GENERAL DE WET

A Biography
By
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CHAPTER 1
THE HARTEBEEST HOUSE

THE sixth baby was being born in a two-roomed homestead on the stupendously empty veld.

Resting on skins of wild animals and on home-woven coverlets, lay a tall, strong-boned woman, whose placid face and fair hair told of a long Dutch ancestry. Aletta Susanna Margaretha de Wet -- born Strydom -- her name stood written in the Bible on the living-room table. An old farmer's wife from the next homestead, ten miles away, and a small black servant girl, seated modestly on the floor, paved with its fresh layer of neatlyplastered dung, were the sole companions of Mevrouw de Wet as she waited for her child to arrive.

Overhead were rafters, covered with thatch. From the wall hung the powder-horns and the muzzle-loading guns which her husband and her older sons used when they went shooting buck, welcome game that saved the family's precious herd of sheep and cattle. Earthenware pots; made by natives in some up-country kraal, and a few tin dishes were all the crockery that stood upon the shelves. Outside, in the open air was a stove hollowed out from an ant-heap. A few stools stood with criss-cross seats plaited from strips of hide, and a couple of lion-skins on the floor -- beyond these there was little of note.

On the skyline of the veld, which stretched unendingly around the farm, moving creatures could be seen. Hartebeest, big, handsome antelopes with curly horns, were among the commonest animals wandering, in their thousands from pasturage to pasturage, according to the rains. Hartebeesthouses, like that of de Wets, were the earliest kind of huts which the Boers, almost as migratory as the buck they hunted, put up in the places where

they halted their ox-wagons. Unable to secure bricks, they contented themselves with walls of reed, resting on roughly-trimmed branches, and capped with a pitched roof of the same material. In the history of South Africa the Hartebeest-house plays the same part as does the Log Cabin in that of America. More than one of her greatest sons first saw the light within it. One of them was the small boy whom the good wife Aletta held towards her husband, when he came in from a long ride to the nearest village.

"Christiaan Rudolph shall be his name", said old Jacobus Ignatius de Wet, smiling all over that honest beard-fringed face, which has been preserved for us in an antique photograph. Christiaans and Rudolphs had belonged to the family, back to the very beginnings of white colonisation in South Africa in the 17th century. And in the family Bible, by the light of a home-made candle, he wrote down the name of his youngest and the date, October 7,1854.

One hundred and fifty-nine years had gone by since the first of the de Wets reached the Cape of Good Hope. Whether they originated in the Netherlands, from which the original Jacobus of the family set sail in 1695 or whether they really belonged to Germany it is hard to say, but the latter seems more probable. In the districts of Westphalia the name is still found and the great woman poet of those parts, Annette Von Droste--Hülshoff, in the *Purgatory of the Westphalian Nobility* (Fegefeuer des Westfälischen Adels) mentions a certain Johannes de Wet, as the un-intentional witness of the hell to which she commits the landed gentry of the province in the after life.

From the first the family was of good repute in its new homeland. Many of its members were officials in the service of the old Dutch East India Company. One of his ancestors, Olaf de

Wet, was "Chief Director" of the first mining company formed in South Africa, as early as 1743. Olaf de Wet's namesake, Olaf Gotlieb de Wet, is mentioned about 1780 in the responsible position of "Master of the Warehouses" for the district of Stellenbosch, and as Landdrost, or Magistrate, of this fertile wine-growing country. Another Christian Rudolph de Wet in the 18th century was Keldermeester, or Master Cellarer for the Government's Wine Store.

When, in 1829, the South African College was founded at the first institution of higher learning in the sub-continent, there were several de Wets among the pupils, and for more than one hundred years an almost continuous list of students has come from the same family. Sir Jacobus de Wet, who held the highly responsible post of Agent for the British Government in the Republican Transvaal, was a distant relative of Christiaan's, and in the very year that saw his birth, a cousin, not too far removed, took his seat in the first Parliament of the Cape of Good Hope.

Over a country as big as England, between the Vaal and the Orange Rivers, lay dotted a few hundred houses, most of them separated by half a day's trek in the crawling ox-wagon. Two or three settlements, scarcely big enough to be called hamlets, had sprouted out of the veld, groups of whitewashed huts scattered haphazard around churches, whose members were still too poor to afford steeples.

Hunters' tracks, crooked and heavy with red dust, meandered inland from the coastal mountains. Irregular in their courses, the passing wheels of the First Trek, twenty years earlier, had ground the roads out of the virgin soil of Africa. With its white hood up the long vehicle came creaking behind its sixteen oxen, cooking-pots dangling from its axles, women sitting with their children under the tent, men walking by their side, gun in hand, on the lookout for buck, while naked little

black boys strode with the team and touched an occasional laggard animal with a flick from their long whips.

Christiaan de Wet's father did not call himself a Voortrekker. That name belonged to the earliest group of 10,000 pioneers who left the Cape in the thirties. His departure from the "Old Colony", as it was called, was of a later date. Its fertile vineyards and orchards, wheatfields and oak avenues, among the rugged mountains near Cape Town and its rolling hilly sheep-country and kaffir kraals in the East, had not been rendered intolerable to him for the same reasons that drove out the earlier settlers. Right through the forties they stayed in their district, continuing to farm, until, at length, overcome by the eternal wanderlust of the Boers, they too resolved to go Northward. Major Warden had defeated their undisciplined commandoes, and once again they owed allegiance to the great Queen Victoria, in the Orange River Sovereignty, between the Orange River and the Vaal.

Was there no way of breaking loose from that far-off monarch across the seas?

Jacobus de Wet was satisfied to remain in the Orange River Sovereignty. Six hundred miles from the coast of the Cape of Good Hope, 400 miles from Natal, 700 miles from the Atlantic shores, the entire country boasted of about 2,000 white inhabitants, practically all of the Dutch Reformed faith, all members of big families, all interested in sheep-breeding, in ivory-hunting, and in being left alone.

The hand of the Queen rested but lightly on her Orange River Sovereignty. She sent a dozen or so of officials, who were more interested in big game than in administration. A few hundred soldiers were stationed at the new "Capital" of Bloemfontein, in the lee of an isolated hill, where the army chest helped to set turning the

wheels of prosperity. Merchants began to put up stores, the church was improved in size and in appearance, gardens were planted on the veld outside the various cottages, and a newspaper, *The Friend of the Sovereignty* (still running) made its appearance in 1850.

Little Englanders were in power at Downing Street. Writers of eminence, including Benjamin D'Israeli, as yet an unreformed Radical, thundered against the "Burden of Colonies"; the British tax-payer was rather bored with native wars in Africa, India and New Zealand; and Gladstone and his Government in their economy decided to circularise the various Departments, the Colonial Office included. In this way the Orange River Sovereignty came up for discussion. There seemed no reason for keeping it. Nothing was native to the land but grass and Basuto warriors. Of minerals there were none, but of Boers there were too many.

So the Orange River Sovereignty was "axed". With due ceremony and against the wishes of a large number of its inhabitants, the Union Jack was hauled down, and the emigrant Boers were told that they might in future govern themselves, as an independent republic. Full of doubts and trepidation, without money, and with the threat of a native invasion, the long-bearded Fathers of the People assumed the burden.

On March 28, 1854, ten months before Christiaan Rudolph de Wet was born, the Orange Free State elected Josias Hoffman as its first President.

CHAPTER 2
THE BASUTO WAR

THE small boy who toddled around the farm "Leeuwkop" (or Lion Head) was a typical Boer urchin. His shapeless veldschoens were of home-tanned buck-hide, his shirt, remade from one belonging to his elders, his straw hat plaited by some kind aunt from reeds gathered along the

nearest river. Despite the isolation of the farm, there were plenty of other children with whom to play -- not only his own brothers and sisters (who continued to arrive at fairly regular intervals, until there were fourteen in the family), but the piccanins of the black servants who, according to the unwritten rule of South Africa, were welcome among white boys and girls, until their growing-up brought into force the colour bar. From these respectful companions the young Orange Free Staters learnt amusing games -- how to make dolosse, or animals of clay, how to kill snakes, hunt out queenants, locate birds by their calls, and how to ask riddles. Father and grandfather and other kinsfolk taught them songs, brought to Africa by the first settlers, 200 years ago, games played with sticks, stones and bones, and other amusements.

Christiaan's first big adventure came when he was five years old, when his father, with that restlessness that still possessed him at intervals, resolved to shift his home into another part of the country. The Smithfield district., whose name told of the British occupation, no longer satisfied him, so in 1859 all his chattels were loaded up and the trek Northward began again, towards Bloemfontein. Jacobus de Wet chose a farm called "Kalkfontein" (Lime Fountain), where there seemed more water, better pasturage and easier access to shops. The journey was unhurried. Every night the servants unpacked pots and pans, provisions and beds, while the men and older boys went out with their guns to bring in the supper. By one of the laws of the newly-founded State, each farm must have its "outspan" reserved for travellers, to camp there without hindrance from dusk to dawn, to gather fuel and refill their water bottles free of charge.

Money indeed was as yet of minor importance. The Orange Free State Treasury was quite accustomed to receiving its revenues in kind, in the form of wool, skins or other produce. The

President's salary of £600 a year often went unpaid, the members of the Volksraad or Parliament were also its civil servants, while the total income of the State was under £5,000.

Patriarchal conditions obliged the President to visit every settlement in the country once a year. The highest judicial power was in the hands of a magistrate and appeals were heard by Parliament itself. The legislators had adopted certain old Dutch legal treatises bodily, and the system worked remarkably well. Despite the simple conditions, the average settler was a superior type, interested in education. Wandering school-masters, run-away sailors or soldiers trekked from farm to farm, glad to instruct the youngsters in return for their keep. In this way Christiaan's brothers learnt to read and write between their duties as herders of sheep and drivers of wagons. Reading from the Bible was their earliest accomplishment, and very soon after their settling at Kalkfontein, whose flat and uninteresting landscape scarcely differed from that of their earlier home, hundreds of miles to the South, neighbouring colonists came together and decided to put up church. However poor they were, (and, here, as elsewhere, haartebeest-houses were the rule) a place of worship was considered essential, to supplement morning and evening prayers at home. Close to the new farm a Dutch Reformed Church was built, and, as usually happens in South Africa, a village began to grow around it: This one is still in existence and is known as Reddersburg.

How slender a hold civilisation had on the Orange Free State was shown at the time when the great stampedes of game occurred. When Christiaan de Wet was a small boy his parent's haartebeest-house was nearly wiped off the face of the earth by an invasion of wildebeest, and his mother with her babies found a wounded animal blinded by pain, dashing into her living room. No one would have lived to tell the tale had not

the farm dogs come to the rescue, and held it until the menfolk returned.

About the time when the American Civil War began, in 1861, old Mr. de Wet packed up once more and went East. Sixty miles away, in the direction of Basutoland, he discovered a promising looking piece of land, and as every burgher of the Republic was entitled to buy such ground for the equivalent of a few pounds, the change was easily made to Nieuwejaarsfontein (New Year's Fountain). To-day the village of Dewetsdorp stands near this site. It was called after Christiaan's father, though the township was not formally established till 1880.

Seven years old, his fair hair cropped short, and his blue eyes looking shrewdly round him, young Christiaan formed the tail-end of the procession which trudged to the new farm. All the calves had been placed in his charge and one of his very earliest reminiscences was of the trouble they gave him on this journey. In after life he proudly told how he prevented the calves from "drinking dry" their mothers, thus rescuing the milk for his family.

Anyone who has seen the strong firm handwriting of General de Wet must be surprised to find how rudimentary was his schooling. "I had but three months of it", he used to say, "and that from a woman who knew only her letters. I was aged eleven. One of my fellow pupils, a little girl, a niece of my father's wife, was lively in disposition. She annoyed the teacher, but the teacher thought it was I who had carried on the pranks. That was not true. She hit me with a quince stick. I repeated: ‘It is not true’, but still she went on. I bent my back and shouted: ‘Hit me!’ She went on hitting until she was tired, but I never uttered a sound." Fiftyfour years later there was a strange echo of this incident. When he was sentenced for high treason, Christiaan de Wet turned to the judge and said: "Is that all?" The name of the old lady who taught him has

been preserved, Mrs. Margaretha Nel. Apart from this we know that his mother taught him to read, and that when he was growing up he had further lessons from Isaac Baumann, a German-Jewish pioneer of the Orange Free State, whose family is still known and respected in that part of South Africa.

Just as important perhaps as schooling were the hours Christiaan spent on the veld with his father and elder brother. From them and from one Hendrik Fouché he learnt how to use a gun, an old-fashioned contraption, worked with a pan-full of powder, and with a kick so strong that his shoulders ached after every shot.

Despite its remoteness and lack of population, the Orange Free State was going ahead. Settlers trickled in steadily, both from the Cape of Good Hope in the south, and from the wild Transvaal Republic in the north. Commerce already flourished, and relations with the British Government were of the friendliest.

Troubles however, were not slow in coming. First there were the everpresent threats from independent Native tribes. On the Eastern border of the Republic, where the mighty Drakensberg, the highest chain in Africa south of the Equator, towered 12,000 feet above the sea, dwelt the Basutos. Their Chieftain Moshesh, was probably the greatest man the blacks have produced. Fragments of nations scattered by the bloody warfare of the Zulus, had been gathered by him into these fastnesses, where by sheer diplomacy and skill he maintained his sovereignty against far mightier rulers and continued to do so despite the arrival of the white man. On top of all these worries came the great drought of 1862, when animals were driven mad by thirst, and the veld stank from the thousands of dead sheep and cattle.

Jacobus de Wet was not the only farmer who lost his fortune during those grim months. It was but cold comfort for him to receive the rank of Field-

Cornet for the Ward of Modder River, near Bloemfontein. As such it was his duty to organise the military levies, mobilised whenever there was danger. He had to see that every ablebodied man, between the ages of 16 and 60 turned out with his horse, his bandolier of cartridges, his gun, and provisions for one week. It was the old, old South African system, going back to the very beginnings of white settlement.

The final trial strength for which the Free State had long prepared, came upon it in 1865. Riding on their tough, hairy, little ponies, the Basutos descended from their mountains to meet the Boers. Every white man and boy who could bear arms, was called out to fight, and even Christiaan, eleven years old, took his turn by the flickering watchfires. As Nieuwejaarsfontein was no longer safe, the family moved nearer Bloemfontein, to a place called "Paardekraal". Many months passed before the commandos straggled home. A sad day was June 15, 1865, when Lourens Jacobus Wepener, the bravest man in the Orange Free State, called for volunteers to storm Thaba Bosigo. He himself fell in a hailstorm of lead, and when the horses tethered far below came back to camp there were dozens of empty saddles.

For three years the Boers attempted again and again to drive the Basutos out of their mountains. Money, cattle, crops, lives -- all were being used up. In the midst of the campaign, the Republic elected a new President, John Brand, and it was this wise and far-seeing lawyer from the Cape, who ultimately managed to restore peace.

CHAPTER 3
TREKKER AND TRADER

WHITE ribbon decorated the whip of the old Hottentot driver, who waited on the front seat of the two-wheeled Cape cart. He sat in the shadow of the blue-gum trees, outside the little church in the veld. Presently the main door opened and out

came a group of tall men in solemn black frock-coats and white ties. A dozen women, in white sun-bonnets and flowered dresses, crowded among them, a few children pushed their way through and then the bridal pair themselves stepped into the bright South African sunlight. Christiaan de Wet helped his young wife into the cart, and, amid laughter and the waving of handkerchiefs, they drove off towards the horizon ...

Moshesh was back on his mountain; his warriors had off-saddled their ponies, and again pastured their flocks on the green slopes of the Maluti and the Drakensberg. But a large strip of fertile lowland country, today one of the granaries of South Africa, had passed into the possession of the Orange Free State. Burghers were taking up farms there, and laying out new villages in what is still called the "Conquered Territory". Folks again had smiles upon their faces; it seemed as though even the weather had improved and droughts were scarcer.

Sturdier and more thickset than the majority of his fellows, Christiaan de Wet, a newly-sprouted beard upon his face, had decided that the time had come for him to set up house. His brothers had already taken that step, except for Jan Albertus Stephanus de Wet, who had chosen to study for the Ministry. Down at the Theological Seminary, in the oakshaded, wine-growing town of Stellenbosch, Cape Colony, where the Dutch Reformed Church taught Theology, this young man was regarded as the most promising member of the family. Whether these hopes were justified can never be told, for he was carried away by some mysterious Victorian ailment before his gifts had a chance of being used. Most of the other boys already had farms of their own. Nineteen years was by no means too young, according to the standards of the day. Not only had Christiaan who at eleven had fought the

Basutos, qualified as a voter and as a member of his country's defence force, but he had been recently confirmed in his church, and was regarded as a most presentable lad.

So thought Cornelia Margaretha Kruger, a girl of seventeen from the farm "Middelpoort" near Bloemfontein. She was a typical Boer meisie -- - healthy, kindly and with no other ideas of a home than those of a farmhouse. She liked the look of "Chrissie" when he came to call on her parents, and the courtship proceeded in accordance with custom.

Old Mr. Izak Kruger and his good wife Cornelia knew the de Wets as a good and respectable family. Whenever the lad arrived a candle was duly lit on the livingroom table, the parents retired and the lovers talked until the guttering of the flame announced the moment for Christiaan to saddleup again and go.

Now they were safely married. As the Cape cart toiled along the dusty track, with nothing to break the view on either side, Christiaan talked about their new home, a little house of three rooms which had just been finished on his father's farm. Young couples usually began like this among the Boers, especially when they could not afford to buy land of their own. Christiaan had made the bricks with his own hands and cut the bullrushes with which the place was thatched and had collected the stones of the kraal within which his modest herd of livestock was kept. Native servants cost only a few shillings a month, but they could not afford those shillings. Nor were there any heroics about their new beginning. For both Christiaan and Cornelia all this was a matter of course. Seven cows her parents gave towards her dowry, and her husband had one wagon, a horse and 60 sheep. For a few borrowed pounds, young Christiaan secured a plough and some other implements, with which he began to cultivate the

soil his father allowed him to occupy. As the eighteen-seventies advanced babies arrived with truly Victorian regularity. Before Cornelia was of of age she already had several children, and it is on record that the gallant little woman copied the native mothers and tied her first-born in a shawl to her back, while she worked on the lands far into the evenings. Maize and wool were the main produce of the farm, and both crops for the first few years were a heavy struggle. Contrasting with the historic drought of the sixties were the rains of 1872, and the plague that killed most of the sheep and cattle. Five pounds was the value of Christiaan de Wet's first wool clip. Even by the simple standards of the Orange Free State, and with all the neighbourly help that was forthcoming, this did not suffice to feed the family, so it was fortunate that there was another source of livelihood for almost anyone in South Africa who chose to use it.

Ever since the historic day in 1867 when the children of farmer Van Zyl near Hopetown had picked up the pebbles which proved to be diamonds, the Orange Free Staters had kept their eyes on the development of the mining industry. At first indeed the harassed little Republic had hoped that the land where the most furious digging occurred formed part of its own territory, but, as many claimants to the new Golconda at Kimberley had appeared, the jurisdiction which President Brand attempted to exercise from Bloemfontein was challenged. Not only did the sister republic of the Transvaal also demand this region, but the Griqua chief, Waterboer, was backed up with all authority of the Queen, and in due course ceded his rights to the Crown of England. Within a year or two of the discovery Griqualand West had more inhabitants than the whole of the Orange Free State, and President Brand, a realist of realists, decided to make the best possible terms for his country. £90,000 in cash was ultimately paid to his Treasury. For a

group of mines that have yielded something like £250,000,000 since then, this does not seem much of a price, yet Brand knew that he was up against forces too great for his little country to master. Something warned him that the Orange Free State might not survive an influx of uitlanders or foreigners, such as proved so fateful to the Transvaal a generation later. Making a virtue of necessity he gave up his claims to the diamond fields with a good grace. While the handsome, long-bearded First Citizen duly received an English knighthood, his superlative tact and wisdom never lost him the confidence of his own burghers. In twenty years, from 1868 to 1888, the little pastoral commonwealth became the "Model Republic". Certainly it had more than one claim to that enviable nickname; in proportion to its size it spent more on education than any other country in the world. Despite its lack of resources, its finances and its credit stood higher than those of lands many times bigger. Its Civil Service attracted the best brains in South Africa. Tolerance prevailed for all religions. No breath of racialism could be noticed. English and Dutch lived together in an amity still to be emulated.

The close proximity of the Kimberly Diamond Fields, only a few miles off the Western border, must, President Brand considered, bring reflected prosperity to his own country. He did everything to encourage trade, and a large percentage of the Orange Free Staters were soon occupied in that most characteristic of old South African industries, known as "transport riding". Mining material, building material, food and other stores required by the 20,000 or 30,000 diggers living in Griqualand had to be carried from the nearest railheads, 600 to 700 miles down-country. Among the transport-riders was Christiaan Rudolph de Wet. The young man soon was a regular visitor at the open-air market at Kimberley, carting pumpkins, bags of maize, loads of forage and a hundred other commodities

to the noisy, blistering-hot rialto on the veld, with its background of crooked lines of corrugated iron houses. Each time he came to Kimberley he saw new things -- steam-engines hoisting buckets of earth from the great crater; hotels offering comforts unknown on the farms, at fabulous prices; a Stock Exchange where shares were bought and sold, to the accompaniment of a din bewildering; the telegraph, that brought this mushroom city into touch with the Coast and even with the lands overseas.

De Wet said little of all this when he returned to his home, but it was easy to see how much he enjoyed the contrasting repose of his own little farm. Soon, by learning to keep his wits with the gentry who were his customers, he managed to accumulate a little money. He too would occasionally buy a load of produce and sell it at a profit. He found there were crafts practised on the farms useful in urban surrounding. One of these was butchery, and he added to his income by the slaughtering of oxen or sheep.

Bit by bit his journeys extended in directions other than that of Kimberley. He found himself steering his oxen Northwards to the drifts or fords of the Vaal River and into the Transvaal. Men here were digging for gold, at Lydenburg, and in the "Low Country". While the Orange Free State steadily grew in happiness and in prosperity, the progress of the other Boer Republic was by no means so steady. Prospecting had gone on since the sixties, yet no payable fields had been located, and the diggers made a bare living.

The election of the high-minded but rather visionary President Burgers resulted in a fruitless attempt to build railways but money gave out, the natives rose, and Downing Street decided to step in. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, an experienced administrator from the colony of Natal, was instructed to occupy the Transvaal.

Accompanied by 24 policemen he arrived at Pretoria in 1877. The Volksraad protested; President Burgers resigned, and, without a shot being fired, the country was placed under the Union Jack. Indignation swept the Orange Free State as it did the Transvaal.

When Christiaan de Wet heard the news, as he afterwards told, he was busy building a wall on his farm. "The Transvaal must come back," he muttered grimly. Like most of the Boers, he frankly disbelieved the excuse given for the anexation. The idea of white men being endangered by blacks sounded laughable to him, even though the Basuto War had been so hard fought. No Free Stater imagined that Europeans could ultimately be beaten by Natives. Was not the whole of the South African history in itself a proof that their contention was right?

Outwardly the country looked calm enough. The friendliness and hospitality of the Boer was such that even the foreign invasion could hardly upset it. British officials travelling round had little to complain of the reception given them by the farmers. Here and there might be a surly welcome, but South Africa was still sufficiently wild for solidarity to be maintained among all Europeans. Traders hastened up and down the roads with their gold, soldiers of the new garrisons marched to and from the various small forts erected at strategic points, diggers continued washing gold in the creaks of the Low Veld, and the Governor of the Cape, Sir Bartle Frere, who paid a visit of inspection, considered that there was very little reason for worrying about the pacification of the country.

Christiaan de Wet, however, was a Boer, and he could see deeper. The bitterness which gripped the nation had not yet died away, the old long-beards would tell him, as they sat with him at night, and they spoke with a freedom they would never adopt in addressing an Englishman. No matter what the British Government did, the

Transvaal would not be reconciled to losing its independence. From the bottom of his heart Christiaan de Wet, trained in the tradition of emigrants who had left the Cape forty years earlier, sympathised with this point of view.

At Lydenburg, the centre of the gold country, in the tumbled Eastern mountains that looked down on Portuguese territory, he parked his wagon and for a while attempted to make his living as a butcher. Survivors of those days say that when practising this trade he looked more warlike than when he commanded the Orange Free State forces in the Field. The butchery was not a success, but the Transvaal, with its richer pastures and greater resources, tempted him to fetch his family and make his home there.

CHAPTER 4
MR. GLADSTONE AND MAJUBA.

"It was impossible, for many important reasons, most of which have been thoroughly discussed in previous correspondence, that Her Majesty's authority should be removed from the Transvaal." ... It was in the Albemarle Hotel, off Piccadilly, that those sturdy Transvaalers, Paul Kruger, Petrus Johannes Joubert, the Rev. S. J. du Toit, and Mr. W. E. Bok, their Secretary, sat reading an official message just delivered from Downing Street.

Christiaan de Wet was back in the Orange Free State, while all this happened. Not far from the Vaal River, in the district of Vredefort, he had bought himself a farm, only to sell it again after a few months, and move to the site of the present village of Koppies, to a property named "Weltevrede" (Well Content).

When the Delegation returned from England and broke the news to the Burghers that the Union Jack was there to stay, de Wet tasted to the full the wave of bitterness and anger

which swept from one lonely homestead to another. Men met after dark and discussed the next step. What few newspapers were published in the land were read from end to end. What had been foretold as a threat to the Transvaal now suddenly, in 1879, became the fate of Natal. Thousands and thousands of well-drilled black soldiers, some armed with the traditional stabbing assegaais, and others with guns smuggled in by the unscrupulous whites, marched on that Colony. Lord Chelmsford, who commanded the troops, forgot the advice given to him by none other than the future President Kruger -- his warning against the Zulu tactics of encircling the enemies by a hornshaped formation, and his plea for camps of wagons, properly secured whenever the sun went down. Result: The massacre of 800 troops at Isandhlwana, a desperate series of fights around improvised defences on the Natal frontier, the death in a skirmish, due entirely to carelessness, of the Prince Imperial of France, who had volunteered for the campaign, and a depressing series of blunders that cost the British taxpayers something like £9,000.000. As if this were not enough, the Basutos again went to war -- not with the Orange Free State, as so often happened -- but with the soldiers of the Queen in the Cape Colony.

"They want to teach us how to defend ourselves against natives", snorted the old man. "Why, we may have to come and help *them,* as things are looking now." Even after the tide turned against the Zulus, and the British Government, by sending out thousands of fresh troops, began to recover ground, the prestige of England had declined heavily.

The British Lion was not what he had been in former days.

Gatherings were held in various parts of the Transvaal. At first they were small groups, just a

few farmers at a time. Messages were exchanged about stores of arms that had never been seen by the British, about the possibility of securing access to the arsenals, about the scattered nature of the garrisons. Before long the meetings were of larger size, though they were generally far out in the country, where there was no probability of interference by the authorities.

Unexpected support came from overseas. Mr. Gladstone was on the warpath, and about to begin the great election campaign that brought him back into office. In the thick of the Midlothian turmoil, he declared: "Ten thousand Zulus have been slain for no other offence than that they have attempted to defend, against British artillery, their hearths and their homes." On the question of Transvaal independence, he was equally emphatic, and hopes rose among the -- farmers on the High Veld. "Our territory, not our strength has increased", Gladstone thundered, "we are like a landlord who buys an estate on the condition that he pays all the rates and taxes and receives no rents. That is the meaning of adding places to the Empire like the country of the Boers in South Africa."

Driven by some strange urge, Christiaan de Wet chose this time to settle permanently in the Transvaal. Sympathy with the Sister Republic was growing daily in the Orange Free State, where it was generally recognised, better even than amongst the English, that a war must break loose soon. De Wet was one of hundreds to declare openly that they would fight for the Transvaal. When his wagons and his herds reached Viljoensdrift, the nearest ford across the Vaal River, they had a comparatively short distance to go to the farm Rietfontein, not very far from what is now Johannesburg. Once again his wife unpacked her household treasures in a modest homestead.

Red-coated troops marched frequently along the main roads, but hope had not yet died. Paul

Kruger and Piet Joubert, the tried emissaries of the nation, now down at Cape Town, were negotiating with the Government and exchanging letters with Downing Street. After seven years of exile, Mr. Gladstone was back at No. 10. Early in July came the Prime Minister's reply to their latest message: "Having regard", he wrote, "to all the circumstances in the Transvaal, as also in the rest of South Africa, as well as the necessity of anticipating the renewal of irregularities which might lead to terrible consequences, not only for the Transvaal, but for the whole South Africa, it is our view that we cannot advise Her Majesty the Queen to give up her sovereignty over the Transvaal. Yet in conjunction with the maintenance of this sovereignty we wish to give to the white population of the Transvaal, full freedom to conduct their own affairs. We believe that this freedom can be most easily and quickly granted to the Transvaal, by making her a member of a South African Confederation".

When the answer was carried, first by train to the railhead at Beaufort West, and thence by coach to Pretoria; and beyond, every farmer knew what it meant -- War.

Rain was pelting down, hour by hour and day by day, as the columns of mounted Boers trudged their horses through the mud of the Eastern Transvaal. District after district sped by, all equally wet after weeks of soaking. Had the summer of 1881 been less disturbed by political events the farmers would have looked forward to a record harvest. But the country was at war and only women and children remained in the homesteads and tried to till the lands.

In one commando of burghers, slithering their horses in the direction of the Vaal River at Standerton, rode Christiaan de Wet.

Much had happened since that Dingaan's Day at Heidelberg, when thousands of men stood under the hot sun and raised their hands as they took

the oath to free their country. Even while the meeting was in progress, the fighting had already begun. Potchefstroom, former capital of the country and still one of its most important centres, had risen against the English Garrison on December 15, 1880. Forty "Rooibaadjes" (Red jackets) under Major M. Clarke were penned in the Government offices of the town, away from its pleasant avenues of willows and murmuring irrigation ditches. They tried to defend the place by boarding up windows and doors, but could not hold out longer than three days, and on December 18, 1880, the old Republican flag again waved over a building, where it had not been seen for more than four years. The Fiery Cross had travelled far and wide through the Transvaal. De Wet joined one of the columns ordered towards the nearest British territory, the colony of Natal. Fifteen hundred men had turned out almost overnight from the neighbourhood of his farm and were on the move towards the South-East. The young Free Stater was delighted he was to be in the field. The mobility of the burghers, with no long columns of supplies; the welcome which they received at every farm and village, warmed his heart. He was 27, though he looked a, great deal older, thanks to his sturdy figure and his obvious touch of Leadership. In his hand he carried the famous little sjambok or whip of rhinoceros hide, which remained a symbol of his energy long after this campaign.

Commandant-General Piet Joubert, the same one who had visited London with President Kruger, in quest of a peaceful settlement, was now at the head of the army. Grown old in the many campaigns against the natives, fought by an earlier generation, he was a genial and popular officer. Not a uniform was to be seen in all his motley force. Bell-shaped top-hats, antique straws, with handkerchiefs wrapped round them, curious frockcoats, homemade shirts and trousers -- to the smart military men from abroad it

seemed the caricature of an army, until it was encountered in the field. No time was wasted on training the recruits, for everyone could shoot and was a born hunter. In his saddle-bag each warrior had biscuits, dried biltong, made from the meat of cattle and game, some coffee, and a supply of home-grown tobacco. Bullets were either cast on the farms, or purchased in the stores. As they trekked across the veld the riders sang psalms to keep up their spirits. Officers would frequently be addressed as "Oom" (Uncle) and in their turn would call their men “Neef” or “Nephew”.

A telegraph line ran between Potchefstroom and Cape Town, the only one linking the Transvaal to the outside world. The nearest British troops were in Natal and Sir George Pomeroy Colley, a former land-surveyor who had become a very popular and successful Governor, took charge of them in his capacity as commander of her Majesty's local forces. He had only been in office a few months when this ordeal came to him. Detachments of the 60th Rifles, the 58th Regiment, the 21st Regiment, the Natal Brigade and some artillery made up a thousand men -- all that he had at his disposal.

While the Red-coats and the Blue-coats marched through the foothills of the coastal ranges towards the North, the Boers steadily approached the border and, as the New Year, 1881, commenced, de Wet with his Heidelberg commando looked down into the Garden Colony. Dominating the hilly country that marked the frontier was a great, flat-topped peak, now wreathed in clouds and driving mist and nearly 5,000 feet in height. Amajuba was the name the Natives had given it. Lesser heights stretched southwards towards the pass known as Laing's Nek. Both armies moved forward very slowly through the rains, and more than once scouts lost their way in the fogs that lay, thick as in the Scottish Highlands.

Only one place seemed to offer Colley a chance to take his forces through the Drakensberg to the Transvaal, and that was Laing's Nek. Here then General Joubert set up his headquarters, and here de Wet too waited for the British. In those bitterly cold and damp weeks; when the Boers lay on guard in the mud, and the Tommies, far below, dug their eight pieces of ordinance out of one quagmire after another, Christiaan never lost his cheeriness nor his watchfulness. At the Councils of War, which were held more or less in public, his suggestions carried so much weight that he was entrusted with a force of 200 men to search for the enemy. He found them near Mount Prospect, not far from Majuba, and on January 28, 1881, de Wet for the first time faced a white army. With bright-blue tunics, made as though to serve as targets for the Boers, the British soldiers, tried to climb the slithering muddy hillside at Laing's Nek.

British artillery opened fire and a number of Transvaalers, unused to this form of assault, scattered from their shelter in old cattle kraals. Then the British advanced to screen the men on foot. Christiaan himself walked up and down, behind the edge of the hill, to prevent the men from getting in each other's way.

"There", he related afterwards, "I came upon a small fellow, lying at the foot of another burgher. "Get out of the road". I shouted at him. He answered: "I am almost dead, please let me go to the horses". So I gave him a rap with my sjambok, saying; "Run after the horses, and if anything is wrong, even with one of the bridles, I'll teach you a lesson". In this free-and-easy warfare General Joubert himself was not above walking under fire.

General Nicolas Smit was in charge of the section to which de Wet belonged. As they approached within range the advancing soldiers

for the first time saw the rows of Boers lying on their stomachs, their guns pointing at them.

The first murderous volley emptied almost half the saddles and, despite the bravery of the infantry, including particularly Major Burnie with the lst Dragoon Guards, who actually reached one of the Boer trenches, the wave of men melted away. Several of the British officers fell dead, and as the excited defenders swooped downwards, Field-Cornet de Wet was in the van.

Seventy-three dead and one hundred wounded were the losses of Sir George Colley's force on that ill-omened day, and it is typical of him that when he congratulated his men on their bravery, he added "the entire blame of the repulse rests on me".

President Brand, who was immensely respected by both sides, sent word to the Transvaal and to Downing Street, that he would try to mediate.

The fact that hundreds of his own burghers had joined the Republican forces was not all to his liking, and he formally called upon them to return, an invitation which was however disregarded.

At the Heights of Ingogo the armies again collided. Once more de Wet, under the leadership of General Smit, was under fire. This time the British artillery did less damage than before to the Boer position. As usual the Republicans lay hidden behind boulders, shooting at the individual gunners, and Sir George Colley himself missed a glancing bullet by a few inches. Thunder and lightning rolled through the hills and the downpour grew so heavy that the fight virtually came to a stop. When night fell they again retreated. Brigadier-General Sir Evelyn Wood set sail from England with thousands of reinforcements, landed his men, and, when the Boers tried to repeat their trick of cutting off his convoys, he

outmanoeuvred them. Colley resolved to meet the approach of help with a master stroke of his own. Far above on the skyline towered mighty Majuba, the stronghold which he could render as impregnable as the Basutos had made Thaba Bosigo. Scouts had told him that the flat top was still empty. The burghers believed no one could climb those steep crags. February 28, 1881 saw hundreds of British soldiers in dead, silence winding up the cliff paths through the night.

Looking upwards at the mountain as day broke the Boers scarcely believed their eyes, when they beheld helmets and the glittering weapons blinking down on them from the summit. According to de Wet himself. Commandant-General Joubert had himself envisaged the possible coup, and had ordered a special guard or brandwacht to be kept. On the fatal night they had not watched sufficiently. Cooking breakfast on the hillside below, they discussed what should be done. Joubert came along. "You are going up to fetch them down", he said briskly. Some of the men had already put oxen into the wagons in preparation for a retreat, before General Smit spoke up: "Those who are not cowards must follow me". From the rush of those who wanted to help, sixty men were chosen as the storming party. One of them was Christiaan de Wet. Before they had climbed far, shots fell from above and came more heavily with each step.

What happened on the summit is hard to say after these many years. General Colley was there, cheering on his men. The soldiers of the 28th Regiment, 60th Rifles and 92nd Regiment, and the sixty-four sailors of the Naval Brigade kept up steady firing until the Boers below came within a few hundred yards. At that point the bullets went over the heads of the attackers, and it was no longer possible to see them in the scrub of the precipices. Three scattered parties were moving, one under Field-Cornet Joachim Ignatius Ferreira, one under Field-Cornet

Johannes Roos, and one under Assistant Field-Cornets D. Malan and S. Trichardt. De Wet was with the party that swarmed up the North-East side, hanging on to the grass to prevent themselves crashing into the abyss. Somehow they crawled up until they saw the little heaps of stones, behind which the soldiers had taken shelter. Why the nerve of the defenders should suddenly break is a mystery, but they no sooner saw the Boers on the top of the hill than they turned and fled. "Fix bayonets!", was the order given; nobody moved. "The officers in desperation clutched the men by the throat and threatened them with pistols", said a colonist who was present. Over the edge poured the Boers in relentless flood. The top of Majuba was almost level, with puddles of water here and there. There was a cry. "Look at Colley!", shouted someone. He lay on the ground with a bullet through his head, in front of his whole force.

"He met his death bravely", said de Wet, "for he was among the first to be killed."

The Boer who fired that bullet made history. It meant the virtual end of the campaign. Not only had the Republicans lost but a single man and five wounded, as against 92 dead, 134 wounded, and 59 prisoners on the British side, but the Tommies were now without a commander. He was buried with many others during the truce that followed, and Dutch as well as English saluted the body of the gallant Governor whose last campaign had been so unfortunate. Less than a week after, on March 3, President Brand sent a telegram to Sir Evelyn Wood, proposing an armistice.

Before the final terms were agreed upon, which restored the independence of the Transvaal under the suzerainty of Queen Victoria -- an expression of much ambiguity -- Christiaan de Wet home again at Heidelberg, carrying a Highland dirk as a souvenir, found his wife had taken refuge with

a neighbour, trekking through the heavy rains with her children. Hard times had come upon them, but she had "sown the grain, milked the cows, and doctored the animals". Within a few months, however, he had again to ride down to Natal, but under happier auspices, to be present on the historic day.

