Owing, however, to Buller remaining inactive for some time, Botha was able to manage the safe withdrawal of his forces from Natal. Had the British pushed home their success north of Ladysmith, surprising the Boers during their retreat by sharp attacks, the war would probably have come to an end during the first half of 1900—so Botha himself admitted afterward.

In reply to a direct question at a council-of-war held at Glencoe toward the middle of February, Joubert indicated Botha as his deputy in the high command. Early in March, the last named was formally appointed Assistant-Commandant-General—not a day too soon. During the middle of the same month, while Lord Roberts was occupying Bloemfontein, Botha was superintending the Boer retreat at Waschbank, Northern Natal, where he had the coal-mines along the railway line put out of action. When Natal was evacuated by his men, he had to choose positions defending the south-eastern Transvaal. He occupied a strong front at Langsnek, at the foot of Majuba, where his younger brother Christiaan was left in command.

General 'Chris' Botha had recently been appointed Assistant-Commandant-General. He had fought against Buller; during the second phase of the war he took part in operations at Belfast, Vryheid, and Itala. The Langsnek positions were so formidable that Buller, on his northward march, refused to make a frontal attack. He reached Volksrust *via* Allemansnek and the Free State, thus compelling the Transvaalers to abandon Langsnek. Lord Dundonald relates that on May 30 Buller sent the Boer commander a message to the effect that, since the latter's communications had been cut, it would be of no use to continue his resistance. An armistice was agreed to, up to June 5, on which date Botha wrote declining Sir Redvers Buller's terms of surrender.

Unconditional surrender had been asked for. Chris Botha replied stating that all he could consider was a peace proposal. Shortly after the Vereeniging Conference, where he had represented the Swaziland commando, he suc-

cumbed to an operation, rendered necessary by the hardships he had suffered during the War. An older brother, Philip, was one of General de Wet's most active lieutenants. Early in 1901 his seventy burghers held off a British column, over five hundred strong, moving from Winburg toward Ventersburg. The morning after this successful defence, Philip Botha was wounded in the forehead. That evening he was dead. At about the same time two sons of his, Hermanus and Charlie, were wounded in an encounter near Vrede. Another brother of Louis Botha's, Gert, captained a scout corps until the end of hostilities.

Botha becomes Commandant-General. — On March 27 General Piet Joubert died at Pretoria. No one could have competed with the victor of Colenso for the honour of taking over the burden of commanding the dishevelled Transvaal forces. Early in May 1900 President Kruger made the usual speech at the opening of the annual Volksraad session. One of the paragraphs ran as follows:

> I have appointed Louis Botha Commandant-General—provisionally, and until such time as an election can be held. It was the late General Joubert's wish that Mr Botha should assume this important position after him. I feel convinced that this provisional appointment has the nation's full approval.

The Transvaal Constitution provided that both the State President and the Commandant-General had to be elected by the people. Botha, however, never attained to the position of a duly elected, full-fledged commander-in-chief! His appointment remained provisional, and at first he was called Acting Commandant-General. All the same, it did not take him long to put his house in order. He pushed younger men into prominent positions, and cashiered incapable officers. Discipline was tightened up, transport and commissariat were systematically attended to. When he assumed chief responsibility there was hardly such a thing as an army left. Demoralization, dejection, was rife. The disaster of Cronje's surrender sapped the confidence of the Boers, temporarily destroying their efficiency as a fighting force. The same catastrophe,

however, galvanized—once the first effects of the shock had passed off—the people into a keener realization of the threatening danger. This enabled Botha to get together a new Transvaal force within a few months.

On May 3 Lord Roberts set out from Bloemfontein at the head of over 40,000 men. General Ian Hamilton supported his right with infantry brigades and mounted troops. Generals Lord Methuen and Hunter, each with 10,000 men, entered the Western Transvaal. General Buller, in June, moved 45,000 men from Natal, in a northerly direction, across the High Veld. Reinforcements to the tune of 30,000 monthly were landing in South Africa. On May 7, Botha with 3000 burghers appeared at Virginia Siding, south of Kroonstad, Free State. Previously he had been in laager at Rhenoster River, approximately six miles from the place where General de Wet was then staying at his farm. The two met in Botha's tent. Mr Louis Esselen, who was present, describes the interview as follows:

"De Wet introduced the subject. 'My command,' he said, 'consists of eight men—and one heliograph operator!'

"Botha's advice was: 'Just give way for the time being. Get your men together again. Then break up the British lines of communication. Later on, I shall send you a good man at the head of a commando to help you.'"

A few days later, Botha had a meeting, anything but pleasant, with the Free State leaders, at which he repeated the advice given to de Wet. Within less than a month, the position was somewhat reversed—Botha being cheered by optimistic despatches from de Wet, after the enemy had started overrunning the Transvaal from various directions, causing the utmost panic among its burghers.

Kroonstad had fallen into the hands of the British; Free Staters, not unnaturally, refused to leave their country at the enemy's mercy. It was then agreed that Free Staters and Transvaalers should defend their respective territory, each government continuing the war on its own

account. As a matter of fact, there had never been any joint supreme command, any more than a co-ordinated scheme of strategy. During the Ladysmith–Colenso period there was but little question of effective co-operation. In February 1900 President Steyn had made an effort to organize the defence of the Tugela line under one head, viz., Prinsloo, the Free State general. This, however, came to nothing. Lord Kitchener wrote to Lord Salisbury: "The Free Staters seem to have little heart in the war, and there is certainly a good deal of feeling between the Transvaalers and them."

Commandos now operated independently; there was no longer any systematic *liaison* between the chiefs. Transvaal and Free State leaders did not meet, except when it became necessary to discuss whether they should cease fighting. It was taken as a matter of course that neither ally should give in without a joint decision to that effect. General Smuts' raid into Cape Colony during the second half of 1901 took place, by way of exception, under formal instructions given by both Republican Governments. The characteristic tendency to diverge increased rather than decreased according as the Boer position became more desperate. When, in May 1902, delegates from both armies met at Vereeniging, relations between the two allies were, if anything, a shade less cordial than they had been at the outbreak of war. "Your war—not ours!" was the leading thought that best interprets the mentality of the Free Staters; their determination to fight till the bitter end becomes all the more interesting in view of this fact.

The Occupation of Pretoria.—Consequent upon the meeting between Botha and the Free State Chief Commandant, General Christiaan de Wet, the latter made it his business to harass the British line of communications with Cape Colony to the best of his ability. Gratefully he accepted Botha's offer of the temporary loan of Danie Theron's valiant Scouts. On May 24 Lord Roberts annexed the Free State by proclamation, what time Botha was awaiting him north of the Vaal. In vain, however,

did Botha attempt to keep an army together. Three days later the Field-Marshal slept in the same dwelling that had accommodated the Boer general and his staff twenty-four hours previously. In conversation with Ben Viljoen, Botha deplored the rout of his burghers, which had dissipated their fighting spirit. He concluded: "Never mind. Let's keep up our courage, and do our duty!"

On May 28 and 29 there was some sharp fighting for the possession of the Witwatersrand. Botha took a decided stand against those who were planning the destruction of the gold mines as a means of harming the enemy. On May 23 the Commandant-General peremptorily charged Dr F. E. T. Krause, Special Commandant of the Witwatersrand, with the responsibility for the safety of persons and property, including the mines. Dr Krause carefully acquitted himself of this task.

When the British advanced on Pretoria (General Viljoen records) matters appeared so hopeless that Botha, "as best he could, got up a rearguard, so that at least organized resistance was not to collapse altogether." In accordance with a formal resolution by the Grand Council-of-War, Pretoria was evacuated. This resolution harmonized with the view of the Transvaal Government that the capital was not defensible and that all military measures should be abandoned in order to remove cause for bombardment. Late in the evening of June 4 Botha sent an orderly to Lord Roberts with a letter requesting an armistice so that terms for the capitulation of the capital city might be discussed. The intention was to get away rolling-stock and prisoners-of-war. Lord Roberts replied to the effect that surrender must be unconditional: his troops would make their entry early the next morning. Botha then notified that he would refrain from any defence—his object being to ward off a bombardment—and that he left women, children, and property in Lord Roberts' charge.

Diamond Hill.—The occupation of the Rand and Pretoria gave the Transvaal commander time for reassembling a force; with a remarkable measure of success he utilized it.

GENERALS BOTHA AND DE WET

In May 1900, not long after the occupation of Bloemfontein by Lord Roberts, Botha and De Wet met near Kroonstad. Botha stands on the left, and De Wet on the right of the central figure. The tall man beside De Wet is General P. Botha—brother to Louis—who was killed during the war.

On June 11 his 6000 burghers put up such a stubborn defence at Donkerhoek (Diamond Hill) that both sides claimed a victory. The British were under Lord Roberts. Fighting had taken place over a front of thirty miles. Once again Botha showed himself a master in preparing and leading a great battle. Time after time the British concentrated at one particular point, intending to break through there. As often, however, they were stopped by the men Botha had ready for them. He was at home all over the vast field of battle; it seemed as if he knew beforehand what movements the enemy was going to make.

The Transvaalers soon recovered. Their enthusiasm, paralyzed for the time being, returned. Meanwhile, General de Wet began to gather fame as a guerilla chief in the Free State. Lord Roberts had thought to "suppress him summarily." All hopes of an early end to the war evaporated among the British, however, as Boer exploits increased in vigour. Nevertheless, the Pretoria-Delagoa railway line gradually fell into the hands of the invaders. Toward the end of July, Republican headquarters were shifted from Donkerhoek, via Bronkhorstspruit, to Balmoral and finally to Nelspruit. Frequently Botha superintended the fighting in person against the advance of British cavalry in order to ensure that cattle and horses at any rate should be sent away in time from the districts he had to give up.

The last great "position fight" of the war took place at Dalmanutha, near the eastern rim of the High Veld. Four thousand Transvaalers were trying to hold a front of thirty-five miles against an assault by at least ten times their number. The British, led by Lord Roberts and Sir Redvers Buller, had abundance of guns. For six days the Boers held on, so as to enable a great concourse (which had gathered behind their fighting-line) to look for safety in the Low Veld. This object was gained, but the commandos were obliged to continue retreating along the railway line, and Komati Poort, the terminus, was occupied at the end of September.

