

South African Memories

his family, including his most remarkable Uncle, Groot Adriaan de la Rey, and his name as the best, most outstanding representative of the highest class of the old Boers, combined to make him individually perhaps the most esteemed and respected of all.

As far as an outsider may judge he had never been thrust forward as a prominent leader of the people; he had never been exploited. The old President's intolerance of anything and anyone who might appear to divide his authority may have accounted in part for this, and yet one must admit that De la Rey's character was not adapted to the practice and politics of the time; to use a common phrase, the old President probably realized that he was not of the kind that one could work with. By nature he was entirely alien to the methods employed, and his simple, fearless candour and outspokenness would frequently have proved a great embarrassment.

Again one must curtail, but there was one incident of great significance which I cannot omit. Kruger ruled his government and his Volksraad in a most arbitrary way; although clever and ready to resort to other devices when he feared he had gone too far, yet in the main he was extremely arbitrary and very provocative, and almost regardless of the individuals whom he might offend. When it came to the actual decision of the Transvaal to take the initiative and declare war against England, although all the preparations had been made, it was still necessary to get the approval of the Volksraad. There was a secret session, and it is understood that no records whatever were taken. Hence what was reported and believed at the time may not have been strictly accurate; but the most striking incident was well verified by numbers of members.

De la Rey took no early part in the discussion—just waited to hear and to understand everything. When at last, and quite late, he did rise to speak it was in his usual way—brief, to the point and very moderate in phrase, but yet pitilessly candid. He was against the declaration of war, and warned the President and the Raad of the magnitude of the task they were facing. I never understood that his words could fairly have been interpreted to mean that he was against war or in favour of England, nothing whatever in that sense was said, but he was entirely against the methods employed, and regarded an aggressive war and the proposed initiative as being totally unsound, and unnecessary from the Boer point of view.

No one ever doubted his sincerity and devotion to the

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

Boer cause, but he was convinced that they had only to bide their time in order to secure the greatest advantage possible for a very small State against the power of England. He appeared to make a great impression on the Raad, and Kruger, jumping up and interrupting, fell into a violent denunciation of all who hesitated to accept his dictum. He spoke passionately and without any restraint. When he had finished De la Rey rose again and continued. Without temper or resentment, without being in any way influenced by the President's extreme provocation, he repeated his main points—then turning towards the head of the State he said calmly that they were there to discuss their common cause and how best to serve it, and it was the duty of every man to speak his mind plainly. It was not right to impute to them cowardice because they differed from the violent proposals which had been made. Those who thought as he did had proved by a lifetime their devotion to their independence and the interests of their country. It was not a personal matter at all, but in view of what the President had said he would undertake to say that, whatever the decision was, he if alive, would be found fighting in the field for their independence and their country "long after *you*" (the President) "have gone away and left us."

The sensation created was tremendous, for no one had ever before stood up to the old President like that. No such scene had ever taken place, and no such words ever been used before him. Paul Kruger seemed disconcerted, almost crushed. De la Rey resumed his seat in silence. He had said his say, and would say no more, and Kruger did not reply. The members of the President's party gradually created a diversion, and when the debate was concluded, the vote for war was carried unanimously; De la Rey declined to divide his people in a national crisis when it was clear that his purpose and plea were of no avail against the will of the President.

The history of the war which followed provided an interesting sequel to this incident. De la Rey was fighting in the field to the last moment, the bravest and most popular leader of all, and Kruger, although age and infirmity provided ample excuse, had left South Africa a year before. With his departure the Kruger Government faded out of existence.

Botha and Smuts of course knew of all this and realized the enormous importance of De la Rey's support. They must also have fully realized the power and character of the man himself as well as his simple, fearless independence; hence they must have known how delicate and difficult a

South African Memories

task it would be for them to induce him to support the union of South Africa, fundamentally opposed as it was to the immediate material interests and traditional beliefs, and the ingrained habits of the real old Boer, of whom De la Rey was the ideal representative.

All these things crowded to my mind as soon as I heard that De la Rey was to be on the Convention, and I watched very closely to see how the longsightedness and courage and broadmindedness of Botha and Smuts would fare in the tremendous undertaking which they faced. I had many opportunities of meeting the delegates before we went to the National Convention, and quite early in the day came to the conclusion that De la Rey, whilst loyal to his leader and to the programme, did not really understand how great would be the change in the Transvaal from the old republican system to that of unification with all British South Africa under one Parliament. From time to time he seemed to show a kind of amused indulgence, except on certain points, *e.g.* native affairs and native franchise, but was never a convinced supporter of the programme, nor an opponent either.

The knowledge of these things naturally made one more than ever anxious to support Botha and Smuts in their effort, and to carry out in the fullest spirit the agreement at which we had already arrived, namely, to aim at the very best possible for the union of British South Africa without any regard to personal, political, local or provincial interests; and the first thing I did was to arrange with them that we, as the Transvaal delegates, should stick together, *i.e.* travel together to Durban and live in the same house, or houses, during the session of the National Convention. The journey down to Durban through Natal has been dealt with elsewhere in this volume. Much of it deals mainly with De la Rey and forms a very essential part of the study of his character, but it has been impossible to transfer it to this chapter because of its very close association with Botha and the actual events of the war. I can only hope it will be regarded as a very important, integral part of this attempt to present Oom Koos as I knew him.

.

As far as possible I would prefer to let De la Rey tell his own story, in his own way. The Union Parliament had developed to a considerable extent those characteristics of the Mother of Parliaments which have justified the saying that the "House of Commons is the best Club in the world." There at the time of which I write the members and their

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

friends met on easy terms no matter what their parties were, and great benefit accrued from the personal acquaintance and the interchange of views. The dining room, common to both Senate and House of Assembly, where members and their guests met informally and frequently without any symptoms of political division, was the great meeting ground.

I, and no doubt many others, made a practice of mixing with friends and acquaintances of other parties to avoid the continuation of our own party discussions, but more particularly to get the benefit and the pleasure of meeting on easy terms friends who did not belong to my political party, but were frequently very interesting indeed, by reason of their knowledge of South Africa as viewed from different angles.

I was passing down the dining room one day when I was hailed by a colleague to occupy a seat which was vacant on his right hand. I had intended going further on to take a seat at the table occupied only by 'Sammy' Marks and General De la Rey, both Senators, great friends and cronies, who usually occupied this table laid for six, but generally left to two of them. They were both remarkable characters, and both knew a very great deal about South Africa, especially the Transvaal. I was on very friendly terms with them both, and many times at their invitation had taken a seat at their table; but this invitation from my colleague with the addition, "Come and listen to this, we want you here," made it a little awkward to pass on, and I dropped into the seat. I then realized that the rest of the party consisted of fellow-members, none of whom were South African born, and that they were warmly discussing a subject of debate in the House which had caused a good dealing of feeling.

My colleague who sat at the head of the table was one of those whose weakness it is to speak authoritatively on all questions, affecting a knowledge which he did not possess, and at the same time watchful and dexterous not to give himself away. I felt very uncomfortable at being dragged in. The subject of discussion was General Hertzog's attitude towards his chief, General Botha. Several pointed out that the break-up was inevitable; that Botha as Prime Minister could not tolerate those outbursts of undisciplined criticism and open defiance of which his subordinate was guilty; and several, I think four out of the six who were at the table, warmly expressed the view that there would be a break-up, that Botha would dismiss his insubordinate lieutenant, and that the latter, who had no known following and had displayed no qualities of leadership, would, upon the loss of his seat

South African Memories

in the Cabinet, cease to be a factor—would be blotted out in fact.

Several times I was asked to express my own view, but I staved it off by saying that one could not be cocksure; although I was South African born and had spent all my life since boyhood in touch with the Boers I did not feel competent to lay down the law, my own belief being that no one but a born Boer really knew the Boers. This attitude was not accepted, in fact it was made clear to me that some almost regarded it as an evasion of the candour which ought to prevail amongst friends, and it was bluntly pointed out that in the circumstances I must know the Boer better than anyone else present. I protested that it was a perfectly natural avowal of doubts and difficulties on my part; that I knew that Hertzog had no backing in the Cabinet, and no considerable open, or even acknowledged, backing in the House. "But have you ever thought that he is appealing to the same reactionary and narrow racial section which made possible the two wars between the Boers and the British in South Africa, and which is now endeavouring to evade and defeat the spirit of the Act of Union which we all appear to regard as the great healing of all racial strife? That section is the same as has appeared many times in South Africa, an intolerant minority who have so frequently bent the majority to their will, and have coerced their own leaders; and if you ask me to believe that by some silent and beneficent miracle this section or element has disappeared from South Africa during the last few years I am afraid I cannot agree."

It was then that my authoritative friend intervened on the side of the four against the one, and he began to let himself go with the words, "I know the Boers well, and I know what is going to happen." After a few words in which he emphatically foretold the complete extinction of Hertzog and his aims, I noticed that his voice and manner changed quite suddenly and that he turned off very noticeably into a kind of non-party, non-committal discussion. At the same time his eyes kept turning to his right, behind my back, and I got the impression that he was talking to a gallery, so I looked round promptly, and there stood old De la Rey behind me, out of my sight, listening in a friendly way to what we were saying, with his big old pipe held in his right hand in the middle of his mouth, not saying a word. But his handsome, aquiline face was perfectly composed and a little gleam of humour in his hawklike eyes gave a benevolent expression to it all.

Marks excused himself on the grounds of business and

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

hurried off. De la Rey simply loitered at the table, amusedly interested in what he could understand of the talk. I caught his eye and greeted him; he simply nodded in a friendly way and went on listening. Everyone there knew De la Rey and regarded him as probably the best authority on the subject under discussion. Hence no one felt disposed to carry on and a rather awkward silence was threatening, so I turned to De la Rey pointedly and frankly, saying, "We have just been talking about Hertzog's attitude, and the trouble it has caused with Botha, and how it will all turn out."

"Yes," he answered, "I heard you"; with the same serious face softened by the same amused smile in his eyes.

"Well then, Oom Koos," I said, "you are by far the best authority on this subject; we are only learners. Tell us what your opinion is."

To this he replied, without any change of expression, "No, Ou Fritzie," which was his name for me, "you have lived all your life amongst the Boers, tell us what you think. I have not heard you say anything."

To which I answered promptly; "No, no, Oom Koos, I am not such a fool as to offer opinions on that subject when you are here, and can tell us everything, and know it all so much better. I may have lived all my life amongst them, but I have always said that no one knows the Boer except the Boer himself, and that the longer you live amongst them, and the more you study them, the more certain you are that you do not know everything."

At this the old man laughed a kind of approval and answered at once: "*Ja, daarom kom jy so naby.*" (Yes, that is how you come so close to it.)

Of course by this time he had monopolized all attention. He had a great faculty of arresting and compelling attention, although he never sought it, or appeared to desire it; and he never interrupted or barged in. I knew his manner well, and when I saw the look of lazy and half-indifferent amusement on his face I felt certain that the impulse was on him to say something carelessly candid and probably unwelcome to some listener. I had seen it scores of times and began to sit tight for fear that myself might be the victim of his indifferent candour.

I had never before heard him on this subject, nor did I ever hear him volunteer an opinion to half a dozen people. He made no speeches in Parliament nor during the National Convention; he never declaimed or argued; he was courteous, calm, brief and to the point. One got to know that he never spoke unless he had something to say, and meant it. We

South African Memories

knew all that, but what we did not know was exactly what it was that he meant or had in mind; the real significance of it very frequently did not become apparent at the time, or even until long afterwards. This was one such occasion, and although I was alert and almost apprehensive I failed entirely to appreciate the full significance of it or even, until too late, to realize what was stirring in the depths of his mind.