As he passed the 300 Free Staters, who had served in the Transvaal army without legal permission, old President Brand in his fatherly manner went up to them and shook his finger in a reproving way.

"Naughty boys", he said.

CHAPTER 5
THE ABSENTEE CANDIDATE

WOMEN'S voices and the laughter of children mingled with the clatter of cooking-pots and the drone of the Native drivers, ministering to the oxen pastured on the green field in the centre of Pretoria. Dozens of waggons stood at all angles, outspanned in the shadow of a church, by far the finest building in the Transvaal capital. Around Church Square were cottages and stores, each with its verandah, belonging to the leading townsfolk. On the same site where to-day stands the stately home of the Transvaal Provincial Council, was yet another building, thatched like all the others, its front balcony supported by roughly-trimmed poles -- the Parliament House of the South African Republic in 1884.

Inside His Honour the State-President, Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, better known as Paul Kruger, wearing over his jacket a sash of office, embroidered with the national coat-of-arms; while on the benches round him sat the deputies of all districts between the Limpopo River and the Vaal, bearded to a man, and each in the same type of go-to-meeting attire. A new member was being sworn in on the great official Bible. He represented the vast but minutely-populated Lydenburg area, as big as the whole of Holland,

yet with fewer whites than an average European village. Christiaan de Wet, holding up his hand, swore allegiance, as the Constitution prescribed, to "Land en Volk" (Land and People).

Britain had said goodbye to the Transvaal. Her soldiers had withdrawn, as Mr. Gladstone had promised when the negotiations began at O'Neil's homestead near Majuba and only one little grain of comfort was left to her wounded pride; independence was granted subject to the Suzerainty of Her Majesty, and a "Resident", whose duties were the same as that of a Consul, was to be appointed. What exactly that word "Suzerainty" meant was never really settled and gave rise to infinite trouble less than twenty years later. Soon after it became apparent that greater certainty on doubtful points must be obtained and President Kruger, newly-elected to that office by a large majority in May, 1883, was instructed to proceed to Europe to settle the matter. Once again the old statesman from the veld and his assistants took a long voyage across the ocean, this time in the *Roslin Castle.* At Plymouth a deputation of South African students, most of whom were studying theology or medicine in Edinburgh, welcomed the Boer delegates. In the address which J. Murray, G. D. Malan and a number of others handed to the visitors they declared: "As we are convinced that nothing will do so much for the well-being and prosperity of our country, as good relations between England and the South African States, we express the wish that your labours in this country may be crowned with success". In his reply President Kruger spoke of his gratitude to the representatives of the various republics and colonies in our Southern Hemisphere and to the descendants of the *various races of which our nation consists",* a phrase foreshadowing the bigger Union that was still a long road ahead for South Africa.

While all this was happening Christiaan de Wet was visiting his family in the Orange Free State. He still lived at Rooikoppies in the Heidelberg district of the Transvaal, where he now had built himself a fine homestead. His friends re-elected him Field-Cornet, and the solemn swearing-in took place afresh at Paardekraal, where a great service of Thanksgiving was held on the Dingaan's Day after Majuba. Transport riding was no longer possible, because of his duties to the State. By collecting the substantial amount of £630 arrear taxes from the Natives, he made a considerable impression upon black and white, for it was no easy matter to go from hut to hut and gather shillings and sovereigns, due to the State, out of the unwilling and impecunious tribesmen. Though the work did not appeal to De Wet, he realised that it was necessary, and he devoted his usual driving power to this task as he did to all others.

Few people are more impressed by sheer personality and less impressed by showmanship than the Boers. With his pawky sense of humour, slow and frequently stern method of talking, and his habit of giving his decision in few but very definite words, "Oom Krisjan" was a man after their own hearts. Perhaps his success was less due to tact than to forcefulness. In any event he was known as a "gawe kêrel", an expression most nearly translated by the American "some boy".

De Wet was not particularly interested in his neighbours, but he saw them at church and in his own living-room; they came to him to drink strong coffee and to talk about the herds and crops and how President Kruger was getting on with the English. So little was he concerned with their opinion that he did not even take into account the prestige value of his Field-Cornetcy. Within less than two years he threw up the appointment and, once more seized by the

wanderlust, trekked 300 miles towards Lydenberg and the more fertile regions of the Low Veld. Once again Christiaan saw diggers, as he had done at Kimberley, though they sought not for diamonds, but for gold. Here there was something of the atmosphere of old-time California. Men in corduroy breeches sluiced in the creeks for the precious dust and lone men set off for the hills to prospect among lions as well as treacherous Natives. Fever was the curse of the Lydenburg district, and this was the reason de Wet did not remain.

One day when he came home from his work he found a deputation waiting for him on the verandah. One of the burghers stood up and made a little speech!

"We would like you to accept this requisition to become our Member of the Volksraad", said the visitor. Christiaan de Wet was lukewarm. Flattered though he felt at the chance of entering the highest body in the land, he did not think it sufficiently important to postpone a trip to the Orange Free State, and he told his would-be constituents in so many words that they would have to do the electioneering in his absence. This was, however, by no means unusual in the early Transvaal. Campaigning was regarded as the privilege of the voters and supporters, so de Wet set off with his family on a visit of some weeks to his father at Nieuwejaarsfontein, without in any way hampering the arrangements for his candidature. Having signed the paper accepting the nomination his duties came to an end.

His wagon disappeared towards the Vaal River, and there was a great welcome for the family from the old Mr. Jacobus de Wet and the other folks. What a lot there was to talk about! The War; the Peace; the new railway, that was creeping from the Cape towards Kimberley and was likely soon to enter the Orange Free State; the reports of new gold discoveries in the Eastern Transvaal, along the De Kaap Valley; the news

that President Kruger and his comrades were back, with a brand-new Convention with England in their luggage-guaranteed to remove the Queen's influence once and for all. These and many other subjects were discussed. Yes, the world had changed. There were even diamond mines in the Orange Free State now... "Patience, Courage, Freedom, Immigration", was the motto of the Orange Free State, and the workings of Jagersfontein and Koffiefontein contributed considerably towards the realisation of these aims. The population now stood at 60,000 whites and 120,000 blacks.

Moshesh was dead. There was peace on the Basuto frontier and the former warriors rode down on their ponies in order to work for the farrriers. Schoolmasters from Holland, from Scotland and from the Cape arrived in shoals, and in no part of South Africa did fewer children lack an education. Such institutions as Grey College at Bloemfontein and Eunice High School for Girls drew pupils from far beyond the borders of the Model Republic. No wonder de Wet felt tempted to come back from the Transvaal. His own family urged him to return. Nieuwejaarsfontein had become a fine property, as the young man soon recognised. His father was thinking of retiring to the village.

"What about buying the farm, Christiaan?", he asked, and Christiaan nodded. At home a surprise awaited him. He had almost forgotten about the Volksraad, and now he found himself duly elected. Unwillingly he went to town to see his lawyer. The advice he received was ingenuous. Since it was possible for a man living in the Orange Free State to attend the Assembly at Pretoria, de Wet told the voters he would oblige them and keep his seat.

Volksraad meetings usually coincided with the quarterly Nachtmaal. From all parts of the country the wagons plodded to the nearest town and, after intervals varying from one to three

months, the burghers and their wives and children met each other again, attended Divine service, took Communion, had their babies christened, their sons and daughters confirmed or married, their wills drawn up, their lawsuits prepared, their stocks of groceries replenished, their agricultural implements overhauled and their affairs for this world and the next generally put in order.

So it came about that one afternoon in 1884 Christiaan de Wet stood in front of the old President and, raising his hand, repeated the formula: "Being chosen as a member of the Volksraad of this Republic, I declare, promise and solemnly swear that I have not given any gifts to anyone to obtain this position, that I shall conduct myself in accordance with the constitution of this Republic to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I shall have no other aim than furthering the happiness of the citizens in general, so help me God."

In the bar of a hotel at Bloemfontein stood a tall man, with fair untidy hair. He wore his slouch hat at the back of his head, and his white trousers contrasted oddly with the blackness of his coat and with his butterfly collar. Not, however, the style of his clothes, nor the fact that he spoke Oxford English to those who stood around him, nor that he drank more glasses of whisky than was usual in the capital of the Orange Free State, caused bystanders to watch the stranger. Everybody knew that, despite his mere thirty-two years, he was probably the richest man in South Africa. Mr. Rhodes chatted to a group of burghers, occasionally drawing his own travelling companions into the conversation. Everyone knew the diamond magnate from Kimberley was successfully progressing with his amalgamation of rival companies, and that he was now a member of the Cape House of Assembly. Stock-priccs and railways, customs duties and land settlement; more irrigation dams for the farmers; the need for subduing the wild

Matabele north of the Transvaal; the importance of closer links between the Cape, Natal and the two Republics. Such were the topics of which they remembered he had talked in that Bloemfontein bar-parlour. No one, not even the most fanatical Republican patriot, could take exception to Cecil Rhodes' sentiments.

Somewhere on the verandah, however, stood de Wet, watching him silently.

Then, without exchanging a word, he went upon his way. "That fellow has a wonderful head", he said to his friends. "No one can deny it, but he will do us harm..."

More or less against his wishes Christiaan was becoming well-known in the land. To all appearances he was merely one of several thousand farmers who formed the backbone of the Orange Free State. But his neighbours knew him as one of the most progressive among them, who delighted to try out new implements and new methods of cultivation.

In a good year he harvested nearly a thousand bags (or 3,000 bushels) of maize on Nieuwejaarsfontein. His herds flourished and his homestead was the best-kept in the district. Still, none of these achievements sufficed to explain Christiaan's popularity. The quiet young man was listened to with respect at public gatherings, whether on questions of the day or when giving instructions as a Field-Cornet. Though bigger positions were offered to him, it was not until 1889 that he agreed to stand for election to the Orange Free State Volksraad. For some years he sat in the parliament of the Transvaal as well -- a tribute to the free and easy ways of the age. He would make the trek northwards two or three times a year to Pretoria, usually in his own turnout, a smart Cape cart, drawn by a neat pair of greys, and driven by his black coachman.

Problems piled up faster in the land of President Kruger than in that of President Brand. Gold on a scale never before witnessed had been struck in the wild Eastern mountains of De Kaap. Within a year Barberton, the new village among the hills near the Portuguese frontier of the Free State found itself a community of 6,000 whites -- bigger than Pretoria, the capital of the Republic.

Scarcely forty miles from Pretoria itself, a greater gold-field was found on the Witwaters-rand. Before 1886 was out a large chain of farms had been thrown open by the President for pegging claims. First in hundreds, then in thousands, diggers made their way to this bleak tract of windy veld. For a while it even seemed as though Christiaan's own old farm near Heidelberg might be included in the magic zone, for the everwidening area staked off by miners came exceedingly near to it. De Wet, however, was not interested. To him Johannesburg -- that camp built up over-night out of tents, wagons and houses walled with sods -- was just another Kimberley -- a rather noisier, nastier and more aggressively wealthy version of the Cape community. The growth of the new town soon put anything on the diamond fields far into the shade. Of railways there were none in the Transvaal, but the diggers willingly paid colossal freights for ox-wagons to convey their machinery and stores. Costly furniture was brought out straight from Europe to adorn the hotels and homes where they took their ease. A telegraph line was rushed up to serve Johannesburg, and the Stock Exchange turned over millions of pounds weekly. Expensive stars, imported from London to perform in tin theatres, drew houses that would have been envied by many a West End cashier. Before proper roads had been made, the banks in the new town were handling more money than did the rest of South Africa put together. Telephones imported by the Uitlanders for their own use led the Post Office into competition. Horse-trams trotted up and

down Johannesburg, while the gas lamps paled before the first electric lights. The primitive system of licenses for prospectors, and of mining-titles for diggers, proving completely inadequate, Paul Kruger decided that a system of concessions, largely modelled on American precedent, would best meet the case: so a bill to this effect was drafted and, for the first time the President found himself listening to de Wet as a debater. The longbeards sat back in their chairs when they beheld Christiaan arise and thunder against the measure. He warned against monopolies; he told of high finance and the power of big companies, as he had seen them at Kimberley. He argued that the individual digger was a better citizen; he foreshadowed bigger fields that the law would not be able to control. Though de Wet was voted down,[1] everyone allowed that it was a good speech and the tribute of Paul Kruger warmed his heart: "I saw how you opposed me in the Volksraad, but I have got to like you in spite of that".

Pretoria was a relief from all this. It still had pleasant irrigation rivulets along avenues shaded by weeping-willows and hedges of roses. The President still sat on the verandah of his house early in the morning, ready to meet visitors and to offer them the cup of coffee, for which the Government allowed him a "Koffiegeld" of £500 a year. The Orange Free State was still more peaceful, though even there eternal clouds of dust that hovered over all roads leading North, told that the day of the Uitlander had come. Unending caravans of ox-wagons, Cape-carts and mail coaches ploughed up the earth, until the tracks were hundreds of feet wide, and the outspans at night could scarcely cope with all the campers.

Railways were wanted, so the Progressives preached, both in the Transvaal and in the

[1] As events subsequently proved the new Gold Law had to be changed more than once.

Orange Free State. Few objected in principle, but many had their doubts as to the method of securing them. Above all, President Kruger thought that the Transvaal must not depend solely on outlets to the British Cape of Good Hope but must have her own railway to the sea, serving the Portuguese harbour of Lourenco Marques. For years, while this undertaking hung fire, he stopped short the lines from the Cape and Natal at the Transvaal frontier. President Brand, on the other hand, strongly favoured a railway connection between the Orange Free State and the Cape, whose system ended just South of the Orange River. He also realised that his little country, whose entire budget was only £190,000 a year, could never finance the 452 miles, costing £2,800.000, needed to traverse the land to the Transvaal.[2] So it was suggested that the Cape Railways, which had all the money of England behind them, might build the system and run it on behalf of the Government at Bloemfontein. Feeling ran high among the burghers and all over the country protest meetings took place. "Anti-Railway Conferences" sat at Dewetsdorp, Ladybrand and Brandfort. Christiaan de Wet and his brother Jan de Wet of Maboela were the leaders of the opposition. "Oom Krisjan" presided at one big meeting at Dewetsdorp, where such points as these were made:

(a) All railways are unnecessary;

(b) They are detrimental to transport-riding by wagon;

(c) They are injurious to horse-breeding;

(d) They are likely to entail heavy land-taxes;

(e) They will encroach on property rights.

[2] In 1886 the total property of the Free State Government was £ 530,000 while the public debt amounted to £170,134.

Undeterred, a special session of the Volksraad was called: On this occasion de Wet took a step which foreshadowed the far more serious incident of his later career. "Armed Protests" were threatened by certain Boers if the Government persisted in measures thought likely to imperil the independence of the country. Christiaan was with the commando that waited outside Bloemfontein while the Parliament argued about the law. In spite of the strength of his opinions he was amongst the first to acknowledge that a satisfactory compromise had been reached, and the incident, which might so easily have caused grave trouble, ended in the peaceable departure homewards of the protesters.

The prominence de Wet gained on this occasion was of great use to him after his election to the Orange Free State Volksraad in 1889, as member for the Upper Modder River Ward. In the Parliament of fifty-five delegates the procedure was very similar to what he knew in Pretoria. Any citizen might walk in and listen to the debate in the tiny "Raadsaal". When Oom Krisjan first took his seat, the Parliament met in a long single-storeyed house with green shutters. "Black coat, black trousers, black waistcoat and black hat" was prescribed, but as there was no regulation concerning shoes, delegates were not above coming to the sessions in velskoens of raw-hide. Details of attire were actually specified by law, and in the Transvaal also the standing orders of the Legislature, adopted on May 12, 1882, laid down, in Section 14: "Members are obliged to appear at the sessions, dressed in black with a white tie. The Chairman shall be dressed in a black toga, which shall be hemmed in front and along the collar, with a black border of velvet".

Hitherto considered a hothead, Christiaan now surprised his colleagues by his moderation. He upheld the Calvinist ban on Sunday trains; but he acknowledged the necessity for all children to

learn English in addition to Dutch, and did not fail to push all measures likely to assist the cause of education. When, however, it was suggested that an Englishman be appointed to teach his language at Grey College at Bloemfontein, Christiaan plumped for a Teutonic applicant, saying "French is taught there by a Hollander, so why not English by a German?"

De Wet was responsible for the State Grant for the Dutch Reformed Church, a measure which greatly added to his popularity. Once he moved the withdrawal of the modest £50 annual subsidy to the Catholics, but was over-ruled. Far in advance of his time was his scheme, in 1895, for the establishment of compulsory labour colonies for "Won't Works", a project only realised in South Africa during 1937. The one-time opponent now worked with great energy for more railways, particularly to the grain districts, for more irrigation dams (some of them are only now being built) and for "agricultural rehabilitation" as it would be called in to-day's jargon.

His views often underwent a change and characteristically he readily acknowledged in after years that President Kruger's Gold Law for the Transvaal had been drawn on correct principles after all, though he had fought against it. Similarly he came to see the virtues of a Customs Union, provided the interests of the Orange Free State were safeguarded.

Some indication of the prominence which he had gained was given in 1896 when Christiaan de Wet seconded the nomination of Marthinus Theunis Steyn as State President.

CHAPTER 6
AS THE SANDS RAN OUT

CLICK-CLACK, click-clack -- the old-fashioned press was running in the "Steam Printing Works" of Mr. C. Borckenhagen, at Bloemfontein, Printer by Appointment to the

Government of the Orange Free State. Beneath the coat-of-arms on the front page of the *Staats Courant* (State Gazette) stood a heading:

"Political Treaty with the South African Republic. The Orange Free State Republic, being convinced of the many bonds of blood and of friendship which unite the people of the Orange Free State with the people of the South African Republic:

"And being desirous of combining more closely the interests of both countries, and of adjoining States by means of a solemn alliance:

And having regard to this and hoping to bring about a Federal Union of both States, even though such Federal Union cannot come into operation for some years ..... does declare and these presents witness.....

There shall be eternal peace and friendship between the Orange Free State and the South African Republic who bind themselves reciprocally and declare themselves prepared to help each other with all their power and resources, if their independence should be threatened from without.....

THUS DONE AND SIGNED at Potchefstroom on this, the 9th day of March, 1890.
(Signed) F. W. REITZ,
State President of the Orange Free State.
(Signed) S. J. P. KRUGER,
State President of the South African Republic.

Misgivings were rife among the burghers when they read this document. Trouble was again brewing up north. Scarcely four years had passed since the first payable gold had been found on the Witwatersrand, and already there were nearly as many foreigners as Boers in the Transvaal-Englishmen, Colonials, Americans, Germans, French and Hollanders. Even now they were asking for the vote and if they got it, the real Transvaalers would soon lose all political power.

"No Taxation without Representation", that old cry from the far side of the Atlantic, was heard in the land. Wealth they had in plenty, those diggers and business-men, yet without citizen rights it did not satisfy them. Complaints continued about their disabilities and about the Government monopolies in various essential mining commodities, such as dynamite. President Kruger had been trying to slip into Matabeleland ahead of the British, only to find his way barred by swifter expeditions sent by Cecil Rhodes from the Cape. Hoping to secure a foreign port at Lourenco Marques, independent of the British Empire, he had again been hemmed-in. The intervening territory of Swaziland he could only administer in partnership with England. On the West the English occupied Bechuanaland, and the two little Boer Republics of Stellaland and Goshen, that might have served as a spearhead for a Transvaal advance, were also absorbed by them."

How lucky was the Orange Free State not to have goldfields! Indeed she was superior in one respect even to the Transvaal, since she owed no suzerainty to Britain.

Although Christiaan de Wet occupied the unique position of having sat in the Parliament of both countries, he relished the alliance as little as did most of his friends. Ever since the recent visit to Bloemfontein of Sir Henry Loch, the Governor of the Cape, and since the conclusion of an agreement authorising the British Colony to build the first railway on behalf of the Volksraad, all friction with the South had vanished. Incalculable possibilities arose from the new alliance, for all its guarantee of the Transvaal's independence; more than one Free Stater foresaw that it might ultimately cost his own country its independence.

But for the time being there was peace. The rails from Colesberg and Norval's Pont on the Cape border reached Bloemfontein on December 17,

1890, and approval was given for their extension to the Vaal. Trade boomed on both sides of that river, and de Wet found no difficulty in selling his excellent crops. Prompted by this he developed, for the first and last time in his life,' a "get-rich-quick" scheme. Potatoes were in great demand on the goldfields. Poor transport and insufficient production made their sale very profitable. There were signs that the next harvest might be a poor one, so Oom Krisjan decided to buy for a rise. For weeks and months the centre of his interests lay in the crowded Market Square of Johannesburg, where hundreds of wagons brought in the daily requirements of the city. Then came the new potato season and, instead of a poor harvest, it turned out to be an uncommonly good one. De Wet was ruined. It has been said that he went bankrupt, but I have found no evidence of this. At any rate he lost most of his money and with ten children found himself in middle-age facing the world again. His boys were growing up and life was not such a battle that he needed to worry unduly, yet the potato speculation remained an unpleasant memory to him for the rest of his days. Curiously enough potatoes retained their fascination for him. He grew them again near Kroonstad, in the Orange Free State, where he presently bought a farm, and there were nation-wide chuckles during the Boer War when, at Nicholson's Nek, he captured not only 1,200 British prisoners, but some thousand bags of "spuds". As Mr. Howard Hillegas, of the *New York World* declared, from personal observation, "They seemed to please him almost as greatly as the human captives".

The "Gay Nineties" ran on. Business, other than potatoes, brought de Wet to the Transvaal, and he took occasion to visit Oom Paul. "Where do you live now?", asked the old President: "By the Vaal River", answered Christiaan.

"Empty out the Vaal River", said Kruger, alluding to the alliance. Quick as lightning, de Wet retorted: "The Vaal River is empty".

It was his way of saying things had developed too far for the Orange Free State to go back. Thunder-clouds grew thicker and thicker. Negotiations for the solution of difficulties between the Transvaal and the " Cape brought little relief to the tension. Even when President Kruger agreed to reduce the period of residence which would qualify the Uitlanders for the vote from fourteen to seven and then to five years, the trouble did not abate. Now it was the Dynamite Monopoly, now the Dutch language basis to the system of education and now the urge to push on the railways from the Cape and from Natal to Johannesburg, ahead of the completion of the rival line to Lourenco Marques. The excessive number of Hollanders in the Civil Service excited criticism, as did the growing intimacy of the Government with the Kaiser. None the less the gold output rose from £80,000 in 1887 to £15,000,000 in 1899. Johannesburg had its first 100,000 inhabitants by 1895. The Free State told a similar though more sober tale of budget surpluses, additional railway lines (now often sponsored by de Wet himself) and of the erection of a stately new Raadsaal building.

With growing concern Bloemfontein watched the progress of the Uitlander organisations. Almost as soon as President Kruger himself, President Reitz was notified of the formation of a military camp on the Bechuanaland border, which the British fondly imagined was a secret; when Dr. Jameson, with his 511 men, swooped down into the Transvaal on the eve of Christmas 1895; the Orange Free State was on the alert as promptly as the Transvaal, and immediately Reitz, in the terms of the Alliance Treaty of 1890, agreed to mobilise his burghers. They met Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of the Cape, on his way to Johannesburg, in the hope of restoring peace.

At this awkward moment the resignation of President Reitz made it necessary to choose a successor. Judge Marthinus Theunis Steyn was

opposed as a candidate by John George Fraser. There was perfect equality in the land for both races; many of its highest offices were held by men of English or Scottish birth. Fraser himself was Chairman of the Volksraad, the Postmaster-General was A. C. Howard, the Superintendent of Education was the Rev. J. Brebner, the Secretary of Executive Council was Mr. H. B. Bell, the State Attorney was A. J. Macgregor, whilst names like Brain, Savage, Kestell, Conroy, Martin, Barlow, Baumann, Rorke, Dickens, Murphy, Smith, Hooper, Pratt and many others told of perfect political toleration. In the war that was soon to begin not a few of the English-speaking Free Staters were to lay down their lives for their new country.

In the heat of the moment, however, de Wet for once lost his usual judgment: "Ek sal my bloed stort voor ek 'n Engelsman sien President word", he thundered ("I shall shed my blood before I see an Englishman as President"). He toiled furiously for Steyn and was delighted to see him win at the polls in March, 1896.

Christiaan felt that war with England had only been postponed. A distant cousin of his, Sir Jacobus de Wet, (descended from a branch of the family which had remained in the Cape), in his capacity as British Agent in Pretoria, was urging the Reform Committee to surrender to Paul Kruger, and proved the anxiety of Downing Street to disown this "armed protest". De Wet no longer opposed Closer Union: on the contrary he joined a special delegation to Pretoria and at the special sitting of the Volksraad in 1896 he moved that notice be given to cancel the Extradition Treaty between the Orange Free State and Rhodesia: that the Customs' Union with the Cape and Natal be terminated; and that a stringent new law regulating the vote for foreigners be adopted by his own country, as it was in the Transvaal. Within a few months a new

secret Treaty of Alliance with the Transvaal was agreed to.

President Steyn, however, decided that the mediation which old President Brand had so successfully used in the war of 1880 might forestall another and greater outbreak. Christiaan de Wet, like any other burgher, waited for the worst. His term in the Volksraad had come to a close in 1898, and with it his official status disappeared. Ammunition had been stored, and the only standing force in the Republic, the 400 men of the State Artillery, with their smart equipment and Prussian uniforms, stood ready to take the field at any time..

The fateful year 1899 began. After months of discussion, President Kruger and Lord Milner, as Her Majesty's High Commissioner in South Africa, agreed, at President Steyn's request, to meet in Bloemfontein. Every man at the Cape-from the Chief Justice, Sir Henry de Villiers, to Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr, popular leader of the Dutch community, was trying to bring about a reconciliation. The Orange Free State Volksraad, like that of the Transvaal, held meetings, many of them in secret.

Four months more passed by: efforts were still being made on both sides. De Wet sat on his farm, busy with his herds and with his ploughing. One day a man rode up to his farm and handed a paper to him and to his three eldest sons, Kootie, Isaak and Christiaan junior. It was a summons to prepare for active service. He must have his riding horse ready, with saddle and bridle, also a rifle and thirty cartridges, failing which "thirty bullets, thirty caps, and half a pound of powder". Eight days' provisions must be in the saddlebag-Boer biscuits, biltong or sausages. The date was October 2, 1899. Nine days later, on October 11, 1899, Britain and the Republics were at war.

CHAPTER 7
DE WET'S FIRST VICTORY

DOWN the gang-planks of troop-ships, moored beside the wharves of Port Natal, British soldiers were tramping in long rows, heavily loaded with packs, wearing tropical helmets and the new "karki" uniforms for active service. Day by day they landed in their thousands, as the steamers arrived from India, from Britain and from other parts of the Empire.

They lined up along the quayside, they marched away through the cargo sheds at the Point into the town of Durban, and to the railway stations, for destinations up-country. Civilians cheered and waved little Union Jacks as the trains steamed out, but there was a heavy foreboding over the land. As the soldiers looked across the coastal sugar-fields, through which their coaches were climbing before reaching the highlands of Natal beyond Pietermaritzburg, other trains, going in the opposite direction, came by, crammed with women and children, some in compartmerits, some in goods trucks: the refugees who had been travelling for days on the overloaded lines from the Transvaal.

Although the anxiety which South Africans felt in those grim days, early in October, 1899, could not escape the newly-landed Tommies, their natural good spirits soon overpowered them. Cheerful military music was heard, and the topical songs of the day, such as "Goodbye, Dolly Grey" were rendered with gusto far into the night. Smart young officers in their brandnew uniforms talked about cricket-matches and polo ponies, and commiserations were expressed for those who would not reach South Africa before the end of the campaign, somewhere about Christmas.

Fifty miles away, among the crags of the Drakensberg, that dropped thousands of feet into the headwaters of the Tugela, the Boers lay waiting. In more or less continuous lines their

commandos were encamped for hundreds of miles along the mighty escarpment which marked the edge of the Queen's authority. Horses stood tethered in the little sidevalleys, while their masters, still dressed in farming clothes, but with cartridge bandoliers around their waists and Mauser rifles in their hands, took turns to watch the coming of the English; their coffee-kettles swung from iron tripods over the crackling fires, as though it were all a vast hunting expedition. Early rains were soaking the veld; the blanketed Basutos, sitting on their ponies, tended their herds of mountain sheep.

Native servants came with their masters, to cook and run messages. Only now and then a Red Cross, painted on the side of a horse-drawn ambulance, still without passengers, met the eye as something unfamiliar and disturbing. Around tables, set up in the open-air, the commandants sat in council, discussing plans for attack and defence or receiving the news brought in by scouting patrols. Now and then a baboon would bark on a neighbouring precipice, or a vulture would sweep upon some buck that had been slain.

At Bezuidenhout Pass, where the rough road from Natal climbed through a narrow gap in the Drakensberg, a commando from the district of Heilbron lay encamped, its members ranging in age from fifteen to seventy years. Old fellows with white beards shared tents with boys who only a few days earlier had been at school. Most of them were neighbours and many were relatives.

Christiaan de Wet was with them, not as an officer, but as a humble burgher, like the rest. History seemed to be repeating itself. The year of Majuba had returned; would another General Colley come to lead his forces to destruction? De Wet had his doubts. This time the English had not 5,000 but 50,000 men to draw upon, and behind them were untold millions.

As de Wet said goodbye to his wife, he made plans to be away for several years, even though he hoped from time to time to revisit his homestead. Cornelia was expecting another baby, but this did not prevent her from preparing the food which her men were to take along with them, from helping to pack the little two-wheeled cart for her husband's personal effects and papers, and from assisting in the choice of his ridinghorse. Kootie de Wet had been asked by his father to secure a mount for him, one that was "salted" against disease, good to look at and able to stand unlimited hardships. Proud to be entrusted with this mission, the lad brought along a magnificent charger, "Fleur" by name. This animal became world-famous ere many months had passed. An Arab by descent, it was as loyal and brave a companion as Christiaan ever possessed, and it lived to an honourable age after the fighting was over.

Among the first duties that fell to de Wet, once his commando reached its war station, was to assist in the election of a Commander-in-Chief for his section of the front. An experienced Boer, by the name of Marthinus Prinsloo, was chosen. His authority, however, was restricted to the border, the principal command for the Orange Free State being in the hands of the Transvaaler, General Piet Cronje, on the opposite side of the country.

While he was away in Natal an incident happened to de Wet, reminiscent of the occasion when he was elected against his will into the Transvaal Volksraad. Coming home after an uneventful day he was informed that his comrades had picked him as a Vice-Commandant, his duties being to relieve the Commandant should he be incapacitated. Within a few hours this actually came to pass. Commandant Steenkamp was taken ill and Christiaan de Wet found himself at the head of

600 men, joining in the invasion of Natal. Almost simultaneously long files of burghers trotted down every approach that led into that Colony from Botha's Pass, from Van Reenen's, from Tintwa's Pass, from Olivier's Hoek.

As they followed their new Vice-Commandant de Wet, the Free Staters were in high feather. At long last the period of waiting was at an end, and references of the Smiting of the Amalekites and similar Biblical happenings were frequently on their lips. Red roofs and white tents and the winding curve of a railway line told them the direction of Ladysmith. Already the Drakensberg was behind them, and they could see the flat-topped outline of a hill, Spionkop, later to be drenched in blood. They camped on the veld and continued at dawn. The railway line was crossed and, on October 24, 1899, thirteen days after war had been declared, Christiaan de Wet was under fire again.

Flashes of bursting shells sprung out of the plain towards Ladysmith, and shrapnel fragments hailed on to the heights where the Boers lay waiting, under orders to hold their fire. As usual the Republicans were told to hold their fire, their only gun giving up its pitiful attempt to answer back. Then came the assault of the "khakis", and the tactics that had prevailed at Laing's Nek were brought into effect at Modderspruit. The Tommies walked towards their death, throwing up their hands as they were hit. Survivors crouched among bushes and behind stones, but the bullets rattled down with dreadful accuracy, from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon. Then the burghers could be heard sounding a retreat, and, as the rain of lead died away, the stretcherbearers came out to pick up the wounded. Commandant de Wet was surrounded by his jubilant followers asking leave to pursue the enemy. "Enough for to-day", he said. "We are not strong enough to catch them".

The Boer Council of War decided, however, that the time had now come to lay siege to Ladysmith, a fatal mistake, as was shown later, for they might well have pushed on to the coast, leaving the British garrison isolated.

For nearly a month de Wet and his men in comparative peace, closed in along the hills surrounding Ladysmith. He saw little of the fighting, his men placed upon heights West and North-west of the British positions. At last heavy booming of guns, heard in the camp early on November 29, told them that there was trouble in the direction of an isolated hill known as "Swartbooi's Kop". Commandant Nel had long been ordered to occupy this with his men, and had not done so. Memories of Majuba flashed back upon the veterans under de Wet when they beheld the enemy at the top of the steep ascent, shooting almost straight down; and, as on that occasion nearly twenty years before, a storming party was called for.

From boulder to boulder, from bush to bush, the farmers skipped under the fusilade from above. They reached the northern end of the hill, without much loss, only to see the English firing across the flat top of Swartbooi's Kop from the shelter of ruined cattle kraals. The Boers charged. Every now and then a man dropped, but the suddenness of their appearance spoilt the accuracy of the English fire. Before long ; white flags were hoisted and Christiaan found himself in possession, not only of several prisoners, but of two Maxims and two mounted guns, minus ammunition, 1,000 Lee-Metford rifles and twenty cases of cartridges. Then only did he discover from his captives that essential portions of the guns had been lost during a stampede of mules, so that it had been almost purely a battle between riflemen. Before nightfall the unfortunate surviving British soldiers had retreated, 817 of their comrades having been captured and over 200 killed. Among those who cheered the victory was a twenty-four-year old,

clean-shaven young lawyer from Pretoria, Jan Christiaan Smuts, who met de Wet for the first time on that battlefield.

Looking up from their trenches around Ladysmith the British' soldiers saw hill after hill occupied by their foes. "The greatest reverse since Majuba" wired the war correspondents on the "Defeat of Nicholson's Nek" and, like Sir Pomeroy Colley in his day, the commander of the Ladysmith garrison, General Sir George White, accepted all the blame.

Worse was to come. Bulwana, an imposing hill overlooking the little town, fell into the hands of the Boers, and as November ran on, shells from Long Tom and from scores of other pieces of ordnance dropped almost incessantly on the defenders. Sweating gangs of white men and natives hoisted artillery on to the top of Pepworth and other hills, and four days after Nicholson's Nek defeat, the British abandoned the village of Colenso.

In their wildest dreams the sober commandos of Boers never expected such success as this. Not only in Natal but in the Cape was the tide running with them. Burghersdorp was evacuated by the British; so were Stormberg and Naauwpoort.

A Republican army was outside Kimberley, another one at Mafeking. Why not continue the invasion of Natal, pushing nearer the coast and cutting the railway wherever possible? Thousands of fresh troops were on the water and every day was precious. Thus thought General Louis Botha, as yet a comparatively unknown figure, and thus also reasoned Christiaan de Wet. Ten days later a telegram reached de Wet, in which President Steyn offered him the rank of "Vecht-generaal" or "Fighting General", to operate along the western boundary of the Orange Free State, 300 miles away from Natal, Christiaan's native diffidence came out once more. His old friend, the late Dr. J. D. Kestell,

has placed on record how de Wet with four or five friends went into the veld away from the camp "to confer in the sight of God". One of the men, Johannes Celliers, spoke up presently; "You must go". And go he did. "To tell the truth", said de Wet, "I should have much preferred to have gone through the campaign as a private burgher". But here were his friends, and here was a further wire from Abraham Fischer of the Executive Council: and so with a heavy heart he said goodbye to his Heilbron Commando.

CHAPTER 8
THE CAMP AT PAARDEBERG

LORD ROBERTS, England's crack soldier, with the fame of many Indian wars upon him, had just been made Commander-in-Chief, and so many troopships were reaching Cape Town that Table Bay could take no more, and an overflow port was opened at Saldanha Bay. Sheer weight of numbers was pressing back the Boers under Cronje along the Modder River towards Paardeberg. The conical hill was passed which gave the place its name and he was concentrating his men on the protection of Bloemfontein, when the British troops under General French caught him up.

De Wet, the newly-appointed Vecht-generaal of the Orange Free State army, watched his Transvaal colleague's manoeuvres with growing anxiety. Now that he had his highly responsible post, he was immediately at loggerheads with Cronje. Those English were learning from their enemies, he pointed out. At Magersfontein they would have had far more serious losses had they not copied the Boers' tactics of digging trenches. Their guns were shooting better than before. Again and again de Wet pleaded with his stubborn old superior, to allow him to make raids against the English, to cut the railway lines serving Lord Methuen from behind, and to raise trouble among the colonists in the Cape. Somehow Cronje seemed to have lost his

judgment, for it was only when a vast force of English were advancing that de Wet was told to meet them with 350 burghers, and to hold them up. Like a good soldier, he did his best with the inadequate troops he was allowed. Not that he ever reckoned on anything like equality with the English, but his shrewd judgment told him that if he had 500 men instead of 350 and only two guns instead of none, he might have accomplished something. Once again he tried the Majuba tactics of storming a steep mountain. His burghers scaled the Koedoesberg, while Cronje's caravan coiled for miles into the Orange Free State. British artillery was brought to bear upon them and many valuable hours lost. Suddenly changing his mind, Cronje allowed Major Albrecht to take two guns to back up de Wet. With thirty-six men lie charged against the oncoming British mounted troops -- 800 or 900 of them. It seemed madness, with shrapnel beating down at about 400 yards, but they were saved by the sudden African dusk.

For days the manoeuvring continued. Forty to fifty thousand Britishers were trailing northward in the course of the "Big Push". De Wet remained detached from Cronje's force and did his best to hold them up. Danie Theron, the famous Boer scout, kept bringing in disturbing reports. Saved by a miracle from the assault of Roberts' cavalry at Koedoesberg he turned the tables on the British, who had suddenly drawn off under cover of night, and at Riet River secured a great collection of booty hastily left in the abandoned camp -- 200 wagons, with tinned meat, tinned fish, condensed milk, liquor, forage for animals, clothes, ammunition. It was the first of a very long list of such captures de Wet was to make in this war, which, in the aggregate, was to cost the British Treasury millions of pounds. Merely to remove this accumulation was no easy

matter, with his grazing oxen spread out for miles.