A month earlier, Botha had, as supreme War Lord, attended a meeting of his Government at Nelspruit which led to President Kruger taking refuge in Portuguese territory. It was considered desirable to let the aged head of the State retire to Europe, rather than allow him to fall into the hands of the enemy, which, sooner or later, appeared inevitable.

V

BOTHA'S 'SECOND WAR'

SOON after September 1900 Botha once more had military matters shipshape. The railways, it is true, were in the enemy's possession. Contact with the world outside had practically ceased, especially since British influence became paramount in Lourenço Marques.

From Pilgrimsrest the Commandant-General withdrew, fighting, in the direction of Sabie Spitskop, being pressed by Buller's troops. At Hectorspruit he fell ill of malaria. Without delay he and his fellow-members of the Government gave the Low Veld a wide berth. He passed Buller beyond the foot of the Mauchsberg range, and safely reached Nylstroom. It was there that he presided at the council of war attended, among others, by President Steyn, who had specially made his way from the Free State for a last consultation with President Kruger. It was resolved that a few commandos were to operate as closely as possible to Pretoria and the Witwatersrand, in order to keep things on the move in that neighbourhood. Botha, meantime, was to fight over the vast plains of the High Veld. The Free Staters would attempt a raid on Cape Colony.

Lord Kitchener Commander-in-Chief.—This new phase was marked by a change in the British supreme command. On November 15, 1900, Lord Roberts reported to the Secretary for War that organized resistance had ceased in both Republics after Komati Poort had been occupied, and that General Botha's army had been smashed. As much as a month earlier Lord Milner had arrived at Pretoria, expecting to be able to establish a civil administration shortly. Lord Roberts was bound to leave soon, for the

post of Commander-in-Chief in England had become vacant. The British Government was anxious to see the conqueror of the Boer States at hand for the filling of the vacancy. Military circles at Pretoria were convinced that Lord Kitchener, too, would soon leave, and that General Lyttelton would command South African garrisons, under Lord Milner as Governor. At the end of November, Lord Roberts left, Lord Kitchener taking his place. During the former's journey to Durban he stated that the war was practically over: only "a few marauding bands" remained in the field! London requested his successor to finish the work as quickly, and cheaply, as possible. The British army consisted of 250,000 soldiers, whereas no more than 8000 Boers (so it was said) remained obdurate. These were the figures supplied by Mr St John Brodrick, the new War Secretary. In the Metropolis people had become tired of the picnic!

"*Another War.*"—A remarkable period had begun. Both in the Free State and in the Transvaal the Boers began to fight with an energy hitherto unknown. Long ago they had had to relinquish or destroy their heavy ordnance. Those burghers who had given up courage were unhesitatingly sent home for a rest. Those who remained in the field were fired by fresh enthusiasm for the justice of their cause. Gradually their number increased. Strong discipline was applied; sharp methods of fighting were resorted to. Botha managed to get his commandants appointed by himself, instead of their being elected by the burghers. Lord Kitchener's biographer states:

> Botha, with a fine contempt for formulae, deliberately inaugurated operations which were regularly adapted to their arena and organization. The Boers started another war.

In October the commandant of Bethal was ordered by the Commandant-General to notify that burghers would be prevented from laying down arms. Disobedience rendered them liable to have all their goods confiscated; even their homesteads might perhaps not be spared. Railway lines were to be destroyed, and trains seized, so that food might

become available. Early in December Botha circularized magistrates and officers, enclosing instructions for the punishment of burghers who refused to join a commando. During the same month, Lord Kitchener estimated the Boer strength at 20,000, noting that they acted boldly whenever a chance presented itself. Throughout the country there was a considerable military revival. Lord Kitchener could see no hope of peace, and asked for reinforcements. Trains were attacked so bravely and successfully that he had to defend and protect railways as well as main roads by a system of blockhouses at an average distance of four hundred yards. Garrisons no sooner evacuated a township than the Republican flag was hoisted, and a landdrost appointed. During the same period Pretoria issued a proclamation expressly offering protection to every Boer who 'handsupped.' This, however, was of no avail; Lord Kitchener's pessimistic despatch was dated less than four weeks after Lord Roberts' boast of complete victory!

Boer strategy in those days was especially directed toward the reduction of pressure in the Transvaal by shifting the main theatre of operations to the Cape, where a large number of farmers were ready to take up arms. General Beyers was ordered to move far southward. In case this led to the evacuation by the British of the Western Transvaal, General de la Rey was expected to join General Smuts' invasion of Cape Colony, so as either to effect a junction with Beyers or work independently.

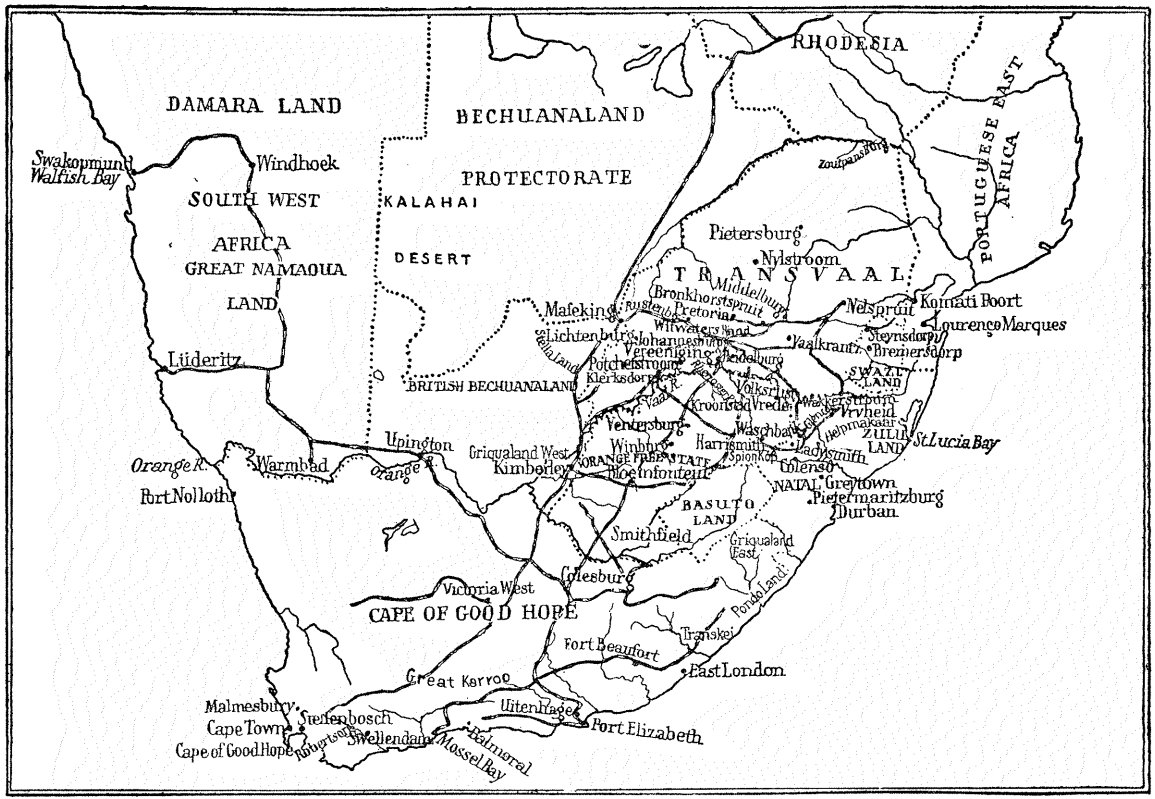
In December 1900 General de Wet vainly tried to move a Free State detachment southward at Aliwal North. In February 1901 he again attempted to enter the Colony. Botha adhered to his scheme of pushing through to the Eastern Province *via* Natal and Pondoland or East Griqualand. The English forces near the Orange River were hurriedly strengthened; by a supreme effort toward the end of February they pushed back Generals de Wet and Hertzog into the Free State. It was only during the second half of 1901 that General Smuts scored some successes in Cape territory, holding his own against General

French. Botha, de la Rey, and Beyers were compelled to continue the fight in the Transvaal.

220,000 *against* 20,000.—Before long, the reinforcements asked for by Kitchener began to pour into Capetown; they were supplemented by local corps, and Pretoria now disposed of 80,000 mounted men, 85,000 infantry regulars, 20,000 militia, 13,000 gunners, 4000 engineers, and 11,500 auxiliaries from Australia and elsewhere. This army, a powerful one for South Africa, had 100 heavy guns, 420 field pieces, and sixty pompoms.

Never before had any European power carried on war overseas on such a scale, and six thousand miles away. Every great port, in the New and Old World both, sent its vessels to the South, heavily laden with remounts, barbed wire, munitions, food, mules, building material, medical comforts, fodder *e tutti quanti*. South Africa's own normal economy was virtually paralyzed. The few who were not either on active service or in gaol made a living out of the British military organization, all for the crushing of some 20,000 Boers, who continued to defend their national independence with their lives.

During the second half of February 1901 Lord Kitchener felt strong enough to detach General French, together with six other generals and 60,000 men, in order to carry out a 'great sweep' on the High Veld. Botha was very hard pressed and urged the neighbouring commandos to greater efforts so as to create a diversion. The boulder did not succeed in smashing the fly. Lord Kitchener had intended a demonstration in order to impress Botha with the hopelessness of further resistance, however pluckily maintained. The British Commander-in-Chief really began to long for a cessation of hostilities, realizing that a dearly bought victory could never lead to inspiring results for the conqueror. A soldier of the fine type to which Kitchener belonged could not relish the grind with which he had been charged. So it happened that this time the olive branch was held out by the British.



