

PREFACE TO  
THE ORIGINAL (AFRIKAANS) EDITION

L. S.

**H**ow many prominent people, popular enough in their time, are remembered even a few years after their death? How much of the life's work of even the most famous men survives them by as much as a century?

The tenth anniversary of General Louis Botha's death is approaching. And yet his people, I believe, have not completely forgotten him! His figure forms an integral part of our own period in South Africa's evolution; it cannot be done without, just at present.

For the matter of that, Louis Botha appears destined for a permanent niche in the national memory. In his lifetime he was perhaps all too great for our respectable little nation. He stood in the way of several of his contemporaries, scandalizing them by his unconventional conception of patriotism.

Future generations may appreciate him better, or, rather, more universally. It is true that the public of posterity will not differ essentially from the public of to-day—the level of which is known to pretty well everybody—but it will have the advantage of seeing Botha's ideal circulate among the crowd as everyday, current coin of the realm. We need not concern ourselves about his future fame. Subsequent generations have better opportunities than are vouchsafed to contemporaries for getting to know who was really and truly a benefactor to his people.

Let us, then, concentrate on establishing Botha's reputation in our own day. Great is the number of those South Africans who supported him during his lifetime, and whose heads as well as hearts are still doing their best to propagate

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the gospel that was his. Many others, again, either knew but little of him, or did not know him at all. Maybe the desire to know what manner of man Botha was is felt by adherents as well as those others.

I cannot be expected to satisfy this desire in every way. Few persons to-day can hit on the correct perspective for a definite judgment of Botha's accomplishments. All of us, however, feel that these were uncommonly great. I have suffered from the disability—and, thank God, I had the privilege—of knowing Botha intimately since his entry into public life. Our ages were approximately the same, and as a journalist I was drawn into personal contact with him; this, in the end, ripened into friendship. Thus I lack the capacity, considered by some indispensable to the true biographer, for the total repression of the last vestige of either esteem or contempt toward the object of description. I simply cannot get away from my respect, my admiration, for Botha.

Owing to my long relations with him, a number of statements in these pages rest not on documentary evidence, but merely on individual recollection, which affects their value. In the nature of things, many an official source of information remained closed to me.

Special attention was given by me, here and there, to biographical detail such as most authors either ignore or evade. Every moment in a great man's life, however, belongs to his fellow human beings. Public interest in every aspect of his activity is the national hero's glory . . . and his cross!

To the Honourable the Prime Minister, General J. B. M. Hertzog, my respectful thanks are due for his permission to avail myself of certain documents from the Archives. I likewise thank all those who placed valuable material or useful advice at my disposal. My special thanks to Mr Paul Ribbink, librarian of Parliament at Capetown, for his great assistance.

F. V. ENGELENBURG

PRETORIA

*March 1928*

## PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THE favourable reception given by my compatriots to the original edition of this work induces sanguine anticipations as to the probable fate of an English version which is destined to reach not only my English-speaking fellow South Africans, but an overseas public as well. Botha's career not merely drew attention outside of his country; it appreciably affected other nations. His name commanded respect among people and races not usually susceptible to appreciation of such foreign individuals as have not identified themselves with their own spiritual existence.

He himself never grasped the scope of his fame, first as a soldier and subsequently as a statesman. He did, it is true, jocularly state once—when, accompanied by his wife, he was looking at an equestrian statue—that, if ever it fell to his lot to have his effigy placed on a pedestal, he would like it to be on horseback. The degree of his fame, however, left him indifferent. It was not in him to pose in front of the Press camera, or to take a hand in the construction of his own particular apartment in the house of fame. Rather was he one of those who are apt to give—give unstintingly and lastingly without claiming applause in exchange.

Its English garb will enable my poor attempt at biography to circulate in a wider realm than the original edition could ever enter. How I should rejoice if in a dozen languages books could be produced that would be the means of bringing the memory of this great South African closer to our own generation!

Six chapters of this book have received the distinction of being published in the South African *Argus* newspapers.

F. V. E.

PRETORIA

January 1929

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## INTRODUCTION

I GLADLY consent to Dr Engelenburg's request that I should write a few lines of introduction to his book on General Botha. I have not seen the book in its English dress, but in the Afrikaans original it appeared to me a fair, reasonable, and true picture of the man who more than any other dominated the South African stage for the first two decades of this century. With Lord Buxton's earlier work it will probably remain for years the authoritative presentation of General Botha. In time, no doubt, with the lapse of years and the passing of this generation, the larger Botha will emerge, the great romance of his life and his work will stand out above the level into which the lesser actors and their performance will have sunk. His colossal figure will then appear in its true historic proportions, and new biographers will arise to tell the wonder of it all. But we of his own generation who have personally known him have also a duty to perform, and are bound to give our impressions, even if they serve only as rough material for the biographers to come. Dr Engelenburg, from his long and close personal acquaintance with General Botha, has very special qualifications for the task which I and others have urged him to undertake and which he has discharged in this work with great competence.

Perhaps I may also be allowed in this foreword to give a brief personal impression of a friend whom I knew well for twenty-one years, during most of which we were associated in our work and our lives in a way which cannot but be rare among men. I knew him not only in the ordinary ways of living and working together, but far more intimately. Together as friends and comrades we passed through the gravest crises of our lives; together we had to take the most fateful decisions. I saw him under the most



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severe tests that can be applied to a human being—tests which would have revealed and brought out any flaws in his inner composition. And it is the way he stood all these tests and showed real greatness of soul that has made him quite outstanding in my memories of the great men whom I have known and worked with. I am not going to discuss here the intimacies of his inner life, but to refer very briefly to some of his qualities which flowed from that inner greatness and struck the world at large.

His natural tact was very beautiful, and indeed struck everybody with whom he came into contact. But in his case tact was not mere superficial form or manner. With him it was the expression of an innate sympathy which was probably the deepest and richest element in his make-up. I have never in any other man seen such a fine power of sympathy. His sympathy made it possible for him to get extremely close to others and to read their minds and divine their characters with marvellous accuracy. It almost amounted to a gift of divination as far as character was concerned. It gave him an intuitive power of understanding and appreciating men which was very rare. I remember many an occasion when he sized up a person in a way which at the time struck me as somewhat forced or fanciful, but which the experience of after years showed to have been perfectly right. Sympathy with him sprang from unusual intuitive insight into the character and motives of those with whom he came into contact, and his reading of men was in many ways the surest I have ever seen. He read friends and opponents alike as an open book. This is a very uncommon and precious endowment. Great men are often wanting in knowledge of human nature and are taken in by quite commonplace scoundrels. Much of their work is often spoiled by a false trust in those who are unworthy of it. I never heard of anybody taking in Botha; and this not because of any analytic power of dissecting motives and qualities, but because of his sympathetic insight, which seldom proved wrong. His knowledge of human nature was as profound as his sympathy, and sprang from it. But

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it was more than knowledge. It had that emotional touch which made him truly human, and endeared him to his friends, and gave him his personal magnetism. With him you felt instinctively at ease; he inspired those who surrounded him with confidence and devotion. And this sympathetic bond gave him a power over men much greater than any other form of superiority could possibly have given. To understand and love as he did, to evoke love and trust as he did, is indeed the finest power which can be wielded by men. This power he had, a power which reached the very souls of people, and did not merely affect their superficial behaviour.