Isolated groups of English still lurked in the neighbourhood and the Free State scouts discovered a small group of about fifty or sixty who were surrounded. There followed an amusing attempt at bluff on both sides. Under the white flag an orderly appeared, asked for General de Wet and told him that a thousand men were about to relieve them; that they were fully supplied with stores and in a very strong position. De Wet smiled. "I will give you just enough time to go back and tell your officer that, if he does not surrender immediately, I shall shell him and storm his position". Ten minutes later the English were all prisoners.

Meanwhile on 17th February 1900 the British troops caught up the retreating forces of Cronje. With a sinking heart de Wet took stock of the position, yet he did not give up hope. If Cronje was willing to abandon his transport, he might still cut his way out from Paardeberg Camp. Calling his famous Danie Theron he asked whether it would be possible for him to make his way through the British lines. "Yes, General, I will go", said this King of Scouts. Early on February 27, the sentries on the British lines thought they saw somebody moving in the tall grass. They fired, but missed. Tattered, soaked and with the skin scraped off his hands and knees, Danie Theron slunk back to the schantzes, or emplacements, behind which de Wet had quartered himself.

Cronje had refused to break out, had refused to take advantage of the chances which de Wet had created. Fifteen thousand British troops lay around the camp. The Boers fought bravely. On a single day they lost 1,262 men, of whom 320 were killed. At six o'clock on the morning of February 27, de Wet saw a

white flag go up. Four thousand one hundred and five men had surrendered.

"I am glad to see you. You have made a gallant defence, sir", spoke dapper little Lord Roberts, as the heavily-built, tired old General came towards him. Cronje said nothing in reply, but some miles away de Wet and his commando, with more bitterness in their hearts than words could describe, rode northwards, in an effort to save their country's capital.

De Wet was now Commander-in-Chief, for all practical purposes, of the Orange Free State forces, and insisted on a standard of discipline which startled his easy-going underlings. That little sjambok had taught a couple of them some painful lessons, which had been widely discussed. Yet the force of tradition could not be disregarded, even by Christiaan de Wet, so every now and then the commando would be allowed to disperse, in a manner completely baffling to the British. They were told to assemble at a certain place on a certain day and, allowing for inevitable desertions, the system worked astonishingly well. The proverbial elusiveness of the General and his forces is in part accounted for by this. Other questions of discipline were not so easy to settle. For a long time the worst of these was the refusal of most of the Boers to abandon their convoys of carts and wagons, even after explicit orders had been circulated by President Reitz himself. Mile-long corteges of vehicles, carrying anything from ammunition to bedsteads, cluttered up the transport of the Republicans.

Many months passed before the wagons, that had contributed so largely to the defeat of Paardeberg, were abandoned by the remaining fighters. Strange were the mixtures of panic and desperate bravery, of uttermost good faith, and inexcusable desertion among the Boers. Nobody has been more outspoken on this than de Wet

himself, and it is borne out by every Afrikaner writer of the period. "Hands-Uppers" was the term of abuse bestowed by the Transvaalers and Free Staters on those of their men who walked over to the enemy. Christiaan de Wet's own brother was to be one of them.

Heavily leaning on the shoulder of the man who helped him out of his little two-wheeled horse-wagon, a tall old gentleman in a top-hat, with a fringe of white beard on his chin, climbed down to the sodden grass. Great clouds rolled over the heavens, and the clothes of the Boer soldiers, who stood with their cartridge bandoliers around them, waiting to shake hands with their guest, were damp from many hours of recent rain.

"Good day, President", said de Wet, as he clasped Paul Kruger's mighty fist; "Good day", said the burghers, in their turn. The President of the Transvaal Republic answered slowly, and then disappeared into Christiaan's tent. An orderly with a telegram was warned not to disturb them. If President Kruger had come all the way from Pretoria to Bloemfontein, and then 96 miles across the veld, by cart, there must be something pretty important in the air. The messenger took no notice but went in, and, within a minute or two both Kruger and the General were out of the tent. "Petrusberg in the hands of the English", read the wire.

"Inspan the horses", roared out de Wet, and the astonished native driver, who had scarcely turned loose his exhausted animals, began to collect the harness again.

"They're too near, President", said Oom Krisjan. "I am sorry, but you are not safe here". Krugger nodded. As the tragic old man took his leave, shells began to fall within a hundred yards of the camp.

Bloemfontein could no longer be held, though de Wet rushed across country to confer with President Steyn about the defence. Small groups

of men scattered over the veld wherever a road led towards home. Even Christiaan's sjambok could not prevail against such an outburst of hopelessness.

"War in Final Stages" the jubilant war correspondents accompanying the advancing British cabled to Fleet Street. A couple of railway coaches, steaming northwards Kroonstad, was all that was left of the Government machinery. Could anyone blame those ignorant of South Africa from assuming de Wet's decision to disband his commando was a sign that he too had thrown up the contest? The General himself was riding to Kroonstad on the northern boundary. An older campaigner than himself, General Piet Joubert, veteran of Majuba and of earlier wars, the rival of Paul Kruger for the Presidency of the Transvaal, fell in with him on the dusty road. At the moment Joubert had no command for he was taking stock of the prospects in order to devise some plan to save his country.

"Where are your men?", asked General Joubert, when he saw his colleague, travelling all alone.

"I have given them leave to go home for ten days", de Wet replied, and they have got to be back on the 25th".

"Do you mean to tell me that you are going to give the English a free hand while your men take their holidays?".

"I cannot catch a hare with unwilling dogs". Joubert snorted.

"You know the Afrikaner as well as I do", said de Wet. "It is not our fault that they do not know what discipline means. No matter what I said, the burghers would have gone home: but I give you my word that those who do come back will fight with renewed courage."

Christiaan's hair was turning grey. Men noticed it as he rode ahead of them and when he off-saddled there was something hard and decided in his walk. He had little time for jokes now -- not that he had ever been a humorist. His orders were curt and that little sjambok was not merely used to emphasise his gestures. Fewer men than ever were taken into his confidence, and fewer councils of war held. They made way for him respectfully when he walked past their campfires. Often he was deep in thought, sitting on a rock by himself. Now and then his boys came to see him, or a note would arrive from his brothers or his wife. He was not far from his own farm now and, indeed, had paid it a visit during a lull in the fighting. Nobody was living there.

Mr. H. W. S. Pearse, an English journalist, saw the place soon after and wrote to the *Daily News* in London: "Rounding the shoulder of the kopje we came suddenly upon a deserted farmhouse, the country homestead of Commandant Christiaan de Wet, who had been there only a few days earlier, as the postmark on an envelope scattered about the house-door proved. The only signs of life about that gloomy place were one hen, with chickens a few days old, and some brood-mares, standing knee-deep in frost-whitened winter grass. Not a grain of forage was to be found in the barn, not an article of furniture in the vacant rooms, where open doors yawned, as if in weariness of the sleepy silence about them. Only a set of boot-trees, carelessly thrown aside by an owner who had no further use for such aids to dandified neatness, told of recent occupation. In an outhouse, beside the broad mere, or dam, as it is called in this country, was a net, showing that others beside Kaffir cranes had access to fish in the waters. Languid air, stirred by the warmth of the sunrise, rustled the reeds, bringing with it a sweet scent of wild thyme from the veld. It would have been a pleasant place to rest for a while and to cast a net, in the

hope of catching something better than bullybeef on which to breakfast".

Cornelia de Wet was far away these days. For a couple of months she remained on the "plaas", with those of her children who were not in the field. Her youngest baby had been born after her husband left. Then the Tommies turned up, commandeered the cattle and gave her a terrible fright by asking one son to help them collect the animals. She had visions of the lad never returning, but he gave them the slip and came back safely to the homestead. When Christiaan managed to call, he found the fields trampled down, the cattle gone, and Cornelia living on food borrowed from her neighbours. The railway line to the North was still open, so de Wet decided she must leave. Accordingly his wife and their youngest children were packed off by him to relations at Klerksdorp, in the Transvaal. Those were precious hours which they spent together amid the turmoil of war. Soldiers in Europe or America might be astonished at a General going over to visit his home while operations were in progress, but they did not understand the Boer customs. The burgher's duty to his country was acknowledged, but every now and then he must return to his farm, not always asking for permission.

CHAPTER 9
THE AMBUSH BY THE WATERWORKS

WHEELS were turning inside a little group of sheds, some of corrugated iron and some of brick, and the steady thud of the pumps was heard across the veld. Here and there a British soldier could be seen, his rifle across his shoulder, marching up and down on guard over the waterworks upon which depended the life of Bloemfontein. On the side of the buildings ran the Modder River to where it suddenly dropped fifteen feet into the bed of the Koornspruit. A line of hills looked down upon the waterworks

and the neighbouring railway station: "Sanna's Post" it was called.

As the sky paled early on March 28, 1900, a group of natives herding sheep and cattle by a wagon near the river bed, stood in conversation with a company of mounted Boers.

"Whose wagon is that?", one of the white men demanded. "Baas, it belongs to another baas at Thaba Nchu. He has told us to take it to Bloemfontein to sell to the English".

"And who owns those cattle and sheep?"

"That English baas of the soldiers; he has just gone down to Sanna's Post over there".

"General Broadwood!" cried the Boers, in astonishment.

De Wet looked at the little pumping-station and at the unfinished buildings. It was now almost daylight, and there was no difficulty in recognising soldiers a few thousand yards away. Eighteen hundred of them there were, as he afterwards discovered.

Hidden among the sheep kraals of Pretorius' Farm was his own detachment of 350 Boers. The remaining 1,100 of his commando, who, after visiting their homes three days before, had gathered at the appointed place, the railway bridge across the Sand River, now lay miles away in the hills. With them were the five remaining precious guns and they had orders to bombard any British force appearing near the waterworks. In dead silence the Republicans waited for their orders while de Wet watched tents springing up out of the grass.

Dog-tired from a long forced march through the night, the Tommies dropped off to sleep, and even the sentries took little notice of a couple of shots to the East. Twenty minutes later came the crash of a shell, and in an instant the English camp sprang to life. Oxen bellowed and black drivers shouted as shrapnel burst among the

transport wagons. Four miles away a commando under Piet de Wet (soon to abandon his brother and surrender) had found the range of Sanna's Post.

General Broadwood gave orders to bring the convoys through the Koornspruit, to what was thought to be safety. On the other side Christiaan de Wet and his followers noiselessly waited for them to enter the trap. They lay on their stomachs, their rifles cocked, while the frightened animals were hastily marshalled by the teamsters. A traffic jam occurred on the steep approaches to the drift. Somewhere among the rocks of the ravine, which was giving such valuable shelter to the Boers, was a keen-eyed man with a long moustache and a strong American accent. Frederick Russell Burnham, the famous scout, had just arrived to join Lord Roberts' forces and had already discovered into what danger the British troops were walking. He rushed down to the river-side, but could not reach his commander before he found himself a prisoner.

Meanwhile General Broadwood had decided not only to bring his transport out of the range of the distant guns, but to move on the whole camp. Slightly hidden by a rise in the ground, Christiaan waited for the first wagon to come through the drift. A woman sat on the front seat, next to a man in civilian clothes. “Jump on to the cart”, said the General to Commandant Fourie and Commandant Nel, and before the astonished arrivals could shout the two men were at their side. "Make any noise and you will be shot", came the warning.

One after another wagons splashed through the drift, many of them with women and even children-English refugees from Thaba Nchu. One after the other the Boers pounced upon them, disarming the drivers and covering them with their loaded guns. Save for the artillery on the hills, not a shot had yet been fired, although

Piet de Wet had moved much closer. Now the cannons of the English were rolling through the ford. Hundreds of soldiers were greeted with the words: "Hands up!", as they approached the other bank. The slowness with which the crossing took place, the glut of transport in the river-bed continued to deceive General Broadwood. "Dismount, you are prisoners", were the words that greeted Major Taylor of the "U" Battery. It was Oom Krisjan himself, working, like a man possessed, giving orders, and watching the other side, where the enemy waited for him, in cheerful ignorance. Two hundred had already been disarmed in dead silence and scores of carts captured. Major Taylor watched for a moment, till something attracted the attention of the Boers, and then dashed back to warn Major Phipps Hornby of "Q" Battery, who was behind him. His guns were pointing the wrong way, but were immediately swung round and at the same moment Colonel Dawson, of Roberts' Horse, arrived on the left of the convoy. At last Broadwood's men knew what had happened, and de Wet ordered his commando to fire. Like a hailstorm the Republican bullets rattled out from the Mausers upon the army sheltered by the little station building of Sanna's Post. De Wet jokingly remarked in later years that he had been responsible, after his conversion to the policy of railway-building, for laying of the line from Bloemfontein to Dewetsdorp. That day he was sorry he had done so.

Just then, one of those errors of judgment occurred which showed that even the Boers were not supermen. The firing of the Republican guns died away, the commando moved forward, but instead of crossing the Modder River at a narrow point, tried to do so where the waterworks had created a great dam. Three precious hours they lost before they reached the obvious place, the same wagon-drift which had cost the English so much. By that time General Broadtvood had recovered his wind and withdrawn towards

Bloemfontein, crossing the Koornspruit more or less out of range.

"Had I commanded a larger force", said de Wet, "I could have captured every man of them, but it was impossible with my 350 to surround 2,000."

Four hundred and eighty prisoners, seven guns and one hundred and seventeen wagons, loaded with valuables, were the trophies of that memorable morning.

Within a few hours de Wet was on the move again in the direction of the little town of Reddersburg. He encountered an English force on the plains, and raced them to seize the crown of a ridge. The prospect once more arose of storming the position. De Wet sat down at his camp table and wrote a note which he sent to the British commander under the white flag.

> "Sir,
>
> I am here with 500 men, and am every moment expecting reinforcements, with three Krupps, against which you will not be able to hold out. I therefore advise you, in order to prevent bloodshed, to surrender."
>
> The answer from Captain McWhinnie of the Irish Rifles was entirely verbal: "I'm damned if I surrender."

Before de Wet could carry out his attack, darkness fell and, after dropping a few shells on to the hill, he put out sentries to surround the British position, and wait for another day. Actually he had 400, not 500 men, but his messengers were out in the district, and the magic of his name was already sufficient to summon every burgher who was back on his farm to join in the chase. From half-past five to eleven the next morning, the shooting continued. Then the white flag went up, and 470 of the Royal Irish Rifles and the Northumberland Fusiliers surrendered, another 100 lay dead on

the kopje. Among them was Captain Mc Whinnie.

CHAPTER 10
THE GREAT ESCAPE

FLAMES rose into the night from bales of blankets, stacks of mail-bags, bundles of fodder and packing-cases of a hundred different sizes. They flared and flickered on the metals of the railway line, on shiny barrels of naval guns, and upon thousands of letters, pulled out of those postal sacks and now scattered upon the veld. For miles the glare lit up the grasslands, as it devoured mountainous quantities of stores, deposited at Roodewal Siding. Here, at a lonely point in the Northern Orange Free State, the British had placed one of their most important depots. Roaring and crackling, the fire ate its way through three-quarters of a million pounds worth of military equipment, while the 15 Boers who had started the blaze were riding hard to a place of safety. By their side ran their two hundred prisoners. Every now and then they turned to look back over their shoulders at the costliest fireworks display that Africa had ever seen.

Christiaan de Wet had given leave for captors and prisoners to help themselves to whatever they liked. As the procession came away they looked as though they were returning from a fair, with booty, thick woollens for the cold June nights, tobacco, newspapers, knitted mufflers, socks, bandoliers and cartridges, and almost every yard of their trail was littered with trophies, too heavy to be carried further. The night wind blew a mighty gust through numberless letters never to reach their destination at the Front. It fanned the blaze till molten metal could be seen pouring down the station building, and the rails began to curl from the sheer heat.

The Tommies joked about their unusual duties as postmen, and swore when their burdens had

to be reduced. Less than a mile now lay between the fire and the retreating commando.

Boom! The first shells exploded of a most stupendous cannonade, its the huge projectiles, lent by the Navy to bombard positions up-country, shot into the air and burst -- cascades of sparks, volcanic tongues of flame, red and white, pyrotechnics from burning cordite, the whistle of shrapnel as it was shivered into bits. Not the whole of that great capture was however destroyed. Somewhere on the plain, in a place known only to the General and one or two of his trusted comrades, rested a great cache of English rifle ammunition, to replace the Boers' Mauser cartridges that were running low. Republican rifles were so few by this time that almost everybody was carrying a captured Lee-Metford. The London War Office was now supplying most of the needs of their foes. Even the dynamite, with which railway lines to the Cape, Orange Free State and Southern Transvaal were being shivered to pieces, came from the same source.

Christiaan was in a good humour. He had cut the communications of the English once again; he had shown that, in their anxiety to push North into the Transvaal, they had forgotten the country behind them was anything but pacified. Moreover £750,000 was quite a substantial loss, even to the British Treasury.

Major Stanham, commanding the Imperial Yeomanry Field Hospital, met de Wet as a non-combatant and described him as "a man of powerful physique, but with weak eyes, which necessitated his wearing tinted glasses in the sun; a good face and one showing, as I thought, shrewdness and determination; a quiet, kindly manner and the general bearing of a gentleman." He spoke highly of the courtesy and consideration which the General showed to the wounded of the Derbyshires.

General Froneman was working in conjunction with de Wet in a neighbouring district. Bigger game, however, was waiting to be stalked. Somewhere near Kroonstad, which for a short time after the capture of Bloemfontein had been the capital, was the man the Boers feared most, more than old Lord Roberts, who now had charge of the operations around Pretoria. Lord Kitchener was travelling Northward, that cold, efficient strategist, with his laurels new-won in the Sudan, where, less than two years before, he had subdued the Mahdi and avenged General Gordon's death at Khartoum. De Wet had a certain inkling of this, as he aptly quoted from the Bible concerning the people of Samaria.

This was Oom Krisjan's plan. North of the Rhenoster River, not far from Kroonstad, there was to be an ambush. Leeuwspruit Bridge, which they must pass, was well guarded by the British. So Froneman was to launch an attack on the next train that came and, while the attention of the passengers was taken up with defending themselves, de Wet would blow up the rails. Out of the gloom of the nocturnal veld came the sound of the approaching locomotive, its headlight blacked-out for fear of sharp-shooters; blinds hung over all the carriage windows. Froneman waited till it was near and then ordered the advance. Again that lack of discipline which sometimes beset the Boers overcame them, and they refused to obey. Slowly the train rolled by, and with it Lord Kitchener. None of the Republicans knew that he was on board. "K of K" quickly ordered the engine to be stopped. A horse was taken out of one of the cattle-trucks and, accompanied only by two officers, Kitchener disappeared into the night -- as he himself admitted, the narrowest escape from capture which he ever had. Somehow the Boers soon heard about this capture if ever human tongue could scourge it was that of Christiaan de Wet, when he met his recalcitrant burghers.

Lack of discipline was noticeable in de Wet's camp, as it was in Froneman's. Just when the British drew near the important town of Bethlehem, and when de Wet had to assume responsibility for the safety of President Steyn, and the entire migratory Orange Free State Government, a number of dissatisfied officers came to complain that he had not been duly elected by law. Ignoring the President's indignation, de Wet called his men together during a lull in the fighting and told them; "If you vote against me I will send in my resignation, and no longer continue as Commander-in-Chief". Only the Field-Cornets, Commandants and other officers this time took part in the ballot. Two other claimants to the command came forward, his brother, General Piet de Wet, and General Marthinus Prinsloo. Both of these were among the pessimists, who openly said the Boers must make terms with the English. Here is the result of the voting:

Christiaan de Wet .. 27

Piet de Wet 1

Prinsloo..... 2

Cheers went up in camp when the result came out. But the last had not yet been heard of the dispute.

Christiaan himself had decided to defend Bethlehem, the more as his forces had grown to 5,000 men. He ordered the women and children to leave the town, and once again tried to leave behind the new convoys of wagons encumbering the commandos. It was an unlucky day. Although the Boers held the hills round Bethlehem, another column of English, under General Sir Hector Macdonald, with the Royal Artillery, dropped an incessant shower of shells on to the koppies. When losses grew too heavy, de Wet ordered the retreat. Across the Roodeberg, or Red Mountains, a great chain forming a portion of South Africa's Switzerland,

the Basuto country, the Boer commandos withdrew. With immense skill they made their way through the passes, while Danie Theron, the famous scout, with eighty men served as their eyes and ears. Commandant Michael Prinsloo (not the man who unsuccessfully stood for election, but his brother) was entrusted with the rearguard. Hidden by the crevices and ledges of the pass around Slabbert's Nek, its task was to watch for the approach of the English, and to prevent the straying of the herds and cattle, upon which the Boers still depended for much of their food. General de Wet said good-bye and proceeded across the defiles of the Berg towards the North. Two thousand six hundred Burghers were under Oom Krisjan's command, and as he grieved to admit, another four hundred wagons.

Icy winter gales blew through the upland valleys as they passed nearly 10,000 feet above sea-level. Very cautiously de Wet guided his men onward. July 19 broke. As the cavalcade curled its way through more level country, he decided to take a look at his pursuers from a neighbouring hill. By his side rode President Steyn, broad-shouldered and tall, with his great red beard and bald head, and also a few other Government officials, one of them Christiaan's brother, General Piet de Wet. At the home of a neighbouring farmer named Wessels, meditatively standing outside, the Commander-in-Chief saw Piet approach:

"Christiaan", he said, "I want to ask you something. Do you still think there is a chance of continuing our struggle?" The Commander-in--Chief grew black as thunder and fingered his sjambok.

"Are you mad?" he roared, turned his back on Piet and went, in to join the others at breakfast.

Not much was to be seen from the peak, save windblown clouds and the hill country, brown with winter. Piet de Wet was not to be found.

One of Christiaan's sons, who was with the commando, said:

"Uncle Piet told me we shall all be captured to-night by the railway line." During that day the General's sjambok was not idle. He was very angry, and the burghers kept out of his way as much as they could, brought in the news that the British had pitched their camp nearby, and the greatest care had to be taken to prevent the whole force being trapped, with the President and the Cabinet. Meanwhile there was trouble with the rearguard under Prinsloo. Instead of following on the main commando, quarrels broke out about the appointment of its new Commandant, Marthinus Prinsloo considering he had a claim, as he had failed to obtain the bigger prize of the High Command. Ballots and political canvassing, very inappropriate at such a critical moment, were going on while de Wet's back was turned.

From his post of observation in the English camp, Mr. Bennett Burleigh, the London war correspondent, was describing for overseas readers the great scheme to capture the Boers. "A combined movement is being made to surround de Wet", he cabled. "Meanwhile the route is to be patrolled by armoured trains, but interruptions to the wires and transport continue."

Scouts Danie Theron and Scheepers had gone ahead to see what could be done about the railway. They reported that the line was clear, and, barely out of sight of the pursuing English army, de Wet made his crossing of this dangerous obstacle. With a bleeding heart he forbore to blow up the rails, as he had temporarily run out of dynamite. To make up for this a train came along, and had a breakdown. For a second time within a few days the Burghers were given leave to help themselves to whatever stores they could carry away, including coffee, sugar and other groceries, all priceless in

these times. Another ninety-eight prisoners were added to the long procession accompanying the force. Safety, in de Wet's opinion, must now be sought on Transvaal soil, and, making his way across the flat grain country around Vredefort, (where several loads of maize were quickly sent for grinding to the local mill) they reached the ford across the Vaal at its confluence with the Rhenoster River (to-day the site of one of Africa's largest irrigation works).

July 1900 was over. Most of the Burghers had recovered their courage, and now showed in skirmishes that their valour was as great as ever. August dawned across the Vaal River. Tents and wagons could be seen afar, where a cordon of English troops were posted to keep them out of the Transvaal. While de Wet considered his next plan, a messenger arrived from the South-East. The camp knew him well. It was Kotze, Secretary to General Prinsloo, the man in charge of the rearguard. But what was this? A letter came from General Broadwood, "authorising him to pass through the English lines." The young man looked troubled as he handed over his message to General de Wet and President Steyn. This is what they read:

"To the Commander-in-Chief,
C. R. de Wet,
Sir,
I have been obliged, owing to the overwhelming forces of the enemy, to surrender unconditionally, with all the Orange Free State Laagers here.
I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,
M. PRINSLOO.

Commander-In- Chief."

General De Wet was too angry to speak. He took a pen and wrote his answer:

"To Mr. Prinsloo, Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated the 30th of last month. I am surprised to see that you call yourself Commander-in-Chief. By what right do you usurp that title? You have no right to act as Commander-in-Chief.

I have the honour to be,

C. R. DE WET,

Commander-in- Chief."

As they made their way back to camp, leaving Mr. Kotze to return to the British camp, the Republican leader tried to take stock of his loss. How many men could have been captured by the British -- 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000? Who knew? It was a day more bitter than that of Paardeberg.

Like giant umbrellas of greenery, the mimosas stood out of the yellow grass that ran from horizon to horizon. The air was warm and summery, although August, the coldest month of the African year, was still only half gone, and snow had fallen on the far-off peaks of the Eastern Transvaal. Comfortably ambling through gaps in the trees, dotted about as though they grew in an English park, the commando of Christiaan de Wet made its way towards the North. Here they were in the Bushveld at last, that sub-tropical region which began with startling suddenness beyond the Magaliesberg. Forty thousand English troops were behind them, along the Vaal River, the mining towns of the Witwatersrand, and Pretoria, where the Union Jack now flew, and over a great part of the territory further on. By dint of surpassing generalship and knowledge of the land, Oom Krisjan had found a way of crossing a badly-guarded ford near Venterskroon, not far from Potchefstroom. It was a race against time, for the enemy had already ordered down reinforcements, and as the last of the Boers disappeared between two ranges of hills on the

Transvaal side, the first of the Tommies hurried towards the banks of the grey, silent border stream.

Next morning de Wet had a fresh alarm. Before his men had time to breakfast they were on the move again, skirting the populous outliers of the North Rand and gradually approaching the Bushveld. Having blown up more railway lines, de Wet resolved to travel quickly and lightly. At last those cumbersome wagons were left behind, and the dozens of prisoners who had marched with him were set at liberty. Within a few hours he was in the Magaliesberg, where he received a friendly welcome. De Wet himself did not yet know whither he was bound. He was certain of only one thing -- the English would take days if not weeks, to find him. Some comfort had been brought him by two Burghers with the news that of Prinsloo's force 2,000 had successfully got away.

Lord Roberts now turned out every man who could be spared in order to close in upon de Wet. Colonel Baden-Powell, fresh from the fame of the siege of Mafeking, was in the offing and had charge of scouting operations. General Methuen was at his heels, Smith-Dorien awaited him at Bank Station, not far from Johannesburg. Ian Hamilton occupied Oliphant's Nek, though he did so too late.

"Scene of the Final War Operations" read the caption on a newspaper map. Only the pessimists foreshadowed that the campaign might last another six. months and nobody dreamt of the two years that were to go by before Peace could be signed. "It seems scarcely possible", Lord Roberts wrote to Milner, "that de Wet and Steyn can get away now."

From time to time the commando encountered a homestead where the burghers were offered, food, fodder and, above all, information. Yet on August l8, 1900, both the Commando Nek and

Oliphant's Nek Passes across the Magaliesberg were in the enemy's hands; Lord Kitchener himself was at Wolhuter's Kop, and the circle round de Wet was complete. The English scouts had actually seen their quarry. Millions of pounds which were being spent on the "Great de Wet Hunt" were at last to bear fruit. Even his despatch of a force to harass the English at Van Wyk's Rust, almost in the suburbs of Johannesburg, to blow up a railway line and capture a train, could not change the outcome. One chance alone remained. All the passes of the hills around them were occupied, but he had climbed to victory up the trackless sides of Majuba; he had done so at Nicholson's Nek; he had got away across the Roodeberg. He must now attempt the Magaliesberg.

"Oh, Red Sea", sighed Corporal Adriaan Matthysen.

"The Children of Israel", retorted Oom Krisjan, "had faith and won through. All you need is faith. This is not the first Red Sea on our trek, and it won't be the last."

"Are you a Moses?" asked the irrepressible Adriaan, but the General had other things to think about.

Doubling back from the English camp, they found on the foothills straw, beehive huts inhabited by natives. Two thousand feet above rose the peaks of the Magaliesberg.

"Can a man cross there?" asked Christiaan of the old Bantu who came out and saluted politely.

"No, Baas, you cannot."

"Has no man ever ridden across?"

"Yes. Baas, long ago."

"Do baboons walk across?"

"Auw! Yes, baboons do, but not men."

The bearded followers of de Wet stood close by, listening to this talk. "Come along, fellows!" de

Wet cried to the Burghers, "where a baboon can go, we can too."

Some little time passed before the incredible fact dawned upon the British outposts that the Boers had actually climbed above the belt of bush on the lower slopes of the mountain, and were attempting to scale the cliffs above. Now they could see them plainly. Shaggy, surefooted Basuto ponies slithered gingerly on to the shingle. There was no question of riding. As though it were not difficult enough, they reached a great ledge of granite, almost as slippery as ice, where a number of horses and farmers in their hob-nailed boots slipped and fell headlong. "What if the English range their guns on us?" someone called out. With his teeth bitten together, and his little sjambok pointing forward, Christiaan de Wet marched on.

"Let them try", he said. "They have only got howitzers." It was an unsatisfactory reply, as he knew, but at any rate his men were content and no shells fell. Silent and perspiring, the men worked their way higher, under the hot bushveld sun. No time for rest. Occasionally a man gulped down a mouthful from his water flask, or passed it to a neighbour. Could they make the top of the mountain? It was only a few hundred yards off, and still there was no firing, and no signs of a move from the enemy. Panting and exhausted, they reached the top. Even the horses had managed it. Those baboons that jumped away, barking harsly, were no longer in sole possession of the peak.

Sitting on a rock, in the coolness of the summit, the General gazed towards the country that separated him from the Orange Free State. The blue hills on the left were the Witwatersrand, with Johannesburg and its gold mines in the centre. Far and wide stretched the Highveld, and somewhere in the distance was the Vaal River. Railway trains could be seen puffing here and

there, bringing up convoys. De Wet knew that he had escaped.

As the tide of war dragged on, occasional atrocity yarns were told about him, mingled with reflections on his sanity, doubts whether he was still alive and daily accounts of ill-health. All of them were untrue. Even his use of the sjambok was much exaggerated. None of these tales affected his astonishing popularity with the masses in South Africa and elsewhere. Sober facts were quite impressive enough. For instance: just after his get away through the encircling lines in the Magaliesberg, the General made an uninterrupted ride of ninety miles, and turned up, quite fresh at the end, for a speech at Klerksdorp. "Capitalists", he told his men in the market square of that village, "are as common in these Republics as bags of pumpkins. If I get caught there will be a successor to take my place. No neutrality is possible among the Afrikaner nation; either they are for us or against us. Not all the English are bad: I myself have a good English friend." Fresh significance was given to this remark in conversation.

"How you must hate Rhodes", said one of his Burghers.

"Not at all", answered Oom Krisjan. "He tried to patch up matters as long as he could, but when things got so bad he sided with his own country, and I should have despised him if he had done otherwise. I too have sided with my country, and when it is all over I should not mind shaking hands with him."

When this was reported to Cecil Rhodes down at the Cape, he said, "I think de Wet must be a very fine fellow."

On the other hand, de Wet was like an avenging angel with any Republican whose loyalty he doubted, and he considered that the right punishment for treachery was the firing squad, as also that of any native who might dare to

interfere in the White Man's War. While outrages were occasionally reported from armed tribesmen and black campfollowers, there was no occasion when the latter threat was ever put into force.

Concerning the Oath of Neutrality, which the British sought to obtain from as many Boers as possible, de Wet declared at Potchefstroom that such an oath was being extorted under duress. "If the promise is disregarded willingly by our Burghers, the Lord takes the responsibility and the oathbreaker is blameless. If he is coerced by us, our Government is responsible. If he fails to break his oath, the Burgher remains responsible and will get six months imprisonment with hard labour."

CHAPTER 11
JOINING GENERAL HERTZOG

Oom Krisjan, the farmer of Nieuwejaars-fontein, an obscure place in an obscure state of Africa, was now a world figure. Just as the war between England and the Boers had risen from the status of a secondrate colonial campaign to that of a drama, taking the resources of the whole British Empire, so the importance of the Republican leaders had steadily risen, even though the number of men under their command was declining. Nobody, not even President Kruger himself, had so caught the fancy of the public at home and abroad as had de Wet.

Folk ditties came into existence, of which no one knew the author. To-day they are still sung at Afrikaans picnics and other jollifications. One extract can suffice:

The bravest of our Generals is -- De Wet.
The bravest man across the Vaal -- De Wet.
The Briton in his pride to-day
Turned on his heel and ran away.
De Wet! de Wet!
Who comes and passes like a ghost? -- De Wet.

And whom does Tommy fear the most? -- De Wet.
By night and day it's always he
Who lurks where none would think he'd be?
De Wet! de Wet!

A horse-truck stood drawn up beside a platform at Potchefstroom railway station, but it carried no horses. Instead a number of human voices could be heard from within, and presently a round-faced, middleaged woman, with a baby in her arms, looked over the side. Other youngsters sat on a bench among the straw. Men in uniform walked up and down the platform, worried and pre-occupied, with no time to glance at the spectacle, too familiar in those days, of Boer wives and children being taken away from the theatre of war. Cornelia de Wet said nothing. She and two other women with babies had now been travelling for days by ox-wagon to Koekemoer Station and now by train to some unknown destination. Presently her small boys and girls began to whimper, pale little figures, very unlike their usual selves;

A Tommy came along, heard the hungry children and began to rummage in his haversack.

"Here you are, mum", he said, and dropped something into the horse-truck. It was a loaf of bread and a tin of biscuits. Mrs. de Wet drew herself up and stopped anybody getting near the gift.

"No!" she said, "he now has nothing himself to eat until to-night. He does it out of pity." The soldier waved to her and disappeared into the crowd, so she reluctantly broke up the loaf and began to give bits to her fellow-travellers. Some hours later, when the train moved on, there was an improvement in the feeding arrangements. Four times during the next day the guard brought meat and bread. The veld no more looked so empty. Villages and mining towns appeared, then great white dump-heaps, and clusters of

blue gums. Late one evening they reached Johannesburg, no longer the bustling peacetime city, but a place of ambulances and artillery convoys. With a number of other Boer refugees, Mrs. de Wet was given quarters at the North Western Hotel.

Newspapers had heard about her coming, and the *Cape Times* correspondent called on her. All she had to offer as refreshment was a cup of sugarless tea. The young man gingerly asked whether she had heard from the General lately. "You Englishmen", she said, "will never catch my husband. He is going to win back for the Free Staters and Transvaalers what they have lost. He has enough food and ammunition to last for three years, and that is just how long the war is going to last."

While his wife sat in Johannesburg with her children, waiting to be sent down to a concentration camp at Pietermaritzburg in Natal, Christiaan de Wet was back again in the Orange Free State, safe from the pursuing armies that had so nearly caught him in the Magaliesberg. Forewarned by a kind of second sight, de Wet had made another wonderful escape near Bothaville, just south of the Vaal River. A Hottentot had come to him, asking for work as an "agterryer" or groom for the horses.

"Good", said Oom Krisjan, "I'm busy now, but I shall see you about this later." In bed that night, in the homestead of a neighbouring farmer, he suddenly felt uncomfortable and called his own native servant.

"Where is that Hottentot?" he demanded.

"Baas", said the black man, "he has gone to fetch his things, to go with the baas."

Leaping out of bed, Christiaan roared out: "Upsaddle, everybody!" and within an hour the whole camp had been shifted miles across the veld. Before dawn a force of 200 English

swooped down upon the homestead. They came too late.

Flight, however, was no longer the General's aim. General Hertzog had done his work well when he went ahead. Revolt had swept the newly annexed Republic from one end to the other. Thousands of men who had abandoned their rifles were now back with the commandos, blowing up railway-lines and capturing convoys. Plenty of dynamite had fallen into the hands of the Boers, and even a Shadow Government operated again, despite the new British Colonial Administration. The time had come to carry the war into the enemy's country, to start a revolt among the sympathetic Dutch farmers in Cape Colony. Dodging the hundreds of thousands of troops wich Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener were swinging round to engulf them, de Wet made his way to the district of Smithfield, not far from the Orange River. At Dewetsdorp he had the satisfaction of capturing the town founded by his father and which commemorated his own name.

Every day his prestige was rising. He broke through a chain of little forts, some of them only 2,000 yards apart. General Hertzog, with another commando, joined him at Bethulie on the way to Smithfield, and they agreed to operate jointly.

Summer had arrived and the rains had broken. Soaked to the skin, the burghers trudged on, in the direction of the famous railway bridge at Norval's Pont, near which they hoped to find a suitable ford across the Orange River. The soil grew muddier and the guns of the Free Staters were delaying the whole expedition. De Wet had a personal fondness for his precious pieces of ordnance, but he was also a realist. His last shell had been fired on an English column near Bethulie, so he left them behind with the empty ammunition cart. Three miles north of a place called Odendaalstroom they struck the Orange, usually an almost empty bed, with occasional

rivulets and pools of water between the thornbushes on its lofty banks. "The river is up again", the scouts reported. And so it was. From its upper reaches, towards Basutoland, a great wall of water had roared down towards the sea and had filled it from bank to bank till it looked like a young Mississippi. As though this was not bad enough, the camp-fires of the English could be seen twinkling on the southern shore.

General Knox, "my dear old friend," as Oom Krisjan was accustomed playfully to call him, had command of the English forces. If ever de Wet was in a tight corner, it was this time. His scouts hurried towards the Caledon River, a tributary of the Orange, seeking a bridge. There was none. Then a miracle happened: the river suddenly begun to fall. How long would it take to become passable? Somebody now remembered that, at a place called Zevenfontein upstream, there was a ford which was useless in flood time, and for that reason might possibly be overlooked by the enemy. The patrol came back, saying that it was unoccupied and could be crossed. Now occurred one of those moves which were so typical of the General. He doubled back to Dewetsdorp in order to lay a false trail, then zigzagged about the southern Free State, to shake off the thousands of fresh troops in pursuit. Near Edenburg he discovered that they were on both sides. He quickly dug himself in on a range nearer Wepener. The African night descended, and to their amazement, de Wet ordered everything to be abandoned. They moved away like ghosts from the camp which General Knox's men were watching. All through the evening they slogged across Sprinkhaan's Nek Pass. As the sun rose they saw the town of Thaba Nchu below them, where more than 1,000 men lay in wait in the chain of fortifications. From both sides of the pass bullets and shells suddenly rained on the commando. Leaving a portion of his men on to higher ground, to fire into the forts and distract

attention, de Wet made a dash for safety, with the rest of his 3,000 men. Less than a mile wide and without any cover, the zone of No-Man's-Land seemed to offer certain death. All the way they were under bombardment. British heliographs twinkled the news to General Knox in the South, to General White on the left, to Colonel Barker, to Colonel Williams and to Colonel Long, whose men formed a great circle round Thaba Nchu. Then came a message: "In spite of heavy fire the Boers are now pouring through the Nek." "Not a single man was killed", says de Wet, "and only one was wounded." Not unnaturally he added: "Our marvellous escape can only be ascribed to Providence, and the irresistible protection of Almighty God, who kept his hand graciously over us."