GENERAL MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA

See also map at page 65

VI

BOTHA AND LORD KITCHENER

THE first effort to stop the war was made by both Boer Governments in March 1900. Shortly after the surrender of Cronje, the commandos were recalled from Natal, Cape Colony, and Bechuanaland, so that British territory was entirely free from Boer occupation. Independence was to be maintained as a *sine qua non*. On other subjects both Presidents were prepared to yield a good deal: but the English refused to negotiate. The 'impudence' of the Transvaal ultimatum was held up in justification of this attitude and as a good reason for complete annexation. As if every nation were not entitled to self-preservation! No State can afford to acquiesce in systematic preparations for attack made by another State. Admittedly it had been with aggressive objects that England had poured troops into South Africa and concentrated them close to the Republican borders. Had Pretoria, then, been unreasonable in demanding their removal? England's irreconcilable attitude of those days, provoking as it did Boer fanaticism on the subject of independence, probably contributed to the series of events that culminated in the salutary changes of the last twenty-five years.

"*Irresponsible Messages.*"—Immediately after the occupation of Pretoria, and with the cognisance of Lord Roberts, 'peace offensives' were undertaken by people who (sometimes, no doubt, in perfect good faith) proclaimed that the moment had arrived for the Boers to desist. General Childers states that "De Wet's successes on June 4 and 7 inclined the scale in favour of peace" at English headquarters, whence a promise was made to the Transvaal commander-in-chief to the effect that he would not be sent

to St Helena in the event of his laying down arms; a few days later Botha and General de la Rey were offered annuities of £10,000 if they surrendered. In the course of the battle of Donkerhoek (June 11, 1900), a couple of Pretorians came to see Botha with British passes. To their representations, Botha (as Ben Viljoen tells us)

> indignantly replied that it was not the first time irresponsible messages about surrender or peace had reached him. Insulting offers had even been made—always in the irresponsible manner of the present ones. He had to express his disappointment at anyone in Lord Roberts's position acting in this way. Lord Roberts might think the country was lost, but he (Botha) would continue to do his duty to the people. He might be shot, gaoled or exiled—his character no one would be able to take away from him.

Further attempts to persuade Botha were made, and in some instances had a tragic sequel.

In the closing months of 1900 the military situation was far less favourable to England than it had been six months earlier. At headquarters someone hit on the idea of finding out, through Mrs Botha, whether the Commandant-General was prepared to meet Lord Kitchener. When Pretoria was occupied, Mrs Botha remained behind with her children in a small house she had rented. President Kruger's wife and the families of several Boer officers also continued to live in the capital. Mrs Botha was informed that, if she wished, she might visit the General and tell him that Lord Kitchener was prepared to see him. The mountain thought fit to go to the prophet!

Mrs Botha's Mission.—Mrs Botha was willing. The Boer Government was somewhere near Bothasberg.

"Lord Kitchener sent a verbal communication to the effect that he was prepared to meet Botha, provided independence was not mentioned," Sir George Arthur tells us in his biography of Kitchener. In General de Wet's book on the war we read: "Botha wrote me saying that Kitchener had asked him for a meeting at Middelburg towards the middle of February, as the British Government wishes to make peace proposals."

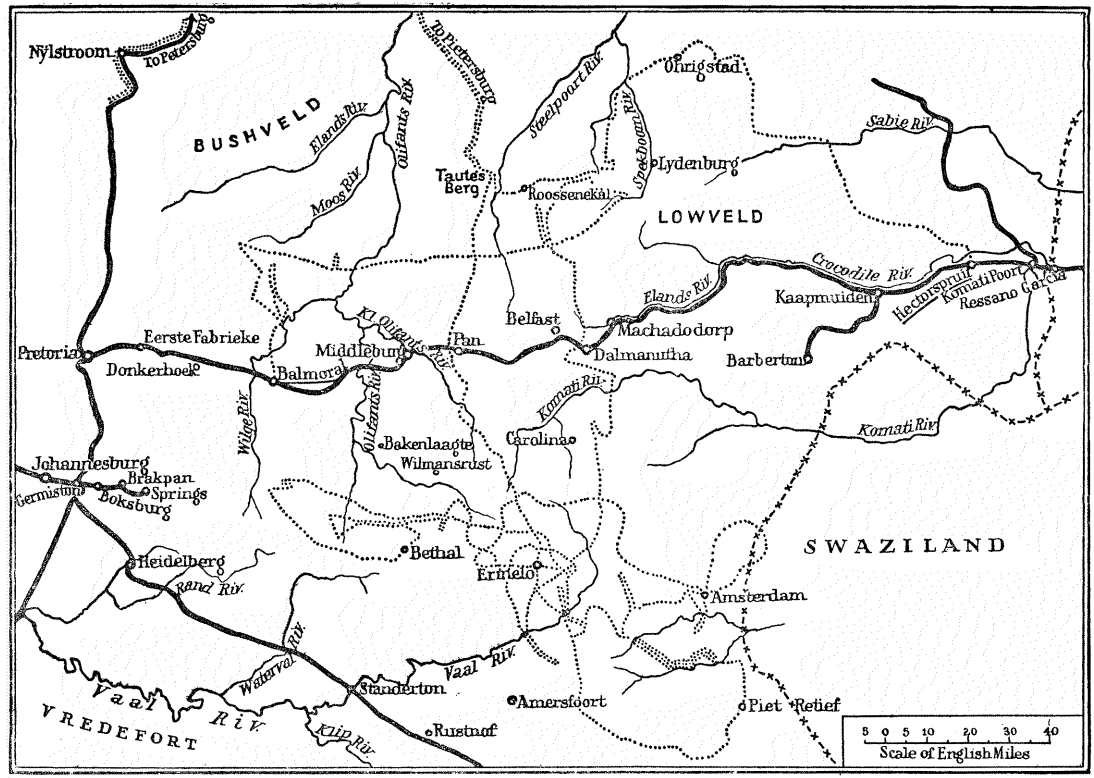
Mrs Botha travelled part of the way by rail, and the remainder by road. The meeting was followed by a few letters in both directions. With the consent of the Boer Government, of which he was a member *ex officio* (and having informed the Free Staters), Botha accepted the invitation to an interview. As Sir George Arthur states, the ever-increasing intrepidity of the burghers had reached a climax in December 1900. Just before the interview (on February 22, 1901, in fact) Kitchener wrote to the Secretary for War (Mr St John Brodrick, afterward Lord Midleton) that High Veld operations—he was thinking of General French's 'great sweep'—had changed the Boers' temper, rendering them more pacific than they had been a few days before. Both generals were careful to take into account the *moral* of their enemy.

Botha no longer indulged in any vain hopes about the ultimate result. Unlike some of his colleagues, he could not continue to pin his faith either to military fatigue in England or to foreign intervention. His idea was to obtain the best possible terms by inspiring in the British respect for the tenacious Boer resistance. Early in 1901 he was by no means at the end of his tether. Consequently, he was far from being a defeatist. Adv. N. J. de Wet (now Senator de Wet), who was his military secretary until the end came, has given me this assurance. As, however, it was highly important to ascertain exactly what the other side was willing to concede, Botha went to Middelburg.

No complete war book has ever been written from the Transvaal side. Those whom one might have expected to undertake the task did not care to do so, or could not find the time. The Middelburg conversations have to be looked for in British records, although Botha afterward gave some information to his friends.

Kitchener's Insight.—Lord Kitchener wrote to Mr St John Brodrick immediately after the event:

> Botha came in at 10 a.m. and left about 3 p.m. He has a nice, unassuming manner, and seemed desirous of finishing the war, but somewhat doubtful of being able to induce his men to accept peace



THE TRANSVAAL HIGH VELD

The dotted line from Hectorspruit to Balmoral indicates the peregrinations of the South African Republic Government in the field, as mapped by Captain Paff.

> without independence in some form or other. He repeated that he and his people felt bitterly losing their independence. . . . He said, incidentally, that he could carry on for some time. He was very bitter about those who had surrendered. Botha is a quiet, capable man, and I have no doubt carries considerable weight with his burghers; he will be, I should think, of valuable assistance to the future Government of the country in an official capacity.

This judgment formed by Kitchener, who was twelve years older than Botha, does honour to both. At Middelburg the foundations were laid for that reciprocal esteem which subsequently was instrumental in promoting the pacification of an agonizing country. The two commanders learned to understand each other, just because they were broad-minded and big-hearted. Botha never made a secret of his admiration for Kitchener. After 1902 they met a few times on official occasions in England.

Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman entertained the Dominion Premiers at dinner during the 1907 Imperial Conference. Nash, his private secretary, tells us:

> He stands chatting with General Botha by the door of the drawing-room at No. 10 (Downing Street). Botha's eyes light up as he catches sight of the most commanding figure in the room, and the two move forward simultaneously with outstretched hands, Kitchener beaming for once.

Sir G. Arthur states that, in October 1910—after unification of South Africa—Botha insisted on Kitchener being consulted on the Union's military affairs, as in all matters of Imperial defence. A few weeks later Kitchener was offered, and accepted, membership of the Imperial Defence Committee.

At Vereeniging.—During the Vereeniging negotiations Kitchener assured Botha that no humiliating feature would attach to the formal surrender of arms by the burghers.

"Leave Lord Milner out of this job," Kitchener said, "you and I will manage it satisfactorily."

Two weeks later, at a farewell dinner in his honour at Pretoria, Kitchener called the Boers a virile race. He felt sure they would be of great benefit to the Empire.

He praised their wonderful stamina and their military tactics.

Lord Buxton tells us: "At Lord Kitchener's sudden death in 1916, Botha read the cable in the House of Assembly. He added a few words in English, and could scarcely speak . . . a broken whisper." Among Kitchener's late enemies there were others who appreciated him; for instance, General de la Rey's widow sent a telegram of condolence to the Governor-General. This is the lady who in 1902, in the course of her enforced peregrinations in the Western Transvaal, offered a few of her very last fowls to Lord Methuen, then a wounded prisoner-of-war. I was present at the first meeting, after peace, between General de la Rey and Lord Methuen at Roberts Heights, the G.O.C.'s residence near Pretoria. There were no histrionics; it was a cordial affair, as between two old comrades-in-arms. These men had nothing that was petty in them.