He stood at my back between me and my neighbour, his left hand resting on the back of my chair, and in his right hand he held, and took occasional pulls at the inevitable old pipe, which he also used occasionally to point the stem end towards one or other at the table. Notwithstanding the admission that I failed to read his mind I was very apprehensive, and was so impressed by what he said that I wrote it down immediately afterwards and am therefore quite certain of the words he used. He spoke of course in Dutch, and very simply and slowly so that all could understand. The words themselves might suggest something of grave purpose, a kind of dogmatic warning. This was not so. His voice was never raised, the easy, tolerant smile that lit his eyes never changed; the look of kindness and gentleness took all the sting out of it, it sounded almost as though a parent or elder were gently and patiently recalling elementary facts which a child did not, and could not know.

"Now listen to me," he said, "and I will tell you what it is." Somehow we were already mesmerized into fascinated attention.

"What is this that you mean—this Union of South Africa? What does it all mean?" And after a slight pause he answered the question himself. "It means one King, one flag, one country, one government, one parliament in the whole of our country!" Another short pause and he asked, "*N wat beteken dit aan die Boer?*" (And what does this signify to the Boer?) His face softened further with a patient smile; there was not a trace of derision in his tones as he went on. "Why, I myself can remember when there were already seven republics in South Africa—and even that was not enough. In those days there was plenty of room. Each of these little republics had its own parliament and very often they were divided in opinions into two parties. The cause of the difference might appear small, even laughable, but our people were very obstinate and strong in their convictions even in the small things; sometimes the differences were purely personal. When these two parties could not agree the minority always decided to break away and found a

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

fresh republic for themselves, where the same process would be repeated.

"Behind it all was the Boer feeling that talking was waste of time and at the back of it all there was the Boer conviction and belief '*Vat nou jou roer*' (Take your gun for it).¹ Sometimes there was war between the two sections. Very often the minority founded their own state elsewhere because there was plenty of room in those days; but even when there was war there was no real fighting. We were few in numbers, and had hordes of enemies; we could not afford to waste the life of a single white man—they were too valuable. These things you were asking about Hertzog and those who agree with him, which you say are strange and new and mad"—the old pipe pointed to the head of the table—"are not strange, are not new, and are not mad. They have all been done before. Who can tell what will happen in the future? Though it is good to remember it has all happened before and that it is *die gewoonte van die Boer*."

I think it was the bell notifying the resumption of business in Parliament that called us away, and De la Rey was the first to move in answer to the summons. He did not say another word, just gave a nod and left, but I felt certain he had said all he wanted to say, and his last words, "*Dit is die gewoonte van die Boer*," left me with a sense of depression, almost apprehension, even though to the very end his manner had remained the same. Whether he agreed with us, or with Botha or with Hertzog it was impossible to say. He never showed a trace of racial antagonism; he criticized no one; his voice was unchanged, the look of faint amusement in his eyes was still in his eyes; his careless, unrehearsed and indifferent candour was unmistakable; and his tone kindly and reflective.

.

This little meeting greatly interested me and there were many questions I wanted to ask, but I knew better than to attempt

¹ Once upon another occasion, during the National Convention, De la Rey was extremely bored by long discussions on the constitution of Parliament. "It is all nonsense and waste of time having two Houses. The great mistake Paul Kruger made was creating the Second Volksraad. Your people talk too much. Our system was the best. The people elect a President and pay an Executive to do the work. Why should Parliament do the work when you pay the Executive to do it? Parliament should meet once a year to see that they have done their duty. If they have failed, turn them out."

"But," it was protested, "the constitution does not give you the power to do that?"

He replied indifferently: "Then take your rifles. Nowadays people talk too much."

South African Memories

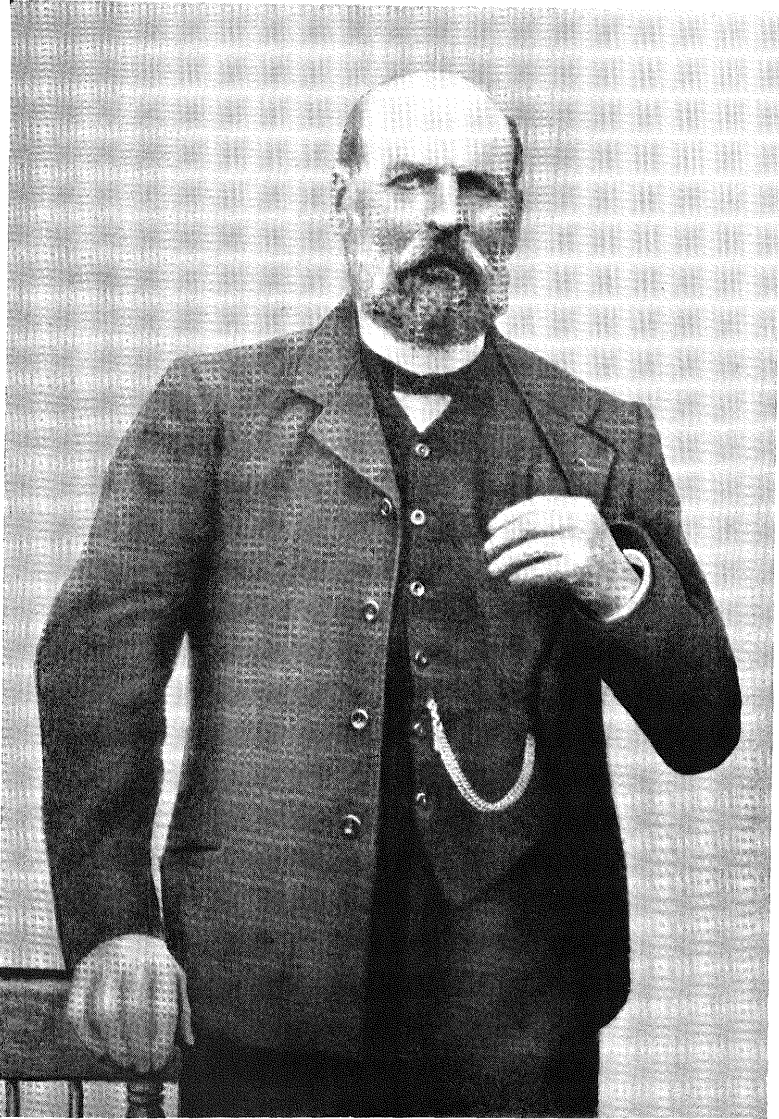
anything like interviewing or questioning him. He would close up like an oyster on the approach of anyone who revealed any such purpose; he was not to be drawn, and as there were plenty of opportunities to meet during the session I waited until he himself gave the opening. It came in unexpected fashion, revealing in a small way how very observant he was.

His friendship with Sammy Marks and the fact that they were constantly seen together had given rise to gossip of the usual cheap character, which did injustice to both men. It was freely said that Marks, a Russian Jew by birth, who had come out as a pedlar and accumulated an immense fortune; whose name was associated with several of the most obnoxious concessions, and who was alleged to care for nothing but money-making, was merely the spider drawing De la Rey into his web, hoping to acquire the large farms which the latter owned in the Western Transvaal. "And," said the gossips, "there could not possibly be any tie between this gallant old Boer and the flint-hearted Jew except that of money obligations and facilities."

The Senate was not sitting that day, and as I went in for lunch I saw that De la Rey was sitting alone at the table. He beckoned to me to share it with him, and after the ordinary small talk there came out of the blue a surprising remark from De la Rey. "The 'old Jew' has been the greatest friend that I have had; he saved my family and me. People say he is just another old smouse (trader) who will take all your money as a man will suck an orange, and then throw it away; but he did for me what I never thought anyone would do, what no Christian, no Englishman, none of my own people ever thought of doing."

I wondered what could have started him on this subject, but merely said that I did not agree with the public estimate of Marks; on the contrary I was on terms of personal friendship with him and thought him one of the most remarkable men in the country, although I disapproved strongly of a number of things for which he was responsible. But De la Rey was not interested in my views, nor concerned to volunteer anything like explanations or apologies for himself. He spoke in his characteristic way, quite candidly, and in a leisurely fashion, and I did not interrupt. Briefly, and in substance, what he said was:

"You know what the war was like, and how up to the end we were wandering all over the country, stopped by the blockhouse lines, chased by great numbers of columns, never resting for a day or night, and never able to go to our



GENERAL J. H. DE LA REY, IN 1909

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

homes; our houses destroyed or occupied; nothing left of cattle, sheep or horses; both sides had helped themselves to what there was. It was just ruin, but I still had left my big farms unencumbered. The war taught us many lessons. It was clear I had to start again to restock my farms and restore my property, and provide for my family, and the first thing I thought was something I had learnt from the war; I must not allow my children to be handicapped as I was by having no education at all. They must at any cost get their schooling so that they could have a fair chance with others in the world. So I took my title deeds to Pretoria to raise money on my farms. I went to the bank and negotiated with them. They were very decent to me, but the interest and the charges were very heavy and they advised me to consult my lawyer before concluding the agreement with them.

“I was walking down the steps from the bank to look for a lawyer when I met Ou Marks. We knew each other quite well before, but had never had any business. I needed no one’s help in those days. You know the ‘old Jew’ has got very sharp eyes, and after we had greeted each other he stopped me from going further, and said, ‘Koos, what were you doing in there?’

“I had some business with the bank.’

“What is that under your arm, that big envelope? And before I could answer he said to me: ‘These are your documents.’ (Title Deeds).

“I told him then that I had been to the bank because I must have money for the education of my children. I think he had been going into the bank himself, but he turned round, caught me by the arm and said, ‘Come to my office, I want to see you.’ I went to his office in the corner of the Square, and to his own little room at the back. He got up and locked the door. Then he was quite angry with me and said:

“‘Are you a fool, or are you mad? You will just tie yourself up and be ruined.’

“‘But I must have the money for my children’s education.’

“Then Marks turned to me as if he were going to bite me. In a few years, he said, I should be ruined and everything taken. Why did I not go to my own friends and get their help, even their advice. I answered that my friends could do nothing: they had to look after themselves.

“‘Am I not one of your friends?’ he said, ‘here, give it to me,’ and he pulled the papers out of my hand, and asked how much I wanted. To me it was a big sum because I

South African Memories

had to provide for many things, and I told him what it was (something like £2,000 or £3,000). After looking at the papers he said: 'Here, you are not to go to any of these banks or lending companies. I will let you have the money on your own promissory note without any security; you keep your titles'; and he named an interest much less than the bank had named. That is what the 'old Jew' did for me. He is the best friend I have ever had, and he saved us all."

I never knew what moved De la Rey to tell this story, but I was glad indeed to hear it. I do not believe that it was an answer to the gossip, for 'Oom Koos' was as fearlessly indifferent to the opinions of others as he was indifferent to personal risks. These things simply passed him by; he never noticed them; but what I do believe was that he was moved to tell the story out of gratitude to his friend, the 'old Jew.'

We moved out into the Lobby and I was quite surprised when he turned to the easy chairs and said to me, "*Sit maar.*" There was nothing to call us away so we sat down and he began, or resumed almost immediately.

"I have got big farms and good farms in the Western Transvaal and, thanks to the 'old Jew,' things are coming right again. Our family has always been there. These farms belonged to my old people. My father was the brother of Groot Adriaan de la Rey; you know all about him; he was the big boss of the Western Transvaal, and we had plenty of enemies. There were very few families and numbers of hostile native tribes, who were always robbing and murdering, so it was necessary to protect your family and your property. The two brothers, my father and Groot Adriaan, owned adjacent farms and built their houses quite close together on the boundary so that, when necessary, all the stock could be gathered and protected near to the two houses which were fortified to resist the Kaffirs. It was like one encampment or laager, and besides giving strength to the two establishments as one it made it possible for one brother to go off from time to time on his own business, and leave both places and families under the protection of the other brother; so it worked very well.

"But you know what I was telling you the other day about the differences that arose in these republics; well, one of these splits occurred; I do not know what it was about, I was too young then, perhaps some silly little thing, but you know how obstinate people can be. Well, in this argument my uncle and my father found themselves on different sides.

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

They never argued it out together and never discussed the matter at home; it all occurred in the Volksraad. It seems very funny now when you look back on it. I was only a child then, perhaps twelve years old. Of course I had been taught to handle a gun, because we all, even the women, took a share in the defence, but I was too young to understand the cause of the quarrel. Anyhow, the two parties were so angry and unyielding that war was declared between them, and every burgher was called out. The two brothers had to turn out and join the different commandos who were at war with each other.