And so he escaped again, and fresh jokes were invoked to celebrate the occasion. A Boer farmer's wife, so the wags declared, had a British officer quartered on her. He was explaining the position at breakfast. "We have caught de Wet", he said, and put a circle of eggs around another egg. "This is how we caught de Wet." Just then a native servant came in and the officer looked up. Quick as lightning the wife removed the centre egg. "And where is de Wet now?" she asked.

CHAPTER 12
ESCAPES BY FLOOD AND FIELD

"Ubique" means "'They've caught de Wet and now we shan't be long"
"Ubique" means "I much regret the beggar's going strong".
Rudyard Kipling.

Locusts were upon the land: giant grasshoppers that skipped away from the feet of the horses, as de Wet's commando rode slowly across the veld. The Cape summer was heavy on the land, the ground bare and an unpleasant smell in the air, as of ammonia. Through the sides of the ponies,

which up to now had withstood all hardships, the bones were sticking out.

A new century had begun. It was now 1901. For nearly two years the war had been in progress, and for the hundredth time the Press was assuring its readers that the final mopping up was almost completed. Yet here was de Wet with 1,400 men - on British soil! Despite the watchfulness of General Knox and his guards, at every ford and bridge he had carried out his plan to cross the Orange River into the Cape Colony.

Equipped with ammunition, buried by him six months earlier, after the capture of the British convoy at Roodewal, with dynamite secured from an enemy railway train near Jagersfontein Road, with clothing that had once belonged to British soldiers, and above all with a spirit still unbroken, the little expedition made its way towards the quaintly-named Hondeblaf (Dog's Bark) River.

As for General Knox, he had been misled by the story which Oom Krisjan had deliberately sent into the world - that he was discouraged by the vigilence of the sentries on the Orange River, and that he had therefore resolved to force a passage higher up. Decoy commandos under General Fronemann and General Fourie became active, and immediately British troops were concentrated near them. While heavy rains drenched the land, de Wet made for Zanddrift in quite a different neighbourhood, where, for several hours, the watch had been relaxed. Willem Pretorius and four Boers captured the covering force of twenty Tommies. Despite the exhaustion of men and beasts, and despite the locusts, which had eaten the veld bare, the invaders rapidly pushed on.

Heavier and heavier grew the rains, but even nightfall failed to stop the trek. In addition to all their other troubles the burghers were now obliged to cross an unending quagmire, where the horses at times sank into mud up to their knees, and where the riders often led their animals by the bridle. Ahead lay the railway to the South, which they must cross, patrolled by an armoured train with search-lights. Though it would soon be daylight, the line had not yet been blown up, as de Wet had ordered. There was plunging and swearing and the whipping of oxen outspanned from the ammunition carts and store wagons. Many of them were bogged for good, and only with difficulty did the General succeed in salving his own precious little pony-trap, loaded with papers. Human endurance could not cope with much more-unless it had the physique of Oom Krisjan. Even the latter saw this and allowed a hundred of his men to stay behind.

Marching with the bedraggled company into the dawn, hungry and unwashed, caked with mud, their clothes dripping wet, were ninety British soldiers, captured after recent engagements. For twenty-four hours nobody had been able to lie down and still they dare not halt, save to rest those invalids whose capture must perforce be risked. At sunrise a metallic streak showed the railway line, with breaks in its continuity here and there. The blasting patrols sent ahead had managed to do their work after all. No trains, armoured or otherwise, would pass on the route to Colesberg for days to come. Staggering and breathing hard the horses climbed the embankment and down again on the other side. On the horizon rose a farm-house. Somebody went in to buy a sheep or two from the Boer, who gave them a friendly welcome. Drunk with exhaustion, they then rode on, but the ground was so barren that de Wet said: "The time for an outspan has not yet come." Only after another full hour were they allowed to stop where scanty

grazing showed on the sodden veld. Like limp sacks the Boers fell from their saddles, to get the first sleep for two days. Only the General still had reserves of energy, and was able to lay plans for the immediate future. Then he too pulled his hat over his eyes and dozed off.

On February 10, he entered the Cape, and less than a fortnight later knew that he must return. With the same fervency with which his men had once hoped for a southward crossing of the Orange, they now gazed on its tumultuous waters on the twentieth of the same month, yearning to find a northward path. British scouts saw him as he made his way, almost parallel with the great bend of the river, towards Hopetown. Commandant Hasebroek, one of his trusted aides, warned him that there were only a few hours to get across. "It is impossible", said de Wet, "to escape either to the South or in the direction of the enemy, for the veld is too flat to afford us any cover. If we are to be cornered against an impassable torrent, we must make our way down-stream to the North-West." Very carefully the men kept in the lee of a low range of hummocks, beyond which lay the English scouts. Once again the sun was the deciding factor. As Joshua prayed for the lengthening of his day of battle, so did the Boers pray that it might be shortened, and when night really fell, it was black from the threatening clouds. Six miles up-stream, so de Wet was told, there was a solitary boat, which could possibly hold twelve men. There was no rest for anyone until he had seen that precious ferry. All night and far into the next day it laboured backwards and forwards between the Cape and the Orange Free State. Horses paddled by its side, good swimmers hung on to its gunwales. Only two things they could not get into the boat, those last field-guns of the Orange - Free State artillery. Both were left behind.

February 23 was the Independence Day of the Republic. It saw Christiaan de Wet on the way back to his own country, fighting a rear-guard action against the English. He worked his way along the south bank of the Orange Free State, past the historic village of Hopetown, near which the first diamonds in South Africa had been found thirty-four years earlier. Once more he slipped back into the Colony, dodging in and out among the encircling armies. As though it were playing with him, the river rose and became impassable: Even Zanddrift, where the commando had originally crossed over into the Cape, was now too deep when they reached it on February 26. A couple of young Burghers offered to swim across. Stripped naked, they took their horses through the floods and continued their journey thus on the far side. Minus their clothes, they looked for all the world like some figures from the frieze of the Parthenon. Grim though the moment was, there were loud chuckles in camp when they made their way to a neighbouring homestead, where they intended to ask for some dresses from the women. Fortunately the good wife still had trousers and shirts belonging to her husband, who was on commando, and she modestly despatched them to the invaders by her young son. Fifteen fords they vainly attempted to cross, before they reached Bothasdrift, not far from Philippolis. As they camped in comparative peace for the first time in several weeks, they fetched out their old hymn-books and sang the Psalms of David.

At this stage in his life, de Wet was a strange mixture of soft-heartedness and ruthlessness. Even after two years in the field, he felt the death of his brave followers as though of his own sons. And how many of them there were! Danie Theron, the great scout, Willem Pretorius, the young fellow of twenty, who had-captured a whole redoubt with four men; his nephew, Johannes Jacobus de Wet, Sarel Cilliers,

grandson of the famous Voortrekker, his own Jewish secretary, and many, many more. In simple, rugged sentences he paid tribute to the fallen, and even wrote an occasional message of sympathy to their families in the midst of all the alarms. Nor was the news from his own wife calculated to cheer him up. After being left alone in a little cottage at Johannesburg for a few months she had been sent down to Pietermaritzburg to a concentration camp.

As yet the name had not the evil significance which it was to acquire thirty years later, but bungling and mismanagement contributed to make it a term of abuse in South Africa. Originally it had been said that Boer women and children could not be left unprotected in their homesteads. Then the argument was added that they were helping their men folk in the field. Out of these two reasons developed the policy of deportation, which was to result in 100,000 non-combatants being placed in a series of camps, some of which became hotbeds of disease: Typhoid began to carry off the inmates.

From England itself came the first protests. Miss Emily Hobhouse, a middle-aged society woman, who had done social work in American mining camps, and who by virtue of her Quaker affiliations, was anxious to restore peace in South Africa, arrived in the Cape to see for herself what was happening. While Christiaan was raiding the north of Cape Colony, she set out to interview the military chiefs, often the only woman for hundreds of miles. She made her way into the lonely places where the refugees were detained and saw the conditions under which they travelled, at times in cattle trucks, as Mrs de Wet had done.

The officers were anxious to help, but there was a lack of money and medicines and doctors, balanced by an overplus of red tape. Here is a typical extract from Miss Hobhouse's diary: "Then I went straight to my camp and just in one

little corner this is what I found: Nurse Kennedy, underfed and overworked, just sinking on to her bed, hardly able to hold herself up after coping with some thirty typhoid and other patients, with only the untrained help of two Boer girls, with cooking as well as nursing to do herself. Next I was called to see a woman panting in the heat, just sickening for her confinement. Fortunately I had a nightdress in my bundle to give her and two tiny baby-gowns. Next tent, a little six months baby gasping its life out on its mother's knee. The doctor had given it powder in the morning, but it had taken nothing since. Two or three others, drooping and sick in that tent. Next, child recovering from measles, sent back from the hospital before it could walk, stretched on the ground - white and wan, three or four others lying about. Next a girl of twenty-four lay dying on a stretcher. Her father, a big, gentle Boer, kneeling beside her, while in the next tent his wife was watching a child of six also dying, and one of about five also drooping. Already this couple had lost three children in the hospital, and so would not let these go, though I begged hard to take them out of the hot tent. We must watch them ourselves', they said. Captain H. had mounted guard over me - he thinks I am too sympathetic, but I sent him flying to fetch some brandy and get some down the girl's throat: But, for the most part you must stand and look on, helpless to do anything, because there is nothing to do anything with. Then a man came up and said: ‘Sister’ (they call me Sister), ‘come and see my child, sick for nearly three months.’ It was a dear little chap of four, and nothing left of him except his grey brown eyes and white teeth, from which the lips were drawn back, too thin to close. His body was emaciated."

Mrs de Wet was interned with her small children in one of the better camps. It was rumoured that £10,000 had been offered to her, if she would hand over her husband, but

that she had said: "No money shall buy me to commit high treason." This story may not be true, but what is certain is that she was invited to head a petition to stop hostilities. She tore it up in the presence of her guards, and expressed herself in such terms that she was threatened with deportation from South Africa. Fortunately the Governor of the camp was a reasonable man, and heard about the incident: he intervened and stopped all further arguments.

Many years later, at the graveside of that same Emily Hobhouse who was to bring reform and relief to this suffering community, and was to be idolised to her dying day by the Boer nation, General Smuts said: "A policy had been adopted by the military authorities in a spirit of muddle, with results which were never foreseen or intended, but which threatened to decimate a whole generation in the life of the people. It was at that dark hour that Emily Hobhouse appeared. We stood alone in the world: almost friendless among the peoples, the smallest nation, ranged against the mightiest Empire on earth - and then one small hand, the hand of a woman, was stretched out to us. At that darkest hour, when our race seemed doomed to extinction, she appeared as an angel, as a heaven-sent messenger. Strangest of all, she was an Englishwoman ... She could speak to her people, even in that hour, when the passions of war and of patriotism ran high. She spoke the word. It was heeded by the British Government. Reforms were instituted and the young life which was ebbing away in the camps was saved for the future."

Small wonder that Christiaan de Wet was among those who later became the closest friends of Emily Hobhouse. She herself is responsible for a little story of how, at a

critical point, Oom Krisjan heliographed to the British guards: "De Wet nearly surrounded. Send one column more." And they did!

The General was back in the Orange Free State, working his way northwards, and blowing up a railway line almost as a matter of routine. He had got as far as Petrusburg, when a letter arrived for him from the Transvaal. It was signed by General Botha, the new Commander-in- Chief of the sister Republic, and it told him that Lord Kitchener had proposed they should negotiate for a peace.

CHAPTER 13
THE BLOCKHOUSES

"… and in consequence I must inform your Honour, that, if the terms now offered are not accepted after a reasonable delay for consideration, they must be regarded as cancelled.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

KITCHENER, General.

Commander-in Chief, British Forces, South Africa.

To His Honour, Commandant-General Louis Botha."

Christiaan, sitting in his tent near the village of Vrede in the Northern Orange Free State, read these closing words to a long letter, and he nodded slowly.

"So you could not agree", he said to the burly, vivacious-eyed farmer who faced him, the Commander of all the Transvaalers:

"No!" said Botha, "we couldn't; we are at it again."

"Virtually", Louis Botha declared, in a letter to his Burghers some days later, "Lord Kitchener's letter contains nothing more, but rather less than what the British Government must be obliged to do should our cause go wrong ... The cause is not yet lost, and, since nothing worse than this can befall us, it is well worth while to fight on."

One man felt no regrets at the collapse of the talks. His wife might be in the concentration camp, his children in the hands of the enemy, his farm destroyed and his whole future obscure. "I would rather see my husband in his grave, than see him lay down his arms", Mrs de Wet told the commandant at Pietermaritzburg. Christiaan himself no longer believed that the war could be won, although he had slight hopes that the intervention of the German Kaiser might obtain better terms. His instinct, however, told him that he must continue the battle yet awhile. As though the war had only just begun, he prepared for another winter in the field. His men made clothes out of animal hides, coffee out of roots of trees. They lived mostly on meat commandeered from the natives, for on the farms hardly anything was left. Even the leather in the tanpits was being cut to pieces and burnt by the Tommies, so that they might not have boots. "Uitskud", literally, "emptying out", was the device by which the Boers began to save themselves from going naked. English prisoners found themselves stripped almost to the skin. Neither de Wet nor his fellow-commanders approved, but there was no alternative. More and more desertions to the English were taking place. In 1901, a letter arrived from F. W. Reitz, formerly President of the Orange Free State, and latterly State-Secretary for the Transvaal Republic: "I have the honour to report to you that to-day the following officers met the Government, namely, the Commandant-General, General B. Viljoen, Generaal J. C. Smuts (Staats-Prokureur), the last-named representing the Western Districts. Our situation was

seriously discussed, and, among others, the following facts were pointed out:

1. That small parties of Burghers are still continually laying down their arms, and that the danger arising from this is becoming every day more threatening, namely that we are exposed to the risk of our campaign ending in disgrace, as the consequence of these surrenders may be that the Government and the officers will be left in the field without any Burghers, and that therefore heavy responsibility rests upon the Government and War Officers, as they represent the nation and not themselves only.

2. That our ammunition is so exhausted that no battle of any importance can be fought, and that this lack of ammunition will soon bring us to the necessity of flying helplessly before the enemy.

3. That, through the above-mentioned conditions, the authority of the Government is becoming more and more weakened, and that thus the danger arises of the people losing all respect and reverence for lawful authority, and falling into a condition of lawlessness.

Up to the present time the Government and the Nation have been expecting that, with the co-operation of their Deputation and by the aid of European complications, there would be some hope for the success of their cause, and the Government feels strongly that, before taking any decisive step, an attempt should again be made to arrive with certainty at the results of the Deputation and the political situation in Europe.

Having taken all these facts into consideration, the Government, acting in conjunction with the above-mentioned officers, have arrived at the following decisions:

Firstly, that a request should be addressed this very day to Lord Kitchener, asking that, through the intervention of ambassadors sent by us to Europe, the condition of our country may be

allowed to be placed before President Kruger, which ambassadors are to return with all possible speed.

Secondly, that, should this request be refused, or lead to no results, an Armistice should be asked for, by which the opportunity should be given us of finally deciding, in consultation with your Government, and the people of the two States, what we must do."

With scorn and anger, President Steyn reported that, as far as the Orange Free State was concerned, there was no question of surrender. He enumerated recent successes of de Wet and others, finishing up: "All these considerations combine to make me believe that we should be committing national murder if we were to give in now. Brethren, hold out a little longer. Let not our sufferings and our struggles be all in vain; let not our Faith in the God of our Fathers become a byword. Do all that you can to encourage one another."

General de Wet had decided to work his way back into the Transvaal. The war seemed to have settled down into a stalemate. General Smuts was just beginning his famous 2,000-mile raid through Cape Colony, which, despite the fact that he had scarcely 300 men with him, was to occupy thousands of British troops, and to cost millions of pounds to suppress. Oom Krisjan was lying low. "It is difficult to follow de Wet's movements, or to estimate his forces", wrote the *Sunday Times*. "In London de Wet is now said to be discussing surrender", another journal declared for the 99th time.

A new factor was coming into the war: bags of cement. Train-loads of them were reaching every part of South Africa now under the control of Britain, with vast quantities of bricks, corrugated iron and above all, barbed wire. Entirely new methods of ending the campaign had been adopted. Little one and two-storied buildings sprang up in the loneliest

reaches of the Karroo, on the Highveld, in the Lowveld - everywhere. Each was protected by sandbags. There were loopholes in the massive walls, and occasionally a crow's-nest for a lookout. From blockhouse to blockhouse ran monster fences of barbed wire. They criss-crossed the plains and climbed through the mountains, in an effort to hem in the commandos. At first the Boers pooh-poohed their importance, and were not unsuccessful in dodging them. Reports had it that herds of oxen had; been used to trample them down. Even though South Africa was too vast to be completely divided up into paddocks, there was no more question of moving round unhampered. Every week further obstacles separated the various commandos. To pass from district to district, it was necessary to move by night, and even then powerful enemy searchlights swept the horizon.

De Wet modified his tactics again. If anything, he, became more mobile than before, sneaking past a blockhouse by creating diversions, setting fire to the veld, and adopting other tricks of the Boer hunters. British scouts located him once more in the Heilbron district of the Orange Free State, and across the bare brown plains an officer with a white flag brought him a letter from the Commander-in-Chief calling for his surrender.

"... All Commandants, Veldcornets and leaders of armed bands - being Burghers of the late Republics - still resisting His Majesty's forces in the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal, or in any part of His Majesty's South African possessions, and all members of the Government of the late Orange Free State and of the late South African Republic, shall, unless they surrender before the 15th September of this year, be banished for ever from South Africa; and the cost of

maintaining the families of such Burghers shall be recoverable from, and become a charge on, their properties, whether landed or movable, in both Colonies.

God Save The King.

Given under my hand at Pretoria, the seventh day of August, 1901.

KITCHENER, General.

High Commissioner of South Africa."

De Wet was getting used to this kind of correspondence. "Bangmaak is nog nie doodmaak" (Threatening is not killing), he muttered as he wrote a brief note in reply:

"Excellency,

"I acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency's missive, in which was enclosed Your Excellency's proclamation, dated 7th August, 1901. I and my officers give Your Excellency our assurance that we have only one aim for which we are fighting, namely our independence, which we shall never sacrifice.

Yours obediently,

CHRISTIAAN DE WET."

On September 15, the day when all the burghers were to surrender, on pain of banishment, General Botha had begun a fresh invasion of Natal; General De la Rey had inflicted a severe defeat on General Methuen, and General Hertzog had gained some fresh successes in the Orange Free State.

In spite of the blockhouses, in spite of the National Scouts, the search-lights and the barbed wire, de Wet, Botha and Steyn on August 25 had decided to continue the war. One typical story of this period concerns his passage of the fortifications between Lindley and Kroonstad.

"General", said one of his men as they rode through the night, "when are we getting through the blockhouses"

"We have passed them long ago", was the answer.

The guerilla war went on right through 1901, till another Christmas passed and another New Year broke. President Steyn sent a letter to Lord Kitchener: "The whole of the Orange Free State, except the capital and railways, is in our possession. In most of the principal towns there are landdrosts appointed by us. Thus in this State the keeping of order and the administration of justice are managed by us, and not by Your Excellency. In the Transvaal it is just the same; there also justice and order are managed by ministers appointed by our Government. May I be permitted to say that Your Excellency's jurisdiction is limited by the range of your Excellency's guns."

Beneath the carved timbers of the House of Commons a peppery Irish member stood up in his seat on the Opposition benches on the last day of January, 1902. Mr. Dillon, later to become famous in connection with the Sinn Fein agitation, turned towards the Secretary of State for War, and asked: "Has the Right Honourable Gentleman's attention been drawn to the fact that Mrs. Christiaan de Wet has been sent to a concentration camp? Is Mrs. de Wet now in camp, and, if not, what course have the British authorities adopted in regard to this lady?"

The House suddenly looked up, as Lord Stanley, Financial Secretary to the War Office, replied on behalf of the Government: "I have not special information but, as far as I am aware, this lady is in a refugee camp." "Is she," roared Mr. Dillon, "in a concentration camp now?"

Lord Stanley: "Yes, sir."

"Scandalous, most scandalous!" retorted a member, while the Nationalists cheered and called out "Shameful!" and another Irishman pointed out the Colonial Secretary and said: "There's Chamberlain laughing", a sally at which the celebrated "Joe" indignantly shook his head.

A couple of days later, Mr. Scott took up the matter: "In which concentration camp is the wife of General de Wet now confined? Is she compulsorily detained? If so, on what grounds? Will special care be taken to secure for her the utmost possible consideration?" Mr. Broderick read from his papers: "Mrs. de Wet is reported by Lord Kitchener to be in a concentration camp in Natal, and to be quite comfortable." Again Mr. Dillon jumped up; "Is she at liberty or is she a prisoner?" "I cannot say she is at liberty to leave" soothed Mr. Broderick, "unless she chooses to go out of our lines and returns to those who will maintain her."

Meanwhile, on a hill outside the town of Pietermaritzburg, among the long line of cantonments, with their strange mixture of patrolling soldiers, women cooking their meals, children playing about, hospital orderlies coming and going, Mrs. de Wet nursed her babies, and waited for news of her husband, whom she had not seen for many months. Despite her refusal to sign any petition for peace, or perhaps because of it, her relations with the Commandant were those of mutual respect.

It was Mrs. Steyn, the wife of the Orange Free State President, and herself a prisoner of the English, who testified long after that Christiaan de Wet said to her: "Now only do I really love my wife, for I have seen what she meant to me in the difficult days of the war."

General de Wet faced the New Year 1902 with the resolve to operate with smaller commandos than hitherto. He had found his way back into the Free State, where his brother, Piet de Wet, who

had been his leader at Nicholson's Nek, and who had fought so well for the Republic, was now a National Scout, giving valuable help to the English.[3] The mountain approaches of the Drakensberg promised valuable shelter for the Republicans. December 24, 1901, saw them approaching Tygerkloof, six hundred in single file, on foot, the horses having been left far below and the wagons having, at long last, been abandoned. Ahead lay Groenkop, precipitous on three sides, but with an easy slope on the third, defended by a semi-circle of British forts, and commanding the enemy communications into Basutoland. Though his officers thought that the easy approach should be taken, the memory of Majuba was still strong with de Wet. They would expect an attack where the slope was gentle, but not near the precipices. Long before sunrise the British sentry thought he heard a faint clatter among the hills.

"Halt! Who goes there?" Below him fiery flashes of rifles blazed out, and then the words followed in Afrikaans: "Burghers, storm"! As the Tommies tumbled out of their blankets they could hear the boulders and shingle rolling down into the valley, while the cliff-faces seemed alive with Boers. Only three or four minutes passed before the alarm went round the camp; which lay 100 yards from the edge of the koppie, but it was enough to give the Republicans a lead, and as for the gunners, whose leaders had placed them with Maxim- Nordenfeldts and Armstrongs facing the wrong direction, they were shot down. The

[3] "Dear Brother", Piet wrote to Christiaan. "From what I hear you are so angry with me that you have decided to kill me if you find me. May God not allow it, that you should have opportunity to shed more innocent blood. Enough has been shed already.... I beseech you, let us think over the matter coolly for a moment and see whether our cause is really so pure and righteous that we can rely upon God's help".

tactics of Majuba and Nicholson's Nek had answered once again.

Wire-cutters saved the burghers on the night of February 6, 1902. As they stumbled across the roadless and moonless veld, they walked into a barrier scarcely 100 yards from a blockhouse. How they passed unnoticed is hard to explain, but the following morning the willow-shaded banks of the Valsch River came into view. Three of the cattle-drovers joined the fighting men a little later in the day. Not as lucky as their comrades, they had lost their way, and had only reached a gap in the fence after dawn. Twenty oxen and one horse, fell under the fusillade of bullets, but Gert Potgieter, Wessel Potgieter and Jan Potgieter, the men in charge, came through unscathed. This incident is believed to be the one which led to the story that de Wet used livestock to trample down the barbed-wire fences. At Wolvehoek Station, a little siding on the line to the North, de Wet heard with much amusement that Lord Kitchener himself had been waiting there, in anticipation of his capture and that of President Steyn.

While the Great de Wet Hunt proceeded unabated, both Republican Governments decided to have a conference at a place called Liebenberg's Vlei, not far from Reitz. Telling his men to disperse most of them made their way singly through the British lines-one of those baffling Boer tricks with which no recognized rules of strategy seemed capable of coping - de Wet rode to the meeting place, silent but in good spirits. If he had any doubts about the future, he certainly never showed them. Every mile or two there was a homestead, roofless, with black flame-marks along its windows and doors. The cattle paddocks stood in ruins, the fields overgrown with weeds. Occasionally women might be seen living in an abandoned native hut, or even in a cave. Barbed wire no longer appeared as fearsome to the Boers as it had been.

The unending trek was resumed after the Conference President Steyn and the surviving members of the Orange Free State cabinet, as well as the unofficial chaplain of the forces, the Rev. J. D. Kestell, joining de Wet's commando. Most of the men were near breaking-point, yet only occasionally did it become evident. Barely 300 yards away the English were firing at them. When de Wet ordered them to charge, only 250 complied with the order. "I used all my powers to arrest the flight of my burghers, even bringing the sjambok into the argument." His son, Kootie, now his secretary, who had charge of the precious little buggy containing his papers, and his son Isaak, newly-recovered from his wounds, were with him in the thick of the melee. In the twilight horses plunged in the river bed, but there was a steady stream of Boer fugitives to the rear. All of a sudden de Wet looked up. He noticed that there was a slackening-off of fire from the side of the spruit. For some reason the English were retreating. No doubt they would again begin shooting very soon, but there was breathing-space.

Colonel Rimington and Colonel Barratt, lying on opposite hills with their men, saw with dismay that a slight gap in the British lines, due to the existence of a spur in the neighbouring range of hills, was being forced by the Boers. Under the light of a full moon, six hundred men, with natives, cattle, women and children, extending for miles across the veld, had cut through the cordon, despite the firing of pom-poms and rifles. Over 200 Burghers and a large part of the convoy had been lost, but the main thing was that de Wet was once again at liberty. As though to make things worse for Kitchener, another force of 350 burghers escaped at another spot. That was a crowning point. On Majuba Day, February 27, the Republics suffered a reverse. News came that a full commando of 400 men under a Commandant van der Merwe had been captured.

For the next few weeks de Wet led a comparatively quiet existence, while President Steyn reorganised the Boers in the Western part of the Free State. Christiaan himself remained on a farm till the word came in March that a move must be made back to the Transvaal. One sad leave-taking now fell due. That little cart, which had travelled thousands of miles from one end of South Africa to the other, could no longer continue in use. Almost shaken to pieces by incessant travel, it was becoming an encumbrance. On the farm of General Wessel Wessels, not far from Heilbron, in a cave a few of the General's most trusted officers buried the official records. Almost as valuable to them were the clothes and ammunition also left here for future need. Colonel Rimington, the Commander of the famous English Cavalry Unit, soon after found his way up the hill to the newly-dug patch of soil. What became of the tin boxes, with those invaluable papers on the, campaign, with diaries, correspondence and other material, remains a mystery to this day. While the British soldiers looked through the documents, de Wet, President Steyn, a few officials and thirty burghers skipped over the railway line near Viljoensdrift, under the nose of the foe. Having cut the telegraph wires as they passed, they reached the Vaal on March 15, swam their horses through the powerful current of the big river, and clambered over the boulders on the northern side until at Witpoort they encountered General de la Rey and his commando.

The weather was already growing very cold; another winter lay near.

CHAPTER 14
SURRENDER

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, still a young and pretty girl of twenty-two, rose from her seat and closed the meeting of her Cabinet at the Hague. Scarcely had Her Majesty withdrawn to her own apartments than clerks set to work,

coding a telegram for London, where Baron Gericke, Minister to the Court of St. James, awaited his instructions. Only a few hours later, on the afternoon of January 29, 1902, a messenger delivered an *aide-memoire* for the Marquis of Lansdowne at the Foreign Office.

"It is the opinion of the Government of Her Majesty the Queen", began the document, "that the exceptional circumstances in which one of the belligerent parties in South Africa is situated, which prevents it from placing itself in communication with the other party by direct means, constitutes one of the causes for the continuance of this war, which continues without interruption or termination to harass that country, and which is the cause of so much misery."

The paper went on to show that the three Republican delegates in Europe, Messrs. Abraham Fischer, Wessels and Wolmarans, were almost completely cut off from communication with the surviving commandos in the field.

"These circumstances cause the question to arise whether an offer of good services could not be made by a neutral power, with the object of at least making it possible to open the way to negotiation, which could otherwise not be begun.

Although Lord Salisbury's Cabinet met immediately, in order to discuss this document, and Baron Gericke received the Marquis of Lansdowne's reply the same day, another month-and-a-half was to pass before the world heard anything fresh about the approaches.

“...It is evident that the quickest and most satisfactory means of arranging a settlement would be by direct communication between the leaders of the Boer forces in South Africa and the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's forces, who has already been instructed to forward immediately any offers he may receive for the consideration of His Majesty's Government.”

March arrived. From the borders of Mozambique to the frontiers of the Cape, from Lydenburg in the Transvaal, almost to the outskirts of Kimberley, the Boer commandos were still on the move. General Smuts passed within sight of Table Mountain. He had then turned north to lay siege to the copper-mining town of O'Okiep in the desert wastes of Namaqualand, where the garrison was more than hard-pressed. In seven months his command had grown from 200 to 3,000, although his effort to rouse the mass of Boers in the Colony had so far proved a failure. Somewhere in the mountain country of the North-Eastern Transvaal the fugitive Government of that Republic still bravely carried on, their offices in railway-coaches and in ox-wagons, with a portable coining-press striking sovereigns out of the half-finished gold disks removed from the Pretoria mint.

Nobody, not even Lord Kitchener, knew exactly where to address the letter that conveyed Lord Lansdowne's correspondence with Baron Gericke. Mingled hope and fear swept South Africa as the March of 1902 ran on.

Christiaan de Wet heard about the peace overtures on March 15. In a fiery speech President Steyn told the men that his views about continuing resistence were unchanged, but Oom Krisjan was less sure of the prospects: "I leave the matter in your hands", he said to his fellow officers. "You decide."

Across the hills and valleys, and through the Highveld and the Lowveld, messengers travelled under the white flag. Kitchener at Pretoria had agreed that he must give facilities for the various scattered commandos to confer. On March 10 Acting President Burger, writing from "Government Laager, In the Veld, S.A.R.", advised His Lordship that it was essential for him to meet President Steyn and demanded a safe-conduct. To this Kitchener consented and even placed the telegraph system at his disposal.

By the time that the formal safe-conduct reached him de Wet had returned to the Orange Free State. A messenger caught him somewhere near Boshof, to tell him what was afoot. He awaited further news, still collecting his men, as though the campaign were likely to continue indefinitely.

We know comparatively little of his thoughts in those days. With the suit that he wore as his sole possession, with a diet consisting chiefly of goat's meat and maize porridge, with not a soul to be met in the homesteads which he passed, with the land almost as barren as before the white man came, he well knew the position of his country. The other leaders were not all as realistic. Bold theories were exchanged at the camp fires, as to intervention by the Kaiser, the Czar of Russia, or the President of the United States. De Wet kept his counsel. Already he could see the Union Jack as a permanency between the Orange River and the Limpopo. Reports had come up from the Cape that Cecil Rhodes was very ill at his little seaside cottage at Muizenberg. Republicans regarded him as their deadliest enemy, the author of the Jameson Raid, the man who had stopped Kruger from reaching the sea, and from breaking through to the vacant North. On March 26, 1902, the day when de Wet was preparing to join Presidents Burger and Steyn, the founder of Rhodesia breathed his last. In ordinary times this would have caused a stir throughout the world. As it was, even South Africa was too preoccupied to give him the attention he merited.

Kruger was in exile; Rhodes was dead. It was a different world. Not till April did the combatants agree that each commando should send a representative to Klerksdorp, there to discuss a possible approach to the British Government for peace terms.

A large tent had been pitched by British soldiers on an open space outside the willow-shaded little

town, and here, on the afternoon of April 9, General de Wet joined the conference. On the Transvaal side was Acting President Schalk Burger, lanky and with a droopy beard. With him was General Louis Botha, head of the Northern forces, lively, blue-eyed, with a spring-like step that told of unabated energy. There was the calm, dignified General de la Rey, solemn and silent, and State Secretary Reitz, one-time President of the Orange Free State, and now one of the chief mouthpieces of the Transvaal. Gravely troubled with his eyes, and ill from his prolonged hardships in the veld, President Steyn had also dragged himself to the meeting. General Olivier, another Free State stalwart, studious-looking, bespectacled General Hertzog, the Rev. J. D. Kestell, all were present when de Wet arrived, along with dozens of officials. The prayer which was said by the delegates as they started was no mere formality. If ever they needed Divine guidance, it was on this occasion.

President Burger lost no time in broaching the subject. He told of the correspondence between Queen Wilhelmina and King Edward VII, and how the present meeting had come about. "Faithful to our compact", he said, "we can do nothing without the Orange Free State. I consider that it is the time for us, the leaders of the people, to meet each other and discuss things fully, with our eyes fixed on God. We must face our condition as it really is. Our subject is to make a proposal for the restoration of Peace."

Each General now gave an account of the state of his forces. Botha declared that he still had eight commandos, numbering 8,500 men, but that there was hardly a sheep left in his section of the country, and only twenty head of cattle. Christiaan de Wet followed. "Innumerable hostile forces", he said, "have continually operated against me during the last eight to ten months. I, with my Government, was so surrounded by the enemy in the north-eastern

districts of the Free State, that we had to fight our way out. Seven hundred burghers were then captured, but among them were many greybeards, boys and other men not capable of serving, so that the number of serviceable burghers captured was not more than 250. As regards cattle, if we compare the present condition with that before the war, we will have to say: There are none. However there is sufficient to eat for the burghers and their families. In the Western and South-Eastern portion of the Free State almost all the men laid down their guns when the great forces of the enemy marched through there for the first time. Consequently the commandos there are very weak. Yet they have still enough corn in those districts for a full year. Cattle, however, are so scarce that bulls and rams are slaughtered. From the district where General Brand was in command the enemy at an earlier stage of the war removed all the cattle, but now they have large herds again and sufficient corn to last for twelve months. In the south-eastern portion of the Free State matters are much the same as in the south-west. In the districts of Boshof and Hoopstad there are many sheep and cattle and there is no want of mealies. Our strength in the entire State amounts to 5,000 men, besides which there are many burghers in the Cape Colony. The spirit of all of them is splendid." Next came General de la Rey. He told of the 2,000 men with whom he had been harassing the British, and of another 1,800 in the Cape Colony still under his command, and of the 600 who really belonged to de Wet. All the afternoon and into the following day the discussion raged in that tent.

General de Wet spoke afresh. "I do not wish to boast when I say that the enemy concentrated against me their greatest forces, and that I had the smallest force, but as far as I am concerned there can be no mention of surrender of our independence. Our cause has progressed since

last June. The places of the burghers whom we lost in the Republic have been filled by recruits in the Cape Colony. I have sufficient food, clothes and ammunition for more than a year. Before I concede one iota of our independence I will allow myself to be banished for ever."

On the third day the delegates decided to offer "a perpetual Treaty of Friendship and Peace" to Britain, including a settlement of the vexed question of the franchise for Uitlanders, the dismantling of all state forts, equal rights for English and Dutch languages in the schools, and sundry other concessions.

A wire arrived in which Lord Kitchener proposed to have a personal interview with the Boer representatives, and on Saturday morning, April 12, two special trains were shunted into Pretoria station. One carried the Government of the Orange Free State and the other that of the Transvaal. Just twenty-one months had passed since President Kruger and his officials abandoned the capital to the advancing British.

To the tall, bearded, brave men who got out on the platform it looked a different place from the one over which their four-coloured flag had once waved. There were still the forts on the neighbouring hills, the trees and the water-furrows on the streets, and the newly-built Government offices on Church Square, token of a prosperity that was no more. Pretty villas on the roads to Arcadia and Sunnyside: still stood in bowers of roses and the Aapies River cut its stony bed along the side of Meintjes Kop, yet the highways through which the official carriages took them breathed another atmosphere. Over the doorways of the Government building was the Lion and the Unicorn; the Union Jack hung from scores of flagstaffs, English was spoken by every second person, whether in uniform or mufti, a new style of architecture was shown in the buildings under construction; there was a

different coinage; the bands of the troops that marched by would never play the Volkslied. Handsome and steely-eyed, Lord Kitchener came to the gate of a bungalow in the suburb, outside which stood two sentries. At times he would nervously stroke his thick moustache, as the company ranged themselves around the heavy table of the living-room, with its door to the sunny verandah.

In slow Dutch sentences, translated into English by Mr. Reitz, the Boers explained their scheme, that they were ready to give up much in order to restore peace, that they wanted the peace to be a lasting one, but that they must retain their self-respect.

Bit by bit the Republicans explained their plan for an alliance, for disarmament, for a mutual amnesty and equality for Uitlanders. Next morning the reply from Downing Street lay on the table. This time Lord Milner, in his sleek, black frockcoat, every inch a diplomat, attended the meeting at Lord Kitchener's house.

"How are you, Mr. Steyn? How are you, Mr. Burger?" he addressed the heads of the delegations, and then lapsed into "President".

If the Commander-in-Chief had scarcely been encouraging about the scheme submitted, Lord Milner's "No" was even more decisive. The countries were annexed, had been annexed for over two years, and their independence was already gone. It was merely a question now of accepting a proposal which embodied a promise of ultimate self-government within the British Empire.

With sinking hearts, the Boer representatives took another resolution, of which they handed a copy to the Statesman and the Soldier:

"The Governments, considering that the people have hitherto fought and sacrificed everything for their Independence, and that they constitutionally have not the power to make any proposals affecting their Independence, and since the British Government now asks for other proposals from them, which they cannot make without having previously consulted the people, propose that an armistice be agreed upon to enable them to do so. At the same time they request that a member of the deputation in Europe should be allowed to come over to see them."

Time was running on. It was decided that both the Orange Free State and the South African Republic should each elect thirty delegates who were to meet at Vereeniging on May 15.