At Middelburg.—What did the victors of Omdurman and Colenso tell each other at Middelburg? Although the cardinal question was supposed to be taboo, Botha strongly urged some form of independence. Kitchener was inflexible on this point. There was to be annexation, but he proposed an Executive, with or without an Assembly. The discussion on representation led to the franchise question, particularly as it affected the non-whites. The Boers were traditionally opposed to any native or coloured franchise. The third subject was the fate of the Cape and Natal rebels. Kitchener was accommodating; all he wanted was to disfranchise these men. He had no full power, however, and could only inform London of Botha's views.

In a letter to Lord Roberts, written on the day of the meeting, Kitchener mentions the following points: Botha asked for greater consideration to be shown in connexion with the sending of Boer women to the concentration camps. Kitchener told him that orders had been issued to leave the women on the farms until such time as adequate transport should be available.

The fact that these orders had been issued showed that Botha did not complain unjustly.

Kitchener says that Botha did not protest against the burning of homesteads. This is not difficult to understand, seeing that the latter had, on his part, recently threatened not to spare the houses of disobedient burghers. Kitchener invited the Boer General and his staff to lunch. The small company—there were only seven in all—was photographed, and shortly afterward adjourned.

Effect in England.—In England the conference attracted a good deal of attention. Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, the Opposition leader, if not an absolute pro-Boer, was at any rate in favour of an understanding. He wanted a settlement in which the Boer claim to be allowed to take part in the government of the country was recognized, and hastened to give his party a lead. At Oxford he made a speech in which he urged "free self-government for the Transvaal and Orange Free State, succeeding a military *régime*, re-establishing peace and order." He opposed any "half-way house" in the nature of Crown Colony administration. On the other side there was a clamant body of public opinion resolutely demanding a ruthless vendetta against the Boers.

On March 7 the British Government's answer was despatched from Pretoria. After the complete pacification of the country, 'representative'—as opposed to 'responsible'—government was to be instituted. The question of the native franchise would only be settled then. If this came about, it would be so restricted as to safeguard the fair preponderance of the whites. Cape coloured persons would, however, obtain the legal rights enjoyed by them in the Cape. As to the amnesty for Cape and Natal rebels, Sir Alfred Milner, the highest civil authority in the country, had opposed it, because it would have a "deplorable effect" in the colonies. Mr Joseph Chamberlain endorsed this view.

Kitchener's Dissent.—Kitchener intensely disliked the reply. He wrote to Brodrick, telling him that the section in South Africa which demanded the ruin of the Boers was

BOTHA WITH HIS A.D.C.'S ON THE WAY TO KLERKSDORP

The central figure is Botha. On his left are S. Pretorius and H. Watkins; on his right are Helgard de Jager and Niklaas De Wet, his military secretary. The central seated figure is F. Siemssen, telegraphist. On his left is Louis Esselen, and on his right Botha's eldest son, Louis, who was in the field during the second part of the war.

a small one. Milner he called vindictive. The war was going to drag on indefinitely!

Like all professional soldiers, Kitchener was averse from lengthy operations. He resented the throwing away of a favourable chance of peace; but he cannot escape the charge of having easily bowed to the 'political' argument, put forward by Chamberlain and Milner. As a soldier he should have realized that rebel amnesty was essential if the Boer leaders were honourably to accept terms.

The March despatch was sufficient to make the Boers abandon any further peace efforts. The exact constitution of the ex-Republics might have been made a subject for bargaining and a non-white franchise staved off for some time. The idea of throwing their rebel comrades to Lord Milner, however, was impossible as long as the commandos had any fight left in them. In April members of the Transvaal Government, Botha included, met President Steyn and General de Wet at Vrede, in the Orange Free State. De Wet, in his book, says: "Botha told me the result of the Kitchener negotiations. It was *nil*. . . . We parted, fully determined to fight to the bitter end."

Botha did not send any reply to Pretoria. On May 9 Kitchener wrote to Brodrick to that effect. He told Lord Roberts that he wished he could point to the end being in sight; hence his desire to make terms with Botha. It seemed to him, however, to be a lost hope.

Twelve Fateful Months.—Did Kitchener ever realize the damage to his country's interests caused by his yielding to the civil power? However that may be, he vigorously asserted himself when, fourteen fateful months afterward, fresh *pourparlers* began. He did not again allow Milner to become master of the situation. The net result of the diplomatic interference with the Middelburg opportunity was that, while England pursued a war from motives of national honour, her international prestige and credit suffered. The Boers felt that the hour when they would be able to claim equality with British fellow-South Africans had not yet struck.

For more than another twelvemonth many precious lives had to be sacrificed; considerable moral and material damage resulted before a proper basis for a permanent understanding was laid down. Botha and Kitchener both did what they could in order to save our country that last pathetic-heroic year. Lord Buxton's book tells us what Botha, several years later, said about the Middelburg incident:

"If others had not intervened," Botha stated, "we might have concluded a peace acceptable to both sides. We were told, however, that the people who had helped us would go to prison. This we could not for a moment contemplate. Negotiations, therefore, had to conclude. We no longer had any food. We were without waggons. We lacked ammunition. Yet we held out for another year. We were forced to smash our Mausers and to go on with rifles and ammunition taken from the British. Great Britain spent millions of money and lives innumerable. In the end we got terms as good as we had asked for at Middelburg."

VII

BOTHA AS A 'BITTER-ENDER'

THANKS to an uninterrupted flow of reinforcements during the first six months of 1901, the British Army was able to act with progressive violence, leaving desolation wherever it went. Military pressure and the systematic denudation of the country districts were being specially felt by the Boers in the Transvaal, where the goldfields were required to register a monthly output once again, and had to be protected against the commandos. Even non-combatants were severely combed out. Homesteads, orchards, agricultural implements, were practically destroyed wherever they were met with. Cattle and sheep were either driven off or killed. In May 1901 the number of whites 'roped in' was 77,000—of coloured, 21,000. Five months later the aggregate had reached 160,000.

On June 14 Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman—shortly after a talk with Miss Emily Hobhouse, who had returned from South Africa—made his now famous protest against the concentration camps and the complete destruction of the farms:

> "It is said 'war is war.' When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism."

The Boers began to feel that their situation was a critical one. The only way left to them of continuing the war was to take what they needed—rifles, ammunition, clothes, food—from the enemy. Early in May a council-of-war was held near Ermelo. Among those taking part were Generals Louis Botha, J. C. Smuts, Ben Viljoen, and Chris Botha. It was resolved to ask the British High Command for permission to communicate with the Republican

representatives in Europe through a messenger. This was refused. Thanks to the good offices of the Netherlands Consul-General at Pretoria, the cable was, however, placed at their disposal.

In reply, Dr Leyds and Abraham Fischer cabled on June 11, stating the opinion of President Kruger, the Deputation, and the Transvaal Plenipotentiary: the decisions taken by the two Boer Governments remained of full force and effect; there was not the slightest prospect of intervention by the Powers; it was impossible to get any more munitions through; in England public opinion continued to veer round in favour of the Boers; measures were being taken to improve the treatment of the women, children, and prisoners-of-war in the camps; whatever might be decided upon, unanimity of the two Republics and equal treatment of Colonial rebels on the same basis as the burghers were urged.

After a meeting of leaders in the field, the following resolution was recorded by the Governments of the South African Republic and Orange Free State, having heard the advice of the principal commanding officers (de Wet, Botha, and de la Rey): "No peace shall be concluded, nor will conditions of peace be accepted, unless our independence and national integrity as well as the interests of our Colonial kinsmen be safeguarded. The war is to be prosecuted vigorously."

Early in June the British had tried to catch the Transvaal Commandant-General and members of the Executive. A cordon was placed along the Swazi border so that, if the commandos took flight in that direction, they might be headed off there. Hard pushed on all sides, Botha and his staff (their indispensable luggage and documents on pack-horses) left their camp at night. Next morning the enemy found nothing but burnt vehicles and a few lame mules.

General Ben Viljoen describes the above-mentioned meeting in Standerton district as follows:

> When I arrived, President Steyn, Generals de Wet, de la Rey, and Hertzog were on the spot, escorted by 150 men. It did one good

to see how cordially and cheerfully the national leaders greeted each other. General de Wet was suffering from rheumatism, and the High Veld winter caused him great discomfort. Like President Steyn, however, he was in good fettle and full of spirit. We sat together, listening to each other's experiences. Sometimes there was general hilarity at the jokes that were cracked.

Nevertheless, fighting became an almost desperate and purposeless expedient, so far as the Boers were concerned. It amounted to a practically continuous evasion of the enemy's forces, overwhelming through sheer numbers. This was variegated by an occasional successful surprise, when English columns were relieved of their munitions, clothes, and food supplies. General Muller, for instance, in June had a success at Wilmansrust, where his 150 men took a camp by a night attack, capturing a pom-pom, rifles, ammunition, remounts, and sundry supplies, as well as 260 prisoners. On May 29 General Kemp had surprised the British under Dixon at Vlakfontein, south of the Magaliesberg, where he turned the enemy's guns on the soldiers! Fighting and fleeing, starvation and shivering, were the order of the day as well as night. De Wet continued his operations in the Free State, Beyers in Zoutpansberg and Waterberg, de la Rey in the Western Transvaal. Botha, supported by Generals Coen Brits and Grobler, as well as others, kept the eastern districts on the move.

Accompanied by but the skeleton of a body-guard, he made it his tactics to concentrate at intervals a few hundred, or a couple of thousand, burghers for surprise attacks. Bloukop, Standerton district, was his favourite signalling station for helio communication with his Executive or principal officers. A few telegraph operators stuck to his peripatetic staff until the end. The clear atmosphere of the South African plateau enables the reflection of the sun's rays to be seen at a distance of a hundred miles. The first duty of the Boers always was to avoid capture, in order that the supply of belligerents might not be cut short. Viljoen mentions a council-of-war that was to have been held in the

winter of 1901. When he arrived at the venue, south of Ermelo, he says,

> there was hardly time to shake hands with members of the Government and to exchange a few words with General Botha: we had to run for it. For eight days in succession we were obliged to make tracks. Night after night the enemy attempted to seize us. It was only on the ninth day after my meeting with the Government that we had a chance of a short rest. Not long afterward, large movements were made, having for their object the capture of the Commandant-General and the Executive.

