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In effect he said: "It was a most difficult problem for me. As you know, our army was composed of Commandos from each district of the Transvaal and Free State, and the leaders of these, the Commandants, were elected by the men themselves. They were quite independent; it was the old law, workable in Kaffir wars, but useless in one against disciplined forces. No one could *order* them; they did as they liked. All their Commandants were older and experienced men; all elected by the burghers because they were experienced or popular, or, sometimes, to keep someone else out. It seemed to me an impossible position for a young man like me and I asked Kruger to name an older and better-known man; but as he refused I had to do my duty and try.

"I had little time to prepare for what was coming, but on the other hand, everyone knew where Buller intended to attack and that he would begin as soon as certain troops and supplies arrived; so if I did not have much time to prepare I knew exactly what to expect and when to expect it; besides," he added laughing, "we had not much to prepare. You see Buller had no mounted force, so he could not go outside a few miles from Colenso. I picked out the places for our 'cannon'—we had only a few—and at night we prepared them on the face of the hills overlooking the river and bridge, and concealed them well by preserving the thick bush and hiding the excavations. The best of our artillerymen was a man with an English name and he was very keen and intelligent; but somehow I got a feeling that we could not trust him, and sure enough the day before the battle he deserted. That night I put all hands on to moving the guns to fresh places and we left dummies on the old spots. It was very funny next day to see all our dummies blown to pieces by Buller's artillery; but they never found the guns themselves.

"But the biggest problem I had was what to do about Hlangwane. You see it there" (and he pointed out the hill a few hundred feet high, covered with bush and densely surrounded by mimosa trees). "You see the line of Kameeldoorn (mimosa) which runs along the base on this (eastern or Buller's) side. It looks just like the line of a river. Well! We found out through our scouts that Buller thought that was the Tugela River. It isn't; it's only a band of bush! The Tugela turns a little away to its left and goes *behind* that hill; so that Hlangwane is on this, Buller's, side of the Tugela, and as you see, from its height and position and dense bush on the flat, it lay right on his flank, with good cover close up to him; therefore, as soon as he moved forward it would

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be right *rear* and an enemy force occupying that hill would have his whole army at his mercy.

"Well, I had a nice job, I tell you. On *our* side there was the Tugela River, then in heavy flood. You know what these thunderstorms are in the Berg (Drakensberg Range) and how the rivers come down from the mountains in a few minutes without any local rain to warn you. Well, how was I going to get our people to occupy a hill close on Buller's flank, with a flooded river behind them and no line of retreat? An order would be no good at all; they wouldn't go. The Commandos were independent and not disciplined and they would see no sense in that sort of sacrifice. You know the Boer way of fighting: the first thing he looks to is how he is to get out of a position and not be caught like a rat. Each one would ask why he must be sent there. No, they would simply refuse or saddle up and go home. And all the other Commandos would think 'quite right.' But, I thought, if this begins here the same thing can happen to me next time. So I made a plan! I called them all together in a *Kriegsraad* (War Council) the leaders of all the twelve (or thirteen) Commandos. All were much older than I was, and men who considered that experience is everything and you cannot find it in young men. It's the Boer way.

"I talked to them a bit nicely," he said, with an apologetic laugh, "I told them that I was young and inexperienced and had not desired the position, but had to obey orders, and that for any success I would have to rely on them; and that I had called them now to get their views about the position and their advice as to what should be done. The independence, even the existence, of our country might be at stake in this battle and it was too much for one man, especially a young man like me, to take the responsibilities of decisions without the guiding advice of his elders who had so much experience.

"Then I told them the main facts and that it was certain that Buller would soon make his attack at Colenso, and I asked for their views. It was long before anyone spoke; but little by little they got to asking questions and talking together until all were interested and each had said something. I alone offered no opinion but asked questions now and then as if to learn something. We must have been two hours talking of everything connected with this attack and our defence, but just the one thing for which I had waited all the time was never spoken about. No one even alluded to Hlangwane and I thought it would never come. I knew the country here better than anyone. I had known it all from childhood; it was my home; but I was sure that most or all of these old

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Commandants knew well enough where Hlangwane was, but no one was looking for trouble; so I knew then that I had to do something and I took a chance.

"I pretended to misunderstand one of them and to think that the hill he referred to was Hlangwane, whereas I knew he meant one on our side of the river, and I said, 'Yes, Hlangwane would be the key to the whole position if it were not that Buller is guarded on that side by the river!' Man! I held my breath for a minute, but I did not move. I felt every man look hard at me but I went on talking quietly. Then after a little time one outspoken old Commandant said slowly, 'But Hlangwane is on the other side.' I looked at him in surprise as if I did not like to contradict him. Then another laughed and said, 'General, there's no river between Hlangwane and the English—that's only thorn bush. The river is on this side of it.' And so the argument began and it went on until they showed clearly that Hlangwane was the real key of the position and that any force there could turn Buller's flank and cut him off once he advanced. So I gave in to their experience and told them that as they were all agreed that this was the vital position and that it meant total defeat of the English if we held it, I did not feel that it would be proper for me to pick and choose and name the man and the Commando to whom would go the glory of the victory and the thanks of our people for saving our country, and it seemed to me fairer that the choice should be made by drawing lots. You see," he explained, "if I named one of them then all twelve might be against me; but if one was chosen by lot then it would be eleven to one against him. So they drew lots and then I had the first bit of luck that came to help me out. The man who was chosen was Joshua Joubert, 'Rooi Joshua,' Commandant of the Wakkerstroom Commando; he is one of the bravest, noblest men alive—a grand man! You know him—old Red Joshua with the one arm—everybody loves and trusts him, Dutch, English—all! As the lots were drawn he stood up at once. Man! It was fine. 'The choice of lot is the choice of God! I go.' That is all he said. He was a splendid example for all.

"It was planned out carefully and it worked well. Our men were posted along the heights overlooking the river and Red Joshua and his Commando swam the flooded river and occupied Hlangwane. I had given orders that no one was to fire until the signal was given by me. Our heavy guns were to remain concealed and to reserve their fire, and our burghers posted all along the hills were on no account to fire and expose their positions. This was particularly so in the

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case of those on Hlangwane. You see we had destroyed the railway bridge, but not the road bridge, and the plan was to draw the enemy on to that open flat across the river and to wait until all or most of them had crossed by the road bridge and then to open fire with cannon and rifle on top of them. With the flooded river, then behind them, and the force on Hlangwane to attack them in flank and rear, the position would have been hopeless and the whole force would have been annihilated, or would have had to surrender.

“It was one man who spoilt it all; one man who saved the British Army that day. They say he had no orders, or he disobeyed orders and they broke him for what he did; but it is the simple truth I tell you, that when Colonel Long rushed his Field Artillery out into the open and began shelling the woods and slopes of Hlangwane, where he must have seen our men, he upset the whole plan. I don't know if any of our men were premature and revealed their presence by shooting, but whatever it was it was Colonel Long who saw them and realized that our force on Hlangwane was already across the river and there was grave danger of a flank attack, and he made it so hot that they had to open fire all along and so gave the whole plan away.

“That day I saw the maddest, bravest thing I have ever seen. I was on the hill above the bridge there and with the field glasses could see it all. All our people were watching: it was a terrible thing to see, like looking down at a play from the gallery. When the teams and the men were shot down, just swept away by our fire, for it was at very close range, Long brought his guns as close up as he could; and when we saw another lot of men and more teams dash out to work or save the guns we held our breath; it was madness; nothing could live there. Then came another lot, and another and another. My God it was awful. I think it was six, seven, eight times, perhaps more, that fresh men dashed out to save the guns. I was sick with horror that such bravery should be so useless. God, I turned away and could not look; and yet I had to look again. It was too wonderful. Lord Roberts's only son was one who lost his life in that mad effort; he was killed at the guns. They saved a few—three I think—and then someone must have stopped them. Colonel Long was shot down in the first lot but not killed. They blamed him for the failure, blamed him for risking and losing his guns, but that man saved the British Army that day. It was his action that exposed our plan and forced us to fight, and then the whole battle turned that way and Buller's army never advanced across the river by the road bridge, as it was intended,

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to where we had planned to crush it, in that little flat across the river under the hills. It was a great disappointment for us. The advance guard had already crossed and if Long had not exposed us on Hlangwane, the whole force would have been in our hands. That would have been the greatest disaster that has ever befallen the British Army."

Botha seemed to be oblivious of his audience, and was living it all again. He was tense with earnestness and his description was most vivid and convincing. His last words were dropped quietly, a sort of regretful reflection. It seemed to me very human, very natural, and I was silent. Then a thought struck him, the humour of it, and with a faint laugh he added, "You know, up to the last moment until that man with his guns spoiled it, we were absolutely certain it would come off. We had planned it all so carefully and everything had gone right. Why, we had even left the wagon bridge standing when we blew up the railway to make it easy for Buller to cross. Some of them had already crossed that way. It was a cruel disappointment!"

That night in Durban I couldn't go to bed until I had written to Mr. Balfour a full account of the day's disclosures, and it is from that record that these notes have been compiled. He had not forgotten 'the bait in the mouth of the trap,' but what was of far more interest and importance was the assurance from Mr. Balfour, and from the Rt. Hon. Walter Long (afterwards Viscount Long of Wraxall), a cousin of the man who saved the day, that this testimony from Botha, the greatest authority in the world on this matter, had been the means of clearing the name of a most gallant and most capable officer who had been retired and for so many years had suffered cruel injustice in return for having saved the British Army from a terrible disaster.

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I know that any addition must promise an anti-climax; yet a fact remains to be told.

We, the Transvaal delegates, lived in the same house in Durban. I had picked up the evening paper and read it as I walked home. The house had a wide verandah all round it and as I came up the steps Botha asked if there was any news. I remembered then that the cables reported a great sensation in Berlin caused by the publication of the *Daily Telegraph's* interview with the Kaiser in which the latter had claimed that he was the author of Lord Roberts's plan of campaign, having sent it to the Queen.

Remembering what Mr. Balfour had said that night, ten

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years before, I wanted to know what Botha would say of it, and in reply to his query I told him that there *was* something in the papers which might interest him, and I began reading the cable. In a moment he went sallow with excitement and seized the paper to read it for himself. He read it slowly word by word, and then with heightened colour and eyes bright with excitement walked quickly along the *stoep* calling, "Jannie! Jannie!" to Smuts who was writing in one of the rooms opening on to the *stoep*.

A very curious thing happened then. The door of the room was of the double glass door, or French window type, and the two sections were opened inwards. Botha stood in the doorway calling out to Smuts, "Here is something that concerns us; listen to this!" And he read the cable out slowly. I had walked along the *stoep* with him and was standing facing him only a few yards away. He was facing partly towards me and also towards Smuts who, quite invisible to me, was at a desk in the end of the room furthest from Botha. As the latter read the cable some movement behind him caught my eye and I saw then that the glass door, by some trick of the light, formed a perfect mirror and what had caught my attention was the reflection of Smuts, swinging round and leaning over the back of his revolving chair, looking intently at Botha as the latter read the cable. When Botha had finished reading he dropped the paper in one hand and with a harsh laugh and a look of positive hatred in his eyes he said, "I think the time has now come for *us* to say something, I think we may now tell——" What he might have told will never be known. The reflection in the window showed a sudden movement by Smuts—a fierce warning frown and a 'wash out' movement of his hand! Botha's voice stopped as though he had been shot, and he turned and walked off in silence!