This sympathetic power not only meant great power but also great pain to him. It meant that he was abnormally sensitive. He had not that thick hide which is supposed to protect the public man against the rebuffs and insults of his unpleasant profession. Politicians should be pachyderms. Public life for him meant not only the supreme enjoyment of achievement but the continual agony of misunderstandings, of differences with friends and associates, of hideously unfair and wounding criticism of which he had an abundant measure. On those whom the gods love they lavish infinite joys and infinite sorrows. He had his full measure of both. His place is in the most select list of the great statesmen and men of action that South Africa has produced. In that list he will in the future probably be accorded the first place. Great as soldier and as statesman, the leader of the Transvaal through the Boer War, the architect above all others of the Union of South Africa, the saviour of his people and its honour in 1914, his achievement is indeed unique. The simple Boer boy of the veld who rose by sheer power of personality and performance to be one of the foremost figures at the Paris Peace Conference has indeed established a record which would be hard to beat. But this great man of action had the tenderest feelings and the most sensitive soul. He combined the strength of a man with the extreme sensitiveness of a woman. A stupid letter of a friend would cause him sleepless nights;

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an undeserved criticism or insult would inflict pain far beyond what was probably intended. His power of sympathy was not only a powerful weapon, but it left him unprotected and exposed to a degree which would be considered almost unbelievable. It was this blending of great power with extreme sensitiveness which made him a supreme friend. Great as soldier, greater as statesman, he was greatest as friend by right of his sheer humanity and sympathy.

What was the religion of such a man? What could it be but the religion of all truly great men? He had his roots deep in the invisible. The human sympathy which bound him to his fellows was one with his deepest contacts with the unseen. All great spirits live by the same fundamental Faith. Most difficult of all to formulate and express, it is yet the truest reality of their lives. Botha certainly never attempted to express it. He observed the ordinary forms of religion, and was in every respect irreproachable in his moral and social habits. But there was always something more which his intimates were conscious of. He did not wear his heart on his sleeve, and seldom spoke openly about religious matters. But in the background was this fundamental faith, and on certain testing occasions it revealed itself visibly in his behaviour. One was at Pretoria the Sunday after the signing (late on a Saturday night) of the Vereeniging Peace Treaty which ended the Anglo-Boer War. He was labouring under almost uncontrollable emotion which it was most painful to witness; and yet through the storms and the wreckage of war and the despair of the terrible ending there was heard the still small voice, speaking of simple faith and trust in the Providence which invisibly guides the fortunes of men. Then there was another occasion (referred to in this book) at the beginning of the Great War, when the rebellion among his Boer comrades was on the point of breaking out, and he with myself and a couple of friends were striving far into the night to persuade General de la Rey to keep out of the mischief that was afoot and to use his great influence against it. General de la Rey—one of the whitest and noblest souls that ever

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lived—was labouring under a deep religious impulse which made him hear the call of God for the release of the Boer people from the bondage imposed upon them at Vereeniging. The argument with him therefore necessarily took a religious turn, and it went on for a long time, until Botha at last said to de la Rey (calling him by the affectionate name which we all used for him), “Oom Koos, it may be the will of God that this nation shall be free and independent. But nothing will ever convince me that it is the will of God that this shall be brought about through treachery and dishonour.” And more to that effect; his very language at the time reminding me of one of the greatest passages in the Book of Job. Then there is the third and last occasion when, at the signing of the Versailles Treaty on the very day when the Vereeniging Peace had been signed, his memories of that awful moment blended with pity for the Germans at the Punic peace which was being imposed on them, and he penned those well-known lines which in their ruggedness and intensity of feeling are almost untranslatable, and which now hang in the Prime Minister’s room at the Union Buildings in Pretoria: “God’s laws shall be imposed on all peoples with justice under the new sun; and we shall continue to pray that they will be applied to mankind in love and peace and Christian charity. To-day I think of the 31st May, 1902.” At that moment, when jubilation filled all hearts, he heard the undertone of the ages and felt only the deepest pity for the fate of human kind. He felt the present whole with the past and the future, and he saw the vision of God Who in His infinite mercy and pity washes out for ever the sins of this poor world and writes forgiveness over it all. His attitude that day was a revelation of what was deepest in him, and also of what to me seems to be the essence of all religious feeling.

There are men whose largeness of soul forms a solvent for the pettinesses of the world; who in their breadth of humanity and sympathy reconcile the differences which divide their fellows; creative souls who, out of the rough material of the passions and self-interests, the party cries

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and sectional strivings of those who surround them, achieve the comprehensive syntheses of a larger national life; who really make a people, place fresh view-points before them, and lead them out of the bitterness and sufferings of the past into the warm, glad light of larger ideals and visions. These are the rare God-like leaders, and of such was Louis Botha. What South Africa owes to him it will only gradually realize with the years, as the creative seed he has sown sprouts and bears fruit in the coming of the united nation for which he poured out his soul.

J. C. SMUTS

CAPETOWN

*February 1929*

## BOTHA'S YOUTH

**D**URING the winter of 1883 a family council was held at Klipplaat, a stock-farm in Vrede, N.E. Orange Free State. Thirteen brothers and sisters had met in connexion with the distribution of the estate of their deceased father, which was being liquidated. They lived in scattered districts ; their ages varied considerably. Naturally, they felt a little strange toward each other. The elder sisters were married and were represented by their respective husbands. Right at the commencement of their deliberations one of the sons proposed to leave the estate undivided ; as for the management, he would see to that. Responsibility, he argued, was nothing new to him. He was used to exercising initiative, and during the father's declining years (the old man's health had not been robust) he had practically managed the farm. Would it not pay all concerned to refrain from breaking up the property ?

The son who sprang this rather extraordinary proposal on the family council was not yet twenty-one years old. About one-half of his brothers and sisters were his seniors. It is not strange that the scheme was not enthusiastically received, especially by the elder ones. They suspected it as being either too risky or an undesirable departure from established custom. No, they were going to divide.

The young man felt hurt. Touched in his pride as a capable cattle-rancher, disappointed by the business decisions of his relatives (of which he disapproved), Louis Botha gave orders to inspan the waggon that formed part of his inheritance. A brief adieu, and off he went to Natal, accompanied by a younger brother. He was able to bear the knowledge that others under-estimated his ability with undiminished

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pride; confidence in his own powers and enterprise were his in full measure.

The unaccommodating attitude of his relations cost the Free State an energetic and able sheep farmer, who would no doubt have made a name for himself as a progressive country member of the Bloemfontein Volksraad. As to South Africa, it had occasion to be grateful to the domestic event that decided the fate of one of its greatest sons.

Louis Botha's ancestors came (according to evidence to be found in the old Cape Archives) from Thuringia in Central Germany. Round about 1678 Friedrich Boot, or Botha, arrived at the Cape at the age of twenty-two. He was a soldier in the service of the Dutch East India Company. Born at Wangenheim, a hamlet north of Gotha, he belonged to the Slavonic race, the brachycephalous appearance of which survives in his offspring. In 1682 he obtained his discharge, and henceforth lived as a free burgher. Probably he sprang from peasant stock, for he spent the rest of his life on the soil.