A Banishment Proclamation.—All in vain! The Boers always had the best of it, both sides depending for rapidity of movement on the same means, viz., horse transport. And the burghers knew how to nurse their mounts. The last guerilla war that was ever waged without motor-cars allowed of splendid resistance. This tenacity induced the British to issue a proclamation, on August 6, 1901, threatening all those who had failed to surrender by September 15 with perpetual banishment from South Africa. The radical ukase had not the slightest effect.

The Transvaalers became more hard-pushed as time went on, owing to the hostile attitude of the natives. The Free Staters were better off; they were even able to count on slight services on the part of the Basutos. In Zoutpansberg, however, natives fired on the Boers. On the High Veld women had to look for protection in British blockhouses. Botha came to an understanding with the Swazis, who undertook not to attack as long as their territory was respected. Everywhere else the native attitude was threatening.

Failure of Raid on Natal.—In spite of all these drawbacks, Boer resistance did not weaken. There was inexhaustible stamina to draw on, and courage remained steadfast. Early in September Botha got together a thousand men, intending to seize Dundee, Natal, as the first step on a southward march toward the Cape. This was meant primarily as a counter-demonstration to the Banishment Proclamation, and also as a rally to reinspire his burghers,

who were fighting in scattered bands all over the Eastern Transvaal.

The column moved through the district of Piet Retief. At Blood River Poort, on the farm Spieshoek, an encounter took place on September 17; the British lost six officers and thirty-eight men killed or wounded. Six officers, including the officer commanding, with nearly 200 men, were taken prisoners. There were also taken three guns, 280 horses, and 30,000 rounds of ammunition.

The Boers went on, continually harassed by 16,000 British with forty guns. Encouraged by their recent success a party of intrepid burghers, fired by desire for booty, captured a thirty-six-waggon convoy at Melmoth, Zululand; this gave them foodstuffs and clothing. On September 27 Botha had engaged the strongly fortified positions at Itala, not far from Babanango. There were heavy losses on both sides, and Botha had to give up the idea of going on. At Pivaan River he fought a rearguard action, and *via* Piet Retief managed to regain the High Veld.

General Childers has given it as his opinion that Botha was bound to fail in his effort to realize what was essentially a lost hope, but that the enterprise showed great pluck. He admired not merely Botha's aggressive tactics, but also his skill in disengaging himself from an encircling movement, carried out by greatly superior forces.

On October 6 Botha, after a night march, attacked the British on his own farm in Vryheid. Heavy fighting lasted until the afternoon. The enemy, about 3000 strong with four guns and three pom-poms, remained in possession, owing to a number of Boers abandoning their positions, thinking that their side had already won.

On October 30, 1901, at Bakenlaagte, Botha (with Grobler) heavily defeated Colonel Benson. The British, 1600 strong with six guns, attacked 1000 Boers. General Childers writes as follows:

> One of the most remarkable successes in the guerilla war. Botha ordered a charge against the rearguard. The Boers, shouting and firing from the saddle, swept over a mile and a half of the

ground, overwhelming the company of infantry, and capturing the rearmost. Near Gun Hill the Boers swung themselves from their ponies, and engaged our men at close quarters on foot. The defending force showed magnificent resistance, and were almost exterminated; the guns were captured.

General Brits' report on the battle of Bakenlaagte stated:

General Grobler, of Ermelo, General Viljoen and I time after time stormed to within eighty yards of the guns. Dismounting, we went in among the infantry. Fighting lasted from noon until nightfall. We took two Armstrongs, 147 shells, two loaded waggons, and 203 prisoners. The enemy had 500 killed or wounded. Both commanding officers, Benson and Guinnes, and 18 other officers were killed. The enemy was 2000 strong. We could not storm the camp, as that contained 25 Boer families and 44 of our men as prisoners. The enemy fought very pluckily, repeatedly refusing to surrender. Our losses: 14 killed, 48 wounded.

Kitchener, anxious as a result of this reverse, reported to his Minister, Brodrick: "If a column like Benson's, operating twenty miles outside our lines, is not fairly safe, it is a very serious matter, and will require a large addition to our forces to carry on the war."

Who could have improved on the sincerity of this tribute to the undiminished prowess of Botha and his burghers! Sir George Arthur writes: "There was beginning to be an uncomfortable conviction that the end of 1901 would find the Boer chieftains still unaccounted for. Botha was just outside the protected area in the Eastern Transvaal."

During this late phase of the war, the same author records, "a brand new force of Yeomanry had to be raised and sent overseas." Yeomanry were ever welcome to the Boers, being raw fighting material, well provided with choice rations, blankets, and sundry comforts.

A fresh method of wearing down the Boers was now tried. General Hamilton was sent out in order to hunt down the Transvaal Commandant-General by a series of night marches. Botha succeeded in escaping *via* the upper reaches of the Vaal. Lord Kitchener had pinned

his faith to this process of attrition, and wrote to Lord Roberts on December 13: "I think about April we shall pretty well have exhausted the Boers," and, a few days later, "There is no doubt the Boers are much depressed in the Transvaal, and consider the game up. The leaders still make them stick to it."

The Beginning of the End.—Botha, with 800 burghers, took eighty men from General Plumer. At the same time, fatigue began to make itself felt in the commandos. Botha no longer hoped for any advantage to be derived from a continuance of the war. To a friend he confessed that it would be impossible to down the English. The same friend, however, witnessed an attempt, not long after, at Piet Retief to stiffen the burghers' backs. "So far," Botha said, "we have fought with the gloves on. Off with them! We shall never give in!"

In December 1901 General Ian Hamilton stated in a letter: "I never could have imagined such a gigantic system of fortifications, barriers, troops, and garrisons as actually exists." During the second half of January 1902 this General led another drive against Botha, who reported on January 29:

"Twelve enemy columns, each about 2000 strong, are after us. We have been hard put to it the last two months. On 18th Dec. we fought near Vaal River, capturing 5 officers, 140 men, 150 horses, 200 rifles and a good deal of ammunition. Our people, under Chris Botha, Brits, and Opperman, moved with me in the direction of the Drakensberg, near Wakkerstroom. On 23rd December we fought once more. After a warm two hours, superior strength forced us to retire. We pushed in the direction of Carolina, and on 3rd January had an engagement at Spitskop, on the day after at Bankkop. This was a big affair. The enemy stormed but were repulsed. We charged in our turn, inflicting a sharp defeat. I much regret the death of Brigadier Opperman, Field-cornet Moolman, my orderly M. v. Buuren, and one burgher; we had eight men wounded."

Finally, Botha had to look for safety in the Vryheid hills. Even there he was pursued for a whole month before he managed to give his enemy the slip. "He disappeared, and was no more seen until he turned up at the Peace Conference at Pretoria," Sir George Arthur tells us; "his authority had of late just sufficed to keep his men in the field." As late as March 15 Lord Kitchener praised "the fine fighting spirit which still exists in the remaining Boers."

It was during the second half of 1901 that Botha's homestead, Waterval, Vryheid district, was dynamited without the slightest excuse of military necessity. The officer told off to do the work took snapshots of the house, before and after the deed; subsequently he sent these to Mrs Botha. Botha once told me that it was a relief to him when at last his house, too, suffered the fate of hundreds of dwellings belonging to his compatriots, who had remained staunch. He never appreciated the fact that his house of all others was for a long time spared by the British.

A despatch by Botha's brother-in-law Brigadier Emmett contains the following:

> On 27th August (1901) about 1500 British horse from Vryheid attacked Field-cornet Henderson at Hlobane. Fighting lasted from 11 a.m. until darkness. The enemy left forty dead and wounded on the field. The next day they went as far as Grondhoek, destroying all homesteads on their route, *i.e.*, those belonging to the Commandant-General, General Emmett, and General L. Meyer, M.E.C. They afterwards returned to Vryheid.

"*The War is Over.*"—On March 4, 1902, Lord Kitchener addressed a missive to the Transvaal Executive, covering the correspondence, initiated by the Premier of Holland, with a view to promoting a peace settlement. A few days later General de la Rey, after a sharp fight at Tweebosch, made Lord Methuen prisoner. The Acting-State President of the South African Republic sent Botha copies of the correspondence by messenger. No one, however, knew Botha's whereabouts; the letter could not be delivered. At last a British officer managed to run him to earth

DESTRUCTION OF GENERAL BOTHA'S HOMESTEAD

From a photograph by the British officer charged with the duty of destroying the house.

somewhere in the Piet Retief district during a religious service on Sunday, March 20.

Botha had no sooner read the despatches than he remarked to his secretary, Mr N. J. de Wet (who afterward became his Minister of Justice): "The war is over." He realized that the commandos would be prepared to lay down their arms, however painful they might find it to do so. The secretary voiced his doubts, but Botha's last word was: "Not one will refuse." And, as a fact, after May 31 following every one—including those who continued to hide in the mountains and forests—surrendered the rifle so dear to him. Botha had remarkable insight into the mentality of his people.

That afternoon he reached Vryheid under a guarantee of safe conduct, accompanied by half a dozen A.D.C.'s and an escort. Unfavourably impressed by the presence there of armed Zulus he declined to lay down his arms or to yield himself to the protection of the British garrison. He and his men returned to the veld for the night. (Those natives attacked a small Boer laager at Holkrans a few days later, killing every man they found.) The next morning Botha returned to Vryheid, leaving by train for Klerksdorp, where members of the Free State and Transvaal Governments were to meet. He arrived in the evening of April 7. In the interim he got in touch with General Coen Brits, who led the Standerton commando, informing the latter that an armistice was to commence forthwith. Brits was at the end of his tether, his burghers being without food. Botha advised him to seize without delay—before the hour at which fighting was to be suspended—the rounded-up cattle grazing on the Standerton commonage, without regard to the firing that was sure to come from the local garrison. The exploit was a complete success. A couple of years later General Clements, who commanded Standerton, confided to Botha his admiration of the dash with which Brits had carried out the enterprise. The Boer *moral* was maintained until the very last moment of the struggle.