“They came home to prepare for commando and that was the first that the wives or any of us knew about what had taken place. There was no argument and no show of feeling at all, but, as I told you, the houses were close to each other, and the first thing they did was to arrange for joint defence in case the natives should take advantage of the absence of the men. They worked all day at this and by the evening the two brothers had their horses saddled and ready, and their wives packed biltong and some meal and other things into the saddle bags for the two of them, and they rode off together along the farm road in the direction of their different commandos, which might have been eight or ten miles away. Their paths divided at the boundary and each went his own way to his own commando. I was too young to understand much about it, but I could use a gun, and I was very proud to find myself armed and treated as the man of the party responsible for the joint defence of the two homes.

“Then we all lived together in one house and strengthened the defences of the houses and the kraals for the stock; it was just one laager. Post, police and communications did not exist; we saw no one and heard nothing about what was going on. In the house I never heard anyone talk about the war, and we had no news at all, until one day my father and uncle came riding back. I do not remember how long the war lasted; it seemed a long time, and then somehow they made peace. The commandos were broken up and the two old brothers met again at the same point where they had parted, and rode together to their homes—and that was the first news we had about the war!”

To me, this story of the old life, and the simplicity, directness and brevity of the telling, conjured up visions of the past, including a thousand things which he had not mentioned but must have known, and which I wanted to hear from him—the illuminating details which make a great picture complete. Very often one hears stories told of those days which are

South African Memories

clearly intended to ridicule or expose the ignorance and stupidity prevalent among the Boers. For example, their alleged belief that the earth is flat, that the sun (*vide* Joshua) revolves round the earth. If there is anything in this narrative which can possibly suggest that view, I shall have failed to convey the truth of what I heard from De la Rey. The easy, matter-of-fact way in which he told it all was to me the clearest proof that he was stating the simple facts. But there was other evidence too.

He told it all in a reminiscent and indulgent way, and his kindly, smiling eyes revealed that much of it amused him. He was keenly conscious all the time of what, for lack of a better phrase, I must call the 'humour of it': in fact, on several occasions, notably when describing how the two brothers went to war on opposite sides; how the wives joined in packing the husbands' saddle bags, and how the two families united in one laager for mutual defence, a faint laugh or chuckle showed that he appreciated how these things would appear to a later generation; and he frequently used such a phrase as, "The Boers were like that in those days", or "It is all different now, but that is how it was in the old days."

What would one not give to have the entire story from such a source? I could not even think of the questions I wanted to ask, but by a fortunate accident blurted out one thing which, although it caused the end of our talk, did elicit something of surpassing interest. I had a feeling all the way through that he had deliberately opened out to me on these subjects, and that in his mind there was some continuity of purpose in the various talks which I have recalled here; that his intervention at our luncheon table was no mere accident and that its casual conclusion, "*Dit is die gewoonte van die Boer,*" was still in his mind; that the other incidents which seemed so unpremeditated and disjointed, the story about Sammy Marks and this later dip into old history, were not disconnected fragments, but something in the nature of a sequence; in a sense not unlike the modern cinema pictures. No doubt there were gaps and perhaps deliberate skips, but there was a connecting purpose in it all, although I was unable to see deep enough to realize what that purpose was.

Perhaps, I thought, the fact that he had found in me an intensely interested and sympathetic listener, a South African by birth, although not of the true breed—the Boer—one who could understand him, might have made the way easier for him to talk; but the truth is that with a man like De

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

la Rey, so habitually silent, so utterly free from all vanity and self-consciousness, so contemptuous of anything like advertisement of self, this little appeal which is usually so effective and so subtle in its flattery—the appeal of an appreciative listener to the teller of a story—could not have influenced him. My impulsive interjection was, “But, Oom Koos, how awful it was that through obstinacy over trifles two brothers should find themselves on opposite sides. They might have shot each other. How wicked that they should have made civil war amongst a few people surrounded by savages; and all for nothing!”

The gentle smiling appearance vanished; his eyes suddenly widened and brightened as though with surprise and reproach.

“You do not understand it at all,” he said sharply. “There was no bloodshed; there was no fighting.”

“But, Oom Koos, how can you have a war without fighting? I really do not understand it.”

When he saw that I really did not understand his expression softened again, and it seemed to me he spoke as to a child, gently explaining what he had assumed I already knew.

“I told you before that the last argument of the Boer who was dissatisfied and wanted to split up was ‘*Vat nou jou roer*’ (take your rifle), but it was quite well understood that it was not intended to kill each other. They declared their war, and went out on commando, but not to murder each other. It was what you might call a demonstration of force. There was plenty of manœuvring for positions in order to prove which was the more powerful or determined party in the dispute; or to secure a settlement acceptable to both; but we did not shoot each other, and never intended to. It was what we used to call a ‘gewapende protest’ (armed protest)—you have heard it many times in South Africa. It is a recognized and perfectly understood practice amongst the Boers.” He warmed up slightly and said “We were not fools. It would have been suicide and senseless waste of valuable lives to kill each other. We were a small people, surrounded by enemies. The history of the Boers has been the same always—trying to get away from their enemies and live in peace; but always having to defend themselves.

“The Great Trek took our people inland and we occupied all this country which is now the Free State, Transvaal and Natal. We had to defend ourselves at every stage. The most priceless thing in the world was the life of a white man; we were few and could not afford to lose a single one. Why, the Boers would not sacrifice the life of a white man, not even

South African Memories

for murder, cowardice or treachery—and there were bad cases of these—but there was never an execution. All knew that they might have their ‘gewapende protests!’ that was their custom and their right; but there must be no killing of each other. Our very existence depended upon preserving the few we had, even those who were the bad ones could still do something else; they could at least rear their families and increase our numbers. The white man’s life was priceless; alive he could still do some good, but dead he was useless. It was war, yes, but there were different kinds of wars; we never intended to kill. It was not like the wars against the Kaffirs or the English.”

This turn of the question offered endless avenues for enquiry and discussion, but I did not succeed in getting much more; perhaps the little check in his narrative, caused by my failure to understand, which led to this excursion or digression, had chilled him a bit; perhaps my next question brought us up too close to what he did not wish to discuss. I put this to him as reasonably and carefully as I could: “But, Oom Koos, those were the old days, and the old ways. As it strikes me I should think it would be a most dangerous thing now even to think of this ‘gewapende protest!’ People cannot take their guns and make a threat of force against their Governments or turn out on commando with loaded rifles without something happening; it would mean rebellion or civil war. A gun fired by accident might start up a war, and real bloodshed seems to me inevitable, and yet you said this idea of a ‘gewapende protest’ is still in the Boer mind and is cherished even to-day by numbers of people as a vital principle—the lifelong habit of the race, their right, and their liberty.”

“Yes.”

“But now there are no longer open spaces to trek to; all the land is occupied and under regular Governments. The ‘gewapende protest’ would mean civil war. No Government could submit to it. Government would be impossible, in fact there would cease to be government. Besides, we have our own Union that everyone approved and our own Parliament.”

He answered promptly: “Union was never intended to deprive people of their rights and liberty. They will not be content to be shut up in a kraal and deprived of liberty and rights.”

I asked at once: “Then what would happen to-day if an armed protest were made? Do they mean to do it?”

But the old General closed his eyes as though tired, and

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

merely asked, "Who can tell what is in the hearts and minds of others?"

He rose from his chair, stretched himself, and made it plain that our talk was over. With a smile and friendly nod he moved off.

Note.—It will be remembered that the defence of the rebels by their leaders and defenders in the Rebellion of 1914 was that it was not a rebellion at all, but a 'gewapende protest.' Even educated men like President Steyn and General Hertzog constantly used the plea.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHOOTING OF DE LA REY, A TRAGEDY OF THE GREAT WAR

MUCH of the information which I have used came to me from or through Botha and Smuts; and scraps of it from many others who were in a position to know. I believe that all I have used is entirely correct. There was another source of information to which I had looked forward eagerly to obtain anything relevant to the particular phase under consideration. Shortly after the war, Mrs. De la Rey, wife of the General, published a book, either dictated or written, entitled *A Woman's Wanderings and Trials during the Anglo-Boer War*—a kind of diary of her own adventures. It was cheaply issued, and is now very difficult to obtain, but I found it a fascinating, human story, and a highly valuable record for South Africa.

Her book, whilst exhibiting her of course as a convinced racial partisan, unconsciously reveals her to be a strong, capable, and deeply religious character. My disappointment is due to the fact that there is little or no reference to De la Rey himself as a soldier or public man in whom I was most interested. If one smiles at the obsession that a large part of the British Army was entirely concentrated upon capturing her, the idea is a very human failing; and one is lost in admiration of the self-reliance, resourcefulness, resolution and courage with which for some two years Mrs. De la Rey conducted her own campaign to escape the British and to avoid causing embarrassment or loss to her own people. Trekking in her ox-wagon, and keeping with her a kind of migratory farm with sheep and cattle and horses; especially preserving milch cows to sustain her young family whom she carried with her; this story of almost unbelievable adventure, so long and so successfully maintained, is a most real and most human document.

References to De la Rey himself are few and far between, and nothing is said about his achievements as a soldier, nothing to extol him as a leader or as a man. It seems to suggest for a moment that she did not understand or appreciate him, but looked upon him as a mere husband—no doubt a good one as husbands go, but nothing to make a fuss about

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

—until one gradually realizes that this was also his attitude to her and that, so far from being disparagement and neglect it was the very highest tribute, and evidence of the most genuine and unselfish trust and co-operation. Their co-operation was ideal, their trust and confidence in each other complete. It comes out gradually without any explanations or protest that each meant to help and to give no trouble and be no handicap to the other. He was attending to his job; she to hers. Their mutual confidence was magnificent. Her courage and resourcefulness met every emergency. His devotion to the cause of his country knew no limit. To both of them we can see it was the same; plain duty and no heroics.

I am told that Mrs. De la Rey, in spite of her strong national feelings, was very firm on keeping faith once peace was made, and especially when completed and consecrated by the Union of South Africa; that she and other members of the family regarded it as a religious duty and an obligation of racial honour to keep faith.

They were strong supporters of the South African Party (led by General Botha), and mistrusted those who were clearly trying to trap and make use of Oom Koos. They knew the histories, characters and aims of those whose purpose was to enmesh and make use of the most prominent, most trusted, and most beloved leaders among the old Boer population. When meetings were being arranged in the Western Transvaal to lead up to rebellion in 1914, there was a scene on De la Rey's farm which has been fully described to me. He had one daughter who was a favourite and devoted companion. A stream of Boers had called that day and the devoted girl stuck close to her father. When the last visitor left, the old General greeted him smilingly, "Well, we'll meet again at Treurfontein. Bring your tobacco with you." The visitor laughed back and nodded. She waited until out of hearing and then turned hotly on her father: "What did you mean by that? You know every Boer carries his tobacco. You meant his ammunition. It's all a wicked shame. It's treachery, dishonour, disgrace. You must go at once to General Botha; he is our leader. You must tell him all." The old man was very gentle and patient, but the girl was not to be dissuaded. She would not leave her father's side—she even slept in his room that night, and at dawn took him to Pretoria.

The foregoing was generally confirmed by Botha and Smuts, and the following is what Smuts told me in the presence of Botha, who smiled or nodded endorsement: "The poor girl was utterly done up from the twenty-four hours' intense

South African Memories

strain and lack of sleep. She tottered into the room leading her father, saying to Botha, 'Here is Pa, General, he has come to see you.' It was just like a scene from a sentimental romance; yet in real life it does happen. She gave a kind of sob and staggered forward. The three of us were just in time to catch her as she went off in a prolonged dead swoon. It was a most painful scene, and it was long before we got her round. She was an heroic soul."