The Company's records always mention him as Boot. One of his signatures, dated 1692, reads 'Friederich Both'; another, of the year 1709, and obviously written by the same person, reads 'Friederich Botha.' Several of his descendants called themselves 'Both' and 'Boota,' which is a spelling found in church registers. 'F. Boot' is one of the first South Africans who farmed under the French *métairie* system: in 1686 he undertook to till another man's soil, in the Stellenbosch district, in return for one-fourth the crop. His work had a romantic sequel. The landlord had, a few years before, married a youthful second wife, who transferred her affections *in toto* to the tenant, now a man of thirty. Twenty years after, the courts had a divorce case before them, and the documents show that both the respondent and the co-respondent were not afraid of strong measures when these were thought necessary.

The co-respondent, in spite of his irregular domestic affairs, was *persona grata* with authority, as appears from his ownership of Sandberg, a mountain farm in Stellenbosch.

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In 1717 a proper marriage regularized his relations with his housewife.

Early in the eighteenth century Swellendam was invaded by cattle farmers; Bothas were among the first contingent. From time to time members of the family pushed farther inland, until they reached what is now known as the Eastern Province. Several of them occupied public posts, such as that of *heemraad*, burgher officer, and commandant.

Mr Graham Botha, Chief Archivist at the Cape, states:

Another Botha family exists, descendants of a French *réfugié* called Boudier, who at one time lived in Germany under the name of Bode. One of his progeny enlisted with the E.I. Company at Amsterdam in 1766. At his own request he was sent to a military post in Swellendam, where Bothas were then established. In that way his name became assimilated to that of the Bothas. After his discharge he went to live at Capetown. The Boudier-Bothas have produced theologians and other *savants*—also a ship's captain, who took part in the *Voortrek* to Natal, and ultimately settled in the Transvaal.

The Bothas to whom the subject of this biography belonged were country people heart and soul, genuine pioneers. This also applies to their womenfolk: Snymans, du Preez, Fouries, Steyns, and van Rooyens. One of the old Bothas was twice married, and had twenty children in all; one of his brothers boasted sixteen. General Botha's grandfather, Philip Rudolph, was the owner of a fine estate, De Kelder, at Bruintjeshoogte, as Somerset East was then called. Among the Voortrekkers he ranks with the Natal division.

This man's second son, Louis, was General Botha's father; he was born in 1829, and died on July 13, 1883, in Vrede. His life fell within the difficult period of transition in which the tracts that had been made just habitable by the Voortrekkers saw their occupants settle down into orderly communities. Old Botha was an active man who minded his own business and seldom interfered with that of others. Originally a Natalian, at De Rust, where his homestead may still be seen, he made his livelihood in the then prevailing



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fashion. Railways or markets there were none. Farmers had to cart their own wool and skins to some neighbouring village.

Later, Botha Senior went to live in Vrede, along the Free State road connecting Pretoria with Maritzburg. He was a prosperous stock-owner as things went in his day, and a patriot to boot. Toward the end of 1880 the First War of Independence broke out. Botha Senior made it his business to gather the maximum amount of ammunition. This he conveyed on his waggon to the Transvaal Boer headquarters at Heidelberg. It so happened that the weather was extremely changeable; the continuous journeys made in heavy rain undermined the constitution of the fifty-two-year-old patriot to such an extent that he became an invalid during the last couple of years of his life. He was a modest man, but as soon as he rose to speak where men were assembled others remained silent. Someone who knew him well tells me that he was gifted above the average, a lover of his country and a fluent speaker; it was worth while listening to his discourse; one would always notice people standing round him in order to hear what he had to say.

His wife, Salomina Adriana van Rooyen, was a lovable woman, esteemed by all her children as well as by the whole neighbourhood. Her father, Gerrit Reinier, came from Uitenhage, Cape Colony, but was a prominent man in the Natalia republic, possessing greater gifts of statesmanship than the average contemporary. In 1840 he accompanied Andries Pretorius on the long and fatiguing journey to the interior (Potchefstroom), where they induced Hendrik Potgieter to amalgamate all the territory occupied by Voortrekkers into one 'society.' This interesting as well as ambitious scheme was destined to be short-lived; it was three-quarters of a century later that one of van Rooyen's grandsons succeeded in unifying the whole of South Africa. It deserves to be remembered, however, that General Botha's maternal grandfather shared the initiative with Pretorius.

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Conducted by General Botha, I once visited the farm established by Gert Reinier van Rooyen amid an attractive mountain landscape in Utrecht and occupied until this day by his offspring. An imposing avenue of heavy eucalyptus leads to the homestead. In front of the house roses are prominent in the flower garden. Portraits of parents and grandparents hang on the drawing-room walls. During my short visit I did not meet any male van Rooyens. The female members of the family fitted in perfectly with the atmosphere of aristocratic quiet surrounding them. In those days the back veld of youthful South Africa did not contain many such scenes.

The birth of Louis Botha Junior, on September 27, 1862, followed conditions that are perhaps worth recording. Six children had preceded him in the home of his parents, close to Greytown, Natal. When number seven was almost due, the mother felt ill at ease, and preferred to go to another farm, closer to Greytown. There she was confined, and was attended to by the lady of the house, who was known to be a skilled nurse. Is it not likely that the personality of the as yet unborn babe was influenced by the mother's excited state?

As a child, young Louis accompanied his people on their trek to the high veld of the North-eastern Free State, which was at that time a rather inhospitable stretch of country. He was old enough to have his share in, and feel affected by, the surprises—pleasant and otherwise—inseparable from such a journey. Every camping-spot on the vast plains harboured its own tribulations. Louis gathered an amount of knowledge and experience—practical acquaintance with men, beasts, and things—such as never falls to the lot of youths whose attention is chiefly concentrated on matters of abstract science. He was intelligent, and although he never had more than an elementary education, he knew how to obtain the benefit of the best that his teachers, men and women, had to give.

The style of his written language (High Dutch) was first-class all the days of his life. He never received any English

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lessons of any kind. He acquired great facility in dealing with his fellow-man; he was never a bookman. Nearly all his time and mother-wit were wanted for the work on his father's farm. This schooling he easily turned to the greatest advantage. Gradually he developed into an exceptionally clever cattle-breeder; but a live young man had other things to think of in those days than woolled sheep and veld fires!

For many years hunting and the trade in ivory had provided a large number of Boers with their principal means of livelihood. Far away, in the wilds of Zoutpansberg, Schoemansdal became a flourishing business centre. As elephants grew scarcer, owing to the inroads of hunters, depression set in. In 1867 Schoemansdal had to be evacuated owing to the minatory attitude of the natives.

The same year witnessed the discovery of diamonds in the Free State. The prosperity of this young industry in a portion of the back country that had hitherto been neglected led to considerable liveliness within a few years. South Africa's quiet, and rather uninteresting, economy underwent a great change. The birth of Kimberley, leading as it did to political complications owing to the Cape's claims to diamondiferous Griqualand West, caused a series of sensations. Suddenly Free Staters, who had until then lived solitary, unknown lives, found themselves surrounded by all the unrest of a storm centre.

The fact that finally the diamond fields were annexed by Britain was, during the days of Botha's adolescence, a subject of daily conversation among the members of his family as well as visitors. This coincided with the gradual increase in the number of indentured Indians, imported as labourers in Natal, owing to which the 'Garden Colony' saw its economic foundations radically altered. In 1871 the first gold-mine was worked in the Northern Transvaal, where gold had already been discovered in 1836 by that great pioneer Louis Trichardt. The Eastern Transvaal was developed by sturdy prospectors, whose discoveries led to a considerable increase in the population and importance of

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the district. A wave of optimism swept over the sub-continent; farmers once more took courage.