Botha's Generalship.—So Botha's career as a Boer general ended after two and a half years' fighting; his object, the preservation of his country's independence, had failed. As a Commandant-General he had shown that he possessed the qualities of a great soldier. A wonderfully developed sense of locality was his, intuitive penetration into the enemy's thoughts, good humour, and a strong constitution, although his digestive system at times left something to be desired. Without ever having studied strategy, Botha was perfectly at home on a vast battlefield, where he was opposed by a better equipped and more numerous enemy. Naturally, the concluding phases of the war were not particularly fascinating to a commander of his calibre, a strategist with wide purview and broad military genius. Nevertheless, he remained a redoubtable captain, even when he had but a few hundred men under him. Bold in the extreme, he was never reckless. He shared the rough-and-tumble of commando life with his burghers. True, there was for him practically no choice. Botha from the days of his youth had never minded physical discomfort. He welcomed having to deal with a variety of men, and was eminently approachable. Not being short-tempered, he knew how to bear both sorrow and disappointment with dignity. As Commandant-General, while treating his subordinates affably, he was easily obeyed.

In sharp contrast with those who relied upon harsh discipline even to the use of the sjambok, Botha was able to dispel by a joke tension among his burghers at the psychological moment. General Viljoen relates that, early in January 1901, a council-of-war was to be held at Hoedspruit, east of Middelburg. Botha had ridden through the night, crossing the enemy lines along the railway. On arrival at Hoedspruit he lay down, shaded by a tree. By 11 a.m. Viljoen turned up. His A.D.C.'s and Botha's welcomed each other so boisterously that the Commandant-General's nap was disturbed. He rose at once, however, to meet Viljoen with his well-known, friendly smile.

BOTHA AS A BITTER-ENDER

The Dutch journalist Reyneke van Stuwe, who served on Botha's staff for two years, wrote in 1919, after the late Commandant-General's death:

> He was a man of great personal courage. Amidst a hail of bullets he rode about quietly, mounted on his dapple-grey charger; his example often inspired us in time of danger. It is a matter of history that, without qualms, he stuck to the road he had himself fixed upon, thoroughly convinced that by so doing he was serving the best interests of his people—impervious to slander and backbiting, undaunted by the desertion of some of his best friends.

The same author gives the following description of a fight that took place in Natal toward the end of 1901:

> I was standing near him when a despatch-rider brought in the first news. The enemy had well-manned trenches. Twenty-six of our men had been killed. In all my lifetime I shall never forget the cry of anguish Botha uttered. I can still visualize the painfulness of his look: *twenty-six of his men fallen!* It was terrible. Let no one, hardened by the world war of annihilation, in which thousands were slaughtered daily, smile at the mention of that number. They were human beings—fathers, many of them. The Afrikanders are members of one great family. Twenty-six killed in one assault was a catastrophe, a price at which any victory was bought too dearly. Let all those who think otherwise admire the field-marshal who, map spread out in front of him and telephone in hand, consigns regiments to decimating cross-fire. I learnt to love the humane general who suffered so strongly on hearing that cruel report.

During the final stage of the war Botha had great difficulty in connexion with ambulance work. Whenever he had to provide for a badly wounded man, the serious lack of medical comforts caused him profound sorrow.

No one in his *entourage* kept a diary or jotted down reminiscences of matters, great or small, that succeeded each other in kaleidoscopic profusion until May 31, 1902. Botha's thoughts in later years were in a different realm. He unlocked but seldom the treasury of his recollections. In it were contained, side by side with elevating memories of stirring events, others of disappointing and offensive

acts on the part of compatriots, in whom he had reposed full confidence.

Of course, plenty of commando anecdotes gained currency in later years. It may be worth repeating that during the first half of 1901 Botha escaped the clutches of General Smith-Dorrien, who was doing his best to corner the Boer commander in Utrecht. Finally Botha broke through one night at One Tree Hill where Colonel Seely, who afterward became a member of the British Government, was standing guard. It was a rather hazy moonlight evening. Suddenly, Seely saw a horseman approaching. He fired, but the other escaped. Botha afterward told Seely that he must have been the one fired at, because he (Botha) rode to the spot in question that night in order to find out whether the enemy was there, and he could remember the bullet that failed to find its billet.

VIII

BOTHA AT KLERKSDORP

In connexion with the first meeting—at Pretoria, on April 12, 1902—between Lord Kitchener and the members of the Boer Governments, Sir G. Arthur writes: "Briton and Boer yearned alike for peace." Toward the end of 1901 people in England very much wanted to see the end of the war, even though the vast majority continued to insist on the annexation of both Republics. There was a substantial measure of agreement with Lord Rosebery's speech in which he alluded to the desirability of a meeting, at some wayside inn, between a few well-wishers of the two parties, by whose friendly intervention *pourparlers* might come about. Late in January 1902 the Premier of Holland, Dr Kuyper, compared notes with Lord Lansdowne, who was at the head of the Foreign Office. Two documents gave concrete form to this process. Dr Kuyper acted off his own bat; he did not ask the Boer representatives in Holland and Belgium for their opinion. At the same time, I have reason to believe that he had been in touch with one of them, Mr A. D. Wolmarans, before instructing the Dutch Minister in London.

The correspondence reached Pretoria within a few weeks; copies were forwarded by Lord Kitchener early in March to the Acting-President of the South African Republic "in the field." It was the Transvaal Government that had formally started the war by its ultimatum to Britain; it was therefore the correct procedure to approach its members with the despatches. In this action by the British Government they recognized a fitting opportunity for the honourable pacification of an exhausted South Africa; and therefore they bestirred

themselves in order to get into touch with the Free State Government.

Not until April 9 could a joint meeting take place between six Transvaalers and five Free Staters. Fortunately, an accurate record has been kept of the discussion between the two Governments as well as of the deliberations that followed at Vereeniging. No reader could escape the impression that the Klerksdorp discussions, regarded from the historical standpoint, by far transcend in importance the subsequent debates, unforgettable though the Vereeniging Conference may be as one of the most poignant moments in South African history.

The Transvaal and the Free State had agreed that neither was to negotiate individually with the enemy, and this was not the first occasion on which the leaders of both Republics formally took counsel on matters concerning peace. The circumstance that, in this instance, the consultation took place under the ægis of the enemy determined *ab initio* the final character of the negotiations that might be expected to take place with the British. Despite annexation proclamations as well as other statements and acts, England once again tacitly recognized the official status of the Boer Governments.

A Fundamental Difference.—When the discussion at Klerksdorp began, Botha, de la Rey, and de Wet were fairly unanimous as to the military outlook. They considered it not too good, but praised the spirit displayed by the burghers. The war, therefore, might very well go on, if one left out of consideration its duration and result. There was no doubt whatever about the equal and undiminished courage as well as fighting trim among Free State and Transvaal officers and burghers. The 16,000 men who were still in the field constituted a force of extraordinary efficiency. The detachments roving about in Cape Colony were just as determined, and able to indulge in the most difficult enterprises. At the end of 1901, de Wet—referring to one of the Cape rebels—had used a characteristic expression in the course of a speech to the

Harrismith burghers: "Last week I met Assistant Chief Commandant Kritzinger. He is full of pluck; if the Republics conclude a peace that is not to the liking of the Colonials, he says, they will continue the war on their own in the Cape, until that, too, has obtained its freedom."

Botha rightly considered every burgher in these expert bodies at least the equal of a regular officer. Concerning their military value neither ally ever made the shadow of a reproach to the other, even though they occasionally differed as to the degree of punishment inflicted on them respectively by the British! It was the political aspects of the general situation that evoked, at Klerksdorp, fundamentally different views on the question of concluding the war. President Steyn did not wait very long for an opportunity of reiterating that "to him, independence was an essential condition for any peace." Should it become impossible to carry on the fight, "unconditional submission was preferable to making terms with the British."

This heroic concept—the retention of sovereign independence, or else the fall of the Boer nation—was fairly general among both Free State and Transvaal commandos. The crowd is always apt to favour the cutting of a Gordian knot rather than look for cool calculation with its uncertain, but at the same time promising, factors such as only a statesman dares to risk. As far back as the early stages of the war Botha had gained the conviction that, since reasonable prospect of victory no longer existed for the Boers, national interests henceforth demanded the preservation of the remaining vitality of the race. Now that their heroic resistance had enforced both the enemy's respect and the sympathy of humanity, he looked to treaty obligations for the guarantee of what was to be seized in the way of independence.

Just as diplomatic activity frequently amounts to unarmed war, it may be said that war often is no more than diplomacy, aggravated by the clash of arms. In this light one may regard the protracted struggle in South Africa, where Boer and Briton have long lived side by side. Though ranged

in two separate political groups, both races saw in the whole of South Africa their inheritance. As against the Steyn doctrine of vengeful submission to British *force majeure*—leaving the conquered Boers not even under the slightest treaty obligations—Botha's school upheld the idea that it was desirable to bind the conqueror to the grant of self-government as well as to economic reconstruction in both ex-Republics. Botha realized from the unprecedented effort made by a distant overseas nation, in order not to allow South Africa to escape from its sphere of power—in those days British imperialism celebrated its final triumphs—that his country would stand defenceless against a repetition of a similar attempt. This would apply as well in the case of a war made by other Powers than England, unless Briton and Boer were taught to respect each other in common love of country, and for the sake of joint political expansion.

Among the British, one group could only see daylight provided the Boers were made politically impotent. Lord Milner, *e.g.*, had advocated "breaking the back of Afrikanderdom," metaphorically speaking, and in the political domain. Steyn, on his part, suffered from the delusion that the enemy would be overtaken by war-weariness, if only the struggle could be carried on by the Boers, so that the Republics would come out unscathed in the end. This had become such an *idée fixe* with him that afterward he told his biographer that Lord Morley in 1910 had said to him: "Had you persisted through the winter of 1902, there would have been at least a chance of your having regained your independence."