I believe that this incident was connected with the Treurfontein meeting of September 15. On page 7 of the Government Report on the Outbreak of the Rebellion (Bluebook 10 of 1915) the salient facts are recorded, but I do not know whether the daughter brought her father on her own impulse, or because she knew of Botha's invitation.

I have been assured that the family were most hostile to and alarmed by the intervention and great influence of the maniac Prophet van Rensburg, whose Delphic pronouncements they did not regard as religious, but as sacrilegious. Besides being angry they were alarmed, because De la Rey clearly felt the influence of the Prophet and began to develop a kind of religious, half-superstitious mood quite foreign to his simple, candid nature. This was remarked by very many in the country and in Parliament. I frequently heard rough, but not unsympathetic remarks about the 'Old Chap going off,' 'religious-mad,' 'getting soft.' I did not see much of him during the last year owing to my absence in England. The old free, unrestrained talks did not recur, and I was conscious that he seemed more thoughtful and silent, although always friendly. I had heard the gossip about the Prophet and religious development, but paid no heed to its political significance; for I would never have suspected him of possible rebellion or anti-British rising, and treachery to Botha and all his old comrades of the S.A.P. To the very end I believed in him.

I laughed at the van Rensburg tales, and did not believe that people, however ignorant, could be fooled and captured by such gibberish. But there was a gang of astute, calculating malignants exploiting the Prophet and poisoning the minds of thousands of ignorant, superstitious people. This Prophet—van Rensburg—had been regarded as a kind of Seer and had been with De la Rey's commando in the Boer War (in 1900). He was something of a character and his peculiarities gave him a grip on many and puzzled many more. His oracular sayings were cleverly ambiguous; he refused to explain or argue; he affected complete indifference to what others thought of him or his utterances; he neither sought

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

nor derived any material benefit from his work or position; and by his 'Take it, or leave it' attitude he acquired the reputation of being an inspired, impartial, detached interpreter, and not a partisan. Unless there were reasons of policy for leaving him alone it appears that even the Government thought there was something in this; for, although he was certainly one of the most potent factors in the rebellion, he was not punished as a leader. He was an ignorant, illiterate poor White, almost destitute.

But, whilst respecting the views of others whose authority, opportunities and knowledge of the facts and of the people are far greater than mine, I feel that there is more to be said. In all these prophecies De la Rey is the central figure, the Saviour of his country and of his people, the triumphant leader who defeats and expels the British.

The Prophet had frequently claimed to have seen in the clouds or in visions the mystic number '15' and despite desperate efforts to entangle him, De la Rey had evaded and disappointed the rebel conspirators who had aimed to entangle him in the Treurfontein meeting of August 15, 1914. It was the belief of the rebel organizers, who were careful not to alarm De la Rey by revealing their plans, that if they could only manœuvre him into being present he would be compromised and committed, and the great gathering would construe his presence as approval. Thus the Prophet interpreted the vision of '15' to mean that the 15th of August was clearly indicated for the appearance of the Saviour, who, after regaining their independence would appear hatless in a carriage, followed by another carriage containing masses of flowers and flags, symbolizing the return of the victor. But De la Rey did not satisfy these hopes. It was after his meeting with Botha and Smuts (when escorted by his daughter) that he made the speech at Treurfontein which so completely satisfied the Government, and disconcerted the Rebel leaders.

Yet, the latter pressed on, and arranged for another meeting at the same place on the 15th September, when the simultaneous appearance of General Beyers (Commandant-General) and De la Rey was to be the signal for the outbreak of a widespread, well-organized, armed rebellion. The Prophet was equal to the occasion. When reminded of the date of 15th August, previously prophesied by him, and its failure, he fell back on religion (Blue Book 10, 1915). "When doubters asked how they could be so certain that 15 signified a day of the month—and of the month of August in particular, they were scornfully, if illogically, told: 'In God's time a month sooner or later made no difference.'" Therefore the

South African Memories

substitute meeting was arranged for September 15 to secure the full advantage of the Prophet's influence; and the Prophet played up to the plan. But this risk of interpreting ambiguous prophecies was well shown here, for De la Rey never reached the second meeting. He was killed the evening before; was found dead and 'hatless' in the car. It was not long before thousands of superstitious people began to wonder if the vision had not been a correct forecast of his death, and (remembering the second carriage laden with flowers and flags) of his funeral.

At the risk of some duplication it is worth while attempting to put the facts from the view-point of the man who cannot speak for himself—De la Rey—and to show how the conspirators strove to entangle and mislead him, how consistently he avoided and defeated the traps and manœuvres; and, to this end, and because few have seen the Blue Books, I quote the following from the Official Report on the Outbreak of the Rebellion (Blue Book No. 10, 1915):

1. The outbreak of the Great War in Europe at the beginning of August, involving England and Germany and bringing them to grips at last, affected South Africa immediately and profoundly. Although the great majority of Dutch South Africans had no sympathy whatever with German aims or Prussian ambition, they were, on the other hand, not very passionately anti-German either. They could not be expected to feel towards Germany as the average Englishman did.

Only a handful of them, whether from ties of blood and kinship, or for other reasons, were pro-German in their sympathies. In the two late Republics, however, there were many who quite naturally regretted their lost independence. The regret might be merely sentimental, but sentiment has to be reckoned with, particularly in times of great excitement, when it easily leads to deeds. It is not surprising, then, that in the ferment aroused by the gigantic struggle in Europe, which seemed to be shaking the whole world to its foundations, young men began to see visions and old men to dream dreams of what the outcome might be for South Africa.

The times were not without their signs. There was a seer in Lichtenburg who had visions of strange import. Years ago and long before anyone in this country had dreamt of war, he had beheld a great fight of bulls, six or seven of them, engaged in bloody combat; a grey bull had emerged victorious from the contest. The bulls signified the great nations of Europe and the grey bull was Germany. Thousands had discussed this strange vision, and had remembered its prophetic

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

character when later war actually broke out. The vision seemed ominous. Germany was predestined to triumph.

The Seer van Rensburg: The seer was Nicolas van Rensburg, of Lichtenburg, a simple and illiterate farmer. He was a prophet not without honour in his own country. On many occasions he had given proof positive of the possession of extraordinary powers of prevision, so men said and believed. It would be out of place here to give examples of the many telepathic forecasts (or happy guesses) with which he was credited. It is certain that he had a great hold on the imagination of thousands of his people. During the Anglo-Boer war some commandos, when van Rensburg was in their laager, neglected all precautions. If 'Oom Niklaas' declared that the English were not in the neighbourhood, it was a waste of energy to post sentries and keep a look-out.

An extraordinary (and apparently quite authentic) vision, correctly foretelling certain events leading to the conclusion of peace, had established his reputation. His fame spread throughout the land, and everywhere strange tales were told of his wonderful gift.

His reputation had, strangely enough, not diminished since the war. This was perhaps due to several causes. He had never attempted to exploit his 'gift' and impressed most of those who came in contact with him with his apparent sincerity. If he duped others, it seemed he also duped himself. Moreover, and this was perhaps the secret of his continued success, his 'visions' were invariably symbolic and mysterious; they possessed an adaptability of character that was truly Delphic. Indeed, his hearers were compelled to put their own interpretation upon his visions. The seer seldom pretended to understand or explain them himself.

General De la Rey took a great interest in the seer, who had belonged to his commandos during the Anglo-Boer war. Van Rensburg again had the greatest admiration for General De la Rey, and had frequently hinted to his circle that great things were in store for the General. One of his visions had been well known to General De la Rey and his friends for some years. The seer had beheld the number 15 on a dark cloud, from which blood issued, and then General De la Rey returning home without his hat. Immediately afterwards came a carriage covered with flowers. What these things portended, van Rensburg could not say. He believed that they signified some high honour for the General.

2. The mere prospect of war between Germany and England was sufficient to produce a rebellious movement. It will

South African Memories

be remembered that war was declared between these two countries on the 4th of August. Already on the 3rd August, Commandant F. G. A. Wolmarans (of Ward Onder Hartsrivier) was warning his friends that "in a short while they would get orders to go to Treurfontein to attend a meeting. The people would assemble and the 'Vierkleur' would be hoisted." When asked: "What then?" Wolmarans replied: "From there we shall go to the German border for ammunition." Asked further as to the attitude of the Government, Wolmarans said: "The Government is all right."

It is impossible to overlook the significance of the remark about the German border. It shows that Wolmarans (who was in the confidence of Major Kemp and others) knew something of the scheme and the position of Maritz.

When the war at last broke out, the effect in Lichtenburg was instantaneous. The prophecies of van Rensburg were eagerly recalled, and it was remembered that he had foretold a day on which the independence of the Transvaal would be restored. One officer actually called up his men to be in readiness on Sunday, 9th August, as that would be *the day* on which the prophecy would be fulfilled. . . .

Veldkornet I. E. Claassen and Commandant F. G. A. Wolmarans, of Ward Onder Hartsrivier, had been commandeering their own burghers, as well as their political friends, since the first week of August to come to the meeting which was to be held at Treurfontein on the 15th. The instructions given to these men were that they were to come with rifle, horse, saddle and bridle and as much ammunition and provisions as they could manage to bring.

3. The meeting was to be addressed by General De la Rey, and it was generally believed that the assembled burghers would march on Potchefstroom immediately after the meeting.

The prophecies of van Rensburg had a great deal to do with the excitement which had been produced locally. The strange vision of the number 15, which had long been common knowledge, was now discussed with intense interest. The 15, it was said, signified the *15th of August*, the day of the meeting. That would be *the day* which had been so long expected—the day of liberation. Van Rensburg was now the oracle. His prophecies with regard to the great war had been signally fulfilled. Germany was at grips with England and her triumph was looked upon as inevitable.

The day had arrived to strike a blow for their lost independence. Van Rensburg assured his following that the Union Government was 'finished.' Not a shot would be

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

fired. The revolution would be complete and bloodless. (A 'gewapende protest.')

Between the 10th and the 15th the plotters in Lichtenburg were actively preparing for the day. There is evidence that German secret agents were working in concert with them. The 15th would mark the beginning of a new era. When doubters asked how they could be so certain that the 15th signified a day of the month, and of the month of August in particular, they were scornfully, if illogically, told that "In God's time a month sooner or later made no difference."

4. Everything would depend on the meeting which was to be addressed by General De la Rey. General De la Rey's position in the Western Transvaal was unique. He possessed an unrivalled influence and was looked up to as the uncrowned King of the West. His attitude at the meeting would sway the mass of his adherents and decide the question of peace or war.

General Botha summoned General De la Rey to Pretoria some days before the meeting, and was able to persuade him to use his best endeavours to calm the excited feelings which had been aroused and to use his influence to see that no untoward incidents should occur.

On Saturday, the 15th August, the great meeting was held. About 800 burghers were present. General De la Rey addressed them and explained the situation in Europe. He exhorted his audience to remain cool and calm and to await events. After the address "a strange and unusual silence" was observed. A resolution was passed unanimously expressing complete confidence in the Government to act in the best interests of South Africa in the present world crisis. The address seemed to have had a very good effect. The burghers appeared to have taken their leader's advice to heart, as they dispersed quietly to their homes.

All danger of a rebellious movement had apparently been averted.

5. *Lieut.-Colonel Maritz.*—At the outbreak of the War, the defences of the north-western districts of the Cape Province, where the Union territory marches with that of German South-West Africa, were in charge of Lieut.-Colonel Solomon G. Maritz.

Maritz had distinguished himself in the Anglo-Boer War, and although quite without education, had given many proofs of a natural aptitude for military operations. He had fought for a long time in the north-western districts of the

South African Memories

Cape Colony, and had come to know the country and its people thoroughly. . . .

On the organization of the Union Defence Forces he had been offered a commission on the staff of the Active Citizen Force. He passed through the Military Training School at Bloemfontein, and at the beginning of 1913 he was appointed to command Military District No. 12, comprising the north-western districts of the Cape Province. At the beginning of August, 1914, he was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel in command of the Union border in the direction of Kakamas and Upington.