For the first time since 1899 de Wet found himself engaged in peaceful pursuits. Up and down the length and breadth of the Orange Free State he travelled with General Hertzog, supervising the meetings - now on a farm, now in a camp, now in a town - at which the commandos elected their delegates for the final gathering, to be decided once and for all, whether to accept the conditions offered or whether to continue the fight.

Vereeniging was not, as it is today, an industrial town. It stood by the banks of the shady Vaal River, a village but a few years old, with a railway bridge, one or two collieries, and little else. Long lines of goods-trucks waited at the sidings, with uniforms, with food of every kind, visible evidence, if any were needed by the Boers, of the immeasurable power of the Empire they had fought for three long years. Men saw each other for the first time who had been separated since the outbreak of the war. There was talk and exchange of reminiscences, but little laughter, Some came in their Sunday frock

coats, but most of them were in the worn, often-patched garments, stained with rain and cut by barbed wire, in which they had been in the field.

Lord Kitchener had caused a large marquee to be erected on the veld near the railway station, and a fence put up to prevent intrusion. War correspondents prowled around outside. One of them, Edgar Wallace by name, was to make his fortune by obtaining the first exclusive report.

"We the undersigned swear solemnly that we, as special representatives of the People, will be faithful to our People and Country and Government, and serve them faithfully, and that we will diligently perform our duties with the necessary secrecy, as behoves faithful Burghers and representatives of the People so help us God Almighty.

Vereeniging, South African Republic. May 15, 1902."

That was the oath which every one of the sixty men swore and signed as he entered the tent. There were no heroics about the speeches, but their sheer drabness was more than eloquent.

General Nieuwoudt said that in Fauresmith there were no more cattle and all but three women had been evacuated. "About seventy bags of grain are left." General Prinsloo had cattle at Ficksburg, but could not move them owing to the blockhouses. In the whole of Rouxville, so General Brand said, there were only nine women. At times his men went two or three days without food. General Wessels thought that round Harrismith they might still hold out for another three months. General Smuts said there was not sufficient grazing left in the districts they had invaded at the Cape. Commandant Schoeman from Lydenburg had lost his 800 head of cattle and all his grain. So the tale went on. General Botha with his men lived on what they could get from the natives as a favour.

Commandant Uys, from the district of Pretoria, believed they might hold out another month. Nobody had imagined that the plight of the Republics was so serious. General de Wet proposed that the policy of raiding might be extended, but it was a half-hearted scheme.

Next morning was Friday. State-Secretary Reitz rose: "I have a proposition to make. Should we not offer the British the Witwatersrand and Swaziland? We can also sacrifice our foreign policy and say: 'We desire to have no foreign policy, but only our internal independence. We can then become a protectorate of England. What have we got in the Witwatersrand? After the Franco-Prussian War France surrendered Alsace and Lorraine to Germany to retain her independence. What has the wealth from Johannesburg done for us? That money has only injured the noble character of our People. This is common knowledge: And the cause of this war lay in Johannesburg."

Reitz's idea gained the approval of several delegates, and the outcome was that General Smuts and General Hertzog were instructed to frame a scheme in which this might be embodied. Everybody knew that an agreement of some sort must be signed. At this stage de Wet stood up in his place from his little folding-stool, and began:

"I intend to say nothing on this great matter, because my opinions on it are no secret. I still have the same opinion that I had when the war threatened us. In the Orange Free State you find the same critical conditions that exist in the South African Republic. There are nine districts which were entirely abandoned by us for a time, but which were later on again occupied by the Burghers. The only food there was some corn, which had been hidden. Meat had to be taken from the enemy.

"I deeply respect the feeling of Commandant-General Botha, although I differ from him and

others, who are of the opinion that we must stop the war. I believe what has been said about the general misery in so many districts of the South African Republic and about the difficulty of keeping up the struggle there, but you must not take it amiss in me if I paint out that the unfortunate correspondence between our two Governments, which fell into the hands of the British at Reitz, painted the conditions in more or less the same colours as those in which they are now represented. That was a year ago. I wish, however, to accept what has been said as true. Still the Free State does not wish to give up the war. I wish to speak openly, and let no one consider it a reproach when I say that this is really a Transvaal war. I say this in a friendly and brotherly spirit, because for me the waters of the Vaal River never existed. I always was an advocate of closer union. There are unfaithful burghers amongst us too, unfaithful to the compact between the two Republics, but I cling to that compact, and say that the entire war is our common cause.

"What is now the mood prevailing among the burghers of the Orange Free State? The meetings there were attended by 6,000 of them. I myself was present at various meetings, at which altogether 5,000 attended, while General Hertzog met the remaining 1,000. At these meetings a voice as of thunder was given for independence. The resolution was: ‘Continue. We have always been prepared to sacrifice everything for our independence, and are still prepared to do so.’ Not a single man spoke differently. There is thus only one course open to me. We must see what can be done for those parts of the country which are helpless. I do not wish to be the man to say what must be done, but I shall do everything I can do to help. It would be very hard for me if we have to adopt General Botha's suggestion to send men into the enemy's lines with their families. We

must continue the war. Let us consider what our numbers were when we commenced. Let us assume that there were 60,000 burghers able to bear arms. We knew that England had an army of about 750,000 men. Of these she has sent here about 250,000, namely one-third. And experience teaches that she cannot send out much more than a third. Have we not also still got about a third of our fighting forces?

"I am also prepared to give up something for the sake of our independence, but, with reference to the suggestion of offering the Goldfields, I agree with General de la Rey on the point. We can have no other government, no English colony, in the midst of our country. That will cause friction. It is said that the Goldfields have been a curse and a cancer for us. Well, they need not remain a curse. And then, how shall we materially rescue our people without the Goldfields? Swaziland is not of much importance. That we can give up.

"The war is a matter of faith. If I had not been able to do so in faith, I would never have taken up arms. Let us again renew our covenant with God. If we fix our eyes on the past we have more ground to continue in faith. The entire war has been a miracle, and without faith it would have been childish to commence the war. We must not think of intervention. That there has been no intervention is a proof that God does not will it, because through this war he wishes to form us into a people. Our help and not our deliverance must come from him alone, and then we shall not become proud. I cannot see into the future, but this I know. It is dark, but we must go on, trusting God, and then, when victory comes we shall not be proud.

"With reference to the Cape Colony, I may say that I am also disappointed, not with the reports from there, but because there has been no general rising. People who sent us information have not kept their word. We must accept the

report of General Smuts, and he says we must not depend upon the Cape Colony; but he does not say that our cause is declining there. The Cape Colony has been of great assistance to us, since it compelled the enemy to withdraw about 50,000 troops from the Republics.

"I feel for the poor families who are suffering so grievously, and also for our burghers in the camps. I think anxiously of their misery, but I have nothing to do with facts. The entire war is a matter of faith. I have to do with a fact only when I have to remove it.

"I must still make this one remark - that if we surrender vanquished, we shall be able to depend on small mercy from England: We shall then, in any case, have dug the grave of our independence. Well then, what is the difference between going into our graves in reality, and digging the grave for our national existence?"

The same evening Christiaan de Wet, with Generals Smuts, Botha, Hertzog and de la Rey, again sat in the train to Pretoria. They made their headquarters at the home of Mr. Carl Rood, Parkzicht, Van der Walt Street. This was the letter they handed to Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner:

"To Their Excellencies Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner, Pretoria,

May 19, 1902.

Your Excellencies,

With the object of finally terminating the existing hostilities we have the honour, by virtue of the authority from the Government of both Republics, to propose the following points as a basis of negotiations, in addition to the points already offered during the negotiations in April last:

(a)We are prepared to give up our independence as far as foreign relations are concerned;

(b)We wish to retain internal self-government under British supervision.

(c)We are prepared to give up a portion of our territory.

If Your Excellencies are prepared to negotiate on this basis, the above-mentioned points can be more fully set forth.

We have the honour to be,

Your Excellencies' obedient servants,

LOUIS BOTHA.
C. R. DE WET.
J. H. DE LA REY.
J. B. M. HERTZOG.
J. C. SMUTS."

Christiaan took an active part in the discussions between the two delegations. He tried to cut away the legal technicalities and to keep the peace between General Hertzog and Lord Milner in their dispute about the powers of the delegation.

"You must know", he said, "that if I speak, I do not do so as a lawyer." Here, at any rate, was something to stir a common feeling, for Lord Kitchener broke into a laugh and said: "It's the same with me." From Monday till Wednesday the discussions went on. De Wet demanded that the Boer delegates consult their people before they might sign away their independence, that provision be made for further concessions by Britain, and that the Boer arguments be referred to London before being turned down. "If it was the intention that we should give an answer only on the basis as given in the British proposals it would not have been necessary for the people to come to Vereeniging. Yet we have virtually come with something which, in the proper sense of the word, is almost similar to the Middelburg proposals, and which meets the British Government as far as possible."

"Take it or leave it", was the decision of Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner. Concessions might be made, for instance a gift of £3,000,000 towards meeting the claims of the old burghers; there were prospects of a big loan and of self-government within the Empire. Independence, however, was at an end. De Wet fought hard towards getting extra grants to help the ruined burghers to re-establish themselves. The payment of Republican requisition receipts was a matter of honour to him.

"I can give His Excellency Lord Milner the assurance that the idea always lived with the people, that, even if everything was lost, they would still, after the war, receive the money in payment of the receipts, and if this is not conceded I cannot conceive what the result will be. I fear the result and hope that you will try to obviate it."

"It cannot be a large amount", said General Botha, "but we do not know how much it is."

De Wet: "You can well imagine that our expenditure was as a drop in a bucket compared with yours. And if I am not mistaken, the Orange Free State had three-quarters of a million pounds, when we commenced the war; and the expenditure by means of receipts began after that amount was exhausted. Your Excellencies must therefore admit that these receipts impose upon us the same obligation towards creditors as any other debt would have done."

He remembered that there were prisoners of war in Ceylon, St. Helena and the Bermudas, who held these notes and who should have a chance to cash them in. "I hope it will not be presumed that we sit here to bind the hands of His Majesty's Government. Sufficient other points will continually crop up, by means of which the Government can gain the confidence of the population. But with reference to the financial condition of the burghers who have been entirely ruined, we feel ourselves obliged to make some

arrangement, which will be a weapon in our hands when we return to the Delegates."

De Wet was already thinking of a peacetime problem. When Kitchener indicated that £2,000,000 to £3,000,000 would probably be made available, he said: "I understand this is something that must be settled by a proclamation, but I want to have as many weapons in my hand as possible when I go back to the Delegates; and one of the first questions which they will put is: 'What guarantees have we that we shall not be ruined by our creditors?' And what objection is there that a draft proclamation be given us to take to Vereeniging, which will be promulgated as soon as peace is concluded?"

Lord Kitchener: "But this will be something apart from this agreement."

Chief Commandant: "Yes."

Lord Milner: "What is the good of it to them?"

De Wet: "It is such a vital question for us that it cannot be taken amiss in us if we insist upon it, because we must give up everything else." Lord Kitchener: "Of course no one takes it amiss in you."

When legal advisers of both sides had drafted out the final conditions, for submission to the conference at Vereeniging by a "Yes or No" vote, de Wet said to Lord Milner: "I will abide by what the delegates do." On Wednesday, May 28, the final terms were handed over. An answer had to be given by Saturday, the 31st.

CHAPTER 15
THE TREATY OF VEREENIGING

Cold and sunny, the South African autumn lay upon the land. Already there was a nip in the air, and the grass on the plains around Vereeniging was turning to stubble. In their ragged and patched greatcoats the Boers shivered as they came to their meeting-place, on the morning of

May 29, 1902. President Burger looked tired and old, when, in the damped light of a marquee, he put on his glasses to read the text of the report which he and his fellow-emissaries must render about their conversations at Pretoria.

Christiaan de Wet sat like a sphinx at the long table as the sonorous Dutch sentences rang out. Most of those in the tent already knew what was coming. "We are informed; on behalf of the British Government, that this proposal cannot be further altered, but must be accepted or rejected in its entirety by the delegates of both Republics."

Five of the Boer leaders, de Wet included, had signed the letter and as he folded it up President Burger said: "There are three courses open to us: to continue the struggle, to accept the proposal of the British Government and conclude peace, or to surrender unconditionally." At the mention of the last alternative the discussion flared up afresh. Would it not be better to lay down one's arms and place the burden of settling all details on the enemy? Not a few delegates thought it a good idea. The rather desultory discussion on the forfeiture of farms and on an amnesty (which Lord Kitchener had foreshadowed for King Edward's forthcoming Coronation) gradually gave way to a consideration of this major issue.

Mr. C. Birkenstock from Vryheid urged: "Half a loaf is better than no bread", while General S. P du Toit of Wolmaransstad demanded: "On what ground can we hope to prosecute the war to a successful issue? If such grounds can be pointed out to me, I shall very willingly decide to go on manfully, but as far as I can see there is no hope for us. Mention is made of Faith. Yes, we had Faith, but in my opinion faith must have its grounds. Abraham wanted to sacrifice Isaac, but knew that, even if Isaac were killed, God's promise would nevertheless be carried out. If we believe that God will ultimately deliver us, we must use our brains."

All the while the burghers sat watching de Wet - wondering what he would say. When a number of others had spoken he slowly began: "I too feel myself compelled to express my feelings. The previous speaker declared that the final word we had from our deputation was that we must fight till the last man was dead and the last cartridge fired. I must say that I never heard such a message. What I know is that the Deputation told us last year they saw no hope of intervention, but that we should hold out until all means of resistance had been exhausted. But I did not understand from them that we must continue until the last man was dead and the last cartridge fired. I wish to express my feelings briefly, but candidly, and I must go back to the beginning of the war. I must say that when we began the war I had not as much hope of intervention as now. In saying this I do not wish to intimate that I now have hope of intervention, but that we did not know then whether we had the slightest sympathy in England or in Europe. And now we *have* found out that we have indeed sympathy. Though no one intervenes on our behalf, our cause is nevertheless strongly supported, so that even English newspapers give reports of 'pro-Boer' meetings over the whole world. This information we obtain from Europe through a man sent here by the Deputation, and I have no reason to say or to think that our informant is not trustworthy. He brought the last letter from the Deputation, and thus certainly enjoys their confidence. The man is acquainted with public feeling in Europe towards the two Republics, and informs us that our cause is daily gaining ground in Europe, and even in England. The question may now be asked: Why have the Deputation not sent us a report on those conditions? The reason is clear as daylight to me. We sent the Deputation to seek help for us. They went to ascertain from the other Powers what could be done for us, and thus came to know what was the policy of those Powers. Will they now be able to lay bare that policy to us? No, certainly not,

because there is a great danger that their letters will fall into the hands of the enemy. Even though the members of the Deputation were here themselves, I doubt whether they would be free to explain to us the future policy of the European Powers. It is therefore significant to me that the Deputation is silent, and this should not discourage, but rather encourage us.

"If there is any man that feels the pitiful condition of our country, then I am that man. And I believe every word that has been said here about the conditions in the various divisions. It is asked: What prospect have we of continuing the fight with success? To reply to that I must go back to the beginning of the war, and ask what hope and prospects we, then had? My reply is: 'Only Faith, nothing more.' And that Faith we still have. How weak we were in comparison with that Power, our enemy, with his three-quarters of a million of soldiers, of which he has sent some 250,000 to fight us! How could we have entered into such a struggle if we had not done so in Faith! We could only speculate on help from Natal and the Cape Colony. Some said that Natal and the Cape Colony would stand by us, but now we miss the persons who said that. They are lost to us, but we have not lost them on the battlefield, for they sit amongst the enemy, and many of them are even in arms against us. However, I never built on that help, although I hoped, - from what history taught us, that we should not stand alone to defend our rights by force of arms.

"I feel why some, taking into consideration our position, seek for tangible grounds upon which we can justify a continuance of the struggle; but then the question arises again: What tangible grounds had we when we *began?* Has the way become darker or lighter to us? It is still all Faith, and we know that a small people can by Faith triumph over the most powerful enemy. And if we, a small people, overcome by Faith,

we shall not be the only people that has done so. Those who say that the struggle must be given up want tangible grounds from us for the continuance of it, but what grounds had we at the commencement? Has it become darker now? On the contrary, the history of the last twenty-two months *has* given me strength. A year ago General Botha wrote to me, and correctly too, that the scarcity of ammunition gave him anxiety. We also had that anxiety, because our ammunition too was exhausted. There was a time when I feared and trembled when a burgher came to me with an empty bandolier and asked me for ammunition. But what happened? Since September last ammunition in large and small quantities has miraculously poured in, so that, to use an expression of the late General Joubert's, 'I was agreeably surprised.' And what happened with ammunition occurred also with horses. We always obtain a supply from the enemy. I do not take it amiss in those who want grounds for our Faith. I have mentioned some grounds, but those are only a thousandth part of what might be mentioned. I may add this further reason. The enemy has approached us. I agree that this proposal is an improvement on the Middelburg proposal of last year. The enemy have made further advances. How have they not approached us since the commencement of the war, when they forced themselves into our country? When our Governments negotiated with Lord Salisbury at the beginning of the war, in April, 1900, the British Government would hear of nothing but unconditional surrender. Today England is negotiating with us. Before we accept this proposal, let us once more take up the struggle, and do our duty - do what our hands find to do, and I have no doubt that the enemy will approach us again with more favourable proposals, if they do not leave us our entire independence. The Deputation said to us: 'Persevere', but I do not think that they can lay bare to us on what grounds this advice was based. Remember, too, that in the First (Boer)

War the South African Republic stood alone against powerful England, without any assistance. Then also there were waverers - the so-called Loyalists. It was then also a struggle in Faith only, and what was the result? They fought in Faith only and won. Is our Faith then going to be so much weaker than that of our forefathers?

"It is asked: What about our families? Certainly we must care for them, but only as far as, and as well as we can. More we cannot do. It has been said that we must let the men lay down their arms to save the families, but it is a hard matter to say to a Boer: 'Take your family, go to the enemy, and lay down your arms.' However, we could do that rather than see an entire people fall.

"We can learn much from the history of America. It has been said that our circumstances cannot be compared with those of the Americans, and yet a comparison is not out of place. Even powerful England had to give in to them. It may be said that America is much larger than the two Republics, but we are not bound to the territories of the two Republics. The Orange Free State offers many difficulties on account of her situation. The railways pass through the entire country, and on the borders we have the Basutos, a powerful nation. We have no Bushveld like the South African Republic, and have thus to find our way through the British forces.

"The matter is a very grave one for us, but we cannot part with our arms. Everything else is of minor importance to me, but if we give up our arms, we are no longer men. Let us persevere. Three or six or twelve months hence or later, a time may dawn when we may be able to do everything with our arms. But if we give up our arms and such a time dawns, we shall all stand as women.

"Now I wish to ask you: Why has Lord Kitchener refused to allow our Deputation to come out? And why did he say that we could see

from the papers that there was nothing brewing in Europe? Which papers, however, did, he refer to? *The Star, The Cape Times, The Natal Witness,* and other jingo papers, which, you must moreover bear in mind, are all censored. If we can accept his word that the deputation can bring us no favourable news, it would have been to the interest of England to let the Deputation come out, or to allow all newspapers through. But there is no question of allowing certain European and even certain English papers through: If we give up the struggle now, we do so in the dark. We do not know what is going on in the outside world. We cannot say that the enemy are making their terms more and more onerous, because that is not so. They are offering concessions.

"Considering all this, and also the fact that the tension in England can be looked upon as indirect intervention, I believe that we should continue with the bitter struggle: By standing manfully we shall get our just rights. When the time arrives that we cannot go any further, we can again open negotiations. Let us keep up this bitter struggle and say as one man: We persevere - it does not matter how long - but until we obtain the establishment of our Independence!"

The burghers murmured their applause, and General Beyers proudly exclaimed: "It is said we shall never get such an opportunity again for negotiating. General de Wet has touched upon this matter, and I agree with him and others that we shall always be able to negotiate anew. This is proved by what has already taken place, and I may further point out that there was a time when General Botha wished to see Lord Roberts, and when the latter replied that it was not necessary. And now the British are negotiating with us; in fact they opened up these negotiations."

The following morning, when the representatives arrived from their hotels, President Burger held a telegram in his hand. "Before we begin", he said,

"I consider it my duty to inform the Delegates and the members of both Governments, that President Steyn had to tender his resignation as President of the Orange Free State yesterday, on account of illness, and that he was forced to give the enemy his parole to enable him to obtain medical treatment. General de Wet has been appointed in his place, as Acting State-President, and, on behalf of the members of my Government, on behalf of you all, and on behalf of myself, I wish to assure him of our deep sympathy, and to express our heartfelt regret at the loss of a man who has hitherto been the support and the rock of our good cause. His retirement is a great loss to us all."

Oom Krisjan got on his feet and looked down modestly at his papers, as he thanked his comrades for their confidence, "As far as my poor powers go", said he, "I shall do everything I can for the Afrikaner." *In this unique manner Christiaan de Wet began his term of office as the last President o f the Orange Free State-for one day!*

It was already Friday; scarcely twenty-four hours remained before the decision had to be given to Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner. The tension of the harrowing week grew worse, that there was much change in what they had to discuss. Every man gave his opinion and it was noticeable that more and more began to side against the “Bitter-Einders” as they were called. General Hertzog spoke as a judge, as though he were summing up in a court case. He told of the new Wheat Tax which England had just adopted - a sign that her finances were affected and that the public would be getting restless. As though the spirit of prophecy were upon him, he spoke these words: "We are nearer the time when a Great War must break out. It is a known fact that the nations are arming themselves more and more, and building ships of war, which is all done in preparation for the day when war will break out in Europe."

The 30th of May ran on. No delegate had a wish for food or drink now that the real time of trial had arrived. A stern young man of 32, who had kept silent almost right through, began to talk - Jan Christiaan Smuts, newly-arrived from the Cape Colony, who had broken off the siege of O'okiep in order to attend at Vereeniging. He was still weary from the two-days journey by special train, placed at his disposal by the British High Commissioner, and in sentences that will be remembered by the Boer People as long as it exists, he set out the facts as they really were. "We are still an unvanquished military force", he told them. "Hitherto I have not taken part in the discussion, although my views are not unknown to my Government. We have arrived at a dark stage in the development of the war, and our cause is all the darker and more painful to me, because I, as a member of the Government of the South African Republic, was one of the persons who entered into the war with England. A man may, however, not shrink from the consequences of his acts, and on an occasion like this, we must restrain all private feelings, and decide only and exclusively, with a view to the permanent interests of the Afrikaner People. These are great moments for us - perhaps the last time when we meet as a free people and a free government. Let us rise to the magnitude of the opportunity and arrive at a decision for which the future Afrikaner generation will bless and not curse us. The great danger before this meeting is that it will come to a decision from a purely military point of view. Almost all the representatives here are officers who do not know fear, who have never been afraid, nor will ever become afraid of the overwhelming strength of the enemy, who are prepared to give their last drop of blood for their country and their people. Now, if we view the matter merely from a military standpoint, if we consider it only as a military matter, then I must admit that we can still go on with the struggle. We have still 18,000 men in the field -- veterans, with whom you can do almost any

work. We can thus push our cause, from a military point of view, still further. But we are not here as an army, but as a people; we have not only a military question, but also a national matter to deal with. They call upon us, from the prisoner-of-war camps, from the concentration camps, from the graves, from the field, and from the womb of the future - so decide wisely and to avoid all measures which may lead to the decadence and extermination of the Afrikander People, and thus frustrate the objects for which they made all their sacrifices. Hitherto we have not continued the struggle aimlessly. We did not fight merely to be shot. We commenced the struggle, and continued it to this moment, because we wish to maintain our independence, and were prepared to sacrifice everything for it. But we may not sacrifice the Afrikaner People for this independence. As soon as we are convinced that, humanly-speaking, there is no reasonable chance to retain our independence as Republics, it clearly becomes our duty to stop the struggle, in order that we may not perhaps sacrifice our people and our future for a mere idea, which cannot be realised."

They laughed bitterly as the young General went on to say: "Europe will sympathise with this only when the last Boer hero goes to his last resting-place, when the last Boer woman has gone to her grave with a broken heart, when our entire Nation shall have been sacrificed on this altar of history and humanity ... Comrades, we have decided to stand to the bitter end. Let us now like men admit that that end had come for us, come in a more bitter shape than we ever thought. For each one of us death would have been a sweeter and a more welcome end than the step which we shall now have to take. But we bow to God's will. The future is dark, but we shall not relinquish courage and our hope and our faith is in God. No one will ever convince me that the unparalleled sacrifices, laid on the altar of freedom by the Afrikaner People, will be vain

and futile. The war for the freedom of South Africa has been fought, not only for the Boers, but for the entire People of South Africa. The result of that struggle we leave in God's hand. Perhaps it is His will to lead the people of South Africa through defeat and humiliation, yea, even through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to a better future and a brighter day."

Shadows of evening swept over the Transvaal and the Orange Free State as the leaders of the Boers made their way out of the tent with President de Wet among them. Few of them slept that night. They sat in their tents, on the verandahs of their hotels, and walked up and down the ill-lit streets of the little town, challenged here and there by the British sentries, talking about the inevitable end. Next morning they assembled at halfpast nine. President de Wet had a suggestion to make: "The time is too short to admit of further discussion on these proposals, and we must arrive at a decision. I propose that we appoint a committee, consisting of Advocates Smuts and Hertzog, to draft a proposal embodying the views of this meeting. I do not say what the proposal must embrace. Let us then adjourn for an hour, and let the delegates of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State meet each other separately, in order to come to unanimity. We must arrive at a unanimous decision, because that will be of incalculable value to us for the future."

Shortly before noon the final proposals were drafted. They contained a record of the devastation of the country, and the prospect "that by continuance of the war an entire race might die out." They invoked the sufferings of the People. "This meeting is therefore of opinion that there is no reasonable ground to expect that, by carrying on the war, the People will be able to retain their independence, and considers that, in the circumstances, the People

are not justified in proceeding with the war, since such can only tend to the social and material ruin, not only of ourselves, but also of our posterity.

"Forced by the above-mentioned circumstances and motives, this meeting instructs both Governments to accept the proposal of His Majesty's Government, and to sign in the name and on behalf of the People of both the Republics.

"This meeting of delegates expresses the belief that the conditions thus created by the acceptance of the proposal of His Majesty's Government may speedily be so ameliorated that our people will thereby attain the enjoyment of these privileges to which they consider they can justly lay claim, on the ground, not only of their past history, but also of their sacrifices in this war.

"This meeting has noted with satisfaction the decision of His Majesty's Government to grant a large measure of amnesty to those British subjects who took up arms on our side, and to whom we are bound by ties of blood and honour, and expresses the wish that it may please His Majesty to extend this amnesty still further."

General de la Rey and General Botha had taken de Wet on one side and had pleaded with him how necessary it was that there should be no division in the voting. The President of the Orange Free State had nodded, and had called together the representatives of his country. One of those present said: "I shall never forget how we sat in that tent and listened, as General de Wet told us that there was no more chance of continuing the fight, and that there must be no division among us. I still see him there, this inflexible man, with his freezing eyes, his strong mouth, like a lion at bay. He would, he

could not, he must give up the fight. I still see the grave, drawn faces of the officers who had hitherto been irreconcilable, and who had been ordered to maintain our, independence. I see them staring, as though into vacancy."

Sixty men walked back into the main tent at two o'clock that Saturday afternoon. One by one they gave their votes, fifty-four in favour of accepting the peace, six of them against. Slowly the tellers wrote down the names. First one, then another broke down and sobbed.

Those grim old Boer soldiers sat there at the long table, and scarcely one of them but had given way. Clearing his throat as though to collect himself, President Burger began once more: "We stand here at the graveside of the two Republics. Much remains for us to do, even though we cannot do what lies before us in the official positions which we have hitherto occupied. Let us not withdraw our hands from doing what is our duty. Let us pray God to guide us and to direct us how to keep our people together. We must also be inclined to forgive and to forget when we meet our brothers. We may not cast off that portion of our people who were unfaithful. With these words I wish officially to bid farewell to you, our respected Commandant-General de Wet, members of both Executive Councils and delegates."

Mr. Kestell fetched out his prayer-book for the last time. Van Velden said: "President Burger, will you please call in Lord Kitchener's representatives." Two British officers, who had been walking up and down on the veld, Captain P. J. Marker and Major Henderson, stooped as they entered the doorway. General Botha faced them with a paper in his hand. A silence as of death prevailed.

"Gentlemen", he said, "this meeting has accepted the peace proposals of the British Government ..."

While the frenzied telegraph operators ticked out the message, which was upon the streets of London, of New York, of Berlin, of Amsterdam, of Sydney, of Calcutta, of Montreal and of Cape Town, within a few minutes of its arrival, General de Wet was riding at top speed in a carriage through the streets of Pretoria, usually so silent and now filled with a crowd. Outside the residence of Mr. George Heys in Mare Street - where Lord Kitchener now had his headquarters-the guard turned out as the Government Delegation arrived from the railway station. Lamps burned over a board-room table, cleared of documents. The clock struck eleven, as Lord Kitchener, dressed in mufti and preceded by his orderlies, walked into the room and the Republicans took their seats. Milner placed President Burger on his left with the Transvaalers, Kitchener waved to President de Wet to take his seat on his right with the other Free Staters. The Secretaries produced a file of typewritten sheets of parchment in four copies. At five minutes past eleven on May 31st, 1902, Burger signed the Treaty of Vereeniging. Then came State Secretary Reitz, General Louis Botha, and General de la Rey, Mr. J. C. Krogh and General Lucas Meyer. Now came the turn of the Orange Free State-President Christiaan de Wet, General Olivier, General Hertzog, Acting Government-Secretary W. J. C. Brebner. Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner wrote their names last. Not a word was said as the Statesmen and Commander-in-Chief laid down their pens. There was something unreal about it all.

The Orange Free State and the South Africa Republics belonged to the past. Lord Kitchener rose from his chair and held out his hand to each of the Boers. "We are all good friends now", he said.

CHAPTER 16
DE WET IN ENGLAND

In the cabin of the Royal Mail Steamer *Saxon,* homeward bound from the Cape, a man sat at a small table with stacks of papers around him. Stewards knocked at his door occasionally, asking whether he had any instructions for them, but he shook his head. Christiaan de Wet was busy on a book. In well-turned, vivid sentences in High Dutch he was composing *De Stryd Tusschen Boer en Brit,* soon to become a South African military classic. Within a few months it was to be no less famous in English, under the title of *The Three Years War.*

Even while the fighting was still in progress, he had conceived the idea of setting down his experiences, but now that not only his own home but those of so many of his friends lay in ashes, and the rebuilding of the entire country had begun, he decided that an exact account of what he had seen and done would awaken sympathy and, by its sales, contribute towards helping the innumerable war victims.

On the morning following the signing of the Treaty, the Boer delegates at Vereeniging passed resolutions delegating General C. R. de Wet, General Louis Botha and General J. H. de la Rey to proceed to Europe to collect the said funds, for the relief of their women and children.

Oom Christiaan had come from Pretoria by train, stopping over at Bloemfontein, where an enterprising young journalist, F. R. Paver, later editor of the Johannesburg *Star,* contrived to interview him at the station. Some few weeks he had spent with his wife, who had returned from Pietermaritzburg, before he set out for Europe. At every town a crowd collected on the railway platform, and at Cape Town loud cheering could be heard as his train drew in, and again when he walked aboard. There she was, the big grey liner, with her red and black funnels; there were his comrades, Botha and de la Rey, with a handful

of friends to say goodbye, and a great mass of Dutch and English, calling out friendly messages from the quayside. A few countrymen of theirs, including the Rev. J. D. Kestell, who had been chaplain to his commando, Messrs. Brebner, Ferreira, Van Velden and others were also to sail, as their secretaries and assistants.

Table Mountain, with its blanket of clouds and the beautiful city at its feet, had scarcely faded out of sight, when Christiaan locked himself in his cabin, sorted out his notes and began to write. People who expected him on deck at first thought he was seasick, till they saw him coming to meals and eating heartily. Whereas Botha occasionally sat down to a friendly rubber of bridge, and de la Rey relaxed sufficiently to indulge in a game of dominoes, de Wet, save for an hour or two after lunch, worked almost from morning to night. Only Mr. Kestell would come in at times to give a hand, but, despite the fact that it was the General's first effort at writing, we have the clergyman's own testimony that his assistance was purely technical, and that the striking imagery, the extraordinary liveliness of description and general accuracy were the author's own. Before the manuscript was passed for publication, de Wet went over it himself once more.

"I am no book-writer", he said in his own introduction, "but I felt that the story of this struggle, in which a small people fought for liberty and right, is justly said to be wanted throughout the civilised world, and that it was my duty to set down my own experiences in this war for the present and future generations, not only for the Afrikaner people, but for the whole world." He cautiously added: "The book has been written by me in Dutch, so I cannot be answerable for its translation into other languages." Not only did he prepare the text, but he drew out, with admirable correctness, the maps and battle-diagrams accompanying it.

Few are aware that he entertained ambitions of further authorship, although unfortunately stress of other events prevented him from realising them. "I intend", said de Wet, "to write on another occasion a book dealing with the Art of Scouting". (What a pity that this never materialised!)

The boisterousness of the many troops and civilians on board contributed not a little but to the gloom of the little company of Boers, conversing with each other as they sat at their own table. The captain of the Saxon showed them the greatest courtesy.

Dense fog hung over the English Channel one early morning in August, 1902, and over, the many hundreds of thousands of people gathering along the south coast of England to see the great Coronation Review at Spithead. Although the Saxon was due in Southampton at dawn the signal-station at Hurst Castle, only sighted her at 8.30. Then the clouds lifted and those who had found their way to the docks were rewarded with a fine view of the liner coming up the fairway. Even the excitement of the naval celebrations had not dwarfed the importance of the visit of the Boer Generals. Silently a few persons got into a launch and went out to meet the Saxon off Netley. One of them was a woman with a sad, kindly face - Emily Hobhouse. Another was a burly, bearded Afrikaner from the Orange Free State, Abraham Fischer, a member of the Delegation sent over by the Republics to Europe in their last effort to secure foreign intervention. Mr. Percy Molteno followed, a relation of the first Prime Minister of the Cape and finally one who wore a chain of office, His Worship the Mayor of Southampton.

The Mayor came towards the Boer delegates, beaming a friendly smile, but was coldly received. "Influenced by extreme depression", as the newspapers put it, the Generals cut the

welcome as short as possible and went off to their cabins for a long talk with Abraham Fischer. The latter had a letter to deliver to General Botha. As he tore it open his face grew graver than before. His old friend, General Lucas Meyer, had just passed away.

The passengers were thinning out, yet the crowd still waited on the quayside. "There they come!" shouted someone. First came Lord Roberts' *aide-de-camp;* then the visitors - General Botha, with his neat beard and blue eyes, wearing a semi-military tunic of dark green, set off with a stiff collar, then de la Rey with morning coat and a round felt hat, and lastly the man who evoked the loudest cheer, Christiaan de Wet, in a serge suit, loosely-fitting and homely, such as is worn on the farm. When he saw the enthusiastic faces below him, De Wet hesitated, but on second thought faced the inevitable and allowed himself to be hemmed in.

Hero-worshippers were disappointed at the visitors' response. Hardly nodding, the men hurried through to the customs sheds behind two police inspectors. The Coronation Review was due the following day, and it had been planned to let them spend the night in the *Nigeria,* which lay only a little distance from the Saxon. The Boer Generals, declining all official hospitality, in the end reluctantly agreed to walk across to the warship.

Soon the long hull came into view, and to a boisterous welcome the Boers were piped aboard. "The position", said an eyewitness, "was a little novel. If now they were bombarded it was only with kind attention. It had long been our duty to destroy their food, but now everybody wanted them to dinner. They who had been shot at had now been snapshotted. The adventurous strategists, who had retired before the approach of Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, now walked

unguardedly into their arms." On the unfamiliar quarter-deck of the cruiser two soldiers stepped towards them with a cordial greeting, the tall well-knit figure of Lord Kitchener and the wiry one of Lord Roberts. A third gentleman-Joseph Chamberlain-in mufti, with an orchid in his buttonhole, bowed to them and his bow was returned stiffly. De la Rey spoke the best English of the three, but even so it was difficult to work up a conversation. Botha spoke about the death of his friend Lucas Meyer, and explained that they did not care to see the Coronation Review. "I think you are making a mistake", observed Lord Kitchener rather awkwardly. The Boers then said good-bye and found their way to the special boat-train which was waiting to take them to London.

That day did their spirits begin to lift a little. As the railway coaches rolled past the meadows and hedges of Hampshire, past old churches and country houses, the instinct of the farmer rose to the surface, and they talked about the soil and about the beauty of the land. How green it all was, thought de Wet and how crowded. He could now understand why the English were so proud of their country. Town upon town, village after village and factories ever closer and closer together as they came near London. All these millions of people., living in a country smaller than the Orange Free State!

At 2.35 that Saturday afternoon they pulled into the great halls of Waterloo Station. However cordial their reception at Southampton, it paled before that of London. "Long before the train came to a standstill", said one journal, "people were cheering with wild enthusiasm and scores of newspaper reporters were struggling to get near the saloon door. So great was the crush that it was quite impracticable for the travellers to get on the platform. The three Boer leaders gravely raised their hats in acknowledgment of repeated

cries of "Good old de Wet!", "Our friend the Enemy!" and "Brave soldiers all!". To those who pressed round the door of the saloon they politely but firmly declined to say a word. Members of the party, in answer to the appeal as to where the Generals were going, replied: "They want to have a rest, and do not wish their whereabouts to be known". Railway police and porters came to their rescue, and by sheer force cleared for a time a space about the saloon door. Still they were hemmed in, not only the Generals, but Mrs. Botha and her son, the Rev. Kestell, Mr. D. van Velden, the Translator, old Mrs. de la Rey and her daughter, Advocate and Mrs. Ferreira, Mr. Brebner, Abraham Fischer, Miss Hobhouse and Mr. Clark. Constables opened a special side-door of the station, and as they climbed into a horse-bus another wave of humanity descended upon them.

At Horrex's Hotel in Norfolk Street, off the Strand, the delegates tried again to shake off their interviewers. All that evening the street was blocked with masses of people but they were disappointed. Applying their veldcraft to mass psychology, the generals remained out of view. Nor would they say what they proposed to do next. Behind the curtain of their sitting room, as evening fell they sat, planning the immediate future. There was Botha, determined, to make the best of a bad job, to make friends with the conquerors and, by gaining their confidence, to justify self-government. He had written-off the Republican episode; it belonged to the past, and, however painful it was, every good South African should admit it. De la Rey was not quite so definite in his views, but what he thought he said with the utmost plainness. Nobody could foresee what the future might bring. He agreed with Botha that, for the time being, they must make friends with the English, and secure the best possible terms for the Boer nation.