It so happens, however, that in 1910 President Steyn never left South Africa, any more than Lord Morley left Europe. Moreover, Morley wrote a letter when Steyn's statement to this effect was published. In it the British statesman categorically denied ever having met the Free State President. Be all this as it may, it is a fact that a nation, when attacked, can only counter a war of conquest with resistance until the last. It should be remembered,

however, that the nature of the Boer War had undergone a change. Even in 1900 no less a person than Cecil Rhodes had indicated the difference, when he pointed out to his English-speaking countrymen that they would never succeed in reducing the Boers to an inferior national factor, even by military subjection.

The Essential Condition.—That the division, crystallized at Klerksdorp, was not a personal one but merely one of principle, or perhaps of temperament, was soon recognized. Steyn was at pains to escape any reproach of undue stubbornness, whereas Botha admitted: "We cannot blame each other for lack of unanimity." It is therefore easily understood that the attitude of the leaders toward each other was invariably marked by mutual consideration and good humour during the discussions. Botha, in opposing "War to the Knife," put the possibility of the enemy at some time or other treating the Boers as outlaws, instead of combatants. What would happen? The Boers would have to shoot a British officer for every burgher executed, "because nothing less than an officer is equal to one of our men." Supposing the leaders, one after the other, were either killed or exiled, the rank and file would be helplessly delivered into the hands of an arbitrary conqueror, who would be bound neither by treaty obligations nor by international law. If, on the contrary, the Boers insisted on autonomy, Botha argued, the ex-Republics might entertain sanguine anticipations of a prosperous future.

Divided by such divergences as these, the eleven members of the two Governments on April 12 met Lord Kitchener at Pretoria. President Steyn acted as spokesman, introducing a scheme that included independence as a *sine qua non*, but accompanied by a customs union, a railway pact, equal rights for Dutch and English educationally, franchise and arbitration.

London replied that independence would have to go, whereupon the Boers pointed out that in such questions there was no constitutional authority other than the will of

the people. The issue would therefore have to be decided by direct popular representatives. After negotiations lasting five days it was resolved to have such representatives elected by the burghers on commando: thirty Transvaalers and an equal number of Free Staters. These were to meet toward the middle of May, at Vereeniging. Although the Free State forces were approximately but one-half as strong as the Transvaal commandos, the same number of representatives was granted to each.

The British Government was kept informed of the course of negotiations throughout. On April 19 the War Office cabled to Lord Kitchener to the effect that, whereas every opportunity could be given for the election of delegates by the commandos, military operations were not to cease meanwhile. "We are continuing to send reinforcements," the despatch concluded. It was clear that England was not inclined to suspend its warlike activities, in spite of peace *pourparlers*.

IX

BOTHA AT VEREENIGING

SIXTY Boer delegates, together with the members of both Republican Governments, met at Vereeniging as guests of the British High Command. The situation had changed, inasmuch as they were aware of the fact that London would agree to early autonomy within the Empire, and that the Cape and Natal rebels would no longer be arraigned as criminals—they would merely be disfranchised. At the same time there was an unavoidable clash between those who favoured a prosecution of the war (with the practically inevitable sequel of subjection minus treaty rights or obligations) on the one side, and the advocates of a peace treaty, equally binding on the conqueror and the conquered, on the other. The Rev. Professor Kestell, well known in the Free State, may be quoted in illustration of the position. He attended the negotiations, and is therefore an authoritative witness:

> The idea (among the war party) was, in any case, to persist until the end of the deliberations. If, then, it appeared that the opponents of a continuance of the struggle were so numerous that it would be impossible for the ultra's to carry on the war alone, these would exclaim: "The pacifists are compelling us, also, to surrender. We were driven to it!" In that way, they considered, the world would see who held out to the end, at the last national gathering of Afrikanders.

Clearly, therefore, they did not really contemplate a long-drawn-out, murderous struggle of despair, but merely histrionics. Professor Kestell's explanation gives us an insight into the meaning of General de la Rey when, during the course of a pacific speech, he uttered a sharp reproof: "I rejoice to think that there are no leaders who, in their

pride, might boast: 'We are able to continue'—only to surrender arms after our return."

De la Rey, however, originally belonged to the pro-war section. He as well as President Steyn and General de Wet disputed the right of delegates to judge the situation for themselves, and to act accordingly. This was the first move in the game, it being urged that delegates were only entitled to vote as their constituents had directed. Botha, Lucás Meyer, and Schalk Burger (Acting State President of the Transvaal), as against this, argued that, as the people were not cognizant of the actual state of affairs, their representatives were necessarily at liberty to decide as they thought fit. The matter was clinched when General (ex-Judge) Hertzog, supported by General (ex-State Attorney) Smuts pointed out that the status of delegates was that of plenipotentiaries. They were consequently qualified to resolve in accordance with their respective opinions, as these developed during the discussions.

On the first day at Vereeniging (May 15, 1902)—the Transvaal general Chr. Beyers having been elected chairman—Botha confined himself to supplying, briefly, information as to the military situation. He recorded the fact that the attitude of the natives became more minatory day by day. His chief handicap was the paucity of food and remounts. General de Wet, on his part, stated that the Basutos "were as pro-Boer as ever." Nine Free State commandants testified optimistically.

In the evening the Transvaalers gave their version. President Steyn's progressive illness prevented him from taking part. In his tent he principally conferred with Free State leaders.

A Great Speech.—Botha's great speech came on the day following, May 16. Undoubtedly it was a stunner for the war party. He explained the extreme awkwardness of the strategic position: the British had redoubled their efforts within the past few months; the Cape was no longer a military factor; to wait for European intervention was hopeless; the prospects of the burghers' families were

LOUIS BOTHA IN 1902

From a sketch by Antoon van Welie in the collection of Dr C. J. K. van Aalst

miserable to the last degree, especially in view of the constantly increasing black peril and of the enemy's refusal to look after women and children any longer. The Boers had held out so far because they had split their forces. If half the Transvaal were abandoned, and the commandos concentrated, the result would be fatal, because the enemy, too, would draw his troops together. Moreover, Botha argued:

"It has been said that we should fight to the bitter end, but nobody can tell me where that bitter end is. Is it there where every man is either buried or banished? Do not let us regard a period of universal burial as the bitter end. If we do, we shall be to blame for national suicide. As far as I personally am concerned, nothing prevents me from carrying on. My family is looked after. I have serviceable mounts. When I look at the enemy's actions, I am inclined to say 'Death before surrender!' I am bound, however, to consider not myself, but my nation and those who will have to do the fighting. I assure you that our plight is a bad one. If I put all the cards on the table, it is not in order to intimidate you, but so as to give you that correctness of perspective which it is my duty to convey. You are confronted with the necessity of taking a highly important resolution. I have always felt that, whenever we see that matters have come to such a pass that we are being starved into submission, we are bound to accept terms while we are still a nation, and before we have quite vanished as such. We cannot procrastinate until we have dwindled to a few thousand, and then hope to be able to negotiate. It will be too late then. If we are to negotiate at all, now is the time. If it be the will of God, we shall be obliged to come to terms, however humiliating. It will not do for us blindly to push on, saying that we put our trust in God. Miracles, of course, may happen, but it is neither for me nor for you to state what God's way with us is, or that the Lord is bound to preserve our independence."

And further:

"I feel that we have defended ourselves, and struggled better than any people in the world. Our small nation has,

in the course of this fight, made more sacrifices than any people known to history. It would be a thousand pities if this nation were to go under, or fight until all are either dead or prisoners, when independence would be gone in any case. Unless we come to terms, our nation is absolutely ruined; if, on the other hand, we do make terms, we shall obtain responsible government, and our language rights will be maintained. Should a famine visit us without contractual peace obligations, the British may supply food provided the recipient takes the oath of allegiance. Are we to fight until we are completely overwhelmed, so that thirty years will have to elapse before we can raise our heads again?"

This striking speech was followed by de la Rey's surprise packet, by which the war-to-the-knife section got into a hopeless minority. During the second phase of the war the Western Transvaal commandos were able to co-operate more easily with the Free Staters (who were not so difficult of access) than with their compatriots on the High Veld. In those days there were no railway lines to facilitate effective military penetration into the Western districts. In that way community of thought arose between Steyn, de Wet, and de la Rey, as evinced at Klerksdorp. The victory over Lord Methuen, a few weeks prior to the Conference, had heightened the Western commandos' self-confidence. During de la Rey's absence, however, the British inflicted a couple of painful defeats on them. Moreover, Botha took the opportunity of a confabulation with his fellow-general, whom he had known as a colleague in the First Volksraad. De la Rey became convinced of the soundness of Botha's views; fearlessly he stated his case to the other delegates.

This conversion meant a serious loss to the extremists. Henceforth they had to be looked for chiefly among the Free Staters. These were mostly juniors, thoroughly conscious of their military prestige, but not by any means the peers of their chief Commandant (General de Wet) or of many a Transvaal officer as regards actual exploits. The

seniors could point to greater experience and a better realization of responsibility.

"Since my arrival," de la Rey said, "and after I learnt how matters stand in districts other than mine, the objections to a continuance of warfare appeal to me. The time, I think, has come for negotiations with the enemy, lest the door be bolted in our faces."

How was the spokesman of the war party to react? De Wet got up after de la Rey, saying: "I will assume the correctness of all that has been said. And yet the Free State will not cease firing. At our meetings with the burghers a voice as of thunder went up in the cause of independence. To me, therefore, but one way lies open."

The debate came to an end on the following day. Unanimously the two Governments were instructed to appoint a commission, entitled to negotiate on any subject. The result was to be submitted to the meeting of delegates. Botha had once more to proceed to Pretoria; de Wet, de la Rey, Hertzog, and Smuts accompanied him.

Negotiations at Pretoria.—On May 28 they had conversations with Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner until the evening—with intervals for awaiting replies from London. Lord Milner at first tried to get the five Boer generals to sign a document (authority to be obtained by them at Vereeniging) recognizing the annexation proclamations, and promising that the burghers would lay down their arms, trusting that their individual liberty and property would be respected. This clumsy scheme could not succeed. Botha emphatically declared: "We came here with the earnest desire to make peace. I fancy that, if our scheme is carried out, Boer and Briton will be able to live side by side. I assume that neither party wishes to oppress the other race. The peace we want is one that shall satisfy both parties, and be permanent in South Africa."