This appointment was made on the recommendation of General Beyers, and had been sanctioned by the Minister of Defence only very reluctantly, on the repeated and urgent demands of the Commander-General. . . .

From the moment that war was declared between England and Germany, Maritz was in close and constant touch with the German authorities across the border. Later, when he was in open rebellion against the Union Government, he showed his correspondence with the Germans to certain Union officers. From this it was evident that he had been in communication with the Germans since the first week in August.

6. *The Conspiracy of the 15th September.*—It was not only in the Western Transvaal that the European War had produced a profound effect. Its course was being carefully watched in the Free State and at Pretoria. It is an established fact that during the month of August a conspiracy was organized which was to lead to a general rising on the 15th of September. This was a much more serious affair than the abortive attempt to engineer a rising at Treurfontein on the 15th of August.

The leader in this conspiracy was General C. F. Beyers, Commandant-General of the Active Citizen Force of the Union. With him in the plot were Lieut.-Colonel Maritz and a number of prominent men.

7. *Ramifications of the Conspiracy.*—In and around Pretoria there were many who were prepared to join General Beyers in an attempt to overthrow the Government. In the Free State there was General De Wet, whose energy and iron determination were well known. He could be trusted to organize the rebellion in his Province. Maritz was already far advanced with his plans and could be counted upon not only to carry on his propaganda of sedition among his own people, but also to keep an open door for his German friends,

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

with whom he was known to be in treasonable communication. In the Western Transvaal there were already signs of discontent, which by careful fanning could be blown into a blaze of revolt.

Major J. Kemp, District Staff Officer for Military District No. 7 (which embraces the Western Transvaal), was a leader in the movement and would be able to do a great deal with the help of his friends among the Defence Force officers of his area. In conjunction with General Beyers, he had organized the Rifle Associations of the West, and there are signs that a policy of careful discrimination in the selection of officers had been consistently carried out. . . .

8. All the members of the Government, as well as most of the heads of Government Departments, would be at Cape Town for the Session of Parliament. It would thus be possible to strike a paralyzing blow from Potchefstroom before anything could be done to avert it.

Position of General De la Rey.—A very important factor in the situation in the Western Transvaal was General De la Rey. If he could be induced to join in the conspiracy, it would be an immense gain to the cause, as his personal influence was very great. Should he oppose the movement, it would be a serious blow to the plotters, as neither Beyers nor Kemp could hope to do anything against General De la Rey in the west.

There is evidence to prove that General Beyers set himself systematically to work on General De la Rey's mind in order to induce him to join the conspiracy. General De la Rey was known to hold strong religious views, which coloured his whole outlook. The seer van Rensburg, who was always full of religious talk, had in this way acquired a considerable amount of influence over General De la Rey. There is the best of evidence (General Beyer's own statement) for the belief that he himself did not scruple to work on General De la Rey's mind through his religious feelings.

9. *Disquieting News from Europe.*—Meantime disquieting news was being received from Europe. The German advance on Paris seemed irresistible. French and English had been flung back, apparently hopelessly beaten. The strategic retreat of the Allies appeared a hopeless rout, and rumour increased its significance enormously. It seemed as if Germany would soon have the Allies completely at her mercy.

The 'Prophet' van Rensburg, indeed, saw visions in which 40,000 German soldiers were marching up and down

South African Memories

London. These absurd imaginings of a disordered brain were freely circulated by the conspirators and some of them really believed (or at least pretended to believe) them.

10. When the Germans began hostilities against the Union by occupying Union territory opposite Nakab (on or about the 19th August) many political opponents of the Government rallied to its support, realizing that the 'neutrality' doctrine was exploded. Not so the extremists. At the 'Nationalist' Congress held at Pretoria on the 26th August, a few days after the violation of Union territory above referred to, the strongest language was used against the proposed 'robbers' campaign' against German South-West Africa.

General De la Rey was specially invited to address the congress. He did so, and, in a speech which made a deep impression, strongly urged union in the present time of crisis. His attitude at this time shows that as yet the conspirators had not ventured to give him any hint of their schemes.

11. *Final Preparations for the 15th September.*—Meanwhile, General Beyers was completing his arrangements for the rising on the 15th September.

Events in Europe were helping his plans to perfection. The German armies were still advancing on Paris with terrible and seemingly irresistible swiftness. The French Government had abandoned the Capital. Paris seemed doomed to fall within the next week or two.

On the 5th of September (when the Allies in France were still in full retreat), General Beyers sent the following telegram, marked 'Private,' to General De la Rey at Lichtenburg: "Very anxious to see you, important business. Can you meet me here Saturday, 12th instant?" To this a reply came from Mr. B. Krige, General De la Rey's son-in-law, informing General Beyers that General De la Rey had left for Cape Town to attend the Special Session of Parliament.

General Beyers thereupon telegraphed to General De la Rey at Cape Town as follows (8th September): "Would like to see you here Monday, 14th, or Tuesday, 15th inst. If inconvenient, telegraph earliest date. Important." At the same time he also telegraphed to General De Wet at Memel: "Do not come to Pretoria now. Our friend will not be here." General De la Rey replied on the 10th September: "Will come to see you when Parliament adjourns."

General Beyers, it is clear, was still hoping to persuade General De la Rey at the last moment to join the conspiracy,

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

or, failing that to place before him a *fait accompli* at Potchefstroom. At the worst, even if General De la Rey should refuse to join the movement, his mere presence at the critical moment, when the first step had to be taken, would be invaluable. The conspirators would certainly not have scrupled to mislead their followers with regard to General De la Rey's position, since we know that they did not scruple, in many cases, to assure their deluded followers that the whole Government was behind the movement.

12. Friday, the 11th September, was a critical day in the history of the conspiracy. An expeditionary force was going to sail from Cape Town to seize Luderitzbucht. General Beyers knew that General Lukin and Maritz were to co-operate with this force and that hence the crisis must come within the next few days.

13. Another telegram dispatched by General Beyers on the 11th, the day on which he was arranging to interview Maritz and Kemp, may be quoted here. It was addressed to General Sir Duncan Mackenzie, who was in command of the force, then about to sail from Cape Town to occupy Luderitzbucht. It read as follows: "As one soldier to another, I wish you and the force under your command every success in the operations which you are about to undertake."

14. General Beyers had in the meantime ordered his chauffeur to overhaul his motor-car carefully and to equip it with new tubes and covers in readiness for a 'long journey.'

The 15th of September.—Joubert arrived at Pretoria on the Monday evening. On Tuesday morning, the 15th, he saw General Beyers. He brought a message from Maritz, "informing him (Beyers) that all arrangements had been made and all was ready."

At the conclusion of the interview, General Beyers sent Joubert directly to Johannesburg in his own motor-car to see General De la Rey. Joubert was too dangerous a personage to be seen about Pretoria. The motor-car was to bring General De la Rey from Johannesburg to Pretoria.

The resignation of Major Kemp was received in the course of the morning. The moment for action had arrived. Everything was ready. At Upington Maritz was waiting for the signal to begin. The Germans were at hand to support him. Kemp and his confederates were completely prepared at Potchefstroom. The members of the Government were

South African Memories

far away at Cape Town, making plans to attack German South-West Africa, in happy ignorance of the blow about to fall upon them.

The arrival of the two Generals in Potchefstroom Camp on Wednesday morning would be the signal of revolt.

General Beyers himself was ready. His resignation manifesto, as we have seen, had been prepared as soon as he heard that Joubert was coming from Maritz.

15. The Minister of Defence, then at Cape Town, had, of course, to be informed immediately. General Beyers agreed to a suggestion that, owing to the critical situation, the telegram announcing his resignation to the Minister should be put into cipher. He did not inform his staff that his letter of resignation had already been handed to the Press.

The further events of that remarkable day are well known. General De la Rey had been expected at Potchefstroom on the 15th on his return from Cape Town, *via* Fourteen Streams. He had, however, returned through the Free State and was at that moment at Johannesburg. . . .

In his evidence before the Court of Enquiry into the shooting of General De la Rey, General Beyers stated that when General De la Rey arrived in Pretoria, the latter asked him (General Beyers) to go with him to Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg. Both of them were opposed to the German South-West African expedition, and hence General De la Rey invited him to go to these places "with the idea of having meetings at both places" to tell the people what was going on.

He (General Beyers) then pointed out to General De la Rey that the burgher training camp at Potchefstroom was breaking up the next day, and that "before the men left for their homes they could inform them as to what took place in Parliament and of the reason of his (Beyers') resignation."

That was the story told by General Beyers on the 28th September.

It will, however, be remembered that on the 12th Beyers and Kemp had arranged to extend the duration of the Potchefstroom Camp specially to the 16th "to enable De la Rey to address the men."

When we bear this in mind, and also Beyers' evident anxiety to get into touch with General De la Rey (as proved by his telegrams and his action in sending his motor-car to fetch him), it seems (to say the least of it) extraordinary that, when the two at last met, it should be General De la

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

Rey and not Beyers who proposes "to hold meetings at Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg."

We may safely assume that the original suggestion came from Beyers. His one object now was to get General De la Rey to the Potchefstroom Camp by four o'clock the next morning, when the revolt would begin. General De la Rey's presence in the camp was needed to persuade those who still wavered. His presence would be easily secured by the pretext of a meeting. In this way also Beyers could make sure of getting General De la Rey to Potchefstroom without as yet taking him into his confidence and explaining the whole plot. This would have been wholly in keeping with Beyers' conduct throughout the conspiracy.

16. The other topic of general interest was the seer van Rensburg and his visions. He had predicted a revolution in connection with the figure 15. The Government of Botha and Smuts was 'finished.' The new State would have at its head "a man who feared God."

Other wonderful visions of the seer were recounted. He had seen the English leaving the Transvaal and moving down towards Natal. When they had gone far away, a vulture flew away from among them and returned to the Boers and settled down to remain with them. That was Botha. As for Smuts, he would flee to England. There was no hope that he would see South Africa again.

17. The day on which the rising was to begin was to be the 15th of September. The seer had so often spoken of the mysterious number 15 and the wonderful things that were going to happen in connection with it that no more suitable date could have been selected.

On the night of the 14th the 'Prophet' himself was specially sent for by motor-car to be personally present on the 15th to witness the consummation of his prophecy. The conspirators hoped to profit by the impression he would undoubtedly make on those who still hesitated. Unfortunately for them, however, the seer refused to leave his home, saying that "It was not yet clear to him that that was his path." Apparently he did not realize that by refusing to come he was imperilling not only the success of the plot, but also that of the prophecy. It may be that he was content to risk his reputation rather than his neck. In any case his refusal was a real disappointment to his friends.

The signal for revolt was to be the arrival in camp of Generals Beyers and De la Rey. They would immediately

South African Memories

seize Potchefstroom and the railway line, and then proceed east and west respectively to organize the revolution.

General De la Rey was returning from Cape Town, where he had attended the Special Session of Parliament. He was expected to travel *via* Kimberley and would be due to arrive at Potchefstroom on the 15th. As a matter of fact, he returned through the Free State and was still at Johannesburg on the 15th. This was another and a serious disappointment to the plotters. They now determined to begin the rising early on the morning of the 16th.

From the above will be seen that (1) De la Rey ignored or refused several urgent telegrams, almost commands from Beyers, his Commandant-General, to meet him and other leading conspirators when Beyers was already organizing rebellion and negotiating through Maritz to join Germany and was feverishly striving to entangle De la Rey. The latter left a message to say he had gone to attend the Special Session of Parliament (called to deal with the question of war with Germany, for which he voted): later he replied to another urgent wire that he would call after Parliament was prorogued! Again, he refused or evaded the attempt of Beyers to arrange a meeting with the Free State rebel leader, General De Wet. At each meeting at which he did attend and speak he allayed excitement, urged unity and patience, to the plain disappointment and dismay of his audiences.

