the small measure of Jan Hofmeyr's support for Merriman appears from a letter written at a German watering-place on September 17, 1909, shortly before the former's death. In it he tells his Cape friends that

In England most of the leading men want Botha. Botha, I imagine, is the coming man. He may be more pro-Rand than is to our liking, but he will please us even less if, owing to Cape strife and squabbling, he is compelled to look to the Rand for support. You must understand that I shall not object to Merriman, if selected. Our majority, however, will not be great enough—neither will our party efficiency and staunchness suffice—to enable us to withstand discord, springing from personal or territorial jealousies. You will therefore do well by being on your guard!

When Lord Gladstone landed at Capetown during the second half of May 1910 no one among the public at large had any inkling as to the Governor-General's preference. A small circle of interested observers, who had studied the atmosphere in Westminster chancelleries, had sensed there a feeling in favour of Botha being chosen. Botha himself was aware of this. Lord Gladstone had publicly denied the story—whispered here and there—to the effect that his mandate was to send for Botha. The responsibility, his Lordship states, rested entirely with him, as Governor-General.

His Excellency spent two days listening to prominent politicians who had come to Capetown in order to tender their advice; he duly jotted down his notes of the interviews. General Smuts naturally recommended General Botha, his reason being that the task of forming the first Government, and appointing the first heads of departments, should be entrusted to an advocate of Union from that Dominion which had made the greatest sacrifices in the cause of