CHAPTER X

THE APPREHENSION OF WAR AFTER THE RAID

MANY years ago, inspired by impatience and discontent from reflections upon South African history, I remember writing that the staple industry of South Africa was the making of history, and in a semi-detached fashion I have since then frequently wondered why I should have blundered upon an expression which unhappily has been many times justified.

We in South Africa are, and have always been, a relatively small community: insignificant among the Nations of the world; and yet, in proportion to our numbers, we have made more history and received more advertisement, and are accorded more serious recognition than, upon mathematical calculation, we are entitled to. Perhaps it is because of our geographical position; most certainly it is largely on account of our connection with the British Empire; yet, in deference to our good opinion of ourselves, it may be said that there is more than this to be considered.

Very many years ago, forty or more, when Johannesburg and the Rand were only beginning to be known, sports were started at the Wanderers Club, and one of our boys, who had made a great name locally as a bicycle racer, had the insane presumption to try his luck in England against the champions of the day. To our unutterable amazement he won everything, and going further afield challenged the world's champion in America and beat him hollow. On this there followed at intervals extraordinary success in all lines of sport. Football teams established the name of the Springboks, and became front-rankers. In short- and long-distance foot races we held, at times, the world's championships; later, in tennis, both men and women figured in the first class of the world; and behind it all there was this astonishing fact, that these representatives of South Africa came from a white population of less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions to compete against those who were the elect of from 40 to 120 millions.

It was the same in the Great War, and if we feel pride in our representatives because of this fact, the warmest thrill of pride in them is that they regard themselves as fortunate and happy to uphold the credit of their country, and that

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their heads are never turned by success. But that, although a fine index of character, is after all only in the sphere of sport. When one thinks of the representative men, there is the same astonishing disproportion of outstanding characters to the numbers of population. Without going back beyond present memories and without any close analysis one recalls Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, Cecil Rhodes, Paul Kruger, Dr. Jameson, Louis Botha, and Jan Smuts as men who, whatever differences of opinion there may be about them, were outstanding characters, and could meet and hold their own with the representatives of any of the great countries of the world.

A corollary of this condition of a small community is that of necessity everyone knew everyone else. This in turn begat a condition which gave rise to two derisive proverbs, "No man is a hero to his own valet," and "Familiarity breeds contempt." Perhaps this influenced us to depreciate our own, or violently to accentuate our differences. However that may be, we saw each other at close quarters and day by day, in undress as it were, and inevitably, therefore saw each other as better and worse than we were, but never quite fairly. I am very well aware that it is impossible to avoid the faults inherent in this position, and with diffidence and sincerity the attempt is made to represent conditions as they appeared to me at different stages.

If it serves no other purpose it may at least indicate how, in all sincerity, I hope, circumstances alter cases and opinions are altered by better or further knowledge.

In few countries, I imagine, did any single business firm bulk as big as did our firm, Wernher, Beit & Co. Their great wealth and power on the diamond fields, where, as I have explained in an earlier chapter, they were the real backers of Rhodes in his great work, and on the Witwatersrand gold-fields where, under the name of H. Eckstein & Co., their position, power and influence were overwhelmingly predominant, made them of necessity a very great factor in the country. The heads of this combination, Julius Wernher and Alfred Beit, were two very remarkable men often quoted as the ideal combination in business because of the extraordinary difference in their characters and methods. Wernher was in the strictest sense a business man—big, strong, wise and wary; and what I have always considered a statesman in business.

Alfred Beit, one of the most lovable of characters, was a positive genius in business; alive and responsive to everything; quick in imagination as in decision; a born optimist of the

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cheeriest nature; a warm-hearted friend with an exceptionally generous disposition; one whose nature was ever young and charged with boyish spirits—sometimes almost impish in their good-natured, mischievous humour; yet a man whose amazing quickness of brain and whose foresight and imagination made him remarkable in any company. These two were the only real proprietors of the two firms; for H. Eckstein & Company was a branch established to deal with the newly discovered goldfields of the Rand. The many so-called partners in these two firms during more than a generation after the start, were in reality only participators in the profits, who were always regarded and treated by their chiefs as partners, and were accorded the greatest liberty and trust.

Nothing could possibly have been finer than the relations in this great business organization. Hence, as the business increased in Johannesburg, we, who came on as younger men, found ourselves entrusted with a representation, and practically with a management, of vast investments, funds and powers. The reputation and status of the firm, and its relations with great investors in Europe, were such that immense funds were under its control, very largely through the great number of leading companies entirely controlled by it. I cannot state what this may have amounted to from time to time, but there were certainly times when a capitalization of £150,000,000 would not have been excessive. This does not indicate the wealth of the firm but is merely a vague indication of what was entrusted to its control. Some indication of the firm's position is gleaned from the fact that the Chamber of Mines, an association which comprised all the mines of the Witwatersrand, was founded largely by the then head of the local firm, Herman Eckstein, who was elected as President; and in unbroken succession up to 1902 a member of our firm always filled that office. I was the last in the succession, and the change, which had never even been considered, was due to my own refusal to accept renomination for reasons which may be referred to in connection with Chinese Labour.

It will be realized that the responsibility resting upon the Johannesburg partners, although only representatives of the chiefs, was at times very heavy, and all the greater because of the generous confidence reposed in them.

As said elsewhere, I have recently recovered the original letters written by me to my senior partners in London; also to Dr. Jameson and to Bouchier Hawksley, an old friend and a trusted solicitor of Rhodes and the Chartered Company. These letters were very confidential and full, and owing

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to political conditions were most frequently smuggled out of the country and no copies kept. They deal with the years 1894-99 and a few deal with conditions after the South African War. After being filed for nearly twenty-five years they were dug up and returned to me and proved to be of the greatest interest. From them I have verified many of the statements in this chapter.

In view of the firm's position it was literally impossible to keep out of politics, since the entire business of the Rand was so largely affected by what the Government might do.

The popular impression and the conviction of the Boer Party—for which I do not blame them—was that we were there to get what we could out of the country and then would drop it like a squeezed orange. I have no desire to make out that we, that all or any of us who were concerned in mining, were idealists and altruists, but mere sanity will enable anyone to understand that people so very largely interested in the country simply had to take the broader view and to give heed to the consideration of what was best for the country.

On one occasion, when discussing matters with Wernher, I felt compelled to offer some defence of what looked like a self-denying ordinance, that is, the refusal to take advantage of certain opportunities, and his reply reassured and pleased me immensely: "Don't let that worry you; our interests in the country are so great that you can always feel that what's best for the country will be best for us."

In the years that followed the Raid we were naturally more suspect than ever; although because of our prominence in the development of the gold industry which brought ever-increasing thousands of undesired Uitlanders, and because of our constant advocacy of new methods and new ideas and reforms in administration, which the changing character of the country obviously demanded, we had always been regarded unfavourably as typical of, and most prominent among the unwelcome elements which conflicted with the old ideas. It needs no elaboration. There was the inevitable conflict of ideals and methods between the two sections, and the same things which were branded as politics by one section were regarded as the very essentials of business by the other. Between these two sections there was another element making for mutual mistrust and misunderstanding; very often playing upon both for their own material ends and generally with the direct purpose of forwarding the political aims of Continental powers. This was what was known as the Hollander Group, whose leader was Dr. Leyds, Secretary of State, and whose

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chief asset was the great Netherlands Railway concession for the control of all the railways in the Transvaal; and the German Group owning the Dynamite Concession with its extortionate grip upon the mines of South Africa. These people, with their great number of business associates and sympathizers, were regarded by us, and by great numbers of the Boers as well, as parasites and mischief-makers and as very largely responsible for the conditions which led to the war. Hence, whether inclined to take an interest in politics or not it was quite impossible to avoid it, and many a difficult position had to be faced, and many a misunderstanding endured in silence.

Towards the end of 1898 there was a very general comprehension of such differences between the Transvaal and England, largely because of the conflict of interest and ideals between the Boers and the Uitlanders, so that a good many people felt uneasy, although very few indeed looked upon actual war as likely, or even possible.

I personally, a South African-born member of the leading firm, and prominent in the mining business and other things, not to mention the Reform Committee period, knew too much to be in doubt. I felt that some determined and consistent effort was needed to avert the crash, and that although we believed, as few will now dispute, that we had already suffered most unwarrantable imposts and injustice, it would be necessary for us to make an effort and to make further sacrifices if war were to be averted.

Of the firm of H. Eckstein & Co. the senior partner was Friederich Eckstein, universally known as Friedie; he was the younger brother of the late Herman Eckstein, founder of the firm, one of the best and most trusted men in the history of the Rand. The younger brother, who eventually succeeded to the seniority, in most respects differed entirely from the elder one. He was a universal favourite and greatly liked and trusted by all who knew him. He disliked prominence and publicity, yet his character won him many friends. Born in Germany, he became a British subject by naturalization and was a convinced Liberal; the only Liberal among us all. But he was no politician, having no taste whatever for politics. Next to him came Georges Rouliot, a Frenchman who had worked with Beit in Kimberley and eventually came with him to the Rand; a man who combined with high ability and great judgment very remarkable tact. I was then the junior.

Towards the end of 1898 I had become greatly concerned about the political position. As a South African born, with

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all my friends and relations in the country, and connected by marriage with several of the Dutch family groups, it was not only natural, but inevitable, that many aspects of the position should excite my interest or apprehension, aspects which might never strike others not born in, or long resident in the country; and when the constant study of this problem seemed to bring a little light I submitted the position to Eckstein.

To avoid interruption we remained in his place after others had gone, for the purpose of discussing this. I had only commenced to give him details when he stopped me, removed his pince-nez, a habit not uncommon when people are moved and much in earnest, and said: "Look here, Fitz, we get along splendidly. I haven't got your taste, or talent, or whatever you call it, for politics. I don't care a damn about politics except to see that they don't get us into trouble. Long ago you promised that you would never do anything in that line without perfectly free consultation and telling me everything. I believe that you have kept that promise, but there are times when, I must tell you straight, I have felt a bit nervous or apprehensive that you might be led into something more than you intend. You see, I look to Wernher personally as my chief; he's a business man pure and simple; my trust is to carry on the business for him and I must do that to the best of my ability. My God, man! whenever one of these damned questions comes up, I can see Wernher's face on the blotting-pad in front of me. Now go on, tell me what you want to say. I had to tell you this; I must know again that you really understand me. You understand my duty and obligation to Wernher and you are not going to let me down."

We were partners in a business in which there were thousands of questions arising on which legitimate differences of opinion might have occurred, but in all the years we worked together I cannot recall even the most trivial friction or dissatisfaction on either side. We were not only cordial comrades; I always felt that we were warm personal friends, and although parted in business for more than twenty years, we have so remained. It is partly because of my high respect for him that this incident is recorded, and also because his attitude has a direct bearing upon what follows.