As for de Wet, it is hard to fathom his sentiments. The dedication of his new book stood: "To my Fellow-Subjects of the British Empire". Yet he was determined not to forget the possibility of a revived Republic. That did not necessarily mean treason or revolt; might there not be a day when peaceful secession could be carried out? Who might tell?

Persistence on the part of the newspapers was at last rewarded by a little statement through the Secretary. "The Generals", he said, "are much impressed by the warmth of their reception in England, and desire it to be made known that they received every courtesy from the captain of the *Saxon,* their voyage being made exceedingly pleasant. They were also delighted with the vista of green fields and trees which unfolded itself on their journey from Southampton to Waterloo". He added that their primary object was to collect funds for the relief of distress in their nation, and that many letters of welcome from prominent men had awaited them. Among the latter may be mentioned Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. W. T. Stead, the great editor of the *Review o f Reviews,* Mr. C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian,* and Mr. John Singer Sargent, the great artist.

Sunday morning broke over London in pleasant summer weather. A carriage drew up at Horrex's Hotel to take the Generals back to Waterloo, where a special train was to convey them to the King who was at Cowes. This was the first time that de Wet could look upon 'the city in comfort, and his devout nature was pleased at the ringing of bells and the large number of people on the way to church.

H.M.S. *Wildfire* lay moored at the Ocean Quay, Southampton, and by the gangway were Lord Kitchener and Lord Roberts, the commander of the vessel, and his officers. Everybody saluted and the Boers bowed politely. Within a few minutes the ship was steaming, beneath an

overcast sky, towards the Royal yacht *Victoria and Albert*. *In* the distance lay Cowes, of yachting fame, and the vast armada that was to be reviewed. King Edward's intuitive tact was evident from the start. With him were Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria. Before the Boer leaders had all left the gangway, His Majesty was already stepping forward to shake hands with each of them, and introduced them to his wife and sister. He spoke with cordiality "of the gallantry and brave manner in which you have fought those long and arduous campaigns", and he also stressed the consideration and kindness with which the Boers always treated the British prisoners, particularly the wounded. "I wish you the very best for the future", he told them, "and I hope that you will have a chance of a trip round the fleet". For a quarter of an hour they talked; nobody touched on any political theme and then, with another handshake, they said goodbye.

By evening they were once more in London, and despite all the secrecy, over 200 people waited for them at No. 4 platform.

Botha and de la Rey told their pursuers: "His Majesty received us very kindly. We are pleased with our reception and thoroughly enjoyed the journey". De Wet, however, only smiled, shook his head and hailed a cab to go back to his hotel.

Heavy rain was falling on August 19, when the Generals, hemmed in by another crowd, drove to Fenchurch Street Station on their way to Blackwall, where they caught the *Batavier III* for Rotterdam. If they had been greeted with cordiality in England, their welcome on the continent might almost be described as frenzied. In an "Appeal to the Civilised World" the three generals announced the creation of a General Boer Aid Fund, to be used to help the widows and orphans, the wounded and the impoverished left over from the war. "We ask for the hearty collaboration of the existing committees in the

various countries of Europe and America. We now are on the point of visiting these countries for the purpose of properly organising the collections." No sooner had they reached Holland than the meetings began and contributions flowed in from rich and poor.

The day after they landed at the Hague, de Wet, in a voice broken with emotion, addressed the crowd at an exhibition in aid of their cause. "The artists and other persons", he said, "who organised this display have contributed to the growth of our nation. We South Africans were on the road to development in art and industry, till the legs were cut from under us. Now we need help and support again ... The fact that we feel so much at ease in Holland conclusively proves that we are the descendants of the Dutch people. Our hearts are too full to speak". For the first time de Wet felt rather exhausted, and he let a doctor examine him. He could find nothing seriously wrong but exhaustion. "I cannot understand it", said de Wet. "I have done nothing special. All that I did on board was writing a book, and I am still writing it". "Writing a book!" exclaimed the doctor with a laugh. "As if that wasn't work!" In spite of this Oom Krisjan insisted on finishing the job, spending almost his whole free time (such as it was) on the final chapters. Reports had it that Botha and de la Rey were to contribute a preface,- but this scheme was not carried out. Publishers bid eagerly for the right of handling the volume and translations were to appear immediately in half a dozen languages, America demanded its own edition at the earliest possible date.

After rounds of meetings, through Holland and Belgium, they returned to England on August 31. Precautions were taken to ensure privacy, and the fact that it was raining when they arrived at Tower Wharf prevented crowds from gathering.

"Generals Botha and de la Rey want it to be distinctly understood that they do not wish to

grant interviews to any representatives of the papers. They have no announcements to make to the Press for the present."

From his home in Chelsea, Sargent sent word that he would be glad to do a portrait of General de Wet, as an illustration for his new book. The experience of being sketched was not entirely new to him, for Anton van Wouw, the distinguished Dutch sculptor, had drawn him once before, and the picture figures as a frontispiece in a volume about the war issued in Holland. As the great American artist had been strongly pro-Boer, de Wet overcame his repugnance to sitting still for hours on end. Though Sargent at that time was charging up to 5,000 guineas for a picture, and though he offered this one as a gift, Oom Krisjan did not fail to debit the cost of his car-fares to his subsistence allowance. The portrait itself is perhaps the best ever done of a South African, a strong, vigorous charcoal drawing, which has become known all over the world in *The Three Years War*.

The immediate cause of the generals' return to London was a far more urgent one. Joseph Chamberlain had just arrived back from Birmingham, wearing his famous buttonhole, and on the stroke of three, Lord Kitchener rang the door-bell at No. 10, followed by Lord Onslow, Under Secretary for Colonies, and Mr. F. Graham of the South African Department of the Colonial Office. In the presence of the interpreter and the shorthand-writers the Boer Generals took their last chance of fighting for the betterment of their people. They spoke eloquently and, at times, bitterly, at the inadequate compensation offered. De Wet, occasionally breaking into English, told Chamberlain how martial law was keeping alive hatred, not only in the former Republics, but in the Cape Colony, and that the £3,000,000 mentioned in the Treaty of Vereeniging would

not nearly suffice to ease the most urgent needs of rebuilding. Chamberlain listened politely, made notes and promised to look into things, but would not commit himself. The visitors felt disappointed. Though General Botha had a further interview next afternoon with Chamberlain, no information was given to the Press, until the official report came out. Invitations were still being showered upon the Boers, and gave the chance for long discussions with W. T. Stead and with some of the Liberal politicians. Gradually they gained the impression that the Conservative cabinet might not last as long as had been feared, and that perhaps self-government for the Transvaal and Orange Free State might be nearer than anyone imagined.

Back in Holland, de Wet for the first time took note of the country. He expressed his amazement at the intensive agriculture, practised behind the dykes, and at the wonderful quality of the cattle. The caps of the peasant women seemed strangely familiar to the descendants of the Voortrekkers. At The Hague, late in September, a cable was waiting for him. His thirteen-year-old little boy had passed away. For a little while he could hardly remain master of himself. Then he put aside his own heartache and resumed his daily campaigns. At Brussels he astonished the public. Arrangements had been made to let him see the one sight thought to have a unique interest for him as a soldier, the battlefield of Waterloo. "I am not going to a place where England gained renown by a great victory", said de Wet, and that ended the matter.

Now the question of his visit to Germany loomed up. Most of its people were glowingly pro-Boer, yet the Kaiser's own attitude was hesitant.

He was in one of his rare pro-British moods when discretion won the day. So, although the hotel where they stayed in Berlin was surrounded by multitudes, although the generals laid wreaths on the tomb of Bismarck and

although they were shown over the Reichstag building, the audience with the All-Highest never came to pass. Instead, they proceeded to Paris, where there was a further bout of visits, a reception at the Foreign Office by M. Delcasse: a visit to the Louvre and a round of theatres and collections. "I will not again take up my rifle, as I have signed the Treaty"; said de Wet, a statement that had a queer flavour in view of subsequent events. One pleasant incident occurred in France. De Wet was able to secure a reprieve for a young officer who had overstayed his furlough; he had spent it fighting with the Boers in South Africa. Invitations came for them to attend the inauguration, in the old Huguenot city of Nantes, of a monument to Colonel Villebois-Mareuil, who had fallen while fighting under de Wet in the Orange Free State, but time was lacking.

On October 21 they were back in London. The book had now gone off to the printers, and the English publishers were rushing it through the press in time for Christmas. During his last ten days in London, de Wet saw a little more of England, but refused to meet a single newspaperman. Leaving Botha and de la Rey to return later, he took ship once more on the Saxon on November 1, accompanied by his friend Wessels. "I enjoyed my visit", was all he would say.

Collections from the trip reached £103,819, 12s, 10d - not as much as had been hoped for.

CHAPTER 17
THE OLD FARM AND THE NEW RULERS

Midnight had struck by the clock in Kopjes railway station. Across the Northern Free State the winter gales whistled through the bones of a handful of passengers waiting for the Transvaal train. Emily Hobhouse put away her fountain pen and dropped a letter into the post box, just as the locomotive drew

in. This is what she had written to her aunt in England, Lady Hobhouse:

De Wet's Farm, July 1, 1903.

"...I am actually staying with de Wet, having arrived at the unpromising hour of 2.45 a.m. Only one train in the day stops at Kopjes station and that, when it is not too late, at 1 a.m. But it is usually late. It was a fine night. The new moon had turned upon its back and sunk into the veld before we left Kroonstad, so there were only the stars to tell me when I had got to the siding and to light us on our drive across the country. Two young de Wets came to meet me and I felt quite certain they would be able to see in the dark, which indeed they could. We slunk into the house as quietly as we could and were very glad of a warm bed after the cold drive. I am shocked to see how thin General de Wet has become, only a shadow of what he was in London. This is partly owing to hard work, he says, and also to a bad finger which for seven months has caused him acute pain. Now it is better and he is riding about his farm on the white horse which carried him through the war. The white horse was captured once, having a lame leg at the time, but it wisely ran away and came back to its master. When the war ended, this horse and his rifle were all the movable possessions de Wet had in the world. He found his wife in Vredefort camp, three hours distant (eighteen miles) and brought them here and he told me that then he himself climbed the kopje above the homestead and sat down for the first time to look at the heap of ruins spread beneath. Houses, out-houses, kraals, wiped out - fruit trees cut down, not a tree left - a desert all round. Of all the money he had spent upon the place only the great dam remained.

"Like all the other Burghers, de Wet is laughing. If he did not, he says, he should

die. It gives him great fun. I do regret not being quick enough to catch all the Dutch proverbs which spice his conversation, nor the humour which runs through all the family talk - they talk so quickly. De Wet is quite delightful in his own house, though, here as elsewhere, he is seldom to be found. In the evening one can catch him at last for a talk, but not for long, as at 8.30 p.m. we all go to bed. I think he is having a very hard pull this year. The only help he has had was the comparatively small advance-sum he got for his book and a royalty of 6d. on each volume-which has not yet been paid to him. It was all he had to begin life upon again.

"I am just finishing this before my midnight start to catch the 1 a.m. train. I shall reach Heidelberg tomorrow, having promised de Wet to attend Botha's great 'Volks Vergadering' (gathering of the people). At first I refused, but I was strongly urged to go, as men from all over the country will be there and they want to see me and I them, and so hear of each different district ..."

De Wet's return to South Africa from England had been more depressing in some ways than his outward trip for, his book now finished, he had nothing with which to occupy himself. All day he would sit gazing on the endless waters of the Atlantic, until at last he was back in sight of Table Mountain. Friends were there to welcome him, yet only when he was on the train for his beloved Free State did his mood lift.

At the farm his wife was waiting and the builders at work on a new homestead. Living for months in a tent, de Wet complained that the fencing had all been removed, and that the new government wanted him to buy it back. Had it not been for the returns from his book, which appeared in English, French, Dutch, German and Russian, he would never have recovered from his losses. He presently sold the copyright out and out, rumour said, for a sum of £10,000.

"Reconstruction" was the watchword of the day. All around convoys of released prisoners of war were on the move towards their homes. Cattle were imported to re-stock the devastated farms. The concentration camps stood empty. Schools carried on under canvas. Some £30,000,000 had been loaned by the British Government for the Transvaal and Orange Free State, in addition to the £3,000,000 which was a direct gift. Diehards declared that it was not more than was needed. Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, a fine type of British officer, who had administered Bechuanaland before the war, was now Lieutenant-Governor at Bloemfontein, but Milner had the last word in ruling the former Republics - a bitter pill for de Wet.

Substantial progress was, however, made. Even before the signing of peace, in July, 1901, a Department of Agriculture had been formed, farming experts' imported, and near Thaba Nchu, the scene of one of de Wet's battles, a great plantation laid out. Teachers arrived from Britain: because they taught in English the demand went forth to start Dutch schools, if need be with the subscriptions of the Boers themselves: Relief works for unemployed were organised under Lieutenant H. O. Armstrong, of the Royal Engineers. The Repatriation Department secured assistance from leading Free-Staters, including de Wet and Joseph Chamberlain himself came to South Africa. The General never met him, but his brother Piet was a member of the deputation that pleaded for a more generous disbursement than the £3,000,000 free gift.

Meetings of protest took place in both new colonies and Christiaan de Wet was among the most energetic speakers. Bit by bit they began to have their way, though the General presently realised that, until a change in the ministry of England occurred, he could not see self-government for his country. All the leaders

took a hand: they established the Urangia Union in the Orange River Colony, asked for mother-tongue tuition in the schools, for self-government, for more railways, and more assistance to the farmers. As a preliminary the Government in 1904 established a Legislative Council, only partly elected, yet a step in the right direction.

In the midst of all this ferment came a cable from overseas. President Kruger had peacefully passed away at his villa in Clarens, Switzerland. It was July 14, 1904. If anything marked the end of an epoch in South Africa, it was surely the farewell of this old warrior. For months the preparations for his burial proceeded and when, on Dingaan's Day, December 16, 1904, the State Funeral wended its way through Pretoria, it seemed as if the Republics were back. Everywhere flew the "Vierkleur". On Church Square General de Wet addressed the crowds that had come in tens of thousands from the utmost corners of the land, old and young, men and women, all with the memory of the recent conflict fresh upon them.

"Brothers and friends", he began, "we *all* feel that we are living through a solemn moment to-day. I feel quite incapable of speaking of such a man as President Kruger, for my tongue is too clumsy. Yet I am doubly thankful to have the honour to say a few words on this occasion, thankful to be able to bring to you the sincere sympathy of the people across the Orange River, a nation that still maintains the same attitude as in the past, which feels with you today and which wishes to join you in paying the last honours to President Kruger. We yonder are grateful and proud that such a great son of Africa has lived. Need I enter upon the deeds which he accomplished? No! For I would not be able to do justice to them. We can only do what President Kruger

accomplished if, like him, we remain faithful unto death. Such a man as President Kruger and his deeds will speak. They live - indeed only now do they *begin* to live - for us, if we really want to appreciate what God gave us in him and to assess him at his true value. The Afrikaner Nation must not forget the past. We cannot be loyal subjects if we cannot keep the past before us.

Woe to him who fails to keep this in mind. The Afrikaner Nation is; built upon its history. Woe unto him who will disturb the building of this Afrikaner Nation. I say 'Woe unto him', and God says so too. Dear Brothers, I hope we understand each other well, for misunderstanding is the cause of our misery." Here the audience, despite the solemnity of the occasion, cheered loudly. De Wet went on to urge the crowd that stood bareheaded before him in the sunshine, to remember Paul Kruger, who had paved the way for the Nation, and to allow those who had thrown in their lot with the Afrikaner Nation to join in the work. "Think of Paul Kruger", he called out. "He has made a Nation, a Nation the history of which has hardly begun ... Our duty is to carry on the battle in the future."

The body of the old President was lowered into its grave, the crowds returned to their homes and de Wet to his farm. He was among his cattle and his sheep, as though there had never been a war. He proudly showed visitors his famous white horse, "Fleur", which had carried him through shot and shell and which in all its thousands of miles of travelling had only stumbled once, and that after fearful hardships on the veld. "Fleur" lived until 1907 and his passing was recorded like that of a public man.

With the beginning of the Crown Colony Government, the Orangia Union grew more influential than ever. In July 1905 de Wet, Hertzog and Wessels met Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams to discuss reforms in education. The

Lieutenant-Governor agreed to recommend that the "Christian National" schools, which had been started by the Boers, should be amalgamated with those of the State, so as to provide adequate Bible teaching. Other signs of change were evident. Lord Milner's term of office ended in April 1905 and in December the resignation of the Conservative government in England was handed in by Mr. Arthur Balfour. Commissions visited South Africa, and early in 1906 General Hertzog declared that the country was on the eve of a new era. "I have hitherto been silent", said de Wet at a meeting in Heilbron on February 19, "because of the intolerable humiliation entailed in bowing my knee to Mr. Balfour and to Mr. Chamberlain. I hope that God will forgive England for the iniquities which Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain have caused them to commit. But England now has a government whose principal members have always been fair and even friendly to the Boers. Therefore the Boers should, as a matter of honour, suspend all agitation for Responsible Government for at least six weeks and give the Liberals a chance of doing justice to the Boers without being pestered to do so."

Curiously enough the Orangia Union was not in favour of the English Cabinet system. At a meeting in Bloemfontein it was proposed that there should be an executive of three elected members, and three nominated by the Imperial Government. De Wet was in his element. He stumped the country and on April 22 we find him in the village of Vredefort, giving his views afresh: "Although it has leaked out that the Constitution of the Orange River Colony has been decided upon, our leaders must be ready to supply all information. I entirely agree with the proposed articles drafted by the Committee ... If the Liberals do not grant us government on the lines which Lord Milner and Lord Kitchener had faithfully promised, the Boers will accept nothing less. There is no necessity to establish a

branch of the Orangia Union, as we have not two parties. We have not to fight De Beers and Capital, as the Cape and the Transvaal do. I urge unity in reinstating our model government. It is a great curse that the English political parties are always flying at each other's throats. There is no racialism in this country", he declared at Bloemfontein, "The Dutch will show the same loyalty to the British flag as they once did in the old Orange Free State." Before the year ended the first Parliament assembled at the old Raadzaal in Bloemfontein. There was a guard of honour of British regiments, but the mass of the thousands of people who thronged the building spoke Afrikaans. On November 27, 1907 Christiaan de Wet was sworn-in by the Chief Justice, Sir Andries Maasdorp, as Minister of Agriculture in the Cabinet of Mr. Abraham Fischer. "I swear", he said, "loyalty to His Majesty the King, his heirs and successors, to serve His Majesty well and truly in the office to which I have been appointed, to advise His Excellency the Governor to the best of my discretion, for the good of the King's honour, without partiality, through affection, doubt or dread, to keep the Executive Council secrets, to avoid corruption and to help in the execution of whatever shall be resolved, to withstand all persons who would attempt the contrary, and to observe, keep and do that which as a member of the Executive Council, I ought to do."

Typewriters rattled, telephones rang and janitors in uniforms prowled down passages, guiding strangers watching those new-fangled motor-cars in Maitland Street, Bloemfontein. Behind a large desk in his own sanctum sat Christiaan de Wet, now Minister of Agriculture for the Orange River Colony. For the first time in his life he was an office worker, taking the train every morning from Kaalspruit and bringing home wads of papers to read through overnight. Secretaries and messengers attended to his wants. "But", said he, "it is a tied-down kind of life, to which I am not

accustomed". Still Oom Krisjan was not a bad Minister. He was excellent at receiving deputations, and at understanding the grievances - not a few - of his farming friends. Many of them called him "Oom Krisjan" as a matter of course, and there was the inevitable hand-shaking as the long-beards of the veld came into his room. Often they talked about a hundred different subjects before getting to the point. Since de Wet was a Boer himself he had the necessary patience, and would ring for cups of coffee, in a manner reminiscent of President Kruger and President Steyn. In the afternoon he walked down to the Raadzaal in order to answer questions or to deliver addresses on the activities of his department. Englishmen, such as Sir John Fraser, were now working with him every day and they all got on well together.

His lack of experience in administration was soon made good and, for all his conservatism, the list of measures which he put through Parliament was impressive, and contributed substantially to the prosperity of the Colony. One of the best was an Act prohibiting the export of Angora goats, whose wool is the product known as "mohair". Save for Turkey, only South Africa can rear this animal, and it was for the purpose of strengthening the control of an important industry that the law was adopted. Similar steps were taken to preserve a local monopoly when the Ostrich Export Prohibition Act was placed on the Statute Book. Even though the Cape was the main producer, the Orange Free State wished to support its sister colony against overseas rivals. Improved facilities for land settlement were provided in the Crown Lands Disposal Act and in the Irrigation Settlement Act, while the foundation for self-help among the farmers was laid by the Agricultural Society Act of 1907, the Central Agricultural Act and the Co-operative Agricultural Societies Act of 1910. Invasions such as those which had afflicted Australia through the introduction of rabbits were

forestalled by the Exotic Animals Act of 1909, and his conversion to new ideas caused the whole basis of sheep-farming to be revolutionised through the new Scab Acts. Similar benefits were conferred on the cattle farmers through the East Coast Fever Amendment Act which gave adequate powers to Government inspectors; while the veld was safeguarded with the aid of laws restricting the burning of grass and the spread of noxious weeds. Finally General de Wet was responsible for providing financial facilities for progressive farmers with the aid of his Land and Agricultural Loan Fund Act.

Railways were again a vital issue, and de Wet was responsible for getting a line extended to Rouxville and another to Ladybrand. Though not regarded as an outstanding orator in Parliament, which was presided over with decorum and ability by the Speaker, Mr. Marais, he was admired for his courteous manner and impressive mode of address.

At frequent intervals he would tour the countryside, where he was almost as popular in the newly-established British settlement at Westminster, founded by Lord Milner and the Duke of Westminster, as in his own district. He called many of the Englishmen by their Christian names. Occasionally he would have his train halted out in the veld, to revisit some farms in which he was interested. In the district of Clocolan he laid out great orchards which are still flourishing. Pedigree sheep were introduced for the first time in the Orange River Colony under his regime, while the predominance today of Friesland cattle is mainly due to him. Roads, dams and other improvements were provided on a scale never before seen. Sometimes he spent two or three days on a farm and gave audience to Boer and Briton, listening attentively to what they all had to say. Not that he would always

agree to their schemes, but his pleasantly humorous manner reconciled many a man to his refusal.

He was very gratified when his motion to pay a pension to ex-President Reitz was adopted without opposition. In his office the General was accustomed to shaking hands even with his juniors and, after laying down his post, he went round the Government buildings, saying goodbye to everybody, even the messengers.

The more friendly spirit that was over South Africa showed itself in other ways. It was recognised that the Inter-Colonial Council; formed to adjust the anomalies of four different states, was only a stopgap. Lord Selborne, that wise and popular English statesman, prepared a memorandum for the Imperial Government, which expressed the feelings of the majority that Union in some form was essential. Societies sprang up to encourage the great ideal, at which both Kruger and Rhodes had aimed, each in his own way. At Heilbron, on March 5, 1908, de Wet told his countrymen what he thought about the fatal tariff rivalry. "Colony must not protect against Colony, but must co-operate. South Africa can only become great under one Government." And so, when later that year a National Convention was called to frame a basis for a Union and (if all went well) to draft a constitution, Christiaan de Wet joined Abraham Fischer, General Hertzog and President Steyn as a delegate in the task of building a new nation.

Scarcely six years had passed since the Treaty of Vereeniging and what miracles had happened in that time! At noon on October 12, 1908, the delegates of the South African National Convention gathered in the City Hall at Durban. It seemed as though the millennium had come, when Dr. Jameson, who had organised the Jameson Raid on the Transvaal in 1895, could write to his brother Sam: "Funny that my main pals to get things done are Botha, Steyn and,

perhaps, Christiaan de Wet", while the Speaker of the Cape House of Assembly, Sir James Tennant Molteno, recalled: "General Christiaan de Wet became a special friend of mine and I spent a memorable day with him visiting Port Shepstone, the Umzimkulu River and the South Coast". And it was de Wet who, in November, 1908, refused to transact business because it was the birthday of King Edward VII! This is not the place for describing the long debates that led up to drafting the Act of Union. No reporters were allowed to be present and the minutes give but an inadequate account of the historic gatherings. Those surviving show, however, that Christiaan de Wet's part was a progressive and helpful one. The General was in favour of calling the Upper House the Senate, instead of the Legislative Council, a scheme that was accepted, and would have preferred the American "House of Representatives" to the "House of Assembly". His policy seemed to favour strengthening the Upper House wherever possible. When Lord de Villiers, presiding over the Convention, proposed that the number of members of Parliament be based on the number of white male adults, de Wet qualified the definition with the words "British Subjects", but he wanted sailors and soldiers in the employ of the British Government to be omitted.

On the vexed question of the Colour Bar he hoped to remove the franchise granted to the non-European voters at the Cape. Here he found himself in the minority, as also when he opposed the establishment of a sinking fund for the National Debt. Generally speaking he favoured extensive powers for the various provinces, which were to replace the four existing colonies, but not in such matters as Native Affairs. For the benefit of backward districts he demanded the construction of railways, even if they might not be payable. He approved of compensating the older colonial capitals for the loss of trade during the centralisation of government. He was not in

favour of a minimum number of members of Parliament for any Province, but advocated the most extensive powers for the Court of Appeal. As regards votes for women, de Wet objected to the proposal to extend the franchise to them, even though only at some future date. He was not, on the whole, as active in the National Convention work as in the Committees. Occasionally adjournments took place, giving opportunities for the representatives to expound to the public their views on the progress of events. So it came that at Parys on March 6, 1909, General de Wet gave vent to his disappointment at the attitude of the great leader of the Cape Dutch, J. H. Hofmeyr, in not being sufficiently helpful to the framers of the Constitution. He also declared that the scheme (ultimately adopted) to let Parliament meet at Cape Town while the Government offices remained in Pretoria, would not prove practicable for all time. Nearly fifty years have passed since then, yet the old statesman's forecast may still come true.

One dramatic incident happened while the Convention was sitting at Cape Town. The Mayor of Paarl invited the members to visit his picturesque wine-growing town, with its mountainous boulder, whose pearly surface gave its name to the place. Through the heat the delegates climbed to the top, 1,500 feet above the sea. Valley opened behind valley and the unending rows of fruit trees and grape-vines spoke of the intensest cultivation in South Africa. Here and there among the oaks were stately houses with their scrolled gables, erected by the early French and Dutch settlers. The main street of Paarl, seven miles from end to end, stretched down the floor of the valley, shaded by hedges and trees. Dutch and English, they stood on the top of the great Paarl Rock, talking softly and thinking of the future. An old ship's cannon had been loaded (relic of the days when the Dutch East India Company ruled the land) and someone asked de Wet to fire it. He struck a match and stepped towards the touch-hole.

"Where", he roared, "is the man who is against Union? Let him come here and stand before this cannon, so that I can blow him away."

CHAPTER 18
GOODBYE TO GENERAL BOTHA

Beneath an umbrella, in streaming rain, stood Christiaan de Wet, around him an eager throng of old-fashioned farmers, clerks, railway workmen, women, students and hundreds of other Afrikaners from town and country. They crowded the paths in Prince's Park, Pretoria, and overflowed into the neighbouring streets - more than 1,000 people - all hanging on the General's words. He looked around with satisfaction as he steadied himself on a chair upon the little hillock. By his side stood a chubby-faced lawyer, with a thick moustache, named Tielman Roos. A Dutch Reformed minister, in his white tie and black coat, had just finished saying a prayer when Oom Krisjan began:

"I have travelled through the night", he said, "and have caught cold, so my voice is not over-strong. I feel proud at being on this platform, although it is only a dungheap". At this sally, which happened to be perfectly true, a roar of laughter went up and he added: "I am proud, on account of the circumstances. Men and people are never uplifted until they have been debased. I would rather stand among my own people on a manure heap, than live in a palace among strangers. No other group, we can claim, has produced so many statesmen as Afrikanerdom in the short period of its existence". De Wet praised the Huguenot ancestors of the Boer nation and complained that the party system was a curse to the country. The jingoes were doing more harm to the British Empire than they imagined. "I told Lord Kitchener that when I laid down my arms", he said. "I have kept my word. Now, let us stand together". It was an extraordinary speech. He condemned the pro-Government paper, *Die*

Volkstem, and said that he was going to see the editor and stop his subscription.

"General Hertzog", he rambled on, "is a greater British subject than many who have boasted of being Britons. I have known General Hertzog since 1891: he is a marvellous fellow: he has an eye to the interests of the people. He is a man the South African people need ... I have laid down my weapons and am an honourable subject, but my patriotism towards England does not mean that I am taking off my coat and handing it to an Englishman. It is all very well to say we have to live side by side. It is true, but it does not mean that we have to get under one blanket." When he finished talking, the crowd surged up to De Wet and chaired him. Then finding a horse[4] among the dozens tied up in a neighbouring street, he led the procession to General Hertzog's little cottage nearby, below Meintjes Kop, in order to bring him an ovation.

The Union of South Africa was two years old. It was December, 1912. What had happened to the man who had been so enthusiastic about the new age heralded at the National Convention? Perhaps he himself would find it hard to explain his feelings, for the change had come over him gradually. Multitudes expected that he would become Minister of Agriculture in the government of the new Dominion of which General Botha was made Premier. De Wet, we know from his personal friends, did not want the post. He had had enough of office work during that period at Bloemfontein under the Crown Colony. Even when he was in the Cabinet he tried to reduce to a minimum the period he spent behind his desk. If he could not get away to his farm he preferred travelling the various districts

[4] This horse, "Rooibok", was given to De Wet by his good friend, Mr Harm Oost who, in his turn, had received it as a present from the Transvaal Farmers for agricultural organising work.

of the Orange Free State. To show that there was no ill-feeling, it was announced, in the New Year's Honours for 1910, that General Christiaan de Wet would permanently retain the title of "Honourable" even after his Government ceased to exist. Six months later, he was appointed to the Council of Defence, the supreme advisory body controlling the State's military affairs, where his judgment was much appreciated. Yet only by degrees did he feel himself urged to return to the political fray. The former parties were being dissolved, including the famous Orangia Union, which had done so much to secure self -government for the old colony, and on November 24, 1911 he eloquently praised the new spirit of friendship that was abroad. In his view the policy of bilingualism, placing the English and Dutch languages on an equal level, was an ideal solution of the trouble. "Loyal and absolute fulfilment of the compromise is necessary", he said at Bloemfontein. "To this end the British and Dutch must be as one, and the Dutch must loyally meet their British fellow-subjects".

Another year began, and the world learned that harmony was not as universal as everyone hoped. De Wet's old comrades-in-arms disagreed with his friend General Hertzog about Empire and international affairs. In a speech made in a little hamlet called De Wildt - so small that it could not be found on most maps - Hertzog threw down the gauntlet. Its immediate cause was the proposal to increase South Africa's grant to the British Navy, a modest £50,000 a year. Rumour had it that this was to be multiplied many times over. General Hertzog declared "South Africa should be governed by pure Afrikaners ... We in South Africa have come to realise that we have attained our manhood and have resolved to manage our own affairs. When the proper time comes South Africa will look after its own interests first and those of the Empire afterwards. All this clamouring for great

fleet contributions emanates from a few thousand or ten thousand people who have axes to grind. The main object is to keep the Dutch and English separate."

That speech set up a storm throughout South Africa, and was the beginning of what became the Nationalist Party under General Hertzog. Immediately de Wet came out as an enthusiastic supporter of this point of view and when General Botha took him to task in the Cabinet (for General Hertzog was still the Minister of Justice) Oom Krisjan decided that his path was clear. "I am a great supporter of the Defence Act", he remarked, "but if one of the eleven Apostles had been requested to co-operate with Judas, what would have been his reply?" When 1913 began he was once again on trek, speaking in village after village, both in the Orange Free State and in the Transvaal to support the new slogan: "South Africa First". General Botha decided to say good-bye to Hertzog and to reconstruct his cabinet without him. At Dewetsdorp, Oom Krisjan declared darkly: "The recent crisis is the result of a long pre-arranged plot among the Ministers to seize the opportunity to get rid of General Hertzog. General Botha, by one blow, killed conciliation by words and promises to increase contributions to the Navy." At Winburg he told his audience that, if Botha would reinstate Hertzog, he himself would return to the Council of Defence, but the hint was never taken: And so his campaign went on. "All lovers of England", he told his friends at Kopjes, "do not need to take money from ruined people for the perfection of the Navy. We have too many widows and orphans for that, and need railways and other things to develop the country." His reception in the Transvaal was less enthusiastic than in his own province and at Potchefstroom a meeting, lasting until two o'clock in the morning, culminated in a vote of confidence in General Botha. Still he hesitated to break with his old

friend. "Botha is dear to me", he said long afterwards, "but my People are dearer still."

One of de Wet's most characteristic speeches was delivered before an English audience at the Scotia Hall in the working-class suburb of Braamfontein, Johannesburg. They gave him a cordial reception (except for one solitary enthusiast, who was twice thrown out in attempting to heckle). His friends could see the General was worried. "I regret," he said, "that I cannot speak both languages. Were I able to, I would speak in English. Often it entered my mind since this meeting is held at Johannesburg. I regret the circumstances are not more favourable. Whenever that thought enters my mind I think that, out of what is apparently evil, good may come to South Africa. It is only now that we understand the Government is travelling on two roads. I think if the Government does not know how to keep on one road it must make room for the party which can do so".

"We ought to invest our money in South Africa, in order to protect our own harbours. The day is far off when we can speak of a fleet of our own, but let us do what we can. If I cannot buy a farm I can start with a portion. The greatest fleet in the world started from a small beginning and I am in agreement with Canada and Australia because, as long as we keep loyal, South Africa should be left alone." De Wet expressed his sympathy with the white working men and his anxiety about the existence of a black vote at the Cape: "I want to conclude with a hearty vote of thanks to Johannesburg. Even in the Free State I have not had a more respectful meeting, and there they are excellent."

Strikes and labour troubles made the year 1913 troublous beyond measure. White miners on the Witwatersrand demanded higher wages, the situation got out of hand and the troops, as well as the burghers, were called out. It was largely this which enabled de Wet to gain such a hearing

among the English-speaking people on the Goldfields. Men had been shot, and martial law proclaimed before the annual congress of the South African Party, of which de Wet and Hertzog were still members, gathered in the Hofmeyr Hall on Church Square, Cape Town. The roll was called and the grave elders of South Africa, Dutch and English, began to discuss the policy of their United Party for the ensuing year.

General Botha spoke for over an hour, explaining why it was necessary, in the light of approaching threats to world peace, to support the British Empire, and point by point he met the indictments of his critics, explaining how involved many questions were and how they required statesmenship and compromise.

Hertzog returned to the charge in his reply, and then de Wet, amid a silence, rose in his place and declared: "Our Court of Appeal is the People. There is a deadlock and it must be solved." He moved that General Botha place a leadership of the party in the hands of one whose standing and honesty was respected by all South Africans - ex-President Steyn, who should lead for the time being with the power, if necessary, to find a new Prime Minister. "I am interested", he said, "in all people who have adopted South Africa as their Fatherland, and I am not friends with others."

Flushing with anger, the Minister on the platform waited. Mr. C. J. Krige, Speaker of the South African Parliament, put forward another motion: "That the Government be instructed to carry on." By 131 votes to 90 this proposition was declared carried. Everybody watched General Hertzog. The reporters laid down their pencils. Slowly, methodically, the General adjusted his gold spectacles, and began to collect his papers. In various parts of the hall other men did the same. One of them was de Wet. As though by a signal, they all rose. Hertzog stepped into the alley, and in a body they walked towards the exit. For a moment they stood hesitant at the doorway.

Someone was turning back. De Wet stepped solemnly to the committee table. He waved his hand and in a loud voice called out: "Goodbye".

CHAPTER 19
THE SEER OF LICHTENBURG

Dreamy-eyed and bearded; an elderly farmer sat on the front stoep of a homestead in the Western Transvaal. All around lay flat empty plains with occasional bushes and still more occasional sheep. Yet the verandah was crowded from end to end with other Backvelders, heavy men in working clothes, who had come for miles on their horses and in their pony traps through the district of Lichtenburg.

Niklaas van Rensburg was talking in a high sing-song voice, leaning back on his chair, his eyes shut, his fingers running through his mop of hair: "I see great trouble. I see the World on fire. I see Great Bulls fighting in the sky - six or seven of them I see in bloody combat. The Grey Bull is winning. What are the Bulls?" The farmers murmured to each other, as the seer continued his trance. "The Red Bull", van Rensburg went on, "is England, the Grey Bull is Germany. Germany will beat England in a war."

Coffee was handed round in big cups by Oom Niklaas's wife. Not a soul doubted that van Rensburg told the truth. Did not all of them know how; during the Boer War, he had foretold, time and again, when the English were approaching his commando? Had he not frustrated ambushes by this means? Had he not been so reliable that, when he said that their laager was safe, sentries were never put out? And what about that occasion, towards the end of the campaign, when he forecast, in the greatest detail, the circumstances in which peace would be concluded'

Had he not warned against the industrial unrest which affected the gold-fields and the rest of South Africa? Wherever Oom Niklaas went

people came to hear him talk. He never charged money for his advice, or tried to influence his listeners.[5]

[5] Every fact referring to this astonishing figure is officially confirmed by the Blue Book issued in 1915 by the Union Government. Amongst others the two Supreme Court judges who prepared this document said: "On many occasions he gave proof positive of extraordinary powers of provision, so men said and believed... . It is certain that he had a great hold on thousands of his people.... An extraordinary and apparently quite an authentic vision, correctly foretelling certain events leading to the conclusion of Peace, established his reputation. His fame spread through the land and everywhere strange tales were told of his wonderful gift. ... Moreover, and this was perhaps the secret of his continued success - his visions were invariably symbolic and mysterious. They possessed an adaptability of character that was truly Delphic. Indeed his hearers were compelled to put their own interpretation upon his visions. The Seer seldom pretended to understand them himself".

Among those who listened attentively and with respect was a fine old warrior, whom we have met before, General de la Rey. From time immemorial, the Boers, like their fellow-Calvinists, the Scots, had shown psychic gifts. Niklaas van Rensburg was by no means unique, but he was the most successful of his fraternity and the one whose fate it was to play a vital part in the history of his country. De la Rey himself as a rule was exceedingly shrewd, though inclined to be too outspoken.