But most significant of all was his last trip. There are two railway routes from Cape Town to Pretoria, where Beyers had urgently demanded his presence before the Treurfontein meeting of 15th September. The Eastern route lay through the Free State, Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Pretoria. The Western ran through Kimberley and through the entire length of the Western Transvaal including Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg (his own home). This vast area was in fact the very region in which he was regarded as dictator—'King of the West.' It was also the home of the Prophet, and the centre where the conspirators had collected to start the avalanche of rebellion on 15th September by the simultaneous appearance on the platform of Beyers and De la Rey. Naturally the rebels concluded that he was in this cleverly stage-managed manoeuvre. As a member of Parliament he had a free pass over all routes, and everyone believed he would make the obvious choice of the Western route; but he didn't. Without a word to anyone he took the Eastern route and was lost to all until, to their utter consternation, he was located in Johannesburg on the very

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

day of the great Treurfontein meeting at which the rebellion was to be launched—15th September.

No more tragic or dramatic affair than the story of this day, the 15th September, has occurred in the history of any country. The occurrences of that day were immediately made the subject of a judicial enquiry under a Judge of the Supreme Court, and the report was published in Blue Book No. 48 of 1914. It is too long to quote, but merits the most careful study by those who want to know the truth. The hearing of evidence occupied seven days, and more than seventy witnesses were examined; but for a better understanding of it all it is necessary to go beyond the scope of the report and to refer to some details which were not put before the Commission.

It happened that at that time Johannesburg was in a state of abnormal excitement, in fact thoroughly disturbed by occurrences which had nothing whatever to do with the political position, and although these occurrences were destined to produce remarkable and tragical complications, the principal characters concerned in the movement of the rebellion seemed to have had no knowledge whatever of what was to affect them so deeply.

This complication was due to the emergence of probably the most desperate and brutal gang of desperadoes ever known in South African history. They were known as the Foster Gang, from the name of their ringleader; and at one time as the Jackson Gang, probably an alias for Foster.

Quotation from the Judicial Report. Blue Book 48.

“Foster, the ringleader of this gang, was a desperate character and was aged 25. He had been sentenced on the 24th May, 1913 . . . to 12 years' imprisonment with hard labour for a particularly bold and daring jewellery robbery. At that time there were seven previous convictions against him. On the 27th February, 1914, he escaped from the Central Prison at Pretoria and had since evaded capture by the police. Maxim, who was associated with him in the crime to which reference will be made, had also previous convictions against him; he had come to South Africa from America, and had the reputation of being a particularly dangerous gunman, and was aged about 35. Mesar, the third associate in this gang, had also been previously sentenced, and was a young man of 23.”

Early in 1914 a number of criminal offences, burglaries and violence were proved against them. On July 17th the

South African Memories

National Bank at Boksburg North was attacked; a clerk resisting them was badly assaulted, but owing to his gallantry and resourcefulness he got assistance and returned to the bank, when three men opened fire on the party, killing a gentleman named Charleson and wounding two others. The bandits escaped on motor-cycles. Immediately after this, murder and burglary warrants were issued and a reward offered by the Government.

On the 26th July the Post Office at Vrededorp was broken into and robbed, showing the same evidence against the Foster gang. On September 12, 1914, a native at the Kimberley Bottle Store at Bertrams spotted the burglars and called Constable Langsberg. The latter was felled by a blow from a crowbar on the back of his head. Immediately afterwards the criminals attacked another place, the Imperial Bottle Store. Sergeant M'Leod, seeing a man sitting near this bottle store, and not satisfied with the replies to his questions, sent Constable Swanepoel up to him to see if he would give the same replies. As Swanepoel approached, the man gave a whistle, and the constable saw some tools concealed in a bag under his coat, so he arrested him. M'Leod came up, and they handcuffed the man. On searching him a revolver and ammunition were found. As the prisoner was being taken past the bottle store he flung himself on the ground, shouting "help, help!" A man appeared round the corner of the bottle store and came up to M'Leod and Swanepoel, opening fire on them. M'Leod received a fatal wound and collapsed. Swanepoel was also hit, but managed to get away for assistance. They then found that Sergeant M'Leod had already expired, and on going into the bottle store Sergeant Mansfield was found lying dead at the back door pierced by two bullets. Evidence was available in shoe prints, cartridge shells and gloves that this also was the work of the Foster gang.

The police strained every nerve to discover these desperadoes. On the morning of September 15 they were reported to be in a house within the Johannesburg area. Detective Mynott was sent to make enquiries, taking with him two watchers, Detective Layde and Constable Murphy. Mynott, who is described as a very brave and fearless man, did not carry out his instructions to observe and locate, but thought that he and his companions were quite able to tackle the criminals, and insisted on taking what he called 'pot-luck.' They guarded the exits from the house, and when Mynott and Murphy got to the east side they saw a motor-car which had been concealed behind a canvas screen. Two men were

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

standing alongside the car and a woman and a baby sitting in it. Mynott boldly went up to one of the men, presented his revolver and said, "Hands up, Foster." Foster was at this time bending down and groping with his hands for something in the car. Mesar was standing alongside Foster, and it was believed that Maxim was under the car making some repairs. Foster did not put up his hands, and Murphy shouted to Mynott to fire, but Mynott hesitated, when Foster, quick as lightning, turned on Mynott, and putting a pistol against his body shot him dead. Murphy and Foster emptied their revolvers ineffectually, then the former jumped over the fence for shelter. Foster then calmly proceeded to remove Mynott's revolver from his dead body, and having done this, the three men backed the car out of the yard into the street, and made off.

This happened between 5 and 5.15 p.m. on Tuesday, September 15. The news of these atrocious murders was immediately made known to the authorities, and with remarkable speed and efficiency, detectives, police, and men of the Defence Force were posted all along the main reef roads running east and west through Johannesburg at all the important crossings or junctions, with orders to stop and examine a black motor-car containing three men, one of whom might be concealed in the back seat.

Hence, when my friend Dr. Grace was driving with his wife towards Germiston at 7 o'clock in the evening down the sharp incline near to the very troublesome junction of the Geldenhuys and Malvern Roads, he was challenged by armed police, but apparently did not understand, or perhaps did not hear the challenge and ran past the constables at this particularly dusty spot where the wind storms along the Reef made it most difficult to see or hear. Both police fired, apparently with the object of bursting the back tyres. One bullet wounded Mrs. Grace in the elbow; the other hit Dr. Grace in the right shoulder, penetrating his heart, and killing him on the spot. It was a terrible accident. Dr. Grace was a great favourite and of high repute. He was of the younger generation of the famous cricketing brothers.

The details of this tragedy were particularly poignant. He was returning with his wife and hurrying out because of his professional duties; he had heard nothing about the Foster gang or the precautions. His first warning was at the level crossing, when the caretaker lowered the booms in front of him and barred the way. He stopped, got out and asked the meaning of it, and, on explaining to the guard

South African Memories

who he was, and what he was doing, the boom was raised and he was allowed to proceed on his way, with no further explanation than that the man was acting on instructions to stop some escaping criminals. His wife asked if certain calls which she thought she had heard were not demands upon them to stop, and in leisurely fashion Grace explained to her, before resuming his seat, that any challenge to stop would be made by the police in the middle of the road with outstretched arms as a warning, whereas there had been no one in front of them. He resumed his journey after crossing the track, and it was then that the fatal accident occurred.

It is only fair to realize at what extremely short notice, and with what wonderful speed and efficiency the authorities had mustered and placed guards at every possible road and junction north, south, east and west of Johannesburg; to do this they had to call upon foot and mounted police, detectives and men of the Defence Force. No instructions were given by anyone to shoot. In view of the atrocities committed by the Foster gang and the actual murders throughout the day all were supplied with arms, and all knew what had occurred, and that they had the most desperate characters to deal with.

In the case of Dr. Grace the men admitted that they fired at the back of the car at a distance of 70 to 100 yards. It was almost impossible that in the bad light and dust they could have succeeded in bursting the tyres. There was no evidence of a ricochet, but both bullets seemed to have gone through the back of the car. Almost immediately, as he was speeding up the rough slope, Dr. Grace heeled over towards the right. The condition of the car, examined by experts, showed that the speeding up was due to pressure on the accelerator, the immediate result of his heeling over to the right, for he seemed to lose control and the car turned on to very rough ground in which his foot slipped from the accelerator, and the car was brought to a standstill. He fell over sideways and died within a few minutes. It seems to have been a terrible price to pay for the wonderfully organized attempt to capture the Foster gang, and not the least terrible part was that apparently the only people to escape the vigilance of the guards that night were the Foster gang themselves.

Foster, with his wife and little baby, and his two companions, Mesar and Maxim, followed approximately the same route that Dr. Grace had taken, at much the same time, and slipped through towards the Geldenhuys Mine to a deserted

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

tunnel or cave which they had formerly used; and from it they never escaped.

The main roads through Johannesburg, and on to Witwatersrand run due east and west, with important feeders to north and south. Dr. Grace was shot at 7 o'clock in the evening on the main road going east from Johannesburg, and it was not many minutes before the news was spread about by means of the telephone. All the guards located elsewhere were advised of this, and the horrible occurrence, coming on top of the outrages earlier in the day had unquestionably excited and stimulated the men who were out to capture the gang of outlaws. But there was still another price to be paid for the Foster gang, and an even more tragical and sensational affair was developing on the roads leading west.

It has been shown by quotations from the judicial enquiry that Commandant-General Beyers, in his efforts to meet De la Rey and entangle him in the rebellion conspiracy, had sent his own motor-car with his own driver to fetch De la Rey from Johannesburg to Pretoria. The motor was equipped for a very long journey at high speed. They left Pretoria just about the moment that Dr. Grace was shot, 7 o'clock, and travelled at full speed along the main road between the two towns. The judicial report states that De la Rey left Pretoria at about 7 o'clock in company with General Beyers in whose car they were travelling. The car was driven by one Wagner, a servant in the employ of the latter. They were travelling to Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg, *via* Johannesburg and Krugersdorp.

The Pretoria-Johannesburg road, like the other main roads leading into Johannesburg, was picketed by police with instructions to hold up all cars, and to look out for the Foster gang. There was a picket placed just north of the Orange Grove Hotel in the immediate proximity of the tram-shed. The men, Corporal Smith and Constable Clay, both wore the usual blue uniform, and were armed with rifles. From 8 p.m. to 8.45 p.m. they had stopped seven motor-cars; these readily pulled up when they saw the police signal; the position was well illuminated by street lamps and there was also light shed on the road from the tramway shelter.

At 8.45 p.m. the car containing De la Rey and Beyers reached this picket; the car had two large electric headlights and two small ones. Corporal Smith stepped into the centre of the road, held up his hand and called on the car to stop. The car slackened speed slightly as it approached

South African Memories

him and then went on as before. He shouted again and stood challenging the car until it was within 5 yards of him; then he stepped aside and again shouted "Halt!" He saw that the driver wore a chauffeur's cap and grey overalls, and that there were two gentlemen in the back of the car. He did not recognize them. He heard a voice call out in English, "No, go on"; saw that the car was grey-coloured and that it put on speed as it passed him. Constable Clay corroborated this evidence and added that his instructions from a subordinate chief were that if he saw three men in a black car, and they refused to stop, and he recognized them as the Foster gang, he was to fire. Many other witnesses bore out his testimony, especially to hearing the voice from the car calling, "No, go on."

Wagner, the chauffeur, does not deny that the police called on him to stop. He says he heard Beyers say to General De la Rey, "Oom Koos, zal ons stop," to which De la Rey replied, "Nie, laat ons aangaan"; but he adds that General Beyers did not tell him to stop, nor did he ask whether he was to; but he would not stop unless General Beyers told him to. Beyers, who had to give evidence at the judicial enquiry, corroborated this statement, and the Judge's comment was, "I gather from this that General Beyers was aware that the police wanted him to stop."

There could be no doubt that the police at Orange Grove did their best to stop the car, but that it went on in spite of their challenge. The police did not interfere further as they saw that the colour of the car was grey; also the dress of the chauffeur tended to avert suspicion.