I reassured him that I had never failed him, and that there could be no better proof of it than what I was about to propose. He replaced his glasses, and sat in silence while I explained. My proposal was that we should make an effort to clear up the points of difference between the mining industry and the Government, by a cash settlement on an

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assessment by valuers, to be mutually agreed, that if this was successful and all friction on material points removed, it would be a good example for others, and it might be possible to achieve or promote some agreement on the political question which divided the Uitlanders from the Boers: *i.e.* the Franchise. That was a more serious point and no immediate settlement could be hoped for, but the success of settlement on the material points, and the attempt to achieve agreement on the political point, would greatly improve the position and would most likely afford a good prospect of settlement of these outstanding questions which were being debated between the Transvaal and the Imperial Government. I was convinced that the Imperial Government did not want a pretext for war; in fact so far as we, the Uitlanders, were concerned, I greatly feared that in our desire to have a settlement and avert all prospect of trouble in South Africa, we might not receive the consideration to which we felt we were entitled, and might fare indifferently well, almost as a minor consideration, in the vast question of Imperial relations to all South Africa.

The matters which I stated as capable of settlement were the Dynamite concession, the Netherlands Railway concession and the Liquor concession; three monopolies which we regarded as iniquitous, rapacious and inconsistent with decent Government and reasonable development. There was another question known as the Bewaarplaatsen, a question too involved to justify a full explanation here. Briefly it means that there were certain relatively small areas upon the line of the gold-bearing reef which were held under the mining area title, but not in actual claim licences. In the earlier days the surface constituted the value for buildings, etc.; later developments revealed that the reef was accessible and payable directly in these areas. Many had been owned by the companies under claim licences, but the Government ordinance had insisted on a change of title, with the result that the owners lost the mining rights. My suggestion in regard to this question was that we put the past behind us; drop the question of our legal and moral right to these areas; have them valued for their potential profits, and then sold to the owners of the neighbouring or surrounding mining claims. These areas, being small, were incapable of being worked separately, and none but the neighbouring mine with its equipment complete, and ready access provided, could afford to work them.

It took a considerable time to detail all this. I explained that a large amount of money would be required; that it would have to be raised co-operatively—say, by the Chamber

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of Mines—that although Rouliot, who was President at the time, was absent on leave, and it would be better to await his return, I felt that every month's delay was dangerous. After all the bed-rock point was whether our firm would give the lead and would provide, underwrite, or negotiate the bulk of the money required, which would certainly run into some millions.

Eckstein had listened intently, almost motionless, and without a word. Then for the second time he unconsciously revealed the strength of his feeling. He took off his pince-nez, and tapping on the blotting-pad, said: "Fitz, I always thought you wanted war."

"Many people have thought that, but it's wrong. Let me tell you, that never a day or night passes that I don't think what war would mean to my people and to me. It would be a fratricidal war; it would ruin South Africa; it would divide peoples and families everywhere. I have often told you how they are prepared and what the plans are. Such a war would shatter the whole of South Africa. But then there's another thing, quite personal. Just think of it from my point of view. I am one of four brothers; one of them has already been killed in a South African war; the others would be in this one. Now supposing I had a brother or one of my most valued friends killed, and I were guilty of deliberately provoking this war, I should be the murderer of my brother or my friend."

He waited for a minute, then said: "Well, you don't want war, that's clear; if you did you wouldn't make a proposal like this. These people, after all, are not damned fools, and no one but a fool would refuse an offer like that."

"I'm afraid you are an optimist; I do not want war, but I am certain that it's coming. They have prepared for it, they have a big plan and they mean to carry it out. But if you look at it practically and without emotion at all, that is precisely the best reason why we should make the effort, every effort that we can think of, to make war impossible and unjustifiable. I know it's a good plan, but we and they are not on common ground; we want a settlement and are willing to pay for it; they do not want it, they want something much bigger and entirely different."

"Well what is your plan?"

"My plan was first of all to submit it all to you and to know whether you personally approve, and whether you believe that our firm would endorse and support this project."

He replied that whether it succeeded or not it offered a practical solution which he would confidently recommend, and

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he had no doubt that the heads of the firm would approve. But how put this before the Government?

"Well, if you agree, I propose to go over to Pretoria at once and see Smuts and submit this to him."

I had seen a great deal of Smuts¹ during the previous two years, and Eckstein knew all about it. The latter commented that Smuts was a very young man, and although Attorney-General he was neither experienced, nor did he hold any influential position; and finally that his office was not an appropriate one to deal with these matters. But Eckstein knew that on many occasions I had discussed with Smuts important questions which had no relation to his office, and that I looked upon him as the brain and force of the forward or progressive section of the Government party, who were at once loyal and devoted to Kruger, but yet determined gradually to get rid of the abuses which irked everyone, and so improve *and strengthen* the Republican party in South Africa. Whilst I had a great liking and a very great admiration for Smuts's capacity and resolution I never had the slightest doubt of his devotion to Kruger and the Republican party, nor in his confident ambition to make it paramount in South Africa.

The proper official head to consider such a question would have been the Secretary of State, F. W. Reitz, who had recently replaced Dr. Leyds; but he was quite new to office, knew nothing of the earlier history of these intricate questions, or even of the position up to date. He had retired from the Presidency of the Free State in consequence of severe illness and a breakdown from overwork. He was also not a young man, yet very excitable and impetuous. Such qualities did not promise well for the negotiation of a very delicate matter in which there would be numberless points of difference, and at every turn something requiring to be dealt with which was the subject of acute and even bitter controversy. On the other hand, the character of ex-President Reitz, his personal charm and high integrity and courage, made his opinion most welcome, and high hopes were built upon the influence he was expected to exert.

Thus, with Eckstein's warm support, I called by appointment to see Smuts.

One day, early in '97, when standing on Parktown platform, I noticed in a group of three a clean-shaven young-looking man, rather lean in appearance, almost hollow-cheeked. His

¹ General the Rt. Hon. J. C. Smuts at the time was Attorney-General in the executive of the South African Republic.

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eyes arrested me, then the formation of his mouth and chin. I asked, "Who's that remarkable-looking youth?" and one of my companions answered, "That's the young lawyer chap here that Kruger's just made Attorney-General. He's going over to take up his office now." I didn't even hear his name, but it was not long before I met him and every meeting strengthened the first impression.

He was at first rather stiffer in observing formalities than in later years, but even then he easily dropped into informal ways of talk and the easy personal familiarity which is a recognized characteristic in South Africa, and not to be confused with either vulgar familiarity or insincerity. We had had many previous meetings and he received me with cordiality. I wasted no time, but as briefly as possible gave him an outline. He listened with the closest attention, and his remarkable blue eyes were a study; the changing expression from the full, unstudied effect of boyish humour and absolute frankness, to the hardness of ice when other feelings were roused, or that startling change where they seemed to recede as though taking back the thoughts he was concealing and veiling them from another's sight. I saw or imagined these changes, but at any rate felt satisfied that all was going well, for above all else he was intensely interested.

I had not gone very far when a little incident occurred which most unexpectedly justified my own rather unorthodox procedure in putting the case before Smuts. I had reached the point of dealing with the Bewaarplaatsen, when the office door was unceremoniously opened, and in walked State Secretary Reitz. He made some hurried apology for the interruption, but Smuts, with perfect composure, introduced me and proceeded to explain that the matter we were discussing would be of great interest to the State Secretary. I saw the change of expression when my name was mentioned and guessed that his feelings regarding myself were based upon Reform and Raid associations. Yet I was not prepared for the effect produced on him by the brief reference to Bewaarplaatsen. He commented warmly and unfavourably before the statement was finished, and then made criticisms and statements which showed that he knew nothing whatever of the subject. Smuts very quietly and tactfully endeavoured to turn aside the discussion and very gently suggested certain facts as possibly not yet brought to his knowledge, but he was not to be pacified, and finally became so warm on the subject, and revealed such complete ignorance of the facts, that only his own angry and abrupt departure brought the unpleasant incident to a close.

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I then resumed with Smuts, telling him practically everything as I had put it to Eckstein. He asked many questions of a very practical nature, bearing upon the prospect of success, and was quite unreserved in acknowledging that this was the first genuine effort made by our people to bring about a real settlement.

On the occasion of previous meetings with him I had had to deal with several of these big questions, but not in the same connection, and throughout this period his attitude and his practical work had all been in favour of effective internal reform. On one occasion—it was when dealing with the terrible liquor conditions, and we had the backing of some of his very best officials in the Department of Justice—he not only gave help but warned me: “There are difficulties, and there will be other difficulties with the President, who is a very strong man. He wants to do the best, but you have to remember that there are a number of people who are hangers-on and who have personal interests to serve of which he knows nothing, and there are times when they make it difficult to carry out what we all know ought to be done.”

Again, once when discussing dynamite with him he remarked that people ridiculed as a shame and a ridiculous fabrication the idea that there could be any connection between dynamite and the independence of the country: “You and I know that strictly speaking there is none; even that our independence would be strengthened if there were no dynamite concession at all. But that’s not the practical point. There are people interested in dynamite who are plausible and have access to the President or his advisers, and who represent to him that the cancellation of the dynamite monopoly would produce such an effect that it would, in fact, alienate many who are powerful supporters of our independence. Therefore you must be patient. We will get these reforms by degrees. You must be very patient with the President. He is a great leader and a great man, but he is also an old man and beset by difficulties, and by numbers of people who are not his truest friends.” That is the gist of an entirely spontaneous pronouncement.

I had purposely dealt first with the material subjects in regard to which we proposed simple expropriation on reasonable terms. But I told Smuts that there was a good deal more to be settled and it would not be possible for me to get through by luncheon time. He was a very busy man and had to attend to three more matters, and therefore asked me to come back in the afternoon.

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The interview of the afternoon was quite unlike that of the morning, and was of interest and importance beyond all expectations. Having dealt with what I called the material matters, I put before him what may be called the possible consequential developments in regard to the Uitlanders, political questions. He was noncommittal, although much interested, and indicated that whilst these were difficult matters there was no doubt that agreement on the material questions with the mining industry would create a better atmosphere. Yet I could see that he gave an impression of hopefulness; though I did not expect him to commit himself even so far as a hope. But the position became much clearer when I went on to suggest that we might possibly achieve a kind of three-cornered, round-table talk in which, besides the questions affecting the mining industry and the political position of the Uitlanders, we might arrive at a satisfactory solution of these other troublesome questions, Suzerainty, the British Indians' proposition and that of the Cape boys, as it was then called, meaning the coloured people who were British subjects and had come from the Cape Colony. The moment I mentioned participation by the Imperial Government and the attempt to settle questions at issue with them, Smuts's manner hardened very perceptibly, and he said promptly, but without heat, yet very firmly: "That, of course, is impossible." I asked why, and he replied in these words: "It will be inconsistent with the dignity of an independent State to discuss its internal affairs with another Power."

As a settlement with the Imperial Government seemed to me the *sine qua non* of peace, I was a good deal upset by this reply, and to the best of my ability represented the urgency of some such round-table talk. He was, however, quite firm, quite confident and admirably restrained and courteous. He was indeed so calm and so sure that I felt the desperate seriousness of the position and 'let myself go' in urging the proposal which I had very much at heart. I recognized that from that moment he was, as one might say, the master of the position in that he was perfectly collected and as calm and cool as though discussing a matter of no personal concern. I appealed to him: "Do you realize what it's leading to, and what must inevitably happen if we don't make a supreme effort to get a settlement; do you realize that it means war?"

Then, and only once, he was guilty of what seemed to me an unreal, almost theatrical effect entirely alien to his nature as I knew it then and have known it since. "Yes, I realize

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it, I think the position is very threatening." He came towards me with a very curious gesture, a wide sweep of his arms, bringing the hands together, and said: "I seem to see two great thunderclouds approaching, and when they meet there will come the crash," and he dropped his arms.