There were but few Boers, however, among gold or diamond prospectors. The late Mr Merriman and the late Senator Moor both had practical experience of mining at Kimberley; but not one member of the virile Botha family felt tempted to tackle Mother Earth otherwise than agriculturally.

During the early part of 1877 Sir T. Shepstone passed a night with the Bothas. He was on his way from Maritzburg to Pretoria, *via* Van Reenens Pass, in order to annex the Transvaal. It is said that Botha Senior candidly voiced his strong objection to the intentions of the British. Louis Junior, then a boy of fifteen, was old enough to realize the significance of the occasion. No one, however, imagined at that time that the unwise annexation was destined to become the prelude to a chain of events that was to affect the fate of Great Britain, and even of the world. Three years afterward a short but sharp war between England and the South African Republic broke out. While Botha Senior went about collecting ammunition for the Transvaal Boers, Louis was kept busy attending to the farm; but this did not prevent him from doing his bit in the struggle. He found out that pro-British messengers used rowing-boats belonging to owners of land along the Vaal; and he did not rest until he had cut adrift every single pontoon and boat in his district. These he allowed to float down the river, in order to disorganize the British intelligence service.

About a year previously his courage and presence of mind had been demonstrated in Zululand. Being a young stalwart, he had been selected to trek his father's sheep down to winter grazing. He had been in charge of similar jobs before. This time Usibepu, Cetewayo's restive opponent, was on the warpath, rendering the country unsafe for passage. Early in 1879 the battles of Isandhlwana and Ulundi were fought. The excited natives murdered a missionary near Botha's camp, spreading panic among white and black.

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On the approach of Mapelo, one of Usibepu's captains, Botha's kaffir boys fled. Mapelo's warriors were soon engaged in collecting the Botha herd as booty. Botha, rifle in hand and six cartridges in reserve, sat looking on. With playful lack of forethought he had spent nearly the whole of his ammunition on small game and birds since leaving home. Mapelo knew him. With defiant gesture he came on, climbed the waggon and seated himself alongside the young farmer. The most impertinent language on his part was not able to disturb the other's equanimity. Botha spoke Zulu fluently; he calmly adduced such convincing arguments as to get Mapelo to order his subordinates not to molest either Botha himself or his stock and chattels. The young man thereupon gave the native chief a sheep to kill for his warriors.

Hardy, spare of body, Louis Botha was steeled by life in the open against cold as well as heat. He was an intrepid horseman and crack athlete, both. Among his people he was rated an expert musician, because he played the concertina well. Good-humoured and with a gentle manner, he was able to inspire confidence by his demeanour. Violet-blue eyes and an engaging smile were unmistakable ornaments of his frank countenance. Quick-witted, he loved a joke. Being fond of a friendly argument, he disliked solitude. His youth was sunny; he was the seventh among thirteen children, who assisted in rearing and educating one another. He never required to sit for an examination!

Neither domestic sorrow nor any spiritual or physical inferiority complex, never a wild ambition, gnawed at his heart in these years. No heartache had him in its enervating grip. Sanguine, poor, but well equipped for the struggle of life, the gifted young farmer entered upon his independent career full of high spirits. Rare gifts alone are not sufficient to entitle their possessor to the respect of the world. It is the way in which he applies them that will fix his niche in history. In less than twenty years Botha became world-famous as a national leader and a soldier. The epos of his heroic figure filled humanity with amazed

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admiration unto the farthest corners of the globe. The fifteen years of unremitting political, diplomatic, and military prowess that followed conferred on him the glory as well as the desecration that are the portion of every statesman standing head and shoulders above his contemporaries.

After the Peace of Vereeniging a great effort was called for if South Africa, dishevelled in every way, was to be rebuilt. The country waited for the Hercules that would dare to tackle and complete such a task. In Louis Botha it found its benefactor, who was to endow it with a new future, a lasting destiny.

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THE South African Republic was almost entirely surrounded by an international vacuum. Owing to treaty obligations, however, it was not entitled to round off its boundaries, except with the formal permission of Great Britain. That country had invented the "paramount power" formula in justification of its claim to maintain a monopoly in "pegging claims for posterity" wherever in South Africa energetic British subjects saw fit to do so. This inhibition notwithstanding, someone in 1883 hit on the idea of establishing baby States just outside the territory of the Republic. After a brief existence all of these asked of their own accord to be incorporated into the Transvaal body politic.

As a fact, they were amalgamated, entirely or in part, with the South African Republic. This took place with more or less goodwill and applause on the part of the British Government, which was not slow in annexing some fresh piece of territory under the designation of 'protectorate.' A pretext was never far to seek. The inhabitants, usually called 'filibusters' for the occasion, as well as restive indigenous tribes, had to be either protected or restrained—as the case might be. Stellaland and Land Goosen, which came into being on the western border of the Transvaal, enjoyed an ephemeral but hectic career, during which a semi-military Commissioner, sent out from England, had to cut a dash.

The most respectable specimen of a miniature boundary State was De Nieuwe Republiek (The New Republic), which, after going through its efflorescence south-east of the Transvaal, eventually vanished, owing to the identical

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process of amalgamation. In this region it became necessary to use the strong hand because the Zulus proved themselves unfitted to behave as law-abiding neighbours of a white South Africa.

Endless inter-tribal squabbles among the natives greatly inconvenienced the cattle farmers who had their winter veld in Zululand, in addition to which disturbances were caused within the Transvaal border owing to fugitives being pursued by their oppressors. The white man simply had to act; and in this way a miniature republic sprang up here as well, after the model of the two big sisters across the Berg. Its founders do not deserve being looked down upon as 'land grabbers.' As administrators they were superior to their Goosen and Stellaland colleagues.

From the very first their work was businesslike and efficient—the reverse of amateur government. Lucas Meyer, the President, had gathered administrative experience in a Government office; he knew how to exercise authority and bear responsibility. The State Secretary, Mr D. J. Esselen, was the son of a gifted German missionary. Himself a man of education and skill, he had not studied at Continental universities for nothing. Mr Henderson proved an energetic State Attorney throughout. There were others, too, men with a tradition to look up to, full of healthy energy, and able to gain the confidence of their fellows—Birkenstock, van Staden, von Levetzow, etc. I frequently met them at Pretoria when they came to take their seats in the Volksraad.

Lengthy, and often sanguinary, disputes raged among the Zulus. Finally the 'legitimists' under Dinizulu (son of Cetewayo) conquered the insurgents led by Usibepu. This they were able to do thanks to the assistance of some hundred whites under Lucas Meyer. Northern Zululand, as far as the Indian Ocean, was proclaimed a sovereign State; according to British usage, the rest of Zululand became a protectorate. At once this led to tension between the Government at Vryheid, the capital of the fledgling State, and the British authorities in the Natal capital.



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Matters mended in 1888, when the Colonial Office assented to the New Republic becoming merged in the Transvaal, all except the coastal strip at St Lucia Bay, which had meanwhile been painted red on the map. Willy-nilly the southern Zulus were added to the British Empire. The South African Republic meanwhile gained a well-governed district; and with it a citizen who before long would faithfully share with his people the most serious afflictions in order to lead them on to glory and deliverance.