On the Witwatersrand wage troubles of the miners and other workers flared up afresh. Instead of putting an end to the problem by its sudden coup of deporting the Trades Union leaders, the Government had caused such a

revulsion of feeling amongst masses of people, not normally associated with class struggles, that the young Labour Party suddenly became a powerful force in the Transvaal.

President Steyn had spoken publicly of the risk of war and so had many other prominent South Africans, Christiaan de Wet included. General C. F. Beyers, Commander of the Union Defence Forces, went overseas in 1912. As he watched the manoeuvres of the Kaiser, the suspicion came upon him that the great armies, then exercising, might very shortly be put to use.

That conference of the South African Party at Cape Town, from which General de Wet had walked out, along with General Hertzog, was a sign of the times. Only a few days later de Wet again appeared before the public.

A tall shaft of white marble, with the bronze figures of two Boer women and a child at its base, had been erected on a hill outside Bloemfontein. "To our Mothers and dear Children - Thy Will be done", was written on the stone. From every part of South Africa gifts had been collected for that memorial, to those who had died in the concentration camps. An Englishwoman was to have been the guest of honour - Emily Hobhouse and, though her health did not allow her to make the long trip from her home, she sent a message which was read in the presence of the leaders of the nation-President Steyn, General Botha and many others.

Christiaan de Wet was one of those who sat bareheaded in that blazing sunshine and spoke to the greatest crowd that had ever gathered in the Orange Free State. Heavy rain fell the day before, and it was with reference to this that he began: "When the storm raged yesterday, it made me think of our beloved dead, who struggled through such storms in the camp; to-day there is an exceptional silence, and that raises another in me - that our heroines, once in those storms, now

are dwelling in perfect peace. The people of South Africa can be proud of such mothers and children. I am not speaking so much to the men, as to the women and children. A nation can only be built up by the women, and it can only become a nation if children are trained according to the traditions of their ancestors. Is not the Afrikaner Nation descended from the Huguenots, who left their Fathers' land, Bible in hand, to seek freedom of conscience in South Africa? The freedom of the foundations of their traditions lay in their worship, and from what I have heard, and from what I know, it was genuine worship, and not an imitation. Worship was the guiding light of our women and children. This was plain in the camps, for I often heard that the psalms of the pious resounded there." Meditatively de Wet asked whether the people had been true to themselves in the last ten years. He expressed his doubts, as he closed with a tribute to the dead. Twenty thousand people caught his final words: "Be faithful to your Nation and to your Religion." Hundreds of women and not a few men were in tears as the multitude dispersed.

Only twelve years had gone since peace had been signed. In spite of self-government, in spite of Union, the wounds were still raw. Not all the sincerity of his beliefs nor his sense of honour prevented de Wet soon afterwards from taking up arms against the State and against the crown to which he had sworn allegiance. It is necessary to realise that his action was something more than double-dealing. Born into every Boer is a deep respect for the law, whether expressed through his government, or through the words of the Bible. "Render unto Caesar" is a maxim which de Wet took very seriously. "Onderdanen" - the Dutch word for "Subjects" - conveys the relationship which the old-fashioned Afrikaners feel towards the State. Democratic they have been for centuries, and the frame of mind which made them shake hands with their Presidents and Commanding Officers, as they did with their

casual visitors, is no mere pose. Yet such a representative Boer as Paul Kruger himself emphasised the duty of an "Onderdaan" to the state in which he lived. In fact it might almost be said that this was at the root of the entire difficulties with the Uitlanders.

Once de Wet had surrendered at Vereeniging he acknowledged in all sincerity his common allegiance with his English neighbours. The dedication of his book, the swearing-in ceremony when he joined the Ministry, the respect for the King, which he had displayed during the National Convention - all these were genuine. An equally striking instance was provided scarcely a year before he went into rebellion. In June, 1913, another great mining strike began at Johannesburg; there was shooting; troops were called out, and then the burgher commandos. Had de Wet, with his grievances expressed at the Party congress fresh upon him, sought an occasion to make mischief, the opportunity was ideal. Instead both he and General de la Rey formally offered their services to the Government.

What, then was going on in Christiaan de Wet's mind during the first half of 1914? He was delighted to be free from official duties again, and had moved into another district, to the farm "Allandale", in the vicinity of Memel. In the village he could often be seen sitting on the kerb, surrounded by a set of war-time cronies, telling stories which were not without a distinctly Rabelaisian flavour. His cattle and his horses took up plenty of his time, and his attachment to his family was stronger than ever. Outwardly he was an oldish man - he had just turned sixty - spending his latter days in peace and domesticity.

About this time an incident took place, which, though unimportant in itself, was to bring a serious aftermath. De Wet, like most of that generation, was very strict with his native farm-

servants, being what is known as "kwaai", or severe in matters of discipline. He administered a thrashing to a labourer. A charge was laid against him and Mr. Colin Fraser, the local Resident Magistrate, found him guilty. Considering that there had been provocation, and that the offence was more or less technical, he fined the General the nominal sum of five shillings.

The drama of Serajevo was drawing near. Occasionally lightning flashed in the diplomatic world. "Dieser Sommer bringt Schicksal" - "This Summer brings Fate" - wrote the famous German journalist Maximilian Harden, with uncanny prescience in January 1914. And in far-off Africa, that long-bearded prophet, Niklaas van Rensburg, was saying something similar. He had followed up his parable of the Fighting Bulls with a vision about his good friend, General de la Rey. "I see the Number Fifteen on a dark cloud, from which blood is flowing, and then General de la Rey returning home without his hat. Behind comes a carriage covered with flowers."

"I do not know what it means", he told enquirers. "I think the figure means 1915 and I think the flowers mean a great honour for the General."

Meanwhile General Hertzog was busy organising his new party, the Nationalists. Although the big strike was ended, deportations had played into the hands of the malcontents and an anti-Asiatic law had produced a campaign of passive resistance among the Indians, led by the future Mahatma Ghandi. De Wet emerged from his farm to give General Hertzog help at his meetings. The "Ou Baas" (Old Master) had not lost his powers of repartee. At Potchefstroom, while the crowd was trying to howl him down, he stood quietly on the platform until someone from the audience called out: "Hertzog is talking nonsense and we must pay for it." Very slowly and deliberately De Wet drew out his purse

and said, "How much expense has Hertzog incurred on your behalf? I will refund it." Amid bellows of laughter, hundreds of sixpences began to rain on to the platform from supporters, until de Wet said, "I don't want to sit with Judas." "Who is Judas?" cried a heckler.

"Will you pay the cost of the court proceedings?" Oom Krisjan demanded with an immovable face.

He was worried about the international outlook. Germany and England were two countries with which he had sympathy, but both were foreign to him. He might be a British subject, but he was not an Englishman, nor were thousands of other Boers.

Whatever may have been said of some of the other rebels, not the slightest evidence shows that de Wet had any communication with the powers in the Reich ...

Thousands of miles across the sea an Austrian Grand Duke and his wife were to pay a visit to the newly-acquired territory of Bosnia. In a Serbian arsenal a fanatical young student was practising with a revolver. The stage was set for Armageddon.

CHAPTER 20
GENERAL DE LA REY COMES HOME

Arthur George Sullivan, a miner employed by one of the great Witwatersrand companies, had come home from work to his little cottage in the Johannesburg suburb of Regent's Park. Sunset was near and after reading the war news in the afternoon paper, walked out to look at his fowl-run.

"Hands up!" shouted somebody close at hand. He peered over the fence. A man with a smoking revolver gazed down at another who lay doubled up on the ground; it was Detective Mynott, of Marshall Square, Police Head-

quarters. Before the astonished Sullivan could move, another detective appeared, leaning over the hedge. More shots rang out and the miner ran for safety. A neighbour stepped out of the doorway of a nearby cottage, holding a revolver: "Now I tell you: get back or I will shoot you!" roared the gunman. One moment later somebody was cranking up a motor-car, and the Foster Gang, which had been hunted by the police for weeks past for bank robbery and murder, had made another escape. Telephone bells rang in every police station along the goldfields, every main road received extra patrols and telegrams were sent to the ends of the country, in case the car should break through the cordon.

Police Constable Drury stood outside Christie's Chemist Shop in the shabby district of Fordsburg. Down the street he could hear other police on beat, for extra men had been drafted into the city to cope with this crime-wave. Upon the plate glass windows of the closed shops there fell the glare of two headlights.

"Halt!", he called, as loudly as he could, but the car made straight for him and Drury leapt for his life. He saw it disappearing-faster than ever in the direction of Langlaagte and the open country. Was that the Foster Gang? As he saw the car flash down the endless lines of street-lamps, he fired. Even the whip of the bullet did not seem to stop its career. Then suddenly it slowed down and began to turn. Surely it was not coming back? It was!

"Are you going to stop this time?" asked the constable.

A man in uniform looked out at him, a middle-aged; bearded figure, familiar to South Africans from the newspapers.

"I am General Beyers", he said. "This is General de la Rey whom you have shot. I was taking him to his farm".

Huddled on a seat lay a fine-looking old man with blood trickling down his back. He was dead.[6]

A strange tale was revealed when the police began to reconstruct the tragedy. The car came from Pretoria, where General de la Rey had been visiting General Beyers. The two men returned together, intending to go via Potchefstroom to the General's home district of Lichtenburg. On reaching the outskirts of the Rand, they had been challenged by a policeman in the suburb of Orange Grove. Each time they met patrols they evaded them. Then Fate appeared in the shape of Constable Drury.

No one knew for sure why de la Rey was in such a hurry. That General Beyers should be distressed at the loss of his friend was only natural, yet there seemed something more to it than that, for when he reached the police station and helped to lift out de la Rey's body he turned to Major Douglas and said: "Here I am. What do you want with me? What instructions have you got for me from Pretoria?"

Only a few hours earlier General J. C. Smuts, then Minister of Defence, received this letter from the Commander of the Union's Permanent Force:

"Honourable Sir,

You are aware that during the month of August last I told you and General Botha, by word of mouth, that I disapproved of the sending of commandos to German South-West Africa for the purpose of conquering that territory. I was on the point of resigning, but, hearing that Parliament was to be called together, I decided to wait, hoping that a way out of the difficulty would be found. To my utmost surprise,

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[6] On the same night Dr. Grace (brother of W. G. Grace, the famous cricketer) was killed by another police bullet at Springs.

however, Parliament confirmed the resolution adopted by the Government - namely, to conquer German South-West Africa without any provocation towards the Union from the Germans..."

Beyers then reviewed unforgotten grievances of the Boers from the time of the South African War, and challenged the authority of Parliament to use the Defence Force outside the boundaries of the country:

"For the reasons enumerated above I feel constrained to resign my post as Commandant-General, as also my commissioned rank."

General Smuts's letter in reply was written four days later, by which time General Beyers had ceased to be an officer in the service of the King:

"... The circumstances under which that resignation took place and the terms in which you endeavour to justify your action tend to leave a very painful impression. It is true that it was known to me that you entertained objections against the war operations in German South-West Africa, but I never received the impression that you would resign. On the contrary, all the information in possession of the Government was communicated to you, all plans were discussed with you, and your advice was followed to a large extent.

"The principal officers were appointed with your concurrence and the plan of operations, which is now being followed, is largely the one recommended by yourself at a conference of officers ..."

With biting sarcasm Smuts dealt with the various political arguments that Beyers had used. "You forgot to mention", said the minister, "that since the South African War the British gave the people of South Africa entire freedom, under a Constitution which makes it possible for us to realise our national ideals along our own lines and which, for instance, allows you to write with

impunity a letter for which you would, without doubt, in the German Empire, be liable to the extreme penalty..." "Your resignation is hereby accepted ..."

Christiaan de Wet was at his farm when, on Wednesday afternoon, September 16th, 1914, a native messenger hurried in from the telegraph office, telling him what had happened at Fordsburg.

"Good God"! cried the old soldier, rearing up with sorrow and pain, as though he had been wounded, "Pack my things". He must hurry to Lichtenburg, to be present when his old friend was laid to rest. To show that there was no political ill-feeling, they had asked him to speak and General Botha, now Prime Minister, had also accepted the request. Within half an hour he was on his horse, making for the nearest railway siding. There is something curious about the fact that it was Ingogo, near those very Heights on which he first had fought in the Boer War of 1880.

Thus the old Boer Delegation to England reassembled, but in what circumstances! All four provinces of the Union seethed with tales and rumours. Why had General de la Rey left the very session of Parliament which decided to invade German South-West Africa? Did he feel the approach of grave trouble to his beloved country? Why had he rushed through Johannesburg, without stopping? Above all, why had he been in touch with Beyers, of whom it was now said that he had already planned an "armed protest" against the South-West expedition at the annual training camp at Potchefstroom? Van Rensburg had seen the Number Fifteen; great things were to happen on that day. Nothing had occurred on August 15th, but on September 15th ? Subsequently General Hertzog recalled that he had been present early in August when de Wet said to Colonel Nussey:

"If the Germans come and take us, you go and shoot them, but if you lend yourself to an attack on German South-West Africa, I never want to see you again."

So rapidly had events moved that it was hard to remember that, less than a week before poor De la Rey met his end, had Parliament assembled for the first time since the outbreak of war.

During the big mine strike of 1914 the Government had issued 60,000 rifles to the Backvelders to suppress the unrest on the Rand. Tales had since been told of secret commandos, and complaints made that the farming population, especially in the Orange Free State, was by no means enthusiastic about an invasion in South-West Africa. When General Botha opened the debate in the House of Assembly he moved:

"This House, duly recognising the obligation of the Union as a portion of the British Empire, respectfully requests His Excellency the Governor-General to convey a humble address to His Majesty the King, assuring him of loyal support in bringing to a successful issue the momentous conflict."

Sitting under the portraits of Queen Victoria and the old Cape Governors, the same statesman who had fought Britain for three years announced that South Africa had agreed to take over all duties of the Imperial garrison hitherto stationed in the Union.

Always anxious to be moderate, even at such a time, Botha added:

"We have in this country a large number of German people who are British subjects and who have always co-operated for the welfare and prosperity of the country. I wish to impress upon the House that we will not wage war upon persons. Today we are to fight the German Crown, which is responsible for this vindictive

war (loud cheers). "The British Government, after having given them their Constitution, has regarded them as a free People, as a sister-state. We are free in South Africa, and on South Africa depends her own future ..."

Despite the cheers which greeted this speech of General Botha, the new Nationalist Party was by no means discouraged. General Hertzog moved an amendment:

"This House, while fully prepared to support any measures necessary for the defence against any attack on Union territory, is of opinion that any action in the way of an attack on German territory in South Africa, will be in conflict with the interests of the Union."

As member of Parliament for Lichtenburg, de la Rey abstained from taking part in this debate, but Senator Munnik, an old friend of his, recorded his remark: "Look here, old chap; German South-West Africa is bound to come into the melting pot at the end of the war, and I don't think at this stage we should sacrifice the life of one colonist for it, no matter of what nationality." The government motion was carried by 92 to 12, but the Backveld did not accept the verdict. Among the farmers the tale went round that de la Rey had not been shot by accident at all. Even the fact that the Foster Gang was finally run down failed to satisfy these doubters. De la Rey, they declared, had been against the South West expedition, and his influence had to be removed. Though sensible men - even many of the Opposition - acknowledged that it was nonsense, the story survived. More forecasts by van Rensburg were circulated. "The great hour for liberating Afrikanerdom is at hand", he declared.

The government had decreed a public funeral for de la Rey and the Cabinet came up specially from Cape Town to be present. Although Lichtenburg had only 2,000 inhabitants, six

times as many strangers flocked into the little churchyard. Parked against the line of single-storeyed shops on the Market Square stood a motor-car, over which flew the colours of the Republican Transvaal and of the Orange Free State. De Wet walked up to the driver of the car and said: "Do not leave these flags there; they will cause bad feeling." "Ou Baas", declared a bystander, "it is the car in which the General was shot. We want to keep the Vierkleur till the burial is over." As they pointed out the bullet-hole to him in the back of the car the General shook his head: "It will cause trouble", he said.

The Prime Minister of the Union was one speaker. Ex-General Beyers, late Commandant of the Permanent Forces - an open opponent of the administration - was another. The third was Christiaan de Wet, perplexed, unhappy and anxious to preserve the regard which even now he admitted having for his comrade-in-arms, Louis Botha. First Beyers spoke, indignantly repudiating the allegation that he and de la Rey had been, engaged in rebellion. Among the bareheaded thousands that stood around there was a visible start when this word was mentioned in public for the first time. Botha followed, eloquent and dignified, as men expected him to be. He was so obviously moved that his appearance told more than his words.

Then Christiaan de Wet began: "I have taken it upon myself", he said, "to represent the Orange Free State here, but I can assure all who are gathered, that the words I now want to speak are those of all Free Staters. When, during the last war, I received news of General de la Rey from time to time, it always gave me new courage, for I knew that he was a man who loved his people, and who often showed that he was ready to sacrifice his life. But you who are present here, his own people, know this better than I, for you have fought with him. Although he is dead, he lives in the hearts of all of you, and not alone in

your hearts. I assure you that he dwells in the heart of every Free Stater". Next, De Wet recalled the occasion when President Kruger had told him: "Empty out the Vaal River!" "The Vaal River is empty", he continued, "and it is not possible for that stream to keep us apart. No power exists that can break down the bond of our Union ... Here we stand, by de la Rey's graveside, and who does not feel what South Africa has lost? None, however, can feel it as his wife does, and how shall we comfort her? Only Almighty God can do that. One thing, however, we can do, and General de la Rey is worthy of it - one of the bravest of the brave, one of the most faithful of the faithful."

On this cryptic note the address ended, and the coffin was lowered into the grave. For hours the crowd filed past, tall men with broad-brimmed hats, held in their gnarled hands; old women, young girls, children. As the old prophet van Rensburg had foretold, General De la Rey had returned, "without his hat, and followed by a wagon covered with flowers."

CHAPTER 21
MARITZ'S TREATY WITH GERMANY

On the desolate northern frontier of the Cape, among the glistening granite hills of Gordonia, stood a group of tents with picket lines for horses - the annual training camp of the burghers living in the district. From their vast farms, some of them 40,000 or 50,000 acres, they had gathered to take part in the military exercises. These were being carried out under the command of Solomon Gerhardus Maritz, with the nickname of "Manie", a burly, whiskered, thick-set man in khaki uniform. A veteran of the Boer War, he had knocked about the world a good deal since the Peace of Vereeniging. He had been to Madagascar; had helped the Germans in the war against insurgent Hereros from 1904-6, and had come to the Orange Free State,

where he joined the police. In the very month when the World War broke out, he received his commission as "Lieutenant-Colonel in Command of the Union Border Force" on the recommendation of General Beyers, the Commanding Officer at Pretoria. Now he was in charge of the local units stationed at the frontier village of Upington and at the settlement of Kakamas. Both lay on the banks of the Orange River, which, another Nile, flows through a desert that blossoms like the rose once it is irrigated.

According to the Government Blue Book, since the conclusion of the Anglo-Boer war Maritz had brooded over schemes for re-establishing a Republic in South Africa. He hoped to do so with German help, and had apparently prepared for the day when Germany and England should be at war with each other.

On September 10, 1914, after the conflict had begun, Maritz wired to General Beyers: "I consider it very desirable that you should come to address the burghers personally in the two camps. If you are coming, telegraph me when you will be here. Everything is still quiet and in good order."

Beyers never arrived, for only a few days later he handed in his resignation to General Smuts. On September 23, when news came that German soldiers had crossed the Union frontier at Nakob, Defence Headquarters at Pretoria sent Maritz the following telegram: "Commandant General would like to see you here Tuesday. If impossible for you then send Joubert." Only two days later did Maritz despatch a reply. He said there were 3,000 Germans at Ukamas alone and that most of his men were not properly armed. "When I was last in Pretoria", he continued, "I warned you that the public will refuse to cross the

border and advance into German South-West Africa, or, if Germans advance into the Union owing to action of Government, they will also refuse to move.

All my officers of the Active Citizen Force, as well as the Defence Rifle Associations, have unanimously resolved to resign as soon as I order them to cross."

General Smuts read this and straight away sent down Major B. Enslin to report on the position.

He found a very serious state of affairs: "Wire me direct what action you propose taking re Maritz. Wire enable me know how to act. Code wire to Enslin will be delivered personally."

For days the correspondence with Pretoria continued, Maritz showing himself more and more plainly in his new role. Extra troops were sent up from Durban and Cape Town to Gordonia and he refused to come to Pretoria to interview the Minister. October 2 brought matters to a head. Maritz marched out of Upington, across the blazing hot plains, towards the German border and made contact with the enemy, returning to issue orders not to fight against them, but against the British. Among the 500 to 600 men who obeyed Maritz were a good number who were merely bewildered by what was happening, others who were in sympathy and some fifty or sixty who openly supported rebellion. Out in the desert, on October 9, the perspiring soldiers were ordered to parade. Corporal van der Merwe, a Loyalist, set down in an affidavit what happened.

"Maritz got on a box and addressed us. He started abusing Botha and Smuts and the capitalists, and said we were being kept under by them. He said that he did not want the land ruled by Englishmen, Niggers and Jews. He said that if ever there was a good time to take back South Africa, now was the opportunity, because circumstances now rendered it impossible for

England to land any men in South Africa. He said that there was a wireless station up north in German South-West Africa, and that he had information from there that the Allies were hopelessly beaten, and that there was now a good chance of getting back the old flag over South Africa, which, by hook or crook, would be planted on Table Mountain."

The next sensation came when the Colonel hoisted the Vierkleur, the old Republican Transvaal Flag, and sent a loyalist officer, Major Ben Bower, to the government, asking them, inter alia, to let Generals de Wet, Hertzog, Beyers, Kemp and Muller come and meet them, so as to negotiate a settlement. To impress the messenger he showed him German howitzers and other equipment which he had received., and the following remarkable document:

"Agreement made and entered into by and between the Imperial Government of German South West Africa, and representative of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Germany, and General S. G. Maritz, who is acting in the name and on behalf of a number of officers and men, who are prepared to declare the independence of South Africa, that is to say:

1. The said General S. G. Maritz has declared the independence South Africa and commenced war against England.

2. The Governor of German South-West Africa acknowledges all African forces which operate against England as belligerent forces, and they will, after further discussion, support the war against England.

3. In the event of British South Africa being declared independent, either partially or as a whole, the Imperial Governor of German South-West Africa will take all possible measures to get the State or those States acknowledged as such by the German Empire,

as soon as possible, and bring them under the terms of the general conditions of peace.

4. In consideration of such assistance the newly-formed State or States will have no objection to the German Government taking possession of Walfisch Bay and the islands opposite German South West Africa.

5. The centre of the Orange River will in future form the boundary between German South-West Africa and the Cape Province.

6. The German Empire will have no objection to the above-named States taking possession of Delagoa Bay.

7. If the Rebellion fails, the Rebels who enter German territory will be recognised as German subjects, and be treated as such."

Exciting though they were, the rest of Maritz's adventures need only be recounted here in so far as they affect de Wet. He finally got away to the Germans, and, after many wanderings, reached neutral territory, where he found safety, while his captives were released by pursuing units of the Defence Force.

It would be hard to describe the sensation which Maritz's insurrection caused in South Africa, although the possibility of a rising had been talked of for months. Rash conclusions were immediately drawn. Enthusiasts, both for and against the Government, lost sight of the fact that, while there may have been dissatisfaction in other quarters, these outbursts were not necessarily links in a common plan.

Stress has never been sufficiently laid upon these circumstances in accounting for de Wet's participation in the revolt. From his Boer War days the old General knew Maritz as a "bonnie fighter"; more recently he had learned about the widespread objections to an invasion of South West, but there has never been evidence to show that he ever

collaborated with Maritz or even with Beyers in so far as a Rebellion was concerned. With Beyers his contacts were much closer, and will be dealt with in due course. Although Maritz sent word to him and made use of his name, it was done mainly because of de Wet's high prestige and coupled with a vague knowledge that de Wet also was against the South-West campaign.

CHAPTER 22
IN MR. FERREIRA'S DINING ROOM

Divinity books and heavy furniture emphasised the clerical atmosphere of the Ferreira's dining room in the little village of Kopjes, Northern Orange Free State. A few yards off was the fine Dutch Reformed Church, and befitting the status of "Dominee" (as a minister is generally termed among the Boers) this home was a place of substance and importance: Around the table, talking in the deliberate fashion of the veld, sat a group of men, well known in the district, one of whom was General de Wet. Like their Scottish fellow-Calvinists these Afrikaners did things "decently and in order", and only after Mr. Ferreira had said prayers was Oom Krisjan formally elected to the chair. De Wet had spoken in the Market Square at Lichtenburg. "I think", he said, "of our departed brother. We are accustomed to speak of each burgher as a brother. If there is anyone who is not my brother, let him go out." Six people there the audience took the hint and the General continued: "I see none of us have gone away, and I assume that all of us are brothers. If there are any step-brothers, they too are welcome. But if there is a traitor I remind him of Judas. The Government has made the Germans our enemy, and the fire is in the grass. Now we must take a decision, but let us be sensible, cool and collected. We must express the will of the Nation. All who feel for right and

justice will join us, for the feeling of justice is a characteristic of our Nation, though I do not say this in order to boast of my Nation, or to puff it up. I speak on behalf of my Nation, and so that we may not sully ourselves. They talk of our duties as citizens. Well, we will be obedient, but even in doing so, we shall not defile our country, and if any wrong steps are taken, this will not stop us from doing right: always, however, we must speak cautiously and constitutionally. Be careful and, quiet, for there are many in South Africa as well as in other countries, who will join us ..."

A great meeting had taken place at Potchefstroom in the Lyric Hall where General de Wet had been given a "rough house". Rotten eggs and dead cats had been thrown at him without disturbing his equanimity. He had dealt scornfully with his hecklers, who, it must be pointed out, were by no means only Englishmen. The climax came when somebody switched off the electric light and the howling mob found itself in darkness. The meeting was continued in the open air, where the General stood on a motor-car. "I am a good target here", he cried. "You call this Civilisation", he went on. "Perhaps you meet with that sort of thing in your part, dear friends, but it is not known among us. Although it may take a long time, I hope that such a rough, uncouth and uneducated class of people from other parts will learn manners in South Africa... Friends, remember we are not yet in Russia. You who boo, go back to your Johannesburg. That is your place, although there are also decent Afrikaner Englishmen. That is your place, I say... The Government proposes to send volunteers to German South West; but they are not all volunteers. Many children were taken from their mothers in a rascally manner." Here an egg was thrown and just

missed him, causing him to remark: "Listen here, people, I have got another coat at home". When the crowd began to sing "God Save the King", he declared: "I am surprised that you dare to drag the National Anthem in the mud; I have much respect for it, but to sing it in this fashion is a dishonour."

Moved by the real feelings of the Nation an old Burgher turned to a British officer in the crowd: "This", he said, "is a family affair between us Afrikaners. You English must keep out of it."

The crowd adapted a resolution, in which "this meeting, having taken notice of the fact that the Government has decided to take German South West Africa, and has received the authority of Parliament to do so, and having already sent a portion of the Citizen Forces to the border, and fighting having taken place, nevertheless begs the Government to take immediate steps to stop all offensive warlike preparations, and to withdraw the forces of the Union.

"And the meeting further politely requests the Government for an answer before September 20, so that it may be put before a committee of the People."

As the audience cheered, someone unfurled an old Orange Free State flag, and held it up, whereupon General Beyers shouted, from the platform: "We don't want any of this nonsense here." Christiaan had been appointed to the Committee, along with General Beyers and General Liebenberg. "The fire is in the grass", de Wet had rightly said.

For the time being the South African campaign against German South West Africa was virtually suspended. In order to pacify the excited Orange Free State, General Botha announced that no compulsory levies would be called up in that province-only volunteers.

This again gave rise to misunderstanding and unfortunately a few overzealous officials disregarded the instruction. .

As he got out of the train from Bloemfontein at Kopjes, on October 12, de Wet first read the correspondence between the Government and Maritz, in which his own name was mentioned. In the quiet Main Street, its single-storeyed shops displaying ploughs and bags of flour on their verandahs, he then encountered dozens of his neighbours, while out the little Court House Mr. Brill, the Justice of the Peace, stood reading out the Martial Law Proclamation.

Now de Wet was sitting in the dining room of Mr. Ferreira, talking to his friends about all these events. He told them that, as Martial Law had been proclaimed, they would not be able to hold any more meetings of protest. He told them that Maritz had refused to invade South West Africa. "It is now my feeling that we must help Maritz."

General Liebenberg, his Boer War companion, who, as recently as the de la Rey funeral, had violently attacked the Government, stood up in surprise. "What?", he exclaimed, "I knew you objected to invading South West Africa, but not that rebellion was contemplated. And what about General Hertzog? You all know that General Hertzog is no warrior, but a lawyer. I saw him yesterday. He is a man who can be trusted in the dark. He is in his proper place. We must have a man to fight in the political sphere. Do not ask where Hertzog is; he will always be found when wanted."

The remark that "Maritz must be helped", was to have very grave results for de Wet. "It is a pure lie", he said later on oath in court, discussing this meeting, "that a conspiracy was hatched against the King and Empire", and he testified that only the previous day General Hertzog had told him that he knew nothing of Maritz's doings, save that he had refused to

cross the border, had resigned his commission, and that his resignation had not been accepted. "I intended", de Wet told them, "to continue my meetings of protest, but Martial Law has stopped me".

"Where is Beyers?" Liebenberg demanded. The General had not come. "Let us send a deputation to wait on General Botha", he went on. In the end this proposal was agreed to.

Outside the doors a crowd was waiting when the debate in the dining room came to an end. Clapping and cheers greeted de Wet and his friends. "What does it all mean, Oom Krisjan?" they asked, anxiously referring to the Martial Law proclamation. "It seems to me, Burghers, as if there is a misunderstanding here. I have not come to hold a meeting, merely to meet a few friends to discuss some business, business of true importance to all of us. That you are interested is obvious from the fact that you are here. Dark clouds are hanging over us, but give us a little time and we hope that there will be more light soon. Go back, all of you, to your farms and plough your lands, for you see that the rains are near at hand", and he pointed to the sky, which threatened thunder in the south-west. The men looked at one another.

Mr. Schalk W. Truter, Secretary of the Kopjes School Board, said in court that he had seen fear upon their faces, and that the General had added: "We are all just waiting for the word."

In the minds of the deputation that caught the Pretoria train at Kopjes that same afternoon there was trouble and doubt. How easy it would be for these negotiations to go wrong! As citizens they had the right to interview the Prime Minister. Most of them were men of standing, and they knew that, even if Britain had a war with Germany on her hands, there was no question of her losing her hold on the country. De Wet himself declared in court: "Had the Union been attacked by the Germans,

I would have been the first to volunteer." Now there was this question of Maritz. His principles might be right, but was he justified in taking up arms against his own country?

Strictly-speaking, de Wet did not consider himself a member of the deputation, though he went to the capital to maintain touch with them at the house of the Rev. van Broekhuizen. Four and a quarter hours, from 11:45 in the morning to four in the afternoon, was the time they spent with the Premier. Patiently Botha took their points, explaining to them that there was no question of reversing the decision of Parliament, for after all those were the representatives of the people and there could be no arguing with them. The invasion of South West Africa was taking place in pursuance of law, and he could do nothing. Again and again the discussion flared up, until, half-despairingly, the Prime Minister said when they left the room: "What do these people want?"

According to allegations made afterwards, de Wet spent his time in Mr. van Broekhuizen's house privately discussing matters with General Beyers, but he himself declared on oath that on this point the Government Blue Book was at fault. The confusion principally arose from the fact that he visited the house of Mr. P. G. Beyers, the General's brother, and when the crestfallen deputation returned, the ex-Commander of the Union Forces joined them. What happened on this occasion? General Beyers was still more outspoken and said that something must be done immediately. De Wet agreed that a decisive moment had come, the Government having refused to hear any further representations. Although he was accused later on of having told the people "to go home and wait for a signal", he himself denied this. But he certainly agreed that a

protest, armed if necessary, must be made. If it led to fighting that would be unfortunate. Beyers had his plans for the Transvaal - de Wet felt that he must go back to his own home. October 22 was fixed for a further meeting at Kopjes, when he would speak his mind. Outside the house, in the shady Pretoria street, there waited the motor car of the Rev. van Broekhuizen that was to take de Wet back to his farm at Memel. Clouds of dust went up on the rough Natal main road, winding across a veld just beginning to turn green with the approach of spring. Little towns and villages passed by, well known to Christiaan for more than forty years, from the days when he lived near Heideilberg, and had fought the English in the first Boer War. At Ingogo station there was a little telegraph office. De Wet climbed out of the car for a few minutes to send two wires. One of them addressed to Commandant Meyer of Kroonstad, the other to Commandant Meyer of Kopjes. These brothers were in charge of the military arrangements for their respective districts. The messages were worded alike: "Resign immediately."

CHAPTER 23
AN APPEAL FROM THE CHURCH

His Worship The Mayor of Parys was present when another public meeting was held in the grounds of a farmhouse near Rhenoster River, about two miles outside Kopjes. Five hundred excited farmers, their wives and children, waited for the arrival of Christiaan de Wet. The General looked worried and he came later than had been expected.

"I have some important news to give the people", said the Magistrate. "May I speak first?" De Wet assented and the official said: "I have permission to announce that the Union Government will *commandeer* nobody for the participation in the campaign against South-West Africa." As the throng caught these

words a thrill of approval ran through it and even the General broke into a smile.

De Wet had never expected such a large crowd, for the real purpose had simply been to assemble the same committee that had met at Mr. Ferreira's house and to discuss the result of its mission to Pretoria. Now however everybody was expecting him to say something and there were far more present than he had hoped for. Someone thought that a resolution ought to be taken, so the burghers solemnly decided: "Whereas the Dutch South African people in the Transvaal and Orange Free State are oppressed, the meeting resolves to confide all further measures to General Beyers in the Transvaal, and to General de Wet in the Orange Free State." Wild talk was bandied about and it was noticed that a substantial number of the audience had brought their rifles. Heckling began about Maritz. Oom Krisjan declared that, if it should appear that he was concerned with German plans to invade the Cape Colony, he would have nothing to do with him.

"I will as little take part in a German attack on the Cape as I would approve of the Government sending an expedition into German territory. I am the last one to wish to introduce German rule in South Africa. I am not a German nor an Englishman, but an Afrikaner, and I only seek the good of my People." "What should be done?" asked everybody.

The General pointed out that most of them were without arms, and it seemed to him that the best thing would be to make contact with Maritz in order to find out his real attitude. This, however, did not appeal to the excited audience. For once they would not listen to Oom Krisjan. Phrases like "Passive Resistance" and "Ultimatum to the Government" were called out.

Ex-General Beyers had sent down an emissary, partly to find out what the Orange Free State Boers were thinking, and partly to bring a message. "Here in the Transvaal everything is in order, and the burghers are virtually under arms."

"Wait a little longer", de Wet replied, "you will know all in good time." Sixty mounted men with guns waited to accompany him to a meeting in Heilbron. It was plain that rebellion was already beginning, although not yet where de Wet was living.

The late Colonel Deneys Reitz, at that time an attorney practising in the village, described how, the morning of the day when the second meeting at Kopjes took place: "A man came to my office. Locking the door after him, he stated that David van Coller, the District Commandant, was coming that night with a strong force to take the town on General de Wet's behalf, and that I was to be shot in my backyard. Having delivered himself of this at a gulp, he unlocked the door and quickly vanished." Immediately Colonel Reitz telephoned to Pretoria, where his old friend, General Smuts, was Minister of Defence, and when Reitz suggested that he should collect some volunteers to defend the town, Smuts promptly forbade him to do so. He did not want to give anyone the chance of saying that the Government had created trouble.

Immediate efforts had been made by General Botha to enlist the aid of the influential Dutch Reformed Church, and on the day following the proclamation of Martial Law the following documents were distributed throughout the land: "Dear Brethren, As we are convinced that you realise, as we do, the gravity of the position in which we are now placed, in consequence of the dreadful war now raging in Europe, and into which our Fatherland has been drawn, we take the liberty to address the

following letter to you, trusting you will do whatever lies in your power to save a portion of our people from a most dangerous and rash undertaking, which may plunge our Fatherland into the greatest misery and wretchedness, and which threatens our people with certain destruction. From public speeches and from other sources it is clear that there are persons who hold that the time has come to make South Africa independent of the British Empire, and who would make use of a war in which the Empire is engaged to make an attempt which will cause a bloody civil war in our country, and which can only terminate in the destruction of those who take part therein. It is needless to point out that such an undertaking would be a faithless breach of the Treaty signed at Vereeniging and a positive sin against God, whose guiding hand we recognise in everything, as also at this place of our history, or to remind you of the incalculable calamities which are likely to result, not only to the guilty, but to all our people, who assuredly will have to pay the penalty of the crime committed by a portion thereof ...

"As sons of our country, who have at heart whatever touches our national interests, we must inevitably form our own opinion regarding the great question of the day. As citizens of the State we have a perfect right to do so; but we, as ministers of the Gospel, should guard against being drawn into party politics, whereby we incur the danger of bringing into contempt the dignity of our holy office, and to render powerless, to some extent at least, the Gospel of Salvation entrusted to us. Our place is not in the midst of the strife, but on the mountain-top, with Moses, Aaron, and Hur, where we lift up Holy Hands without anger or discord, to plead with the God of our Fathers for our country. May the Lord grant us all grace in these troublous times to abide in the secrecy of His

tent. May He have mercy on our beloved country.

(Signed) A. I. Steytler, J. I. Marais, P. J. G. de Vos, C. F. J. Muller, B. P. J. Marchand, D. S. Botha, J. P. van Heenden, G. S. Malan, P. G. J. Meiring.

Cape Town, October 13, 1914."

Simultaneously the Consistory passed a resolution:

"This meeting professes its profound indignation at the treacherous conduct of Lieutenant-Colonel Maritz. It views his actions as a base violation of faith, which is calculated to place our people in a bad light, and which will have the most fatal consequences. The meeting, therefore, desires to impress on all members of the Church to act according to the spirit of the above open letter, and to support the Government in all possible ways to maintain law and order."

CHAPTER 24
PRESIDENT STEYN TAKES A HAND

President Marthinus Theunis Steyn was perhaps the most honoured figure in Dutch Afrikanerdom. Old, clever, moderate, with a tact that had been tested both in war and peace, and in the hammering out of the Union Constitution, he counted chief among the elder statesmen. A fighter who had kept the Orange Free State in the field, until the very end at Vereeniging, he enjoyed the regard of the English as well as of his own people. His health had been ruined as the result of hardships suffered in the field, but even so his inscrutable eyes, the bald head with the straggling beard, mounted on a burly pair of shoulders, now beginning to stoop with age, seemed a symbol of sagacity to the nation.