Although somewhat chilled by what I thought a theatrical gesture, I was too excited to be put off by that, and in a tone which I am sure conveyed impatience and reproach, I retorted quickly: "And do you know what such a war means? It will extend from the Zambesi to the ocean. It will divide the races and the States; it will split us from one end to the other; communities divided, families divided, father against son, brother against brother; God alone knows where the thing will end. It will mean utter ruin to South Africa; and you will risk all this for a little thing which is only vanity. Inconsistent with your dignity, that's all it is!"

He replied quite calmly: "I know what it means."

But his calmness only added to my warmth, and I rapped out at him: "Your dignity! Your independence! Good God, you know England, you were educated in England: you know what the Empire means; in six months you will have no dignity left; you will have no independence; no State; nothing! What kind of madness is this!?"

It was a cold douche to me to see his face perfectly calm and even smiling. We had walked about the room whilst this talk was proceeding, and he turned towards me until quite close up, and said: "Yes, I know England; better perhaps than you think. I lived and studied there. You are quite right; I do know England. Not in six months, my friend, not in six years; you may take the cities and the mines, for we would not meet you there, but for six or seven years we shall be able to hold out in the mountains" (it was an extraordinary expression instead of the veld, yet that was the expression used) "and long before that there will be a change of opinion in England. Other things will crop up, they will become tired and lose interest; there will be another general election and the Liberals will come into power." Then he stepped forward and tapped me on the chest, and with deep conviction in his glance he said: "And *this time* we shall get all that we want."

It was to me a devastating end to my fine dreams. There was no mistaking the intensity of conviction and of purpose, and I felt defeated. However, it was he who relieved the position by turning back to the earlier discussion and we

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talked for a little longer. But I had no heart in it, feeling that nothing would come of it and that we must just go on as before with the dismal certainty of war before us.

I was quite ready to go when he gave me yet another surprise. After saying that he cordially approved and would co-operate heartily in any settlement of the mines question, he made an astonishing personal reference. "I fully appreciate what you are doing," he said, in effect, "but I want to be quite clear on this matter and to stand clear with you personally. You have spoken about the difficulties with the Uitlanders and with the Imperial Government; now Fitz, I know perfectly well that you are at the back of it all; that you are the moving spirit in this thing and that you are the one man who is really responsible for the trouble. You were most largely responsible in the Reform business. I don't regard so seriously the other prominent men, but you are South African born and you knew what you were doing and you meant it. I was not in my present position then, as you know, but I know a good deal about it. Now we have got along very well together and there are many things upon which we agree, but I don't want you to make any mistake. You are at the bottom of all this trouble, and I will catch you some day, and no considerations of personal friendship are going to weigh with me; the day I catch you I'll hang you as high as Haman, you can take that for a dead certainty." He laughed almost lightly as he said it, but there was no mistaking what he meant. The issue was clear enough to me, and it was plain that in some measure at least it was a match of wits. I laughed back at him and said: "You will never catch me." He replied: "I will—make no mistake." And I retorted, "You'll never catch me, because I am not guilty of what you think." He laughed loudly, and flung away, saying: "You can bluff as much as you like, but I know you are behind it and I know that I shall catch you and when I do you can take it I'll hang you, and personal relations will not count."

I left him then, both of us laughing more or less grimly.

I returned greatly depressed to report to Eckstein the total failure of my effort; hence nothing was ever known of the attempt. But to our inexpressible surprise, a few weeks later there came a proposal from the Government that a Committee representing the mines and business enterprises of the Rand should meet to discuss with the representatives of the Government means by which outstanding differences could be arranged. This resulted in what was afterwards known as

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the Capitalist Negotiations, and when the tentative agenda of this Conference was enlarged to include the discussion of the franchise and Uitlander differences our astonishment was very great, for these were the very things which I had proposed to General Smuts; but whether this action on the part of the Government was due to my suggestion, or to their own independent initiative, I haven't the least idea.

CHAPTER XI

CAPITALIST NEGOTIATIONS IN THE TRANSVAAL

OUR astonishment was complete when, a few weeks after the events recorded in the last chapter, we learned that it was proposed to have a conference in Bloemfontein at which Lord Milner, representing the Imperial Government, would meet Presidents Kruger and Steyn and their advisers, as representing the two Republics. It would be presumptuous to assume that this was the result of my attempt to get a round-table talk, yet it seems, at least, a very remarkable coincidence. But even if the letter of the proposal was observed, or almost observed, the spirit was entirely different; for, as became clear afterwards, these two men never for a moment contemplated the spirit of negotiation and accommodation, and give and take. In both cases the old conditions and policy of the Transvaal Government were rigidly maintained. The Conferences were nothing but manoeuvres for a more advantageous position.

Whilst the selected representation of the mining industry and of the Rand gave no ground for criticism, a fatal mistake was made when Mr. Edouard Lippert, the dynamite monopolist and concessionnaire, and the recognized arch-enemy of the industry, was appointed the Government emissary and representative. He came as appointed by Dr. Leyds, the high official who was least trusted by the Rand community, and this combination was regarded as an avowal of insincerity. The Chairman of the Rand Committee, so-called Capitalists, was Georges Rouliot, President of the Chamber of Mines, who had then returned from his holiday. The subjects of discussion were all business matters concerning the industry, and were naturally fully discussed by the various delegates with their business representatives; thus I was properly and intimately acquainted with everything with which my partner, Rouliot, had to deal.

Notwithstanding the prejudice and the unfortunate impression created by the appointment of Mr. Lippert to represent the Government, matters were discussed with the sole aim of arriving at a reasonable settlement; and there was nothing of altruism about this, but simply a business precaution, because

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in our firm, for instance, investors from Germany had entrusted large sums to our management, and in France there was capital running into many millions for which we were responsible. Other firms represented more Continental investments, and there was a very considerable American interest to be considered. Hence, what were called political considerations were absolutely out of the question; people dealt only with the material economic affairs of their own business.

To the surprise of the 'Capitalist' delegates, the question of the Franchise and of the Uitlanders' rights was pressed upon their consideration, and they replied that this, being a political question, was entirely outside their sphere. This reply was not accepted, and they were again pressed for recommendations on this matter and also on the questions concerning the British Indians and the Cape boys, etc., which were subjects of negotiation and rather sharp controversy between the Transvaal and the British Government. The Committee again replied that they could have nothing whatever to do with matters under discussion with another Government, but that to facilitate the Government's wish in regard to the Uitlanders they recommended that suitable political representatives of that class should be consulted separately and asked for a report.

When, at a following meeting, Mr. Lippert urgently sought suggestions as to this Uitlander Committee there was much reluctance to mention names, but under hard pressure it was pointed out that although there were no elected representatives of the Uitlander class there could be no doubt but that the members of the old Reform Committee were generally regarded as competent exponents, and the four leaders who were sentenced to death having by then left the country, I, as secretary of the Reform Committee, was designated. Lippert instantly made an angry protest. "If you import that man the whole thing's going to be ruined." The Committee's reply was that the matter did not concern them and they would be quite ready to drop it as they had never wished to touch the subject, but that they were unable to change their opinion as to a suitable representative.

It must be remembered that all this time I knew everything that was happening, since it directly concerned my firm, and when two or three days later Lippert again returned and ungraciously communicated Dr. Leyd's acceptance of me as a representative, I was prepared to deal with the position. Remembering what Smuts had said of the fate which was awaiting me, and remembering also the sentence of three years' silence or three years' deportation which had been

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passed upon me after the Raid, I was not disposed to take unnecessary risks, and therefore wrote a polite acknowledgment, with the regret that, owing to the three years' silence which had been passed upon me, I was unable to take part in political discussions unless I had a definite request or authority from President Kruger and his Government.

I had not forgotten, either, the interview at which my proposal for the round-table talk had been made, and whilst I had no desire, nor indeed any apprehension, that this invited intervention in politics might qualify me for the exalted position indicated by my candid and genial friend, Smuts, ("Hanging as high as Haman") I confess that the recollection did occur to me; also that I experienced the very human feeling of something like malicious amusement at the idea of exacting an explicit demand that they did want me, for their own purposes, and that they should be compelled against their will quite openly to recognize, and even invite as representatives of the Uitlander population, two members of the Reform Committee. It must have been a bitter pill to swallow, that they should have to invite two who had suffered imprisonment and other heavy punishment for the very same cause of representing the Uitlanders' rights. But the fact that it was swallowed was sufficient warning that for reasons unknown to us the Government attached a very great deal of importance to these so-called Capitalist Negotiations, and that they clearly hoped to obtain from us admissions, or manœuvre us into mistakes which would be of use to them in their negotiations and controversies with the Imperial Government.

We took a heavy responsibility when making this unauthorized statement of the Uitlanders' rights, but we did not flinch from facing the Government's demands for a settlement. Whilst never deluding ourselves that we were a match for these incomparably dexterous, resolute and secretive opponents, I felt confident that in fair conditions, and *in the open*, we could hold our own and could appeal with confidence to a wider and more impartial tribunal—the public. The great opportunity for a definite stand had been presented to us and firm action was necessary; someone had to act—and we took the responsibility.

For a better understanding of this position and my action it should be mentioned that my first meeting with Lord Milner had taken place in January 1898, so that everything was not guesswork or inspiration upon my part. On receipt of the required assurances I insisted upon selecting a colleague who would share with me this unauthorized and wholly delicate task of representing the Uitlanders. I named Mr. H. C. Hull,

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the leading member of the Reform Committee, and afterwards Minister for Finance in both the Transvaal and the Union Governments under General Botha. We submitted the report, with the proposal for the franchise after five years' residence, which was afterwards submitted by Lord Milner at the Bloemfontein Conference and refused by President Kruger.

The Capitalist Negotiations can be regarded as a factor of no great importance. But the whole episode was none the less most illuminating and of considerable value in illustrating the conditions at the time, and the methods employed. From the outset it was looked upon as a manoeuvre and it had become a match of wits in which there developed something like the excitement of a sporting tussle. Everyone on our side knew from the moment that Lippert was appointed and Leyds took charge that by no possibility could the result be to our advantage, or anything approaching a fair settlement. The report itself, which was compiled almost entirely by Rouliot, was, in the circumstances, quite a masterpiece. Ostensibly these negotiations were a genuine effort on the part of the Government to deal with outstanding differences. There was no suggestion of privacy or secrecy, for that would have ensured instant rejection upon our part; and although proceedings were not supposed to be published the very nature of the whole business was public, and the clear inference was that the report with the Government's reply would be given the fullest publicity. But when Lippert reported how matters were proceeding, and, finally, the conclusions arrived at, the Committee were informed that the proceedings must be regarded as absolutely private, and that exceptional precautions were to be taken to avoid any publication of the report until the Government had had time to consider it.

On the other hand, Lippert had been at no pains to conceal the fact that it would be unacceptable to the Government, and it was a certainty that this report on which they had spent great time and effort, and which was really a defence of the economic position of the Rand, would never see daylight. However, the report *was* published within a few days and created great excitement and interest, for it was precisely the clear, moderate and reasoned statement of the position for which everyone was waiting. It was not published by the Transvaal Government nor by the Committee. There was indeed a violent protest on the part of the former against the gross breach of faith which this publication perpetrated. But the only result of this violent indignation was to reveal that it had been nothing but a manoeuvre to put us in a false position, and it showed them "hoist with their own petard."