Among the armed horsemen, pioneers of the New Republic, was Louis Botha. He was now twenty-two years old. After his exit from the family home he had come into contact with the prime movers in the Zululand adventure. In 1884 he joined the commando that entered native territory in defence of Dinizulu's prestige. The affair, which lasted a couple of months, was in no sense a picnic. He owed his life to the fact that he shot straight when a hot-headed Zulu, quite close to him, smashed the handle of his assegai in order to be able to use the shorter weapon more effectively against the young mounted Boer.

On May 21, 1884, Dinizulu was crowned as Zulu king in the presence of his white allies. Botha was there in his capacity as A.D.C. to the Boer Committee. On the 5th of the following month Usibepu was decisively defeated, so that, on August 16, the New Republic could be formally proclaimed. The day before, Botha had been made chairman of one of the four commissions of inspection, charged with the duty of an immediate flying survey of the farms that were to be allotted the burghers after the drawing of lots.

This difficult and dangerous work began at once. For years the country continued to resound with the warlike exploits of the natives. In May 1887 Botha reported. The time occupied had been long, for, owing to climatic reasons, it was possible to work only in winter. Moreover, in view of the unexpectedly large number of men who were entitled to a grant, it was decided—when the work was about half finished—to reduce the size of allotments. This

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meant that the whole job had to be tackled afresh. The result of Botha's survey was a thick book, now reposing in the Union's archives at Pretoria. A clear description, detailed and with proper diagram, is supplied of some 250 farms. Botha's zeal and reliability had already been appreciated at the start of the Zululand adventure, as appears from the request to him, made by the Executive in September 1884, immediately to proceed with the inspection of the land on which the township of Vryheid was to be laid out. Shortly afterward the Government established its capital there.

In 1887 Botha occupied Waterval No. 130, a farm he had obtained in exchange for another which had fallen to him by lot. His estate was one of about 3500 acres, situated in Ward II, not far from the township of Vryheid. In the course of years, an extensive, up-to-date homestead arose from the one-time wilderness.

In 1886 Botha had married Annie, the eldest daughter of John Cheere Emmett, a Swellendam man who had settled at Harrismith, Orange Free State, and who was descended from a brother of the famous Irish patriot. Miss Annie Emmett had a sturdy brother, who had taken part in the Zululand expedition and struck up a lasting friendship with Botha. In that way the latter came to return to the Free State one day and meet his future wife, a very talented girl. She was a good musician and, *rara avis* among women, blessed with a sense of humour. Her people favoured the advances of a swain who did not appeal to her; on the other hand, they wondered what she could possibly see in that "little Dutch boy" (Botha was a six-footer). So, to be free from annoyance, she accepted a situation as a teacher at a sufficient distance to protect her from unwelcome attentions.

Early in their married life, Botha and his wife, like most other young couples, experienced financial stringency. The primitive nature of society around them was oppressive. Thanks, however, to the strong sense of duty and infinite energy on the husband's part, as well as to the wife's grace,

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tact, and devotion, their married life brought them uninterrupted happiness. They had three sons and two daughters. Botha's serious views on marriage and family life were in accord with the national tradition. During the whole of his life he never swerved from them. The warm affection between the spouses remained unchanged; she was a thoroughly modest woman, he was an equally decent man. Early in 1917 Mrs Botha's health left much to be desired; in the course of a letter to a friend the anxious husband twice mentioned a turn for the better, adding: "Thank God, she is a great deal stronger. My cross had become almost too much to bear. I was getting so nervous as to be sometimes on the verge of a breakdown, but now I can see light again."

A few years of material cares were followed by a period of prosperity. Botha knew how to make farming pay, the more so because he was a practical business-man, not averse from a little flutter at times. Energetically he worked his farm, which was suitable for mixed husbandry; and in October 1899 it included a comfortable dwelling-house, built of freestone; further, a neat outhouse, used as an office, a roomy store, stabling for horses, cows and pigs, and large enclosures, all made of stone. His cattle was always of particularly good quality. When the Boer war broke out he had about 4000 sheep and a dozen imported rams (wool sold at 4d. to 5d. in those days!), approximately 600 head of cattle, mostly milch-cows, a hundred fine mares, and among his first-class stallions a costly thoroughbred Oldenburg cart-horse, which was the envy of the neighbourhood. Then there were a good-looking lot of foals and a number of riding-horses, carriages, and waggons—in fact, everything that the heart of a well-to-do yeoman, used to a spacious life, could desire.

Despite initial financial struggles Botha, like most landed proprietors, yielded to the temptation to increase his holding by the purchase of neighbouring farms. In 1894 he was elected field-cornet of Ward II, which meant a salary of a couple of hundred a year. As native commissioner he had

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to collect hut tax; and as his ward contained the bulk of the Vryheid native population, he drew another couple of hundred in this way. Three years later he bought part of Uitzicht, next to Waterval. In 1898 he added a portion of Kalbasfontein and the whole of the farm Yorkshire.

The same year saw him elected to the Volksraad. Hard work, coupled with marvellous intuition as a farmer, had made him financially independent, the owner of more than 16,000 acres. To the properties mentioned he added part of Zeekoevlei, in the bushveld; the farm Wilhelmhome; in 1895 the southern portion of Varkenspruit, in the district of Standerton (Transvaal). This he bought at about 6s. 6d. an acre; when he went to live there after the Boer war he called it 'Rusthof' (Home of Rest). It was the summer farm for his small stock.

Not all his funds were derived from farming. In 1891 he purchased from the estate of a deceased brother-in-law about 1800 acres containing coal measures. The value of this ground went up in consequence, and during his premiership of the Transvaal he sold it to a company for £9000. In partnership with L. Meyer, who was an equally shrewd man of affairs, and knew all there was to be known about the district, Botha entered into a contract with the Government for the construction of a railway line from Vryheid to Buffalo River. This they made over to an engineering firm; each netted about £5000. In those days nobody took offence when a Volksraad member publicly contracted with his Government. Meyer and Botha, between them, managed a land syndicate, which yielded its thousand pounds from time to time.

In 1895 the Transvaal Government prevailed on Botha to go and look after its interests in Swaziland. On April 25 the Executive formally decided to appoint four R.J.P.'s, who were to be at the same time sub-native commissioners. They were under the Special Commissioner at Bremersdorp. On May 18 Botha was appointed to reside at Mbabane; there he stayed until the middle of November when he returned to Vryheid and resumed his field-cornetcy.

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In our day, Mbabane is on the Transvaal-Delagoa motor road. Toward the end of last century it was a very small place indeed, almost without means of approach. The R.J.P. and his young wife were among the few presentable inhabitants. The white population of the territory, small though it was, could by no means be said to be of uniformly high quality. Many an unpleasant quarter of an hour was caused the Transvaal official and his wife. Their short stay in Swaziland did not leave any delectable impressions. There was for instance a wholesale illicit liquor traffic with the natives; Botha was the first man to succeed in putting it down. The Swazis thought a great deal of him, as was shown by their queen-mother always referring to him as a "good white man."

Shortly after his return to Vryheid one of those upheavals, so frequent in South African history, occurred. The Johannesburg 'Reformers' went into revolt, simultaneously with the Jameson Raid. The country was in a hubbub—part of it under arms. The burghers of Botha's ward, although far removed from the centre of unrest, at once consulted their field-cornet. As such, he wired to President Kruger:

"My burghers and I fully approve Government's action towards Johannesburg revolt. We offer assistance, and are ready to start at any moment. We are indignant at Johannesburg's actions, and hope that all rebels will be punished and made example of. We trust the Government, and stand by it, come what may. Burghers were never more unanimous than now, and stand by Government like one man."