They took a short cut through Vrededorp subway, a difficult passage. They were again challenged by Constables van Rooyen and Peens, both in blue uniform, blue helmet and armed with rifles. They had already challenged seven or eight motor-cars which had responded to the challenge, and shortly before 9 o'clock General Beyers' car came along and refused to stop. When it came near van Rooyen, one of the occupants shouted, "Pas op voor!" and he had to jump out of the way and the car nearly ran over him. General Beyers himself admits that in going through the Vrededorp subway he saw one or two policemen, whom he took to be regulating the traffic. He saw one holding up his hand, but no remarks were made. He would not say they did not shout, but he did not hear them.

The car was next challenged by a picket at the corner of Park Drive and Main Road, Fordsburg. The place was well lighted; both men of the picket wore the blue

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

uniform, blue helmets, and were armed with rifles. The police stood in the middle of the road and shouted, "Halt!" The corner to be passed is a sharp corner; both streets are narrow, and there is a catch-water drain. The car slowed down on getting to the drain, but immediately put on speed again. The chauffeur must have seen him as he looked straight at him and swerved the car round him. Constable de Wet immediately ran to the Charge Office and reported the refusal of the car to stop, and the direction it had taken.

The car now went on by the main road to the village of Langlaagte. Another picket was encountered at the corner of de Ville and du Toit Streets near a bright acetylene lamp. The Constables on duty were Charles Drury and Charles Ives, both wearing the uniform of the Mounted Police, namely, khaki tunic, breeches and gaiters, and both were armed with rifles; Drury had a bayonet attached to his rifle. Ives had no bayonet. Drury in his evidence stated that he had instructions to stop all cars and to examine them for the bandits, Foster and Maxim. About 9.15 he saw a car coming 400 or 500 yards away. It carried headlights and he went to meet it, leaving Ives under the lamp at the corner of du Toit Street. He advanced 20 paces and stood in the middle of the road and challenged the car, when it was 70 or 80 yards away, by holding up his hand and shouting, "Halt, Police!" twice. As the car did not slow up he repeated this challenge when the car was 30 yards off, and again when it was 12 yards off. At that point he shouted to the driver, "Pull up. I am going to stop you," but the car came straight on and knocked him off the road, and struck his bayonet somewhere in the neighbourhood of the radiator, and the left mudguard struck his hand. No attempt was made by the driver to stop. Ives was 30 yards off, and Drury called to Ives to stop the car. When the car passed him he could not see how many occupants there were, or the colour of the car. It was going too quickly and he was spun round by the bayonet's impact with the car. (No doubt he had tried to bayonet the front tyre.)

He saw the car pass Ives, and he saw Ives challenge it, and as the car went right on without stopping he fired. "My intention was to burst the tyre. I aimed at the right-hand wheel; that was the only shot I fired. The bullet struck the ground; fire flew up; but the car did not stop, it kept on going." The car was 42 yards from him when he fired, and went on for 200 yards after the shot, and then it came

South African Memories

back to where the picket was. Drury went to meet it and said, "Halt, are you going to stop this time?" The car stopped immediately and the sad report was made that General De la Rey had been shot dead.

They found the groove in the road where the bullet had struck and ricocheted into the car. At the post-mortem Doctors Girdwood and Visser found that De la Rey had been killed by a piece of the nickel casing of the bullet which, entering the left side at or near the waist, penetrated the chest, lacerated the heart and lodged itself in the breast bone. A small piece detached from the rest was found buried at the top of the heart. The leaden part of the bullet and the rest of the casing dropped out of the clothing when the body was undressed. General Beyers, who had been called before the judicial commission, stated that, in his opinion, it was a ricochet bullet, but he thought, notwithstanding this, that the bullet had been discharged at the car but that the bayonet weighed down the rifle and caused the bullet to strike lower than the marksman intended. The Judge commented, "I do not adopt this view." The chauffeur, Wagner, says that he saw the police at Langlaagte, that they were armed, and he noticed one man had a fixed bayonet at the time he stabbed the car. This policeman held up his hand, and shouted, "Halt." "I did not halt," he said, "because I was waiting for orders to stop." Wagner also stated that when they were 20 to 25 yards past the policeman who stabbed at the car he heard a shot, and added, "Even then I would not have stopped, had I not received orders." "This," comments the Judge, "is certainly very extraordinary evidence. The driver is supposed to be in charge of the car, and, unless he receives orders to the contrary, he is the responsible person who has to stop when called upon by the police." General Beyers said in his evidence that "Wagner had to wait for instructions from me to stop. I did not tell Wagner that. As usual, when he drives I tell him when to stop; he cannot stop whenever he likes, but I gave Wagner no special instructions that evening."

There are several circumstances worth recording which are not referred to in the report. At the time the car came back to the police General De la Rey was lying dead. He had never spoken a word. Without doubt Beyers then believed that his plans for stirring up rebellion had been discovered, and were the cause of the attempted arrest. Knowing nothing about the Foster gang, he walked back to the police with the apparent intention of surrendering to arrest, but when the men recognized their Commandant-General they were

The Shooting of De la Rey, a Tragedy of the Great War

so completely staggered that it gave Beyers time to realize the facts and to recover his presence of mind.

The object of this judicial enquiry was to elicit the facts connected with the death of De la Rey. All had a bearing upon the greater question of the rebellion, and it is important to note certain points about General Beyers' evidence before the Commission.

In the first place, as regards the actual facts of the tragedy nothing that he said upsets or conflicts with the evidence given by the police and other witnesses. He admits the correctness of the repeated defiance of the police challenges; admits his own responsibility as owner, and for giving orders to his servant, the chauffeur; but when he is able to get away from the indisputable facts of numbers of witnesses he reveals another aspect of his evidence.

In the first place he made the statement that it was De la Rey, and not himself, who suggested, or insisted upon this long trip to Treurfontein, Potchefstroom and Lichtenburg. The presiding Judge pointed out at once that, in view of Beyers' admitted responsibility, his efforts over a long period to organize this meeting, and his strenuous efforts up to the last moment to capture De la Rey for his own plans, and finally the sending of his own motor-car, with his own driver to bring him from Johannesburg, and the outfitting of this car for a long journey, it was not possible to accept this statement of Beyers, concerning which it was not possible to get further evidence, De la Rey himself being dead. The meaning of the Judge's summary was perfectly clear.

Note.—Sir Percy FitzPatrick had nearly completed his narrative of the shooting of De la Rey when his health gave way. It was his intention to close with a re-estimate of General De la Rey's character, exonerating that remarkable man from any purpose of treachery, but expressing the belief, now generally held in South Africa, that his mind had become temporarily deranged under the influence of the Seer, van Rensburg, and that his actions from the close of the Parliamentary session of 1914 were not those of a fully responsible man.

CHAPTER XV

THE STORY OF A GREAT DIAMOND

GOLDMINING has at least one advantage over all other productive businesses in that there is no question about the disposal or the price of the product. Gold is always saleable at the standard price of the day. It is not so with diamonds; and the disposal of the product of the diamond mines early became a very great problem. Production was one department of the industry, sale was another, and a very intricate one. It did not pay the individual mine to organize both. Long before the great Diamond Syndicate¹ was formed, the necessity for organization was recognized, and steps were taken to meet the difficulties.

Arrangements were made between the producers and certain combinations of buyers, whereby, for a definite period, the entire output of a mine or of certain claims, should be disposed of at an agreed price. The variations in size, colour, and quality of the stones, and the consequent enormous variations in value introduced very speculative factors into such business; however, it was mutually advantageous that some workable arrangement should be made whereby the producing mines should be certain of a steady market, and at the same time leave to the buying syndicate the possibilities of profit commensurate with their heavy outlay and the risk that the world's market in the future might not come up to their anticipations.

In order to assure this, a valuation per carat was agreed upon with certain provision for exceptional finds. It was intricate, but one example will suffice. A first-class diamond of one carat in weight might be worth in the rough £5 (the figures given are purely illustrative). Another diamond of equal quality weighing 10 carats would be worth not ten times as much, but perhaps 100 times as much, as the commercial value of a large stone is incomparably greater than the ratio of weight would suggest. In these agreements for purchasing the half-yearly or yearly output of a mine, it was therefore provided that a special price should be paid for the larger and more valuable stones: but a reasonable limit

¹ Now merged in the Diamond Corporation.

The Story of a Great Diamond

was fixed by valuing all the best at the same rate per carat, say all over 50 carats would come into one class—the highest. Thus no provision was made for those rare and incalculable occurrences—the fabulous stones. The possibility of such a find being so remote, this ‘gambling chance’ was, as one might say, ‘thrown in,’ and it was one of the great speculative attractions which tempted syndicates to risk very large investment in the purchase of stones without any certainty that the world’s markets would hold up, and that they would be able to resell them at a profit. The gambling chance came off occasionally.

Such an agreement had been made between the Jagersfontein Mine and a syndicate of which Wernher, Beit & Co. were the founders and principal constituents. The agreement was to buy the year’s output, and it terminated on the 30th June, 1893. The output of the mine for the following year had already been disposed of to another buying syndicate. As a matter of fact, the results of the previous experience had not been so encouraging as to induce Wernher, Beit and their friends to consider a renewal of their agreement.

Here is the story of what occurred, to which brief reference is made in Dr. Bauer’s record:—

Diamonds are so valuable in proportion to their bulk, so easily concealed, and so readily saleable that special precautions were necessary to protect the industry. The penalties for I.D.B. (Illicit Diamond Buying) were extremely severe, yet the temptations and opportunities for profit were so great that the loss through the stealing of stones was an extremely serious factor in profitable mining. The producers were everlastingly on the watch to reduce the chances of theft.

At different stages in the processes of mining there were opportunities for picking up stones, and although a visitor might spend an entire day in the mine and in going over the open floors on the look out for a stone, without seeing a single diamond, the opportunities to pick them up were very numerous; and the natives and others working in the mines, becoming familiar with all the conditions, developed the finding faculty to a remarkable degree. Hence, though an infinitely small percentage of stones might be called ‘visible’ in the rough or disintegrating blue ground, the total output was so great that even this small percentage represented a very large value in cash. But what made the risk of loss the more serious was the obvious fact that it was the larger stones and the more brilliant ones which were most likely to be found during the process of mining and exposure on the floors.

South African Memories

The discovery of such stones by workmen was very frequently recorded, and in certain mines a system of rewards had been introduced for reporting such finds. Thus was achieved the double incentive to honesty, reward and penalty—but the discovery of a stone within the compound even with the intention of theft was, so to say, only the first risk which the producer ran: after that the risks were increasingly on the side of the thief. The critical point was reached when the diamond had to be smuggled out of the closely wired and guarded compound into the open, where numbers of the lowest class of illicit buyers watched an opportunity to profit by the thief's success. Great as the risk was that was run by the thief, his own reward was by no means as great as might appear. The mere fact that the diamond thus smuggled was stolen property, and that neither title nor licence could be produced if he were searched by the authorities, compelled him to sell in a hurry and to take the best price he could get; and the illicit buyers—as unscrupulous and merciless a gang of criminals as could be found, took full advantage of this. Hence a stone whose legitimate value to the mine or the producer would have been, say £10, frequently passed into the illicit trade for a pound or two—sometimes less: and on the few occasions when really large stones were smuggled out and disposed of, the disproportion between the value and the price received was very much greater, for, of course, the difficulty in disposing of a large stone and the risks of detection whilst it was still within South Africa and subject to the I.D.B. laws, were multiplied many times.