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How it came to be published has remained a mystery, although many extraordinary stories were current at the time. As I happen to be the individual who knows, or ever knew, the facts I shall give them now and leave the reader to answer the question: "Was it right?"

There was violent controversy at the time and very severe criticism, but this was founded upon total ignorance, or very partial knowledge of facts. At that time there was in Pretoria an extremely keen and capable young journalist, an Irishman, who was the correspondent or sub-correspondent of the *London Times*. He had a real gift for gathering news: he seemed to absorb it and he knew everybody in all camps, and although an exceptionally keen worker in the cause of the British and of the Uitlanders in general he had the faculty of making friends with those who were most bitterly opposed to his personal views.

I had known him well for years and was often amused and sometimes rather annoyed that it seemed impossible for me to visit Pretoria without being instantly pounced upon by Falconer¹ and subjected to questions, appeals, and every kindred device to extract news. In ten minutes he made one feel like a squeezed sponge, but he was genial and one of the best-hearted fellows going.

When the report of the Capitalist Committee was completed, and the request received for delivery by hand, the Chairman, knowing that I had business to attend to in Pretoria, asked me to take it over and to deliver it personally to the State Secretary. I went to Pretoria, and to my disgust and embarrassment one of the first to greet me on the station as the train stopped was Falconer. This meeting was particularly undesirable, because I knew I was under observation and every movement reported—generally with the most ridiculous interpretations.

By what ramifications he got his news I don't know, but he pounced on me with the astonishing statement that he knew I had come to deliver this letter and that I had it with me. He appealed to me at once to tell him the results as everything would be public on the following day, and was intended to be published, and asked me to let him have one glance at the letter just to get the substance of it. I drew the sealed letter from my pocket and showed it to him, saying that with all goodwill, and thoroughly understanding his professional anxiety and his personal keenness, it was absolutely

¹ The late P. C. Falconer, for several years the gifted correspondent at Pretoria of *The Cape Times*.

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impossible for me to divulge what we had been asked to keep absolutely private; that the members of the Committee, through the Chairman, had entrusted me with this mission and that it was sheer waste of time to talk about it. As for allowing him to glance at the letter, I showed him the sealed envelope to prove that in any case that was not possible for I had no copy.

Poor Falconer was crushed with disappointment. He used every argument one could think of, pointing out that if, as he had reason to believe, this report did not suit the Government it was quite certain that they would not publish it and that the whole thing, as suspected from the beginning, was nothing but a trap and a manoeuvre. Moreover, the last-moment stipulation for secrecy was monstrous and dishonest. A Committee had represented the public, there was no particular secrecy at their meetings, and if it was all to be hushed up now feeling throughout the country would be outraged and there would be the suspicion, already prompted from the other side, that the aim of these so-called Capitalist Negotiations was merely to secure financial advantages for themselves at the expense of the country and the community; a purely selfish and wholly improper conspiracy for personal gain. But that was nothing new to me, for, as I told him, he had touched the point. We knew from the beginning that the endeavour would be to put us in a false position and to make out that we were intriguing behind the backs of others for personal aims, but even so that would not warrant me in divulging what I had been trusted to keep private.

His insistent entreaties and arguments so delayed me that all the passengers had left, also the cabs, and when he said that his cab was waiting for him and offered me a lift, I was glad to take it. During the drive to the hotel he was in despair and became quite silent for a good while; then he said: "You know, I don't get paid much for this job and I have stuck to it hard, but you can't do anything here without money. If I had £50 or even £25 I'd have that damned letter to-night. I'd make the biggest scoop that has ever been made in this country and do the biggest service to our cause; but I haven't got it. Do you know, I have spent every penny of my own and my wife and young child are both ill and ordered by the doctors to Durban. I had £25 to pay for their journey and it's gone this last week in trying to get this information. I wasted it trying too soon, for I didn't know that the report was yet to be sent in."

I asked him what he meant by getting the letter if he had the cash. He gave a harsh, sardonic laugh and said: "You

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know it well enough yourself. There's nothing you can't buy here. They have filled their offices with a lot of jackals and spies; smart Hollanders of a low class who are there because they will do dirty work. Well, of course, they are just as ready to sell their employers as anybody else. My God! if I had only the money that I had saved to send my wife and child away I'd have that letter to-night."

I told him that it was a mistake to come and see me and it would be very unwise for him to be seen with me; that I would leave him to go on with his cab and I would walk the rest of the way. He seemed so utterly depressed, and I was so upset by the details of his sacrifice that I asked him to have tea with me at our office in the afternoon.

I delivered the letter to the hands of the State Secretary himself. These were very trying times, especially trying to people who were sensitive and nervous, and I am bound to say without any resentment at all, and indeed with nothing but admiration for the personal character of that gentleman, that his best side was not shown. Perhaps he resented our meeting when he had denounced my ideas about Bewaarplaatsen, but more probably he was thoroughly angered by the results of the negotiations and the reports of the whole proceeding which reached him daily from Lippert and Leyds. Knowing the sources and channels of his information I could understand his manners and feelings. He was not particular about formalities or courtesy, was evidently much excited and very angered. He had already been advised of my mission, and showed very clearly by his offhand manner that he was not the least interested, and did not bother about the ordinary conventions. I knew well of his kindly, courteous nature, and could realize that something had upset him. Anyhow, his position and his age imposed restraint on me.

It was a very brief interview. He sat at his desk and I remained standing. He did not trouble to open the letter, but made some remarks which I interpreted to mean that he was well acquainted with the contents and had no desire to discuss anything with me. I was surprised that he did not even read the letter but put it, almost threw it, unopened into the drawer of his desk. Probably it was not intentional, but it looked to me like a discourteous dismissal and, wishing him good-day, I left.

I had a good deal of other work to do in Pretoria but this interview kept coming to mind and the abrupt and unpleasant features rankled in me. I think it was during luncheon that there came back to me with sudden force Falconer's despairing confession that he hadn't a bob in the world and couldn't

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even send his wife and child to the coast; but if he had a little money, "By God! I'd have that letter to-night!"

He found me at work in the office, but I had just finished, and sent for tea. He looked really ill; haggard and worried to the last degree and so depressed that he never spoke unless spoken to, and even then one had to repeat the remark and he would jump to attention, his mind evidently completely occupied with other things. At last I roused him up by saying: "I can tell you this much now. I delivered that letter and he never even read it; hardly looked at the address. He just pushed it into the open drawer at his right hand—the top drawer—I thought you might like to know that; and that, at any rate, I am not bound to keep to myself. The reception that I got was not what you would give to an ordinary stranger; it was discourteous and most hostile."

He agreed and regarded it as further corroboration of what we had always feared. I then asked him about his family and urged him to get away to the coast himself and take them down. He looked at me in blank surprise that I should press a suggestion which he had repeatedly told me was utterly beyond his means. But before he could make much protest I said to him: "Look here, I only learned from you to-day how you have spent everything you have got on this, and that's not right. You do the work, but there's no reason why you should pay the expenses when it's our cause too. The simple fact is that these little sums are big things to you but they are nothing to us, and I look upon it as a privilege if you will let us help a bit to enable you to get away with your family and get the change and rest which you all need."

He was much moved by this, but at the same time said that he couldn't possibly go away himself; he couldn't run away from total failure, and at any cost he must try his best and see this through.

"Well," I said, "that's really your own personal affair, but if you will allow me to do it I'd like to stand the expense of your wife and child's visit to the coast." I took from my desk an envelope containing some banknotes, and handed it to him, "With the best of luck." He thanked me warmly and then, as though something had occurred to him, took out the contents and counted and said: "But look here, this is a great deal too much; this is twice as much as I need."

"It's not more than you have spent yourself, and if I know you, it's not nearly as much as you would like to spend again if you had got it. However, it's not my affair, as long as you take the family to the coast and get that off your mind you can do as you damned well please with the rest."

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He stood for a moment as though something beyond his control was working in him. The old look of intense keenness grew in his eyes and suddenly he broke into a laugh; and stuffing the envelope into his pocket he grabbed his hat and said: "By God! I've got it. I'll have it to-night!!" He made a wild grip at my hand and swished off out of the room, but I saw his eyes glistening as he turned to wave to me.

I believe he crossed the border next day in order to take his family to the coast, and he despatched his cables and telegrams from an office where there would be no delays or mistakes; one where the Transvaal Government did not control either censorship or records. This was a common precaution with us in those days. I did not see or hear from him or of him from the moment he left my office.

At any rate, the report appeared *in extenso* in the London *Times* and in the *Cape Times*; and the first I knew of what had happened was when I read the telegraphed news and summaries in the local papers.

Then came the burst! This publication had exposed to the world the entire position with the plans and methods developed in secret, and a light was thrown on the position which had hitherto been obscured and misrepresented. The storm of protest on the part of the Government against the so-called breach of faith involved in the publication recoiled on themselves, for no secret negotiations had ever been contemplated; no such thing was ever possible or would have been entertained for one moment. The members represented very large interests in the community and also were the local heads or representatives of very important principals. Every member had full information and records; each was invited, not for personal reasons, but because he represented large interests—his firm, company, group or section. Secrecy which excluded their principals would have been treachery, and not a single individual who participated would have been accepted had such a stipulation been made or intended. The record or reports were in the hands of a number of persons and had already, and most properly, been referred not only to the big local interests concerned, but had been reported to the representatives of the great investors and groups overseas, whose property was being dealt with by this very report. It is conceivable that for a week or two nothing would have been given to the Press, but in the circumstances it was absolutely certain that within a very short period complete publication would take place on the side of the Committee, to those whom it represented—and most properly so.

The protests of bad faith were clearly the angry outbursts

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of disappointment and rage, at having their designs exposed. In view of the then impending Conference at Bloemfontein between Lord Milner and the Presidents of the two Republics it certainly was a most untimely and awkward revelation for one party; most welcome and useful to another; for, for the first time, the hand was exposed and cards tumbled on to the table.

The story of the Bloemfontein Conference is on record, and as we, the so-called Uitlanders, were excluded from participation on the grounds that the Governments alone were concerned, there is little one can add to what has been published.

CHAPTER XII

“THE TRANSVAAL FROM WITHIN”

IN the routine of our business it was my turn for a holiday and rest when Rouliot returned from his trip. The spell in Pretoria Jail and the insanitary conditions of imprisonment in the condemned cell had left their mark, and for a very long time I was subject to recurrences of trouble due to that experience. Owing to this and to the strain of overwork I was under doctor's orders to get away for a long spell and had to sail in February; but the Government's proposal of the Capitalist Negotiations decided me to stay and see that business through as I personally was most familiar with the facts and most responsible, and could not fairly leave the burden upon others; but no sooner was this crisis passed than the Bloemfontein Conference began to occupy all minds, and again I postponed leaving, and did not sail until July. Although it was necessary, for the reasons above given, to sail for England, there was another, and eventually much more cogent reason for taking the trip.

I had written most of *The Transvaal from Within* while still in jail. It was not designed for publication but, as the earliest issue showed, it was a record printed only for circulation amongst fellow Reformers and friends. It was really a private record. My arrangement with my publishers, who had previously published for me *The Outspan*, made it quite clear that the book was for private circulation only and that the total number of copies to be printed would not exceed a couple of hundred.