Early in 1897, Botha became a candidate for one of the two Volksraad seats apportioned to his district. He was well off at the time. The value of his farms, plantations, and other assets may be put at £30,000. Had he wished to do so, he could easily have entered politics at an earlier date, but he always felt that a public man should be free from private and financial worries. He was not moved by any strong desire to further any original policy or economic

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programme; much less did he come forward owing to any vanity or caprice. Nevertheless, he was fully convinced of the fact that he would be able to serve his people better than many another politician. He proved so popular that he polled more votes than his senior colleague for the double constituency, the veteran L. Meyer, who had helped to build up the district above, and who represented the other part of Vryheid.

In those days everybody knew everybody else over large distances. Throughout Natal, in the eastern Free State and in the southern Transvaal, Louis Botha was sure of a welcome as a successful farmer, a good fellow, a real sport, and a popular character whose word was to be trusted. His notable victory at the poll was the outcome of appreciation and respect felt for his personality—not the triumph of any platform cry. While the Vryheid electors, by their strong support of Botha's candidature, demonstrated the correctness of their democratic views, they never became passionately attached to any one of the political groups that were turning out their respective shibboleths at Pretoria and Johannesburg. The honourable members for Vryheid were expected to look after local interests as well as to take into account the intelligent and independent patriotism of their constituents; as long as this was done, Vryheid was content.

## BOTHA IN THE VOLKSRAAD

THE first Volksraad of the South African Republic consisted of barely thirty members—quite enough, considering the small number of voters. The Government was constituted, partly by plebiscite, partly by appointments made by the Volksraad. There was therefore no question of party government by a parliamentary majority. ‘Opposition’ to the Administration amounted to criticism—neither more nor less. On occasion, the Volksraad itself assumed executive functions. There was no grouping of disciplined parties. A vague division existed, it is true, between those who (influenced by President Kruger) looked to the arbitrament of force as the sole means of defence against the constant menace provided by the Uitlander movement and men who trusted to the absorption of non-burghers into the legitimate political sphere of power vesting in the old population, in the expectation that this would increase the strength of the resistance to the aggression of oversea financial interests. In consequence of this dividing-line there arose later on, both inside the Volksraad and in the country, a war party as opposed to the forces that were making for a *modus vivendi* resting on common South African interests. Though a Transvaaler to the backbone, Botha sympathized with these broader currents.

Volksraad sessions lasted from February until October, sometimes longer. They were of an exceedingly deliberative character, and one heard of complaints to the effect that it was difficult for members to catch the Chairman’s eye. When Botha took his seat for the first time, the fathers of the nation occupied themselves for days with the question of compensation to be awarded a widow owing to the loss of some land.

## BOTHA IN THE VOLKSRAAD

Repeatedly Botha objected to Volksraad interference in essentially executive issues. On one occasion he advocated an increase of administrative departments, under the control of Executive members, whose number, he said, might very well become greater. During his first session, lasting 160 days, he spoke over fifty times. He seconded a motion to grant Volksraad members an annual salary of £1200 (*i.e.*, proportionately to the time spent by every one on his legislative duties) with the argument that the increase had the full approval of his constituents. The motion was adopted.

*The Dynamite Question.*—During the same year he showed himself an opponent of the dynamite concession worked by Nobel's Trust as Transvaal manufacturers. In Johannesburg, London, and elsewhere a systematic agitation was maintained against this concern; the Colonial Office at Westminster knew something about this movement. On August 21, 1899, shortly before the Boer War, Botha made a speech in the Volksraad in his capacity as a member of the Select Committee to report on the question. The record of the oration is perhaps the lengthiest to be found in the official Minutes. He completely changed his old views on this important question. The Raad, he said, would make a mistake if it annulled the contract between the Government and the Dynamite Company. There was a clamour for such a course, but he felt convinced that no court of law would grant it, hence cancellation had to be regarded as wrong.

Botha made this somersault, fully aware of the "jeers and insinuations" (as he called them in his speech) that would be thrown at him, and from which he had not enjoyed immunity during a few preceding skirmishes in the House. His success as a farmer and a man of affairs, young and well-to-do as he was, caused envy. His change of attitude on the burning question drew the attention of the late President Steyn among others. Steyn pressed Kruger to cancel the concession, without further ado, in view of the awkward clouds of dust that it raised. Subsequently, Steyn relates:

During the war I once asked Botha how it was that he too had reported in favour of continuing the concession he had at one time



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opposed so strongly. He told me that, having gone carefully into the whole matter, he saw no other way open to him. The Government had bound the country in connection with this concession as well as with cognate agreements; there was nothing else for it.

Steyn admits that his anticipation of Lord Milner bringing up the refusal to cancel as a *casus belli* proved incorrect. In connexion with Botha's change of opinion a criminal case came before the courts eight years later. Botha was alleged—by way of reward for his attitude—to have received £2000 from the Dynamite Company on the day when the vote was taken. A man who had been convicted once before visited Botha, in company with another, in June 1907 at his office; he attempted to blackmail him for a large amount, threatening to reveal the payment of the £2000, made by himself, so he said. Now, ever since the gold industry began to increase in importance, there was no paucity of schemes having for their object the influencing of the Executive and Volksraad at Pretoria. Thus a class of individual sprang up who claimed that by means of judiciously distributed presents they were able to get the wishes of their credulous and liberal principals carried out. What they did was to stick to the money, while unscrupulously stuffing their principals with imaginary facts. Such a person was the man who tried to blackmail Botha, and who on August 2, 1907, was in consequence sentenced by the Transvaal High Court to three years' hard labour.

Contrary to the custom of the majority of his fellow-members, Botha used to bring his family to Pretoria with him. Even more exceptional was his occasionally accompanying his wife to a dancel Such an innovation in Pretoria's legislative circles was nothing less than offensive. Honourable members were punctilious as to a semi-ecclesiastically formal dress and generally as to a dignified behaviour.

*Botha and the War.*—Perusal of the voluminous reports of Volksraad debates (1897-9) is bound to lead to the conclusion that Botha distinguished himself by a level-headed, businesslike conception of his duties. The shadows cast before by the approaching war against England were

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remarkably light as far as the Volksraad was concerned. A few secret sessions were held; but until the last moment members with seeming calm devoted the whole of their attention to comparatively futile matters; all the time, excitement in connexion with the approaching catastrophe was increasing throughout the country.

A few weeks before the outbreak of war, Botha quietly took part in a Volksraad debate on native locations, the fencing of farms, and the leasing of Government ground. Yet he had moved, a couple of months previously, a brief adjournment in order to enable members to meet their constituents, and inform them as to the trend of events. When on October 2, 1899, shortly before President Kruger's ultimatum, the Raad thought fit, "in view of the abnormal situation," to adjourn the Session, the member for Vryheid had already left the capital to prepare for military service. It is to be supposed that he did his very best in order to preserve peace; the available documents, however, supply but little evidence on the point. On September 5 and 8, *i.e.*, a little over a month before the declaration of war, a full-dress debate on relations with Great Britain took place. On the second day, Botha said what was in his heart:

What he wanted was a defensive position—not war. Emphatically he would oppose any steps that might affect the integrity of the country. They should avoid a defiant attitude; at the same time, they should say: thus far, and no further. The Government had already yielded more than Cape Ministers had asked for at the Bloemfontein conference, but this had not satisfied the other side. The British Government was trying to force its subjects on to the Republic, just as if they had been a set of rogues, whom England wanted to get rid of. . . . British threats deeply grieved him. (Here the speaker became so excited that the Chairman twice had to call him to order.) The Transvaal had done all it could in order to preserve peace, but he thought they had now gone far enough. Already, it was being said—the Boers are afraid; they are conceding things all along the line. He denied this, however. They had yielded, and had gone very far because they wanted peace, but not on account of any fear. He strongly denied any such thing.