Is this the language of a knocked-out suppliant, creeping in the dust under the conqueror's mailed fist in order to receive a few concessions by way of charity? The act of

submission, proposed by Lord Milner, was condemned by Botha in these terms:

"We desire a peace honourable to both parties. As I understand this document, however, we are asked to go much further than that. It makes us not only surrender our independence, but binds every burgher hand and foot. Where does the honourable peace come in, as far as we are concerned? If we are to cease fighting, it can only be as men who have to live and die in this country. We cannot accept a peace that would leave the iron in our souls. I shall do anything in my power to come to an understanding, but I think this document goes altogether too far."

What the Commandant-General, as a man of tact, could not as yet say to the embittered delegates at Vereeniging—"Boer and Briton must inhabit South Africa as neighbours, in mutual tolerance"—he repeatedly urged to Lord Milner. He did it all the more emphatically because the two who negotiated on behalf of Britain were strangers to South Africa. The success or otherwise of the peace pact would, however, in the first place affect English-speaking South Africans. It is true that, among loyalists, Boerophobia was stronger than among the general ruck of British soldiers; this may be due to the fact that the Boers had proved the loyalists' superiors in the field. Botha, however, realized that subsequent to the war the loyalists would remain, after the last soldier had left our shores. Hence it became necessary to obtain the complete political and social equality of the two races.

Opposite Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner—oversea men—Botha sat at that conference table as the embodiment, not merely of the ever-ready Boer warrior, but of all South Africans, whatever their descent. As a diplomat he did his best to save the ex-Republics any post-war pressure England might choose to exercise; as a patriot he pleaded for solid foundations to a South Africa worth living in for both Briton and Boer.

He succeeded in obtaining a draft which subsequently became the Peace Treaty. After prolonged discussions the

sum of £3,000,000 was finally fixed upon as the amount required to assist economic reconstruction after the war. Lord Kitchener, by his accommodating attitude, neglected no opportunity of making up for Lord Milner's *intransigence*.

Fresh Deliberations.—On May 29 the meeting at Vereeniging was resumed. President Steyn had to leave the place on the identical day, attended by a medical man, and, more dead than alive, obliged to seek a cure abroad. He was penniless. The Boers gave him the balance of their Exchequer—£700 in cash. Throughout the war the Free State had been financed by the Transvaal Treasury. As recently as the winter of 1901 the Free State Government had received £15,000 "on loan." The southern allies were occasionally able to import clothing, etc., *via* Basutoland. President Steyn felt relieved that he need not affix his signature to the Peace Treaty. For those who signed, their act was one of almost superhuman volition and self-control.

For three days the resumed negotiations at Vereeniging lasted. The Free Staters, recognizing that the "war party" was in the minority, were in a hurry to come to a decision. If, as appeared likely, they were outvoted, posterity would always be able to point to them with pride as the final champions of Boer Republicanism and Boer ideals. Once more Botha made a long speech, in which he adjured his hearers to use their common sense, and to stand together, "in order that after peace we may cling together as well, looking for ways and means of assisting widows and orphans by sending representatives to Europe and America in order to get financial aid in rebuilding our farms and helping our people."

Reacting to a hint from General Smuts—to the effect that a simple majority in favour of or against the Peace Treaty would not meet the case—Botha, accompanied by General de la Rey, visited General de Wet in his tent, early in the morning of the last day of the conference, and laid before the latter a proposal that only in the event of at least two-

thirds of the delegates voting in favour of it should the Treaty be ratified—thus at least forty out of sixty members must decide the fate of South Africa. The onus in connexion with the success or failure of the peace negotiations was hereby laid upon the extremists, thereby "calling the bluff" off those who, whilst no more anxious to continue the fight than were the others, yet desired to avoid the ignominy of surrender by agreement.

Despite inequality of fighting forces—the Transvaalers having a larger number of men in the field—each Republic was represented at the conference by thirty delegates. If the war was to go on, unless two-thirds of the assembly voted for peace, a good number of extremists would be compelled so to vote, instead of only Transvaalers being on the Treaty side. The Botha–de la Rey proposal, however, was never formally brought forward. Evidently General de Wet realized that, in the event of such a thing happening, he and his adherents could not refuse to support such an heroic gesture. Were not the extremists posing as the advocates of war *à outrance* in maintaining the struggle for independence! And here was laid before them the opportunity of rendering all too easy the rejection of the Peace Treaty—a course unwelcome alike to de Wet himself and to his followers. Botha's attitude demanded a change of tactics. General de Wet was not long in reaching his decision. The only course left was to offer his support and that of his followers in the cause of peace. Calling his Free Staters together, he persuaded them to ratify the Treaty. In the afternoon of May 31 the Treaty of Vereeniging was passed by fifty-four votes to six. Both Free Staters and Transvaalers equally shared in the pain as well as in the 'ignominy' of their surrender

Botha has been charged with owing his success with General de Wet to an argument on his part, urging that unanimity in accepting the Treaty would in later years be helpful in obtaining a joint repudiation of the obligations it imposed! Even in 1902, however, Botha's aspiration, as sketched in these pages, was so definitely in favour of

the future co-operation of Boer and Briton that the allegation may be summarily rejected.

Two British officers were called by Botha into the meeting tent. Amidst death-like silence he informed them that the Treaty had been ratified. During the same night of May 31 the document was executed at Pretoria by the members of the two Boer Governments, Lord Kitchener signing on behalf of the British War Office, and Lord Milner on that of the Colonial Secretary. The famous annexation proclamations were therefore tacitly disavowed. The incorporation of the Boer Republics into the Empire by way of treaty had, as far as England was concerned, the advantage that international law had been complied with. The Boers profited, because their future was contractually guaranteed by their late enemy, the rest of the world never having stirred a finger for their protection.

Two Free State Opinions.—It is interesting to note the opinion of two Free Staters—*i.e.*, from a quarter without any predilection in Botha's favour—as to the most prominent figure in the course of the negotiations. In his *Life of de Wet*, Professor Kestell unbosoms himself as follows:

> Here, at Vereeniging, I learnt to esteem and respect Commandant-General Louis Botha among other military chiefs more than I had ever done before. At the last moment they made their final sacrifice for the sake of the people. It was especially General Botha who, at Vereeniging as he had done previously at Klerksdorp, repeatedly drew attention to the national aspect of things. He never tired of referring to the Colonials who had fought on our side. For the people's sake the war lords immolated their military pride. So as to be able to take care of the people, they recommended the delegates to fall in with the British proposals.

On May 30 General Hertzog spoke to the assembled delegates as follows:

> I shall always respect Commandant-General Louis Botha; for he has shown himself to be possessed of a heart that feels all these things (the brunt of the war), while he has had the courage to tell his people, and us, exactly how matters stand.

History soon justified Botha. Five years after peace, the former Free State Chief Commandant was, at Bloemfontein, acting as Minister of Agriculture in his own autonomous Government. Can it be that passionate Christiaan de Wet ever pondered the fact that he owed the position he then occupied especially to Botha's far-sightedness during those critical moments at Vereeniging? Seven years after the conclusion of peace, President Steyn consulted his physician in Europe on the practicability of his accepting the Premiership of a United South Africa. Did the Free State patriot, during the period when he weighed the considerations centring round a Premiership, ever realize that he had above all things Botha's courageous advice to thank for such possibilities as existed? In any case, it must have caused Botha satisfaction to read in de Wet's *Reminiscences*, which appeared shortly after peace: "Continuance of the struggle would have led us into pitch-dark night. We simply could not think of fighting on." And the final sentence of that book read: "Let us be faithful to the new Government, as a matter of self-preservation. Let us be true, as befits a nation that has done what we did."

Torture!—An extremely distasteful duty was awaiting the principal Boer leaders. They had undertaken to reveal to the burghers who were still in the field what was to be the end of their striving, and to promote a rapid, orderly disarmament. Botha travelled for days in the south-eastern part of the High Veld in order to visit the scattered commandos, and to tell his faithful comrades-in-arms that South Africa no longer needed their military services; they were to hand in their rifles. Nothing less than a deep-rooted sense of duty enabled him to set foot on this final portion of the *via dolorosa*. If the decision had depended on the men still out on the veld, the treaty would never have been ratified! What Botha must have felt and suffered can be gauged from de Wet's confession, given in his *Reminiscences*:

> Was I to keep on, going from commando to commando, enduring the torture of witnessing the surrender of arms? No,

that would have been more than I could bear! I resolved, with regard to the remaining commandos, simply to tell the burghers what had occurred, and then to leave, before the men gave up their rifles.

Botha, however, endured the torture. And he was to bear a great deal more in the years that lay ahead. Heart-broken, he took final leave from his staff officers at Skaap-koppie, six miles from Vryheid. He expressed his deep regret at his inability to do very much in the way of assisting them to find a new career. As related to me by Mr Louis Esselen, a member of the staff, his words were: "Many thanks for your faithful services. It oppresses me that I can do nothing else for any of you, and that I can give no more than thanks. One consolation remains to all of you: You can now go and rest a little. As for me, my real work only begins at this hour. The day when rest will be mine, will be the day when they lower me into the grave. The sacrifices we had to make were terrific; but we are going to see a Greater South Africa."

Mr J. P. Jooste—now a member of the Executive Council of the Transvaal Province—has described to me how, in his presence, Botha met the Wakkerstroom commando in order to explain matters to them, preparatory to their surrender of arms. It was a particularly chilly evening. The men were down-hearted; sadly, sitting round their fires, they sang their melancholy songs. Mr Jooste, who sat beside Botha, supported by the wheel of a waggon, could not help asking: "General, had I to be in the field with you for three years solely in order to have to witness all this misery?"

The answer was: "No, my boy, to-morrow begins our great task of building a South African nation."

Botha had already said a couple of times: "I feel my inner struggle to be a thing of the past," nor did he enlarge on the theme. Those who heard him use the words subsequently interpreted his meaning as follows: I am convinced that the hour of the cessation of hostilities heralds a new future for South Africa. It will be essential to have