Some time in 1898, I believe, the proofs having been corrected, a dozen bound copies which bore no title were sent to me. The sentence of three years' silence or abstention from politics which had been imposed on me at the Reform trial, in addition to the sentence for imprisonment, of course, was an unpleasant one on account of its uncertainty, more so than any definite threats of execution. The President alone would decide what constituted participation in politics or the breaking of silence, and the penalty laid down at the time of the trial was three years' banishment from the country, which, to a person whose life, family and interests were staked in it, was a serious matter.

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Possibly that consideration prompted me to limit so definitely the publication of the book. At the same time I did not believe that it would do for publication; that anyone would care to or trouble to read it. Interesting as it was to us to have some record of our troubles, it never even occurred to me that the book could carry itself, so to say. So little did I think of it that even when I met Lord Milner and had my first interview with him, it never occurred to me to mention that I had written anything or made any notes on the subject.

It must have been about the end of 1898, on a Sunday, when a number of young friends were as usual gathered for tennis and to spend the day. We were all much younger then! Among them was Ossy Walrond, then Private Secretary to Lord Milner, who was in Cape Town. Walrond had come up, I think, for the Christmas holidays and recess, etc., and being very keen on his work he was just having a 'sniff round,' as he put it.

During the morning I noticed that he was not sharing in the games, and went to look for him and found him buried in an armchair in the library so completely absorbed in a book he was reading that he did not see me or notice my presence until I stood over him and recognized the book. I took it from him, saying chaffingly: "What the devil do you mean by reading my private papers?"

He got very excited, completely ignored my protest and asked me why on earth I had never spoken about this, why I had never sent it to the 'chief.' Hadn't I realized that there was no such record in existence, and no book of reference containing this information. He said all sorts of things of the interest excited by the book, and finally took it from my hands, saying he would put it in his bag at once as he was returning next day, and Lord Milner would love to have it.

Honestly I thought the whole thing was ridiculous and Walrond altogether off his judgment. I protested that I would be ashamed to submit a thing like that to a man of Lord Milner's position and intellect, and that he wouldn't even look at it; that it was not right to bore him with that sort of stuff as he had no time for it. However, in the end, and with due emphasis upon the threat of deportation, I let it go.

Within a fortnight, and to my great surprise, I received a note to say that Lord Milner had read it at once with the greatest interest, that he had no doubt it would be as interesting and valuable to others since there was no written record in existence and no statement had ever been made of the case for the Uitlanders; and in his opinion I should go to England at once and get it published as soon as possible.

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It may seem now like affectation to say so, but it is the literal truth that I had thought so little of it myself that I had not shown it to my comrades, but the very few who knew it was being attempted understood that it was only intended for fellow Reformers and a few friends. I interpreted the phrase "as soon as possible" to mean that the publication should take place after June 30, when the term of three years' silence would have expired; hence, I did not hesitate to delay departure in order to be at hand when the Bloemfontein Conference was to take place.

After this I had another more urgent message, and finally, when I saw Lord Milner in Cape Town, he disapproved of my delay and told me plainly that the best service I could render was to go at once and get the book published as no one understood the position, and no one else knew that there was a full record actually in existence. That portion of the book entitled "The Last Three Years," which brought the record up to date, was written on the voyage and after arrival in England. No one but myself was in any way responsible for the production; no one inspired or urged it; no one collaborated in the work. The labour of collecting data of which there was no written or private record was very great, and according to my lights every effort was made to be fair, that is to say, accurate. When publication was suggested and seriously entertained I went through all again most carefully, and since it is practically impossible for a partizan to be strictly fair, I took extra precautions. The fact that I had intimate friends and connections on the other side, whose sincere devotion to the Republican cause commanded the greatest respect, and who in their personal capacities were quite at one with us in condemning the abuses, and in supporting the remedy of grievances, gave me numberless opportunities to check my own views.

The certainty that these friends and others would stand by their country and fight against us in the event of war was never absent from my mind, and could not have been, for many a time they warned me. I recall one of the very best; utterly devoid of racialism, occupied in his own profession as a lawyer, taking no interest or part in politics, frankly detesting the ever-brewing trouble and fearing results, yet quietly firm in his loyalty to his adopted country, the Republic where he had settled as a very young man and accepted the obligations of citizenship—that is—a Nationalist burgher. I quote him because he was to me a very fine representative of a considerable section. We met frequently and familiarly. He would say: "I quite understand your

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position and agree entirely with you except that remedy by means of war or force is too heavy a price to pay. Don't be impatient and we will get things straight. At present we are run by extremists and by intriguers, born mischief makers who want to force a war with England or to choke England out of the country. But it's not the feeling of the great majority. A big change is coming about. The old man (President Kruger) has outlived his generation, his methods are all wrong, but remember he's old now and cannot last long. Younger men are coming on whose views are the same as yours, but you must remember this, if ever the question of war arises every one of us will support our Government and fight for our country. There won't be any moderates or progressives, we will all turn out to defend our independence, and you mark my words, the fighting is not going to be done by the men who have talked big and tried to make trouble; they will be in some safe place behind the lines. It's we who will have to fight; we who hate it and will be fighting our friends."

I recall vividly one night after spending the evening in his house he followed me into the street. He never really "let himself go," and rarely showed how deep his feelings were, but this time he gripped my arm, and although habitually our medium was English, his appeal came from him in Dutch. What he said to me was: "Fitz, for God's sake stop your political trouble agitation or we shall be at war in no time; and you and I will be on opposite sides."

How seriously and bravely he had faced it all was not long in coming home to me. In the early days of Ladysmith, on a wild, dark night, he stood to his post on Green Hill, at the last alone, to face the storming party, and was killed in the last bayonet charge of the Imperial Light Horse regiment, which I had helped to raise. A splendid fellow and most gallant soul!

Apart from the checks which I got from these intimates on the other side, I sought the opinion of one who had been a very intimate friend for a great number of years; one occupying a very high position on the Republican side, and I sent to him the proofs of the entire book as far as it had been written, and asked for a candid, dispassionate criticism. We were not only personal friends, but frequently close business associates, and I cannot think of a point in connection with our internal troubles, and what you might call domestic politics, on which we were not in complete agreement. But he had always been preaching the same thing, namely, that the case was indefensible at the time, but that any impatience

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in seeking redress would be sheer madness and would throw every one of our Boer friends back into the arms of the Kruger party; for in no circumstances would they waver in defence of their flag.

I was prepared for criticism, but not for the astonishingly angry letter which I received. He had thought that he knew me, he wrote, not only as a personal friend, but as a reasonable, fair-minded and, above all, truthful person. He would not deal at length with the book, but returned it, not being inclined to read it all. He thought it was outrageous and inexcusable because of absolute falsities in relation to which I must have known the facts.

I valued his friendship and opinion far too highly to let the matter drop, and wrote back saying that there must be some mistake or he would not have written with such unaccustomed vehemence or have made such criticism; that on the whole my object had been just to get from him the straight truth and to see if I had made any mistakes, and I assured him that if there was any foundation in fact for his criticism which he could bring to my knowledge I would without hesitation make the correction and be very grateful to him for it, for no one had ever seen the proofs and the book was intended only for private circulation, but none the less was I as anxious that it should be right; therefore, would he mind pointing out where the supposed inaccuracy had taken place?

He was a good deal mollified and wrote back in quite a different tone, yet firmly upholding his view, and he selected two matters on which he said my version was a travesty of the truth, in fact the very reverse of it, and that everybody knew what the facts were. I took some time to investigate these two and found the same explanation for both. There was no record in existence, there had been no proper publication, and each of us had failed to learn of the very last stage in the two instances. I gave him the full details and references and sent him a draft in which I not merely corrected, but entirely reversed, the statements contained in my proof, and adopted his own words. As to the second incident, I sent him the clear proof that he in his turn had overlooked something which I had known. He wrote a very frank and friendly reply which I greatly valued, acknowledging his mistake and thanking me for correcting mine, saying he was very sorry to have written in such extreme and general terms in the beginning, and was delighted to feel that his personal opinion of me was not altered. But the fact remained that we saw things from different points of view, and without

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any doubt he thought there was nothing for us but what he had always said, namely, that we must stick to our own sides. I am glad to add that through the war and after, and despite all political differences, our friendship remained unaffected.

One more attempt I made, not to secure approval but to give time and a chance for a protest if any inaccuracy could be established. The difference between the Raiders and the Reformers and the aftermath of friction which was never publicly revealed created the position that I, in writing this book, was a partizan who might fairly be regarded as the biased critic of Dr. Jameson and those associated with him. My own personal relations with him had not been impaired, and for reasons which I have never understood he seemed to hold me excused of some action or attitude he appeared to resent in others. His immense capacity for silence, for facing everything without retort, is well known, and as far as I know he never opened his mouth to clear or excuse himself, or to blame others. But this very fact worried me and made me feel the obligation to submit what I had written to his judgment. I explained it all to his brother Sam, and the latter handed the book to Dr. Jameson.

I heard nothing in reply, not even an acknowledgment, but some weeks later a mutual friend came to see me, one very intimately interested in our political affairs, and instantly fell upon me with reproaches that I had never sent him my book. I did not realize to what he was referring as I had shown the book to no one else. Indeed the final proof was not yet complete, hence, never thinking of this, I denied that there was any such book in existence, to which came the laughing reply: "Nonsense, you can't play secrecy with me. I was with Jameson last night and in trying to clear up some obscure matters I asked him questions. You know his offhand, impatient way. He just laughed and waved me off, saying 'Read Fitz's book, it's the only decent record that's been compiled. You can get all you want from that.'"

On many occasions the book has been referred to as the cause of the war. Whether such ridiculous judgment is worth answering, or whether the matter is of any public interest, I do not know, but it will be of some concern to personal friends, at any rate, to know that although the book was completed, printed, and ready for issue, and although I was pestered for several months by my publisher and by numbers of people who somehow or other got to know of its existence, I refused to allow publication as long as there seemed to be the least chance of peace.

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I left the matter to the judgment of my friend and senior, Sir Julius Wernher, well known as first and foremost a man of business who took no part in politics and was supremely anxious for a peaceful solution, and not until the final decision taken by the Transvaal Government, which culminated in the ultimatum, was known, did he agree that further delay was useless, and it was only a few days before the outbreak of war that the book was published.

This ultimatum, calling upon the British Government to withdraw their forces from the British territory of Natal within forty-eight hours, was issued on October 9, 1899, apparently with the idea that it would be an omen of good luck to have it expire upon the following day, the birthday of President Kruger. So at least it was generally regarded. Dingaan's Day, December 16, had been chosen for the declaration of independence in the previous war, and again and again the inclination for coincidences of this kind was, as I have already explained, clearly manifested. Everyone now knows that the ultimatum came with the unexpectedness of a thunderbolt, and although it was for a time assiduously represented as the calculated result of British diplomacy, there is no longer a doubt that it was utterly unexpected by the British Government as well as the people of South Africa. The spirit of confidence, of determination and of satisfaction with which this decision was arrived at by those responsible for it is illustrated by the incident of the delivery of the ultimatum. It was delivered in person by the State Secretary, Mr. F. W. Reitz, to Mr. Conyngham Greene, the British Resident in Pretoria. The latter, although well informed, was dumbfounded by what he regarded as the audacity of the Republic in taking this offensive attitude against the British Empire. But the representative of the Republic, courteous as he was, was not in the least apprehensive or overcome by his responsibilities. Returning from the suburb where the British Resident lived, he met a friend who was so struck by his happy, buoyant manner, that he said: "You appear to be in great form, what's the news?" And to this there came the instant and smiling reply: "Oh, I've just tipped Long John Silver the Black Spot." But it must be recognized that the great majority, even Republican sympathizers, did not feel as satisfied or exultant.