After two days' discussion, it was resolved by acclamation

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to express regret at the concentration of British troops on the Transvaal border, and to repudiate responsibility for any war that might result.

The tone of Botha's speech had been neither below nor above the general high level of Transvaal patriotism of the day. It was decidedly not that of a convinced pacifist. Three long years of the miseries of war were to cause an entire metamorphosis in Botha's patriotism. The member for Vryheid, who in 1899 was afraid of the other section doubting his courage, was not to lead his people through many vicissitudes in vain. In the end he gained the right to point out to South Africa, after the Peace of Vereeniging, a new path leading to a greater future than even he had ever dreamt of.

As a legislator Botha did not particularly influence the course of South African affairs in pre-Boer war days. Nevertheless, his Raad membership undoubtedly affected South African history deeply—it made him a 100 per cent. Transvaaler. Born in Natal a British subject, he first became a Free Stater and then a burgher of the New Republic. He adopted his fourth nationality when the little State in question was absorbed into the South African Republic. Botha's active participation in the Volksraad's work definitely assimilated him with the Transvaal Boers, also in the eyes of outsiders. The staunchness and stamina, the military virtues generally, of the Vryheid (New Republic) burghers made their commando one of the nuclei of the Boer army during the great period of national struggle.

When finally, in May 1902, lasting peace between Briton and Boer was proclaimed, Botha no longer was a 100 per cent. Transvaaler: the Second War of Independence had made him into a 100 per cent. South African.

## BOTHA AT COLENZO—AND AFTER

THE Vryheid commando under General Lucas Meyer, to which Botha belonged, was in the nature of things destined to take part in the Natal offensive which had for its object keeping the English forces near the Republic's south-eastern border in check. Botha, in his capacity as principal A.D.C. to the commanding officer, was present at the battle of Dundee, and on October 30 at the fighting near Ladysmith. There he took General Meyer's place, and was himself promoted to be a general, Meyer having been put out of action for a while by severe illness. The Ladysmith garrison was, before long, invested by the Free State and Transvaal commandos, and Botha soon showed himself an active soldier with a long view, in contrast with several of his slow-going, heavy-thinking, fellow-officers. His initiative led to welcome activity in the Boer laagers round Ladysmith.

He also induced General Piet Joubert, the commander-in-chief, to order a *reconnaissance-en-force*, which was pushed nearly as far as Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, practically under Botha's leadership. The remarkable success of this bold move forced the British command to change its plans and divert part of the reinforcements, which were then landing, to Natal. The reconnaissance showed the Boers that the 'Garden Colony' was practically defenceless. At a council of war, held in connexion with this result, Botha was all in favour of occupying the whole of Natal. Joubert refused to sanction the enterprise. Perhaps he did not see his way clear to effect the civil administration of such a slice of conquered territory, or to keep the harbour of Durban—far removed from the Boers' chief base—in a

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state of permanent defence. In any case, he preferred to maintain the siege of Ladysmith in order that the gateway to the Free State and the Transvaal might be kept intact.

*The Tugela Line.*—Botha, for his part, insisted on the strategic importance of holding on to the northern Tugela bank. This would deprive the British Army of any advantage derived from the presence of the river, reducing it to the necessity of preparing for the attack at a spot a good deal farther south. And thus it was decided. Botha was obviously the man to undertake the vital defence, advocated so strenuously by himself; he was to hold the line of the Tugela against an army corps under Sir Redvers Buller which had been landed at Durban for the relief of Ladysmith.

Until the end of February 1900 Botha withstood continuous and tremendous pressure on his position; but, although his strength of mind—combined with military genius—had become literally indispensable, he was never formally given the supreme command of the Tugela defenders. Only later did the Boers realize the necessity of co-ordinating great military operations by entrusting the direction to one hand. The famous brain-wave of the French Directoire which appointed Napoleon, then a man of but twenty-seven, generalissimo of the French troops in Italy, would have been inconceivable with a nation like the Boers who were accustomed, in time of peace, to determine the choice of a Commandant-general and other officers by the method of popular election!

Suddenly the railway hamlet of Colenso, where a bridge spans the Tugela, became world-famous, when Buller, on December 15, 1899, attempted to hack his way to Ladysmith through the Boer lines. The extremely efficient manner in which the attempt was foiled by Botha suddenly caused his name to be entered on the list of great commanders. His military genius showed itself in his knack of fathoming the strategic significance of movements; in his extraordinarily correct and quick grasp of how the land lay; in his sound knowledge of the effect of artillery and rifle fire respectively. Aeroplanes, tanks, and other modern arma-

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ments were not invented until after the Boer War. With uncanny facility he was able to divine his enemy's thoughts. He knew how to "see what went on behind the rise." He was not only a splendid tactician, but also a great strategist. And yet he had never studied military science, or had anything to do with soldiering.

Experts testify that the defence of the Tugela lines could not possibly have been arranged more scientifically. The scheme for a possible overwhelming of Buller's army was perfectly conceived, even though it was not carried out in its entirety. Botha's idea was to keep the exact position of the Boer trenches, and the presence of defending forces, a complete secret; the British artillery fire was to be left unanswered, and the enemy led to think that the most convenient route to Ladysmith could be forced by a frontal attack north of Colenso. If his scheme succeeded, as it did, the British troops were to be allowed to cross the bridge without let or hindrance. It was only after the enemy's arrival on the northern bank that the Boers were to open fire. The Boer trenches quite dominated the ground, and, since the Transvaal guns easily covered the bridge, a retreat across it was virtually unthinkable. The British would have been caught in a trap, and Buller's only way out would have been surrender.