All these facts, and many others, were present to the minds of the legitimate producers and, whilst asking the strongest protection by law, they adopted every precaution on their own account to protect themselves. Hence arose certain practices in self-defence, which, whilst being founded upon sound practical sense, and the old rule about self-preservation, consisted of a sort of compromise between right and expediency, that introduced a fresh element into the already exciting gamble of diamond stealing. As has been pointed out, the critical point was reached when the stone had to be passed out of the compound area, and many and amazing were the expedients resorted to here. The mining companies and producers recognized that it was worth while to make one special effort, even at a considerable cost, to prevent a valuable stone from passing out into the unknown where recovery would be infinitely more difficult, and the device by which they dealt with this problem was as follows:—

The Story of a Great Diamond

Whilst doing the utmost which vigilance and organization could effect to prevent the stealing of stones within the compound, they introduced the practice of granting purchase and immunity against prosecution, also a handsome reward and immediate release from labour contract, to any thief who had succeeded in evading all other precautions up to the last moment, provided that, before attempting to get his stolen diamond through the defences of the compound, he should voluntarily report to a responsible official his discovery, and hand over the stone, claiming in return this privilege of purchase and reward. It was astutely judged that in almost all cases, especially where large stones were concerned, the ignorant native thief, knowing that he would be much at the mercy of the illicit buyers, and that he would have to face all the risks of detection, and suffer all the penalties, would hesitate on the brink of the great adventure and would prefer, so to say, to play for safety by accepting from the mine the known and, to him, very liberal reward, rather than face the risks of the unknown.

These were the conditions obtaining in the Jagersfontein Mine on June 30, 1893.

In that invaluable record, *Precious Stones: Their Characters and Occurrence*, by Dr. Max Bauer and L. J. Spencer, published in 1904, there will be found (p. 254 *seq.*) an account of the then largest known diamond. This book was written prior to the discovery of the great Cullinan Diamond, consequently no reference is made to the latter, which, as is well known, is the largest high-class diamond in the history of the world; curiously enough the Cullinan Diamond itself is apparently only one-half of the original stone, though no trace was ever found of the other half.

In this invaluable record—which was originally written in German by Dr. Bauer and translated into English and added to by Mr. L. J. Spencer—there occurs the following paragraph:

The largest of all known diamonds is the EXCELSIOR, afterwards called the 'Jubilee' in honour of the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria. It came from the Jagersfontein mine in Orange River Colony, and weighed $971\frac{1}{2}$ carats, measuring $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, 2 inches in breadth, and 1 inch in thickness, thus surpassing in size even the 'Great Mogul,' which in its rough condition is supposed to have weighed 787 carats. It was found on June 30th, 1893, by a Kaffir, who received as a reward £500 in money and a horse equipped with saddle and bridle. It is said that an agreement existed between the mine-owners and certain diamond

South African Memories

merchants by which the latter were to purchase every stone found in the mine during a certain period at a uniform price per carat. This period ended on June 30th, and the 'Excelsior' was one of the last stones to be found on that day, so that the mine-owners instead of the merchants came very near to profiting by this lucky find. The stone is of a beautiful blue-white colour and of the purest water, and has been valued by different experts at amounts which vary between £50,000 and £1,000,000; the latter value, however, seems somewhat prohibitive. The rough stone, though of such perfection of colour, lustre and water, had a black spot near the centre of its mass which had to be removed by cleaving the stone in two. From the larger portion was cut an absolutely perfect brilliant weighing 239 international carats of 205 milligrams and measuring $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches in length, $1\frac{3}{8}$ in breadth, and 1 inch in depth.

Precious stones of this size and character have fancy values. There are few possible buyers and yet the owners almost invariably hang on in the hope of getting such price as they deem adequate. In the long run this policy has led only to disappointment. From a commercial viewpoint those who have accepted a lower price for immediate sale have done far better. This particular stone, although owned by those who could afford to wait, gives only one more proof in the same direction. For over 33 years it lay in the coffers of Wernher, Beit & Co., awaiting the buyer who could afford to put up so much of the estimated million sterling as would tempt the owners. Once the Shah of Persia negotiated for it; on another occasion two great Indian personages, whose marriage was projected, were to mark the occasion suitably, but the marriage did not come off—nor did the sale!! In 1926 this famous jewel passed into the hands of Sir Richard Tata at a price of £95,000. It is somewhat chilling to reflect that had it been sold immediately, at a third of this price, it would have been 'good business,' for the interest realized on the proceeds would have been greater than the eventual sale.

On the afternoon of the 30th June, 1893, the work was proceeding as usual. It must have been known to most of the responsible officials, and probably to most of the white men, that the contract to purchase the output of the mine would expire at midnight. It may have been a subject for speculation to what extent this would affect those whose interest and activity had been stimulated by the offers of rewards for detecting any illicit work. This is not known for certain, and the writer cannot vouch for it being an

The Story of a Great Diamond

absolute fact, although he has been privileged to obtain much of this information direct from those concerned and to have it again revised by one who was an active member of the Buying Syndicate, and who held a triple share in the great diamond up to the time of its sale in 1926.

A young overseer, with an exceptionally good record for keenness and ability, was among many on duty, and was occupying a position which enabled him to look over an important section of the mine. He happened to notice one native working apart from the others, and without any special reason or the suggestion of suspicion his interest was attracted to this boy. According to himself there was nothing whatever suspicious in the appearance of the boy—or in his actions—except perhaps a too obvious inattention and indifference to his surroundings and a kind of intermittent slackness in his working.

From time to time as he kept his eye roving over all the gangs at work on the broken face and among the tumbled fragments of ground, he found his eye turn again to this boy, who would do a little work with his pick or shovel and then stand at ease apparently enjoying a rest in the sun. Every now and then the boy would make some small pretence of work, or would drop his pick; withdraw from his ear a brass rifle shell which he used as a snuffbox; shake a little into the palm of his hand; snuff it up, and make those appropriate noises which indicate profound satisfaction. It was all so totally commonplace and typical of the native workers and their ways that the man did not know how he came to be interested in watching such a proceeding. It was only on the third or fourth occasion of observing this that he noticed how the boy, after taking his snuff, would in the most natural way in the world turn round slowly, little by little, until he had made a complete revolution. The suspicion crossed the mind of the overseer that this was deliberate and that the boy was taking stock of his surroundings, and from that moment he became convinced that there was something wrong, and was determined to keep his eye on this particular native until knocking-off time, when he proposed to be on the spot and find out what was wrong, or take him in charge for examination.

It needed only the faint suggestion that this might lead to something unusual, to stimulate the keenest interest and even to raise some extravagant hopes of getting the much coveted big reward for detection as well as promotion for first-class work.

Not much more than an hour of daylight would pass

South African Memories

before the 'knock-off' would sound, so choosing a better position where the rays of the setting sun would shine direct on the suspected one and the quarry-face where he was working, the overseer sat down, and, believing that he himself was under observation and suspicion on the part of the native, tried to show as much seeming indifference as possible. He was convinced that a diamond—and of course it would be a good one—had been found; and from the boy's manner he was equally certain that it had not yet been removed but that the native was taking stock very warily of his position and of all those who might possibly be observing him.

The overseer sat down on some broken ground and ostentatiously smoked a cigarette, lounging rather at his ease. He did not face directly towards the boy for fear of exciting suspicion, but lounged in such a position that without turning his head he could keep his eyes fixed on the suspect. He was determined to take no notice of anything or anyone else so as to be ready to turn on to the suspected one by the downward path, already selected on, the instant the 'knock-off' sounded.

Those who have had any experience of endeavouring to keep such a watch as this know well that almost invariably some influence—some unrecognizable distraction—occurs and that the watcher, truly unconscious of having moved his eyes, suddenly finds himself glancing at vacancy. This is a most common experience in hunting wild game. One watches intently and for a seemingly interminable period waiting for a move that will expose a good specimen and offer a dead shot. There they are before one's eyes, never moving, like graven images; then a bird chirps behind one, or a faint rustle occurs, and for what seems to be half a second the eyes are turned away, or the attention distracted. One glances back again only to find that without sound or sign the animals have vanished—and so in this case. For a second the overseer's gaze wandered—when he looked back the boy was gone!!

It seemed an impossible disappearance, for it was not yet knocking-off time and natives everywhere were still at work. But the amazing, dramatic touch was all that was needed for one primed to 'go off' at the least provocation. He seemed to explode, and suddenly went 'berserk.' He dashed straight for the spot, filled with almost murderous intent; searched and scabbled about to find any evidence; collared and bullied other boys nearby, all of whom showed stupid, stolid indifference and ignorance. He did everything that was possible thoroughly to advertise his suspicions; but

The Story of a Great Diamond

up against the stolid indifference and stupidity of the ordinary native it was all futile. He then reported to his immediate superior and gradually the whole organization was moved to ascertain the whereabouts of the suspect.

In the meantime the word went round that this young overseer had gone murderously mad on the subject and was searching everywhere, armed with a revolver, determined to shoot on sight if he could find the suspect. Such a proceeding would have been plain murder. There was no reason or excuse for it, and it would not have been countenanced for a moment by the authorities of the mine. But his behaviour did have some practical result. The story of his mad hunt was told and was believed to be true; the mine natives were humming with excitement, and the word was passed round everywhere. In such circumstances, and having in view the buildings of the compound enclosure and the limited area it seemed beyond all possibility that the suspect should be able to hide himself and his supposed booty, so that not a soul could trace him. The search continued well into the night. The excitement had not subsided at all. How the boy managed to conceal himself, and even to move about, no one has ever understood; but at about half past eleven that night he appeared suddenly at the office of the mine superintendent just in time to meet face to face a highly responsible official; he made a sort of terrified appeal to him for protection and offered to give up the great diamond which he had found, and which he said others wanted to steal from him. They would not hesitate, he said, to murder him. He was totally demoralized by fright, and presumably had heard exaggerated stories of what was happening, and of the overseer's intention towards himself. Anyway, his nerve broke, and at the last moment he found refuge in the office, handed over his stolen diamond, wrapped in a filthy rag, dumped it on the table, and was immediately escorted out of the compound under proper guard. That night he was given his reward, as has been stated: £500, horse, saddle and bridle, and a pass to his home.

No one will ever understand how he disappeared in the open mine when the overseer took his eyes off him for a moment; or how and when he had picked up the diamond; or how he could have concealed himself and a prize so large and valuable during the remaining hours of frantic search.

The value of the stone, as I have said, was estimated to be anything from £50,000 to £1,000,000 sterling. It was by far the biggest diamond in the world at the time, of the first quality. The reward which would have gone to the

South African Memories

overseer would have set him up for life and would have been indeed well deserved. The price at which the Buying Syndicate secured this stone from the producers—under the agreement to take the output of the mine—was probably not one-hundredth part of its real value. Had the native not lost his nerve half an hour before midnight, the stone, which was worth a huge fortune, would have passed at a ridiculous price into the hands of the I.D.B. or remained in the mine to fall into the hands of the syndicate which had contracted to buy the output for the following year, for at midnight on the 30th of June, the rights of Messrs. Wernher, Beit & Co. lapsed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PRETORIA FORTS, AN EPISODE OF 1897

A FIRM like ours necessarily had many and various points of contact. Business ramifications brought us in touch with all sorts of people, and although most of the occurrences were commonplace enough, now and again there happened some development which had bearing upon something of a very different character.

In the early 90's after the occupation of Rhodesia by the Pioneer Column, and the turning back of the Ferreira Trek, when Kruger, resenting the extension of British authority, made his dramatic comment, "Now they have shut me up in a kraal," incidents were always occurring to aggravate the relations. Many years before (in 1870) the discovery of the Diamond Fields on the disputed boundary between the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State had provided such an 'incident.' It threatened awkward developments. The British Government, anxious to avert this, offered the alternative of handing over the territory to the Free State, or buying it from them for £100,000. The wise, far-seeing and patient old President, Sir John Brand, who realized the problem of handling a mining industry and a new community, commented humorously on the communication: "I feel as if a friend had offered me a present of a lion!"

Whether President Kruger recalled this when fortune revealed the existence of the Goldfields in the very heart of the Transvaal, is not known; in any case there was no dispute about the territory and no option for him but to retain and administer this record-breaking goldfield. He deeply resented a discovery in his territory which others would have rejoiced in.

The old President, with perfect right, took steps to control the position and to make himself an efficient keeper of this 'present of a lion' which Fate had given him, and to build a fort on Hospital Hill, on the site which commanded the whole of Johannesburg. It was a fort designed to weather and to resist artillery; its purpose was to dominate this alien centre of unrest. The fort was completed, equipped and occupied long before there appeared to be any question of