The completion of the writing, the revision and the proof-reading of my book were a severe strain. Like the unharnessed cab-horse, I missed the accustomed supports. The strain and overwork had been too much and the completion of writing at high pressure had resulted in a kind of collapse.

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On top of this came what was then called La Grippe, or 'Russian Influenza,' a new affection then which, as one knows, attacked one in all vulnerable spots, and for a long while I was practically confined to bed.

The interviews with my publishers must have been amusing to them. I remember on one occasion when one of the partners suddenly burst out with, "You don't seem to understand in the least what you have done. I don't believe you care tuppence about this *Transvaal from Within* and you think more of *The Outspan*." To which I answered, to their loud guffaws, "Of course I do. One is only a record of public affairs which I had the luck to compile, the other's the life that I lived."

The first of the great party leaders—the first of all individuals—to give the book the cachet of his approval, was Lord Rosebery, who, as usual, rose high above party when the question became national. I met him but once, a few days after the great speech in which he gave the rallying call to all, regardless of party. Very distinguished and aloof, he yet managed to let fall in the lightest way that it would not detract from the value of the book if one reference to Mr. Gladstone were more in harmony with the restraint that seemed to characterize the book! I took the hint.

It was Mr. Alfred Harmsworth—as he then was—who had introduced me to this cold and curious personality. To him, too, I was indebted for a vignette of Lord Salisbury. The *Daily Mail* was a growing force then—its circulation touched the million once during those days and its influence was useful, but Alfred Harmsworth had not yet reached the Napoleonic status of dictator, and it was a great and unexpected honour, as I could see, that Lord Salisbury had sent for him to Hatfield. Harmsworth described the visit vividly. He quoted the oft-applied term, "The weary old Titan was sitting at a small table in the middle of a large room. He looked huge beside it. The massive frame was bent and his big head, and beard, and great heavy thoughtful eyes, made a striking picture. I'm not easily impressed, but it seemed a long walk across half that room to approach him. He was sitting there like a sculptured figure as if he stayed there; and on the little table before him there was an open book, from which he looked up as I came in. It was *The Transvaal from Within*. I believe he had just discovered that England had a case, after all. It was his Bible: they say it's the only thing he reads!"

All this was told with boyish laughter and thorough enjoyment, and I took it as playful exaggeration. However slow

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the British Government may have been to seek local knowledge, that reproach does not lie against the Press of London. It was *The Times* and the *Spectator* whose reviews launched and made *The Transvaal from Within*; and the services of the writer were gratefully at their disposal at all times and were freely used. The *Morning Post*, *Telegraph*, *Standard*, and, to their honour, the editors of the *Westminster Gazette* and *Daily News*; Alfred Spender and E. T. Cook—greatest of editors—knew how to call out the best that was in one. The most insistent, thorough, and remorseless, was Alfred Harmsworth, who called for anything at any time and once apologized laughingly in his own sanctum by saying “Here—you edit the *Daily Mail* while this lasts. I’ve given orders.” In the same spirit I asked, “Aren’t you afraid of the risk?” The answer came with swift curttness, “I’m afraid of nothing! There is no editor here except Alfred Harmsworth. I never allow anyone to remain long enough to become strong enough to be dangerous or stereotyped!” Napoleon was his model, in method and mien, money and power his ambition. There was a childish vanity which seemed inconsistent with some very hard traits and great ability. He loved to talk about himself and even showed me his books and records and returns from the *Daily Mail*, *Evening News*, *Answers*, etc., etc. He boasted of his own profits up to about £200,000 a year, and his consuming desire was to find out information as to the wealth of Rhodes and Beit. Once, when he thought he had got a good line from me, he broke out gleefully, “They are not so wonderfully rich after all—I’ll beat them yet—see if I don’t!”

The ablest, quietest, sanest and most charming and inspiring of all was E. T. Cook—beloved and trusted by everyone, except the narrow and petty section of his own old Liberal party, by whom he was persecuted. This greatest of editors twice lost his position, but refused to change his convictions, by his paper having changed owners behind his back. There was room enough for him in London daily journalism and there were many offers; but when his own people turned on him he gave up the editorial chair for good. Mine was a curious—probably unique—position, in which talk was very free and one heard views from all sides and many revelations instructive and amusing. Not the least interesting was to hear E. T. Cook and Alfred Harmsworth on each other. Cook had been an editor when Harmsworth began life as one of his reporters and much of the story told in that amazing book *Lord London* was told to me in E. T.’s kindly generous way—for he spoke ill of no man when it could truthfully be avoided. His knowledge and judgment of the younger man

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were profound and his forecast, expressed with singular tolerance and half amusement, half regret, was extraordinary, a sort of philosophic regret. Commercialism, greed for power and personal considerations were of a sphere which Cook, and the other great leaders and exponents of British journalism in those times regarded with cold hostility, even disgust.

Harmsworth's view of Cook, his old chief, was one of warm admiration, dashed with regret and a kindly pity for his lack of 'practical sense.' They expressed the same idea, but in different terms. One night, when waiting for the day's cables from the front, Harmsworth broke out suddenly—"Do you know what my ambition is? It's to own *The Times*; and I shall have it some day. I don't care what it costs, I'll have it; and I shall soon be able to afford anything they are likely to ask. The old crowd are a lot of duffers. Tradition, convention, propriety, their own reputation, will kill them. They don't know how to run a modern paper, I could make it pay; but, Lord! they would be horrified if they even knew what to do. They will die—respectable! I'll get *The Times*—you'll see! and I've got an editor for it already! There's only one man in the world fit to edit *The Times*; the greatest editor in the world. He was born for it. He'll be the greatest of them all!" I was wise enough not to name the 'only one'; and I knew too much to be caught napping or to believe that there was the remotest chance of agreement. So when he announced with due emphasis the name of E. T. Cook, I affected mild surprise and asked if he had spoken to him already.

The reply was full of confidence. "No, but I know him. He is the ideal man. It would not be complete without Cook—he was my editor, when I started as a reporter," and he laughed heartily!

Whilst on the subject of my book, I may as well dispose of it by recording another incident.

I was in the doctor's hands until the middle of 1900 when I returned for a time to South Africa, but had to give up again. I had stayed for a spell at the Mount Nelson Hotel and met many of those prominently concerned in the war.

Walking past the corner of the old Supreme Court Buildings one morning, I collided sharply with someone who was deep in thought, with his head bent forward. He gripped me by the coat to save a collision, and looking up sharply, said, "By Jove! I was just thinking of you."

It was Winston Churchill who, after his escape from Pretoria, was staying for a few days at the Mount Nelson Hotel, where I had been talking matters over with him the night before.

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His quick, attractive manner and smiling face gave quite a genial interpretation to the very informal greeting. “Do you know,” he said, still gripping my jacket with both hands, “I do think you are the biggest damn fool in the world. I have just been thinking about you.”

“Excellent,” I answered, “that’s fine; and now, what have I done?”

“That book,” he replied, “what have you got out of it?”

“Got out of it, what do you mean? A lot of people have read it and I think it’s helped.”

“But what have you got out of it for yourself?”

“For myself?” I answered, in astonishment. “Nothing, of course. But I did not do it for myself.”

“There you are,” he replied. “I told you that you are the biggest damn fool in the world. If I had written that book I’d have had the British Government on their knees to me and I’d have got anything I wanted out of them. What a waste! You haven’t a notion of what you could have made them do”; and with an impish bubble of laughter, he pushed me off and went his way towards the Club.

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN, GENERAL J. H. DE LA REY

I BELIEVE that if a ballot could be taken among those South Africans of both races who knew De la Rey well, whether as comrades or opponents, or among those many thousands of others, women and men, who did not know him personally, it would reveal that no figure in recent South African history stands higher in public regard than General De la Rey—'Oom Koos,' as he was affectionately called by those who knew him, whether they served under him or against him. Many great qualities rarely found in a single individual combined to make him unique in the little world of South Africa. In the greater world outside his name is well known and the same estimate of him is widely shared, but of course lack of intimate knowledge and association deprive it of the fire of affection, honour and admiration which moved those who knew him.

As a South African, and one in a different political camp, the writer has most earnestly wished that someone well equipped with opportunities, knowledge, and ability should have given us the full and balanced story of his life, that it might hang for ever in our national portrait gallery. These notes are not a presumptuous attempt to provide a substitute; only a small contribution to an understanding. The writer was acutely conscious that the publication of these Scraps of History, without some attempt to do justice to De la Rey would have left an unpardonable gap, and the attempt to fill that gap might provide a personal consolation. This little tribute is one of personal affection and the strongest admiration and sympathy; and for the very reason that it comes from one not tied to him by race, language or party, it may escape that charge of partiality which conceivably might be laid against one who knew him longer or better, and was of his own people. The reader may well seek or demand explanations of seemingly conflicting allusions. I cannot supply them, and would not invent or guess. Who can *know* what is in the mind of another?

My first close contact with De la Rey occurred after the Boer War. An American gentleman whose sympathy was

General J. H. De la Rey, a Great South African

strongly with the Boers made a generous gift of £10,000 for the benefit of sufferers on both sides. The trustees for the Boer side were Botha and De la Rey, and I was greatly embarrassed and dissatisfied in finding that he had nominated me as trustee for our people. I knew that the donor's sympathy was with the Boers; also that they needed help more than we did, and finally that in any case I could do nothing useful because it was two to one against me. In these circumstances my endeavour was to carry out what I believed to be the donor's wish in the spirit appropriate to such a trust, to avoid anything like disagreement or disappointment. I had never met the donor, nor even had any communication from him. I had, and have, no idea how he came to nominate me. It was an extremely difficult and delicate task.

The only other person who knew of it was Lord Milner, and I consulted him freely and without any difficulty obtained his approval. In addition to his instant recognition of the donor's desire that this money should go to help the destitute Boers and his recognition that they needed it more urgently than our own people, I felt that Milner was not disposed to accept assistance for British subjects under a British Government from those who had been hostile in sentiment throughout the war. He did not say this, but revealed unconsciously that his national pride rather revolted against it; and with this I was in complete agreement.

After one of our many discussions of this subject, in which I must have revealed very clearly the differences in manner, outlook and character that existed between my two distinguished fellow trustees, both recognized as of the finest type and representative of the Boer people, I found Milner's eyes crinkling up with faint amusement, and was then conscious that he had been drawing me. There was nothing of importance to discuss. It was late at night, we were sitting by the fire, and I knew well that he liked to give that idle hour to talking about, or asking about less urgent matters and frequently clearing up smaller things which had slightly puzzled him, before going off to commence his important night's work, for which he required freedom from all interruption and which usually lasted from midnight to 3 or 4 a.m.

With half a smile he said: "You have a great opinion of De la Rey," and as I agreed promptly he followed up with, "Well, so have I. He is a remarkably fine fellow; he is a man, every inch of him; and one of whom any country in the world might justly feel proud."