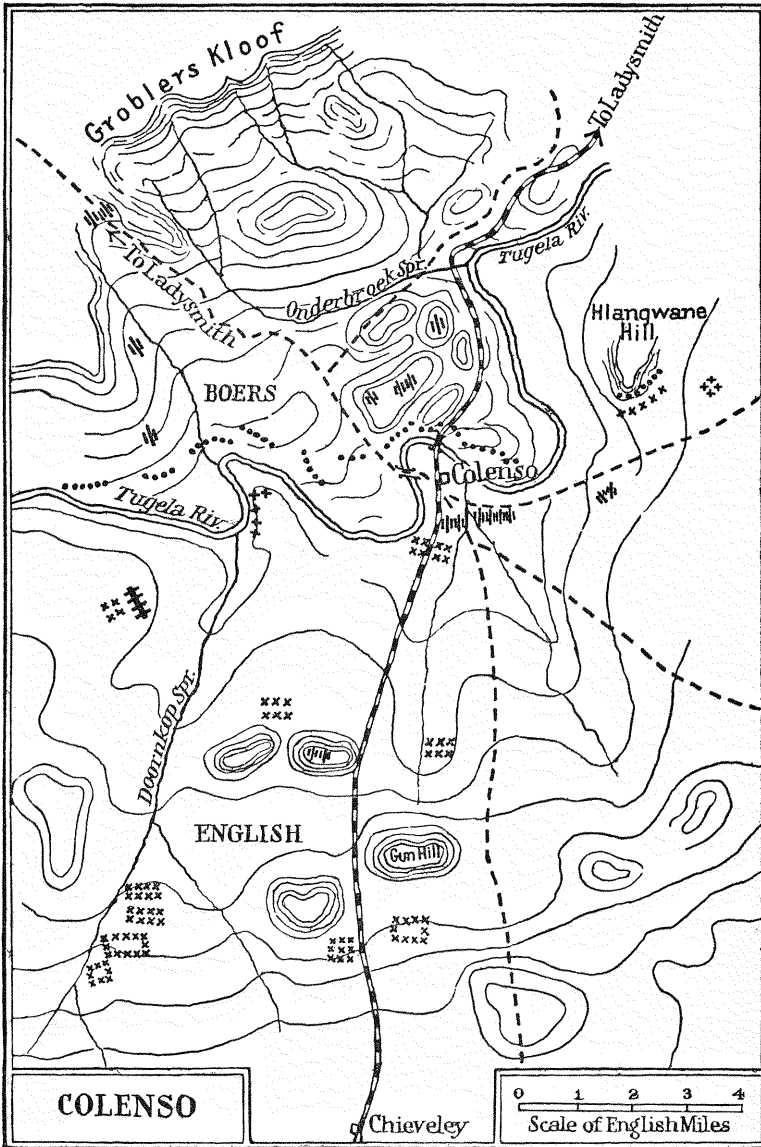
*The Battle of Colenso.*—Botha's express orders not to fire until he had given the signal was, however, ignored. A battery of English guns, unduly advanced, came within range of a squad of Boers, who could not resist the temptation to pull the trigger. The bravery displayed by the British in trying to save the guns—only two were got out—is one of the most famous episodes in the day's work. The incident totally changed the complexion of the fighting; the crossing of the Tugela, foreseen by Botha and actually ordered by Buller, did not materialize. The Boers had reason to be satisfied; but the result remained far below Botha's anticipation. The people were grateful, because they had discovered in Botha the strategist and the fighter who had been so anxiously sought. Technically as well as

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by his strength of will and the ease with which he both inspired confidence and enforced obedience, he was more than a match for most of his colleagues.

I remember an incident belonging to the Colenso period that deserves to be recorded. The Boer positions had been bombarded continuously for two days by heavy naval guns. One requires to have gone through such an experience in order to realize how demoralizing it all proves to irregulars: day after day, with but short intervals, the interminable bursting—in unexpected places—of heavy lyddite shells, until the very earth rocks! Botha had to draw on the last bit of his personal magnetism, if the burghers were to maintain their self-control. Without rest he rode along the lines, inspiring his men with the courage to stand firm, and inspecting trenches. He began to feel the strain of keeping his forces in the positions allotted to them. All at once the important post at Hlangwane, south of the Tugela, on the Boer left flank, was abandoned. The most peremptory orders were required in order to get the Wakkerstroom commando to reoccupy it. In such ways the commander-in-chief had, without intermission, to look after the *moral* of his subordinates! On one of those abominable days I was told to convey a verbal message to him from Commandant Joachim Ferreira, whose strong laager was, without molestation, guarding the road to Helpmekaar, east of the lines. He offered part of his contingent for the reinforcement of the Colenso positions.

After a long, roundabout ride I found Botha. He was holding a council of war under a tree. Slowly, impressively, he was addressing his silent, almost sullen, officers. Several of them were older men and had been, until a few weeks previously, senior to him in rank. My message having been delivered, Botha spoke with powerful voice, full of conviction: "I shall let Commandant Ferreira know that I do not require reinforcements; as long as everyone does his duty, we shall beat off the enemy." Determination, not bulk, was to prevail. Whereas Buller disposed of 15,000 men, with abundance of artillery, Botha had to defend





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his miles and miles of front with less than 5000 men and half a dozen guns.

The telegraphic despatch sent by Botha to Pretoria read:

To-day the God of our fathers has given us a great victory. On all sides we repulsed the enemy. We allowed twelve guns, under heavy bombardment, to be advanced to just near the river. As soon as these had been unlimbered, we fired our Mausers, killing the gunners and disorganizing them to such an extent that they could not recover more than two of the guns. The other ten fine, big cannon we took, together with thirteen full ammunition-waggons. About 150 of their best men, who bravely stormed time and again, were taken prisoners, several officers among them. The enemy's losses must have been terrific. Bodies are covering the veld, and I think there must be 2000 killed. We have about thirty killed and wounded. I shall send further particulars later. With a thankful heart I can congratulate you and the Afrikaner people on this brilliant victory.

The British losses afterward turned out to be a little over 1100. Botha, after taxing the enemy with abuse of the Red Cross, concluded his despatch:

Humbly I request Government to proclaim a universal day of prayer in order to thank Him who made us triumph.

*Spionkop.*—Successfully Botha kept guard along the Tugela, beating off repeated attacks by Buller. The best-known of these culminated at Spionkop, west of the Colenso positions. On January 17, 1900, the fight for the hill began (a week after Lord Roberts' arrival at Capetown). It lasted until the 24th. English casualties amounted to 1733, of whom 44 officers and 655 men were killed or missing. Botha's victory was made possible by the correct use of barely half a dozen guns, excellently served, and the assistance of a small number of stalwart burghers. The English kept up the eight days' assault with exemplary courage. On the last evening of the stubborn fight the Transvaal generalissimo was quite exhausted. An officer who had to deliver a despatch found him in the tent of his magnificent commander of artillery, Major Wolmarans. Botha was busy, dictating an account of the operations, when fatigue

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got the better of him. General, major, and secretary, all three, fell into a deep slumber. Their heads leaning on the table, they were discovered by the officer, entirely done up after the prolonged severe tension.

At the end of January, Botha visited Pretoria, but General Joubert soon recalled him. He was just in time to resume command on February 6, when Vaalkrantz, east of Spionkopp, had to be defended against a fresh attempt to break through to Ladysmith; this failed like its predecessors.

Elsewhere, matters began to look black for the Boers. Kimberley was relieved on February 15, 1900. Lord Roberts sent a strong cavalry detachment into the Free State, and on February 27 Cronje surrendered to the British commander-in-chief.

These reverses caused a panic among Free Staters as well as Transvaalers. The fact that their country had been invaded made almost every one give up courage, and set up an intense longing for home. The commandos, never susceptible to discipline, were possessed by apathy. The desire for leave, which had given a great deal of trouble from the very beginning, became irresistible. De Wet even disbanded for the time being the whole of his command, while the British were resting on their laurels.

In Natal Botha had to keep up a running fight, yielding one position after another, so that Ladysmith was relieved on February 28, after an admirable defence. On February 17 things had begun to go wrong for the Boers when General Lyttelton forced their positions at Monte Christo, on the eastern wing of the Tugela line. This was the beginning of a general retreat. The demoralized burghers had fought for ten days, suffering a heavy bombardment, while Buller, who continually received reinforcements, pushed the attack. The late General Viljoen says in his book, *Omzwerving*:

If Botha had not, driven by a sense of duty, seen to it that a rear-guard was formed, thus covering our retreat, the English would have taken an appalling number of our laagers; a great many burghers, mounted on exhausted horses, would have been made prisoners.