I was very pleased to hear an appreciation so unreserved, for in matters which concerned his duty and trust and which

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appealed to his amazingly clear intellect, Milner did not usually let himself go so unreservedly. Still smiling faintly he said: "You feel that you can trust him entirely?" But it struck me that this was not so much his own testimony as a faintly indicated question to me. I answered emphatically in the affirmative. There was no longer any trace of amusement in his eyes. He looked just sympathetic and very friendly as he answered quietly:

"I feel like that too; I also would trust De la Rey absolutely. But," he continued without a break, "I cannot feel certain that I understand the Boers, and that I can see into their minds. It is not hostile suspicion; anyone can be suspicious, that is cheap; it is the feeling that I cannot understand and feel sure. Races differ, as do individuals. The French and Germans and other continental people differ from us, and yet I can understand them. I have had experience of the East too, and of native races where the difficulties and differences are far greater; but I never feel that this imperfect knowledge justifies the superficial and very positive judgments on the Boers which one frequently hears, nor that they afford any reliable guide. The Boers are different. Their experiences and their history have given them an individuality and characteristics which, with the conditions and circumstances of South Africa, have made them a unique and very puzzling problem.

"Their capacity for silence—I do not mean common secrecy or deceit, but rather 'not giving themselves away'—is truly remarkable. Of course, the men of the younger generation differ from the old Boer, but there are characteristics common to both. I confess that the genuine old Boer attracts me very much, and not only as a study or a problem. These old fellows, quite uneducated in our sense, who have probably never read a book except their Bibles, and very frequently cannot write an ordinary letter, are yet, as one has known it in the rural communities of other countries, the landed aristocracy, and are gentlemen in the best sense; dignified, courteous and hospitable, and amazingly self-controlled. They 'think behind their eyes,' and give nothing away. One feels that deep down there is a stratum which one cannot penetrate, beneath which are hidden and sealed the secrets of the race and of the individual; their fundamental convictions; their abiding purposes and aspirations; their amazing oneness as a race to which all others are alien."

He talked, and I listened, filled with wonder and admiration for the shrewd and impartial and often sympathetic review of the position. I doubt if many or any had ever heard him let himself go like this. He was simply thinking aloud, and

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revealing a side of himself entirely unknown to others. I would give anything to reproduce his words, but that is obviously impossible, and I can do no more than give a brief summary with a few phrases and points that it was impossible not to remember.

He referred with evidence of deep thought to old South African history, even to the influence of history and heredity before the British occupation of the Cape; the difficulties of mutual understanding where communication across the immense distance to Europe, and also communications in South Africa itself were so slow and unsatisfactory; then to the abolition of slavery and the troubles that followed; the irreconcilable views upon arbitrary government, and especially on the native question; the Great Trek and the consequent increase in distances and difficulties. It seemed impossible that there could be mutual understanding. "Look at it from their point of view, and you can well understand why there were differences and hostility. Had we been in their position should we not have felt and done the same? They read no books, except their Bibles; wrote and received no letters; newspapers did not exist, nor could they have read them had they been obtainable. Thus the history of themselves and their country was no more than oral tradition, entirely one-sided and inaccurate. Could you fairly blame them? Could it have been otherwise? And yet it is on this basis of partiality, invention and hearsay that much of the so-called history of to-day is founded, and that the deep convictions and the dour purpose of the Boers rest."

At one point, when he touched on the diplomatic or secretive attitude of the Boers, he branched off suddenly and came back to the subject which had started him, saying: "People call it slimness, this characteristic of the Boers; like most generalities it is only partly true. The description is inadequate; moreover, the alleged characteristic is applied to cover an infinity of variations. Take, for instance, the leading men with whom we have to deal," and here he named half a dozen individuals very well known in South African history as leaders of the Boer people. "The quality or characteristic of slimness as sometimes applied in their case does not apply to De la Rey. There does not seem to be anything paltry or tricky in his nature; straightforward, even blunt; direct, and as brave as a man can be; all we know of him repudiates the disparagement of slimness. Of course, he is a Boer of the Boers, and deep down in him there may be, in fact there must be, that which the Boers never disclose."

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Years later, when Milner had long left the country, there occurred that development on which these notes are largely founded, which was an amazing justification of Milner's judgment. I feel confident that in the whole of South Africa there was not another individual who foresaw and foretold or apprehended De la Rey's last act; not another soul thought it even possible.

It is only after a better knowledge of events has been revealed (essentially with a keen desire to see things from the view-point of others) that one is able to appreciate the difficulties and actions of those from whom one differed seriously at the time. It is a continuous process, often extending over many years, and it simply means that better knowledge enables one to understand; almost approximating to the more generous judgment that "to know all is to forgive all." As a matter of fact it was not many days after the meeting of the National Convention to form the Union of South Africa had been definitely arranged, that I began to realize a good many of the difficulties with which the Government of the Transvaal was faced.

This Government was formed by a party, *Het Volk*, as uncompromising and racial as it could be; its history and its aims violently anti-Milner and anti-British. We, the former *Uitlanders*, formed the Progressive Party, mainly British, and strongly in favour of Lord Milner and the British Government. There could have been no more clean-cut division between any two parties; but, in addition, we had been deprived of highly valued and important provisions in our constitution, and had been subjected to the disgraceful gerrymandering of constituencies resulting from the vilifications and intrigues of the so-called Chinese slavery election. The Liberal Government in England had intervened to handicap us in any way they could so as to make sure of getting the Boers into power in order to abolish Chinese labour, and so provide a kind of post-mortem justification for the notorious conduct of what was called the Chinese Slavery Election in England, by which the Liberal Party came into power. As a matter of fact the British, or *Uitlander*, population completely outnumbered the Boers in the Transvaal, as was shown by the first voters' roll compiled after the election. The latter would have been in the minority in Parliament, and in the votes cast, had the British voters not been split up into parties by minor considerations which never moved the Boers.

At the same time it must be recognized that Botha and Smuts, who were fairly regarded as the government of the country, were personally not guilty of the extreme attitude;

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in fact they appeared to many to be genuinely determined to soften the asperities between the two races, to find common interests and harmony, whilst not imperilling their own authority. Thus many occasions arose, from the commencement of self-government in the Transvaal, upon which these two leaders and sometimes two or three of their firmest supporters or colleagues had to speak in a sense which was notoriously unacceptable to the Transvaal Boers.

It is impossible to repeat here all the details; for the present purpose it is sufficient to point out that in these circumstances it became clear that if they were to carry the Union of South Africa on liberal terms, the Government and the people of the Transvaal were dependent upon the strong and united support of the Uitlanders, and this became more and more evident as the proceedings of the National Convention developed. For example, some points of fundamental difference:

The Transvaal had always looked to Delagoa Bay as its natural port, and it aimed at directing the whole development eastward through that port. The distance was the shortest; the proportion of mileage within the Transvaal, the greatest; and, most important of all to them, it was a foreign port and able to be leased, a point which made it extremely attractive as against the other ports which were all British and equipped with long and powerful railway lines to capture the trade of the Transvaal.

Next, the native labour, which, owing to the development of the mines had vastly increased, was obtainable only from Portuguese territory, where there was no local competition, and where the relations were at the time very friendly and on a commercial basis which suited the Transvaal. The native question was perhaps the most violently exciting point of difference. In the Cape the native had the franchise, and was in many respects treated like the white man, whereas the laws and customs of the Transvaal did not recognize him as a human being.

Then there arose the question whether the entire railway system of British South Africa would not be pooled and run as one, in which case the Transvaal would lose all its natural advantages and, consequently, an immense proportion of its own revenue. Again, in the same way it was suggested that the mining industry should go into the common pool, thus giving up that which was the Golconda of the Transvaal.

Finally, there were immense sums held by the Treasury from the surpluses of previous years, and these, like the railways and the mining industry, would possibly be pooled

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as the property of the Union of South Africa. These things were actually done by the National Convention. It was an appalling sacrifice, in the material sense apart from the sentimental aspect, that the Transvaal, and more especially the Transvaal Dutch or burghers, were called upon to authorize.

There were many other points to be remembered; for instance, in the use of the two languages Botha and Smuts were always against the present extreme provision. They were against creating and forcing a struggle for equality or superiority between the Cape Dutch dialect and the English language. From the earliest days I had felt that whilst they must foresee these things, and understand what they were doing, I did not see how Botha and Smuts would have the courage to face such tremendous obstacles and such fierce prejudices in order to achieve the end which they had adopted in their negotiations with me.

I must avoid, even in summary, matters which are of the greatest interest, and which are possibly dealt with or inferred in other parts of this volume, in order to stick to my immediate point. Clearly the most careful forethought and preparation were needed to secure the backing of the Boer element in this tremendous change. With the Volksraad would rest the ultimate decision to approve, amend or reject on behalf of the Transvaal what might be decided in the National Convention, and no doubt the greatest pains were taken to secure the adherence of members. Nevertheless, the selection of individuals who were to represent the Transvaal as members of the Convention and would frame the recommendations was the first essential, at any rate in tactics. On its own initiative the Government decided that the Government party was to be represented by five members, and the Opposition, our Progressive party, although numerically quite inferior to the *Het Volk* party, were allotted three members. Thus in this they clearly recognized what has been explained above, namely the very large proportion of the inhabitants and voters who, although divided, belonged to what was called the 'British Party': with their greater freedom from old prejudices and narrow doctrines, their wider knowledge of modern developments, and their acknowledged disposition to regard South Africa as one and to look upon this proposed union of the four provinces as removing the most dangerous cause of friction and promoting the consummation of real union and peace between the races and the Provinces.

The Progressive representatives were Sir George Farrar, Leader of the Opposition; Mr. H. L. Lindsay, bilingual,

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and South African born and highly esteemed, and myself, also born in South Africa and resident in the Transvaal, for nearly thirty years, from the discovery of the goldfields. The members representing the Government, or Het Volk party, were inevitably General Botha and General Smuts, and their colleague, Mr. H. C. Hull, Treasurer-General, a very able man, South African born, with wide experience, but temperamental and liable to changes of opinion. He had been a member of the Reform Committee and had suffered imprisonment. He was for long a prominent member of the Progressive party, then changed his views on the question of immediate responsible government and joined Botha, and became one of his colleagues in the first Ministry. Much later, for reasons unknown to me, he had acute differences with Botha when Treasurer-General in the Union Cabinet,¹ and was compelled to resign that position—but that does not concern the present narrative, though I should like to add, as a tribute to one who may have been misjudged, that in the ability displayed in his services, and in his fidelity to the least undertakings and the highest ideals, no one behaved more worthily or more effectively than he did as a delegate representing the Transvaal.

In addition to the three Ministers above mentioned, two men typically representative of the country Boers were selected. One was General Schalk Burger, who had been Vice-President of the Transvaal Republic under President Kruger, and had acted for him till the end of the War while the President himself was away; he was not a brilliant man, nor a strong character, but had been long in public life and had frequently shown sound common sense and moderation in his class, and of course commanded a very considerable following. The fifth man was General De la Rey. De la Rey, as far as I know, had never held a political or official position which would have indicated him as one of the political leaders or the chosen representative of President Kruger and his ruling party. Men much inferior to him in mental capacity and character had been so selected, but as a rule the old President required people definitely amenable to his influence; he required pliability and submission in certain things, which De la Rey by nature held in profound contempt, and the subservience of his own opinions to the will or orders of even the head of the State was a thing he was utterly incapable of. He was, as many had called him, "King of the West." His character and his splendid record, and the tradition of

¹ The differences were rather between Mr. Hull and the late Mr. J. W. Sauer, on questions of railway finance, than between Mr. Hull and General Botha.