As early as 1905 he had seen the coming of the Great War. In 1911 he wrote to General Botha, warning him that, if fighting broke out between

Britain and Germany, as seemed to him inevitable, there might be serious trouble in South Africa. With increasing alarm he now saw and heard about the growing tension, and of the insubordination of Maritz. "Onze Rust", his beautiful home outside Bloemfontein, with its shady garden and spacious verandahs, more and more became the centre of negotiations between the opposing sides.

Two days before the first meeting between de Wet and his friends, General Botha sent the following wire to his friend Steyn: "Regret to have to inform you that Maritz has committed treason, and has joined enemy with majority of his officers and men. He has arrested those who declined to join and sent them to German South West Africa. He has with him a force of the enemy near Kakamas, and yesterday sent the Government an ultimatum in which he threatens to invade Cape Province further, unless by ten o'clock this morning it is agreed to allow Generals de Wet, Hertzog, Beyers, Kemp and Muller to meet him at his headquarters, to give him instructions. Government has ignored ultimatum, but taken strong steps to deal with situation. For this purpose Martial Law is being proclaimed tomorrow and burghers in certain parts commandeered. You, of course, realise the seriousness of the affair. A word from you will go far."

This message brought a quick response. It was that of a man, honestly troubled as to how to reconcile his duty to the State with his personal convictions. His son, Dr. Colin Steyn, later a Cabinet Minister in the Union, was entrusted with the delivery of this important message: "I have received a telegram, containing the serious news about Maritz and his commando. I need not tell you that I fully realise its serious character, and also understand what the consequences of it may be for our people. You say a word from me can do much. It is just here

that difficulty comes in. Not that it is hard for me to repudiate treason, or to condemn the action of Maritz and his followers. That deed is done, however, and whatever I might say or do, it cannot be undone. Yet where I have to speak a word to the people I must deal with the people honourably and openly."

President Steyn admitted his own doubt about the Government attitude to South West Africa. "As far back as three years ago I warned you against your policy, and on the outbreak of the European War I again repeated that warning to General Smuts. I regret that my well-meant advice, which I regarded as in the interests of South Africa and the Empire, has not been followed. As a result of that policy a number of officers and men, who as far as I know were loyal, have become rebels. You will thus see that a letter, written in that spirit, will not have the desired effect, but, on the contrary, will do more harm than good, and yet I cannot intervene in this affair without making my standpoint clear. I owe this to my people and to myself. I am not yet strong; I am already feeling the evil effects of the terrible times in which we are living, and therefore I had hoped to be able to remain outside the present conflict, quietly and, wherever possible, exerting my influence in the direction of moderating public feeling in its excited condition. Even now I still feel that this is the most effective course for me to pursue. My position is not easy. It is with difficulty that I can get about, and, so I cannot go to the people. I cannot speak to them either, as even in ordinary conversation I sometimes find difficulty in speaking.

"An open letter to the effect detailed above is undesirable. I understand your difficulty and shall do nothing to render your task more difficult still.

"I have written frankly, in order that you may understand my position and also realise my

desire to remain outside the conflict at the present time.

"I am sending Colin with this letter, so that he may deliver it to you personally and inform you fully as to my condition. If you have any information that you wish to communicate you may also do so through him.

"It is my heartfelt prayer that in these dark days the needful strength and wisdom and above all prudence may be vouchsafed you from on High."

General Botha expressed his deep disappointment at the letter in his reply…

"It is an abominable thing that Maritz has done. A large number of unthinking young men, who had been entrusted to his charge, who were in one of the annual training camps, and whom we should not even have employed in the attack upon German South West Africa, have been prevailed upon by him to commit the crime of high treason. President: the misery and the sorrow that may come upon our people in consequence of this action are so awful that, in my opinion, it is the sacred duty of every man of influence in our country to do everything in his power to keep the consequences within as narrow limits as possible. At the same time, President, if you cannot speak that word otherwise than in the form you have indicated, it is better to say nothing, because that would not encourage our people to support the authorities loyally in this crisis, but rather the reverse."

Hard on the heels of this message came another from General Smuts, who thought it would be wise to keep secret any mediation, a policy with which the President agreed. Telegrams began to reach him from dozens of places in the Cape, Transvaal and the Orange Free State, all asking him to intervene. By the time the meeting at Pretoria had taken place,

and the second meeting at Kopjes, the last hopes of forestalling violence depended on him.

The same day that de Wet was talking to his friends at Kopjes, Botha sent an urgent letter to the President: "I regret most deeply to have to inform you that the Government is in possession of information, which they can no longer question, that preparations are being made for a general armed insurrection amongst our Boer population, and that Generals de Wet, Beyers and Kemp, with others of our old officers, are actively employed at the head of this movement. I consider it imperative that you should without delay, through your son Colin and the reliable men, despatch a letter to de Wet, Beyers and Kemp, and either summon them to meet you, or in some other way turn them from the path of destruction where they now stand. If they come to you, the Government will take steps not to arrest them and will provide every facility for your messengers. Do your best, President, to save our people from this reproach, this indelible dishonour. The position is more serious than words can describe. What you do must be done at once; an outbreak may now be expected every day."

When he read this the old President sat for a long time in his study, and then proceeded to write three letters. The first of them was addressed to the Prime Minister, assuring him that he was asking de Wet, Beyers and Kemp to visit him at "Onze Rust". He hesitated to accept the allegations about de Wet.

"In a matter of this kind, General", he said, "statesmanship is frequently of more effect than force of argument. I cannot too strongly recommend the policy of forbearance, not only in the interest of your people, but in your own. Once blood has been spilled, the time for forbearance is past and, rightly or wrongly,

your colleagues will have to bear the reproach that civil war, if not fraternal war, broke out." He offered his son Colin to seek out de Wet, and to deliver another letter to him. This is what he wrote:

"October 23, 1914.
"General C. R. de Wet,
Dear General and Friend,
From the letter of General Botha to me, which Colin will read to you, you will understand the purpose of my writing. I don't know whether conditions in the Transvaal are as alarming as General Botha writes, but I have no doubt as to the truth thereof. I have written to him, however, that I don't accept the reports about you as correct. No harm, however, can be done if you will come with Generals Beyers and Kemp to 'Onze Rust', so that we can discuss this very serious affair. You don't need to tell me, for I know from our former conversations how deeply you feel about civil war, if not war between brothers. I also know that no one will see such a thing happen with a heavier heart than you. Please, however, arrange for a day to be fixed by General Beyers at 'Onze Rust', so that we can have a heart-to heart talk, to see whether there is not an honourable way to forestall threatening disaster. Please do. Matters are urgent and don't let anything prevent you. That Almighty God give us all his guidance in these dark days is the urgent prayer of your Afrikaner friend,

M. T. Steyn."'

Neither Beyers nor de Wet were fated ever to come to that meeting at "Onze Rust". Dr. Colin Steyn managed to locate the Transvaaler at a place called Doornhoek, and Beyers said that he would willingly go, provided de Wet could be found. This, unfortunately, seemed impossible. Neither Colin Steyn nor General Hertzog, who also took up the task of tracing him, succeeded. Commandos were formed in the Northern

Orange Free State, and they rode into the town of Heilbron under the command of Rocco de Villiers, a local attorney.

Why, then, did de Wet fail to meet President Steyn? He was actually on his way to South West Africa. "Look here'", he said to his friend, Mr. Harm Oost, "General Beyers and I went into this thing together; I am not going to negotiate alone, for it looks as if I have left General Beyers in the lurch. If General Beyers still gets notice, he can come to the Government, for I have full confidence in him, but I have no right to demand such confidence from him."

It was a tragedy of muddle and mismanagement.

Beyers and de Wet had been planning something, and on October 28 the secret was out. Mr. Cecil Meintjes, of Lichtenburg, had been to see General Beyers in the field, and found that the latter had composed a document which read:

"Steenbokfontein,
29 October, 1914.
"Notice is hereby given to all Burghers of the Union, that, whereas the Government has deprived the public of its right to protest peaceably, by proclaiming Martial Law and regulations, now, therefore, we continue to protest, arms in hand, against so dangerous a principle, which the Government desires to carry out against the wish and will of the nation, being convinced that our Nation will be plunged into the greatest misery and disaster, and that God's curse will fall on us, if this resolution of the Government is carried out.

"As our attitude of protest is not to shed fraternal blood, but on the contrary, as already proved, to avoid this where possible and under no circumstances to

assume the offensive (aanvallenderwijze op te treden). We in conclusion call upon all Burghers to use their powers and influence against the conquest of German South West Africa, and at the same time to refuse to be used by the Government to fight against us with weapons, as our only object is the honour of God and the welfare of people and country.

(Signed) C. R. de Wet, C. V. Beyers,
Generals of the Protesting Burghers."

Meanwhile, de Wet was back at his farm, preparing to rejoin his commando. As one of the men afterwards said in court: "The General wanted to arrange everything without firing a shot, or any bloodshed, but still - a commando was a commando." All his sons were present, including the youngest, Hendrik, who was only seventeen, and rather undersized. The horses were brought out, and Mr. Oost describes how the General turned to Mrs. de Wet and said: "But, wife, Henkie (Hendrik) is still so small, you can safely keep him at home to look after you! There are only women here."

"Man", she answered, "if your life is not too good to sacrifice for your people, Henkie's is not too good, either. Henkie must go with you too." So all the sons went.

CHAPTER 25
THE "FIVE SHILLING" REBELLION

Vrede is a village of about 4,000 people, of whom rather less than half are whites. It lies in the north of the Orange Free State, and after the evacuation of Bloemfontein during the Boer War, served for a short while as the capital of the old Republic. All through the years anti-British feeling had remained strong there and when a meeting was announced on October 28, 1914 trouble

was expected. "De Wet is riding again"; like lightning the message went from farm to farm and within a few hours commandoes sprang to life. A strange, muddled attitude still prevailed among the insurgents. They spoke of a protest – of arms in *hand* as distinct from a protest where arms were actually used. What was passing in the mind of de Wet is hard to say, but that little-known "beroerte" or apoplectic stroke which he had suffered not long before, undoubtedly exercised an effect upon him. "I am a hasty man" (ek is 'n haastige man), he said afterwards, in court, and he could offer no other excuse for one or two of the ensuing incidents.

Sixty burghers had joined him on his farm on October 26, merely, as he put it, "to give weight to the protest". When his followers at Damplaats proposed to raise the Republican banner, he told them that it was too early. "We are going to Maritz", were his own words as he recounted them to the judges, "and when I meet him I wish to convince my self that there is no agreement with the Germans. If there is, we shall return. Otherwise we will go to Pretoria and see the Government, and if they will not heed our protest, then we will hoist the Republican flag." He pointed to a cart standing near, where lay the colours of the defunct Orange Free State. "The reason why we trekked through the district", he told the Bench, "was to gather people to go to Pretoria". Certainly he succeeded in raising the countryside. At four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, October 28, 150 men on horseback, 100 of whom carried rifles, clattered down the main street of Vrede, in the wake of their old General. From every part of the Province reports were coming in that the Government's authority was defied.

Rebels were in charge at Heilbron, Harrismith, Parys, Lindley, Bethlehem and Kroonstad.

Everybody knew that they were approaching Vrede. By the roadside a young man waited - a clerk in the local post office. As he beheld the cavalcade he jumped on to his bicycle and pedalled back furiously through the village, to let the postmaster know how many burghers were coming. Mr. Evans was beside his telegraph instruments. Arthur Langton, a bank clerk, was also standing by, when he was caught up by the commando, who apparently mistook him for the other youth. "De Wet asked me certain questions", he said, in court, "and I replied I did not know. Thereupon he called me a liar, dismounted from his horse and struck me with his whip. Then a revolver was held at my head, and de Wet administered the whip, which resembled a sjambok." Explaining this incident de Wet declared on oath. "I gave young Langton a few cuts because he did not answer some questions. It did not hurt him, but it had the effect of getting the Post Office open. I wanted to see the latest wires and papers."

As the rebels were hammering at the front entrance, trying to get in, the Postmaster tapped out a message to Pretoria: soon enough the door gave way, but they were too late to stop the report. All the instruments were smashed, and the telegraphist knocked about by the angry invaders, though de Wet himself tried to hold them back. In a tearing fury the General stood in front of a local war memorial and ordered the prisoners to be led before him. In his hand was the dreaded sjambok. "Bring the magistrate to me!", he shouted. The magistrate was the same man who had sentenced him to a fine of five shillings for assaulting a Native. Mr. Colin Fraser sat in the court house, coolly awaiting developments. Characteristic of South Africa was the fact that when the would-be captors walked into his office they first of all offered to shake hands. They were greatly taken aback when His Worship declined to exchange this courtesy, and still more so when he refused to attend on Oom Krisjan. Six men hurried down,

with instructions to fetch him by force if necessary. Mr. Fraser said that in view of this threat he would go.

An excited crowd of Vrede citizens stood in the open air beside the monument. Temporarily losing control of himself, de Wet addressed some very offensive remarks to the magistrate, about which even his friends afterwards could only express surprise. As his old comrade, the Rev. Dr. Kestell put it: "His inflammable nature flared up so that unfortunately personal remarks came into the address."

"Ladies and Gentlemen and Burghers", he said, "I have asked you to come here to explain my position". Turning towards Mr. Fraser, de Wet continued: "Magistrate, I want you to get a shorthand writer to take down every word that I am going to say, because, whatever I may do in the future, I can never commit a greater act of rebellion than I have already committed. I am going through to Maritz, where we will receive arms and ammunition, and from there we are going to Pretoria, to pull down the British flag and proclaim a free South African Republic. All those who side with me must follow me, and those who side the Government must go with them. I signed the Vereeniging Treaty and swore to be faithful to the British flag." Here de Wet put forth the extraordinary argument that as the King had allowed a magistrate to be placed over them "who is an absolute tyrant, he has made it impossible for us to tolerate the Government any longer. I was charged before him for beating a native boy. I only did it with a small shepherd's whip, and for that I was fined five shillings."

Mr. Fraser still kept his nerve and, facing up to the flashing eyes of the General, he said: "Did you not plead guilty?"

"I did plead guilty", admitted de Wet, "but you keep still until I have finished. If you won't hold your tongue I will make you hold it. Moreover",

he continued, "after the magistrate had delivered judgment, instead of reprimanding the boy and ordering him in the future to be obedient and to do his duty, he looked at the native as if he would like to give him a kiss. The magistrate is the brother-in-law of a man for whom I have the greatest respect, and who is very dear to me (president Steyn), and for that reason I will give him another chance, otherwise I would have taken him prisoner and handed him over to the Germans. The magistrate's father was one of the staunchest pillars of the church, and if he was alive today he would be heart and soul with me in this movement, and condemn the dastardly act of robbery which the Government are going to commit.

"The ungodly policy of Botha has gone on long enough; and the South African Dutch are going to stand as one man to crush this unholy scandal. Some of my friends have advised me to wait a little longer, until England has received a bigger knock, but it is beneath me and my people to kick a dead dog. England has got her hands full enough. I hate the lies which are constantly being spread to the effect that thousands of Australians, Canadians and Indians can be sent to fight us. Where will England get them from? She has not enough men to fight her own battles.

"I am going through the town to take the following six articles, viz., horses, saddles, bridles, halters, arms and ammunition, and if anyone should refuse to hand to my men these articles, if they should be found in their possession, I will give him a thrashing with a sjambok. I now order the storekeepers to go and open their shops, and I will select men to go round and take whatever I require, apart from the above articles, and they will give receipts for what they take, and if they will not open their shops willingly I will open them in another way.

"My advice to you English is to remain quiet in your houses and not interfere with my men, and if you don't, beware when I come back. I have got my eight sons and sons-in-law here with me, and the only people left on my farm are my wife and daughter. Anyone can go and see them if they like, and I request the magistrate to give them any help they may require if he will do so."

The old warrior's rage rose to boiling point but quickly calmed down. Mr. Fraser was allowed to go back to his office in peace, though the police station was ransacked. The evening saw de Wet, as he departed, naively instructing the sergeant to carry on as usual, "for the rebels, if *they* won, and for the Government if *they* were successful." Rather an unexpected sequel was that, immediately the commando departed, the officer arrested a number of local hotheads, who duly appeared before Mr. Fraser!

By now the Transvaal was also aflame: Captain Jopie Fourie of the Permanent Defence Force, had thrown in his lot with General Beyers, and Pretoria itself was in danger of being attacked by commandos that had sprung up in the neighbouring districts. Louis Botha had taken charge of the position - no longer as Prime Minister - but as General. A small force of 150 Natal Carbineers were the principal protection of the capital but, when messengers arrived under the white flag to treat for terms, unconditional surrender was demanded. Similar reports came from the Western Transvaal, where Beyers took the lead, and where a hide-and-seek game was in progress. There was now no question of an expedition to South West Africa; order must first be restored in the Union. According to official figures, over 7,000 burghers took up arms for the Government in the Orange Free State alone, a vastly greater number than the 890 who had followed Maritz,

although the latter had the advantage of four guns and 600 rounds of small ammunition.

Even at this juncture, however, it could be seen how confused were the notions of the normally law-abiding communities. When one of his followers at Stormhoek spoke disparagingly of Botha, de Wet immediately turned on him and called him a low dog. At Vrede he left the Union Jack, although he said that he was not sure whether or not it had actually been flying when he arrived. On reaching Heilbron he complained that the British Flag had been taken down, and openly deprecated such conduct. We may accept as a fact the genuineness of his astonishment when he learned that Botha was prepared to fight.

CHAPTER 26
FIRST SHOTS

Burghers who reached General de Wet's camp on the Sand River in the Northern Orange Free State felt as though the Boer War had returned. There, before their eyes, was a commando as they remembered it, with its horses, its camp followers, and its free-and-easy attitude towards superior officers. As in days of yore, most of the commandants were elected. Rumours flew from farm to farm and from laager to laager: some of them were true; most of them were not. Among the genuine reports was one that fighting had taken place in the Transvaal, where General Beyers' commando had encountered General Botha's troops in the western districts. There had been shooting and casualties on both sides. De Wet feared the initiative had passed to the Government, and his fiery temper blazed out; already he had covered hundreds of miles, from Vrede to Winburg and on through other little towns of the neighbourhood. Senator Stuart, a former Republican judge, was seized at Winburg and brought before him.

Oom Krisjan looked round and fingering his revolver said: "Are you here, too? I feel inclined to shoot you where you stand." However, he did nothing more than detain him with a number of other Loyalists, including the local magistrate and, after the next big engagement, they were released.

Charles Woods, who had charge of a Government ambulance at Winburg, was sent for. "If you will attend to our wounded", de Wet said, "I will guarantee your safety". This offer was accepted.

The tide seemed to be running with Oom Krisjan. Somewhere on the veld General Hertzog came to him, anxious to arrange another meeting with President Steyn. De Wet pointed to a paper just received, with the news that Beyers had been driven into the Bushveld. "They want to lure him away from my people", he said, "so that they can surround him". No argument would convince him that this was not so. In court he told how he sent out despatch riders to find Beyers, but that he suspected a trap: Even when his good friend, Dr. Colin Steyn, arrived, he failed to persuade him to the contrary. Finally, he wrote a message that, if General Beyers and General Kemp would meet him, he would join them in a visit to ex-President Steyn. Meanwhile he would assume a tacit amnesty.

Among de Wet's luggage was one rather suspicious object - a flag of the old Orange Free State Republic. His wife had packed it for him in his portmanteau, so he later told the judges - and he claimed that, in pointing it out to his burghers, he merely wanted to emphasise its historic significance. Possibly this was true - de Wet was a man of sentiment, but unfortunately the interpretation that his followers and, still more, his opponents placed upon the act was to provide the final evidence that he wanted to start a revolution.

Saturday, November 9, 1914, saw de Wet approaching a kopje near Winburg, the Doornberg, or "Thornhill", overlooking the same Sand River railway-bridge which he had so successfully attacked during the Boer War. His commando was trotting through a gully towards a homestead when they caught sight of a column of wagons approaching the town. The dry bed of the stream lay at their feet, with the Doornberg rising sharply from the veld above it. About 600 horsemen could be distinguished at a distance of about a third of a mile and, as nobody knew whether they were friends or foes, de Wet ordered his men to halt. Next minute bullets were flying.

Reports on how the trouble started are conflicting: de Wet's men claimed that the Government fired first, but Commandant Cronje placed the blame on the Rebels. At any rate it was the first actual fighting in the Free State, and, with his blood up, the General ordered his men to charge the heights above. "I intended to pass through without a collision", he said, "and I never expected the troops to fire; in fact I gave orders, that no one was to load ... I never expected Frikkie Cronje to fire on me", he added, with a catch in his voice, as he referred to his one-time comrade. Still, he himself admitted in court that he was not absolutely certain about the facts. It was just one of the tragedies foredoomed to happen now that events had progressed so far. Eight or nine of the rebel burghers lay dead, eleven of them were wounded, twenty were taken prisoner. On the Government side three were killed and six wounded. As the firing died away and each side drew off to attend to its casualties, the General suddenly grew white. There, among the dead, lay his own son, Danie.

"This is the first victim", he muttered, "now we must go through to the end". It was a turning-point in his life. Out on the veld they dug a

grave and the General, slightly bowed and visibly older, himself delivered the address on his boy. "There can only be peace", he said, "when the Government has been overthrown."

With eyes ablaze he followed the retreating Botha force, right through the main street of Winburg. Here some of his followers got out of hand and shop-looting took place. The most dramatic incident, however, was connected with the Union Jack which flew over the Public Buildings. As the commandos approached, three local women, Mrs. Zylstra, wife of the Town Clerk, Mrs. W. Pienaar and Miss van den Berg, lowered the flag and Mrs. Pienaar, walking past the invaders, wrapped it round her waist and challenged them to remove it. They let her go unmolested, but the incident caught the South African public's imagination.

No further hope remaining of a meeting with President Steyn; General Smuts, as Minister of Defence, refused to give General Beyers a pass to meet General de Wet. Lindley was now occupied and the station-master at Lovat described how he saw the General with 1,500 men encamped beside the line. Several of them commandeered gangers' tools, with the aid of which they pulled up the rails for a distance of 100 yards, while the wires were cut on the telegraph lines and the poles knocked down. Once more the young bloods broke loose, and started looting. De Wet undoubtedly did not approve of this, but it is equally true that it really happened.

Some days later General Botha had the following announcement distributed through the land:

"Pretoria, November 12, 1914.
"To all Citizens of the Union of South Africa:
"The Government, with a view to preventing bloodshed, have spared no effort to avoid internal strife, and have afforded ample opportunity to those who have joined in the

Rebellion to lay down their arms and return to their allegiance.

"In spite of these efforts a large number of persons still continue forcibly to resist the authority of the State, and now are actually engaged in organising armed resistance to the Government, are in conflict with the military forces of the Union, and cause not only considerable loss of life, but also great loss and damage to the property of loyal and peaceable citizens ...

"1. All persons in Rebellion on and after the date hereof are hereby called upon to surrender themselves voluntarily, with their arms and any Government property which they possess, at the office of the nearest Magistrate or Special or Resident Justice of the Peace, or to any officer of the South African Police or Union Defence Forces; *on or before Saturday, the 21st November, 1914.*

"2. All persons who do so surrender will not be criminally prosecuted at the instance of the Government, but will be allowed to return to their homes and remain there, on condition they take *no* further part in the Rebellion, give no information or any other assistance whatever to the Rebels, and do nothing or say nothing whatever which is likely further to disturb the peace or to prolong the Rebellion.

"3. This amnesty will not, however, apply to persons who have taken a prominent or leading part in the Rebellion, or who, while in Rebellion, have committed acts in violation of the rules of civilised warfare. The Government reserve their authority to deal with these cases on their merits.

LOUIS BOTHA,
Prime Minister,
General Officer Commanding-in-Chief the
Union Defence Forces in the Field.

Twenty-seven thousand copies were issued in Dutch, six thousand in English and eight thousand in both languages. Fully half of the Orange Free State was now involved, and a good section of the Transvaal and Northern Cape.

CHAPTER 27
ESCAPE AT MUSHROOM VALLEY

General Botha's offer of an amnesty did not pass unnoticed in the Western Transvaal, where Mr. Cecil Meintjes, of Lichtenburg, as an unofficial emissary, sought out General Beyers and General Wolmarans had moved off. He brought back the news that opposition to the campaign in South West Africa would be abandoned if it were carried out solely by volunteers, and if there were an amnesty for all the Rebels. Within a few hours, however, Beyers was on the march again and there was every sign that he proposed to continue his campaign. To President Steyn's plea that a pass should be given to Beyers, General Smuts sent a very plain answer:-

"Had I expected any good result from interview I should certainly have given Beyers a pass. He is discouraged and depressed and de Wet is firmly resolved and determined to proceed. The only result of a meeting between them in your house would be that de Wet would talk Beyers round. We delayed active operations in Free State in expectation of conference until at last de Wet had 5,000 men in the field, until he was openly saying in his speeches to his commandos that he thought it strange that the Government should be anxious to negotiate with Rebels, and until, after temporising for a long time, he finally refused to attend the conference. We could wait no longer and unless de Wet is convinced by force I do not believe he is more likely to listen to argument. It is therefore in the highest interests of country and people that we discharge our duty as a Government".

Two statesmen, both well-meaning, were at cross-purposes. Steyn thought that there should be a certain amount of forgiveness on the part of the Government, and trust in the good intentions of the insurgents.

On the very day when these wires were passing Botha met his old brother-in-arms on the field of battle.

Mushroom Valley lies not far from the village of Marquard and is surrounded by a circle of hills. Leaving Pretoria, the Prime Minister - once again a soldier and guerrilla fighter - placed himself at the head of those commandos who still believed that his policy was right. All over the country loyal burghers sprang to arms, with horses and biltong and cartridge-bandoliers, as in the days of the Vierkleur. From first to last, according to the official figures of Colonel Hamilton Fowle, Provost-Marshal of the Union, 32,000 men were called out, 24,000 of whom served in the field, and 8,000 on garrison duty. In the Orange Free State 12,000 burghers were mobilised, 8,000 served in the Transvaal and 4,000 at the Cape. Fowle estimated the total number of Rebels was 7,000. When it was realised that the Union at that time, more than 40 years ago, had a white population of only about one-and-a-half millions, and that there were about 7,000 well-trained troops in South West Africa, it will be seen how dangerous the upheaval had become. Not all of the Government forces were yet at Botha's disposal when he came riding toward Mushroom Valley in the hope of trapping General de Wet. All around the hills were alive with Loyalists, some under Colonel Brand, others under General Lukin, a veteran of many Native wars. 3,500 Burghers had gathered in the valley under de Wet and his supporter, Hendrik Serfontein, a member of Parliament. Helios flashed messages from kopje to kopje; horses stood tethered by the wayside, while the men boiled their coffee. Clouds of dust rose where the artillery and supply-columns

rolled forward. Though Afrikaner was fighting Afrikaner, de Wet himself suddenly felt younger. His skill and his generalship once more were back, but there was one difference - beside the horse now stood a new weapon of war - the motor-car. Throughout South Africa they were being commandeered and there were thousands at General Botha's disposal. De Wet lacked cars and he lacked petrol. Nothing, it seemed, could stop his capture by the encircling Government forces.

Along one section of the skyline, near a hill called Hoenderkop, was Brand's detachment of pursuers. Another section was under Botha himself. A third was under the same Colonel Brits who had driven Maritz into the desert. The only one for whom they were waiting was Lukin. Fate now took a hand. The heliograph operator twinkled out a message to Lukin, and omitted to give the code word. Lukin's operator believed that the message was a rebel trick, and never passed it on. When the Government forces suddenly moved forward in a great wave, the "bag was open". At Koraanberg, where Lukin was supposed to be waiting, there was a gap. All the memories of the escape in the Tabaksberg, in the Magaliesberg and at Paardeberg, and of many another hard-fought field rose before Oom Krisjan, as his scouts reported the incredible news. Quick as lightning a commando thundered through the opening in the enemy's line and before Botha knew what had happened they were on the way south, towards the village of Excelsior. In bitterly cold weather they camped out on the veld. Machine-gun bullets had rained down on them as they made their escape, and more than one hundred carts of the convoy, two motorcars, 250 prisoners and a number of killed and wounded had to be left behind. Those new weapons were worse than the old Maxims: even riflemen lost heart before their spitting volleys.

Rest and food were to become scarce after Mushroom Valley. The worst days of 1902 seemed to return. At Maquatling's Nek they camped out in the bitter winds that blew from the Drakensberg, and de Wet ordered his men to double back so that they might shake off the troops. Every inch of country was familiar to the General, but it was familiar to his opponents too. Near Virginia, where Count Villebois-Mareuil lost his life in the Boer War, his commando ran into a small force of 180 horsemen under Colonel Badenhorst. A fierce engagement ensued, during which 2,000 Rebels got across the railway to the north, but, aided by the timely arrival of an armoured train under Captain Dickson, the remaining 1,500 were beaten back. Needless to say, de Wet himself was among those who escaped. His burghers were getting fewer and fewer though they still represented a substantial body, and were by no means short of arms. That same spirit of defeatism, however, which had cost the Republic so dear, now spread among his commando. The offer of an amnesty by General Botha was causing hundreds of them to surrender.

The ex-President felt that they could afford to be generous, so he sent off this wire:

"To General Smuts, Pretoria.
From Steyn, Tempe.

"Brand Wessels just returned. Reports that General de Wet is willing, if he can obtain safe-conduct and if safe-conduct can also be sent to General Beyers, to visit me, along with Beyers, and open negotiations, in order to see if a way cannot be found by which peace can be restored.. As I said before, if we do not take advantage of this opportunity now I foresee bloodshed and misery that will continue for years. Do not refuse consent therefore. You know General de Wet, and it is only by means of the utmost exertions and by bringing all my influence to bear that he has been prevailed upon to come to me. If you

agree, please wire separate safe-conduct here for both generals, also a safe-conduct for Brand Wessels to take the safe-conduct to de Wet and accompany him here."

General Smuts did not delay his answer:

"To His Honour President Steyn.
From General Smuts, Pretoria.
"The Government has seriously considered your telegram of yesterday's date. We feel that the position has entirely changed since General Botha first appealed to you to use your influence with de Wet and Beyers to avert bloodshed. Then no hostilities had yet occurred, and de Wet and Beyers were merely busy forming commandos. Beyers would not go to you without de Wet, and de Wet put off from day to day, with the obvious intention of gaining time in order to mobilise a great force. Meanwhile hostilities broke out in the Transvaal and later in the Orange Free State, whereupon de Wet point blank refused to go too. Since then bloody encounters occurred in Transvaal and Free State and many have been killed and wounded. Even yesterday a battle took place at Virginia, with considerable losses on both sides. We feel that, however much we desire peace on an honourable basis and to avoid further bloodshed, the military position has become too serious to sanction the proposed conference. The Government has made its position clear by the issue of a notice containing the terms on which Rebels who voluntarily surrender will be treated. To such an extent is public feeling embittered that great dissatisfaction exists among the loyal burghers on account of the leniency of these terms, and the Government feels that the position is likely to become still worse and more fatal than it is today, if the Rebels are allowed to extort peace terms from the Government. Unconditional surrender on the basis of the Prime Minister's conditions is necessary, on the understanding that there is at present no intention to apply capital punishment in the case of leaders.

"While we cannot, therefore, consent to grant a safe-conduct, there is yet every probability that General de Wet has met or will meet General Beyers to-day, and that they will therefore be able to exchange views and, if they so wish, to approach the Government. We extremely regret having to send this reply to your telegram, but looking to the present position, the manner in which it arose, and the security for the future peace of South Africa, there seems no other way open to us."

Nothing more seemed to be expected, and General Botha, holding the telegraph system under his control, moved his troops like a chess-player is about to checkmate. Up the valley of the Vet River, a tributary of the Vaal, the dwindling columns of Oom Krisjan continued their weary march, stopping occasionally at friendly homesteads, but rarely able to get what was needed most, fresh horses and ammunition. In addition to this the rains were late and the grass poor. Troops and commandos caused him to turn back towards Boshof, where the chase was taken up by a fresh force under Colonel Manie Botha.

Hope was gone; thousands of fresh soldiers were answering the call of the Government, thousands of motor-cars placed at his disposal. Nearby along the Vaal River, perhaps some ford was carelessly guarded. Anyhow, he must risk it. He told his commando he was going to join General Kemp, who was retreating from the Transvaal across the Kalahari Desert to German South West Africa; he would find him. Not a few were prepared to risk it, yet as De Wet himself said: "Each rider saw the miserable condition of his horse, and this made it impossible for him." Each cried: "Give me a horse and I will go along", but this could not be done. The General told them to put away their guns and go home. Taking only twenty-five men, he left behind his companions and galloped away towards the border stream,

which he had so often successfully crossed during the Boer War. This time he was not dealing with a Kitchener or Roberts, ignorant of South African conditions. General Botha forgot no precautions. Far-off stretched the green line of willows that marked the edge of the river and, sure enough, there were the outposts under Commandant S. P. du Toit, with their rifles pointing at him. One of the bullets wounded a horse and, as the rest of the tiny force galloped away towards safety, one of de Wet's staff officers, carrying most of the General's papers, fell a prisoner to the Government.

Only eight men were left that evening when de Wet, in pitch darkness, managed to swim his exhausted animals across into the Transvaal.

CHAPTER 28
CAPTURED AT LAST

Eight weary men trudged their horses across the veld in the bleak Wolmaransstad district of the Southern Transvaal: de Wet; his son-in-law; Mentz; his secretary, Harm Oost; his adjudant, Spies; and three burghers, Wessel Potgieter, Gert Muller and Koos van Coller. That was all that remained of the huge commando that had followed the General through the Free State. True, the Rebellion was by no means over. In the Transvaal, particularly, Beyers and Jopie Fourie were still very much on the move. The latter had been a Captain in the Defence Force, a permanent officer and, at the end of October, he had gone to the support of General Beyers, who had been driven with heavy loss into the Rustenburg district. Over-confident at their initial success, one of the Government commandos, sent in pursuit, fell into an ambush, losing two killed, five wounded, and more prisoners. Fourie now blew up the railway line, thereby stopping an armoured train, and vanished into the bush of

the Waterberg district in the North, while he planned to capture Pretoria itself.

Before a supporting group of Rebels under General Muller could reach him, Fourie again met Government troops and commandos under Colonel Dirk van Deventer. The engagement was described as the fiercest in the whole Rebellion, but Fourie got away, to reappear at Hamman's Kraal, barely twenty-eight miles North of Pretoria. On the afternoon of November 21, 1914, it was telephoned to the capital that 400 Rebels were threatening its safety.

Only a few policemen were on the spot, but immediately riflemen were rushed out by train. Fourie's men dug themselves in, outnumbering the Loyalists six to one. After sustaining heavy casualties they withdrew, but Fourie was captured a few days later and court-martialled. He and his brother were duly tried on the charge "that, being officers of the Union Defence Forces, they were guilty of treason, in that they in the Transvaal, on or about the months of November and December, 1914, and specially on or about the 16 December, 1914, in or near the district of Pretoria, did resist His Majesty's Forces and were found and captured, together with other persons in armed rebellion on or about the 16th December, 1914." Jopie Fourie was sentenced to death, and at dawn the following day met his end in front of a firing party. His brother. although also found guilty, received five years' hard labour.

For General Beyers, a different fate was in store. He had finally agreed to meet President Steyn, but as set out in his telegram, General Smuts, on learning that de Wet was actually fighting, cancelled the previous arrangements and had Beyers taken back safely to his own commandos. For three weeks hardly anything was heard of

him, and it was during this time that de Wet managed to cross over into the Transvaal.

On November 22, the day after he arrived, the following confidential notice was circulated to all police stations:

"Although General Botha's notice of 12 November in regard to surrendering rebels has expired, I instruct you to continue to let rank and file who surrender go home peaceably and quietly, and await decision of Government in respect of them. All rebel officers or persons of prominence, such as members of Parliament or Provincial Councils, or all who have taken prominent part in Rebellion should, however, be kept under arrest until further orders. If uncertain as to status or prominence of a surrendered rebel, inquiries should be made by telegraph to the magistrate of the district to which the surrendered rebel belongs. If thereafter there is any doubt whether a surrendering rebel should be detained, instructions should be asked for from Defence Headquarters, Pretoria. Of course all rebels who are captured, instead of surrendering voluntarily, should be kept under arrest. Notice addressed to all Force Commanders and magistrates in disturbed areas. Latter should immediately transmit those instructions to all assistant resident magistrates, special justices of the peace, and police stations in their magisterial districts."

The Rebellion was by now subsiding to the dimensions of a police job. One hundred of de Wet's own men surrendered on the 18th at Ventersburg, another 72 at Dewetsdorp; at Vrede and at Winburg 53 gave themselves up to Colonel Manie Botha; outside Odendaal's Rust 299 were captured by Commandant Cilliers. So the tale went on.

While General Kemp, one of the Rebel leaders, was actually making a successful get-away through the barren wilderness of Bechuanaland, De Wet and his little band had only one chance

left - to reach the Kalahari Desert as soon as possible and there to make a dash for German territory, a curious irony for the man who had most objected to any dealing with a foreign colony. As yet, however, he was far from safety. In the distance could be seen the motor-cars with which he was ever-lastingly pursued, which, not far from the town of Wolmaransstad, came within a quarter of a mile.

From Mr. Harm Oost, a well-known South African journalist and member of Parliament, I have the description of how they were nearly caught: "Spies, one of their number, had stopped to bathe his weary feet in a neighbouring stream, and found himself taken prisoner. A shower of bullets fell round the fugitives, wounding Mentz, who was also captured, and killing my own horse. De Wet turned back, holding the handpaard (spare horse) of his son-in-law by the bridle. ‘Climb up’, he shouted, and together we charged ahead of the oncoming Government motor-cars. Suddenly Mentz's horse also collapsed, badly wounded. The General saw it and ordered me to dismount, hide the saddle and try and find safety. At this desperate moment, when all seemed lost, Christiaan found time to break a piece of bread in half and to give it to his comrade. Then he waved good-bye and dashed away westwards."

Taking shelter somewhere in the veld, Mr. Oost eluded the excited pursuers, and next day caught up Oom Krisjan. With tears in his eyes the General welcomed him: "It is a sign from the Lord". Next they made their way towards the village of Schweizer Reneke, where another fugitive commando under Commandant Nezer was trying to reach South West Africa. They decided to join forces. Though they were better provided with equipment than for some time past, the odds were overwhelming.

"De Wet has made many forced marches in his life, but it is safe to say that he never did such a remarkable trek", commented P. J. Sampson, a local newspaper man. Four thousand men were after him, spread out over a distance of seven miles, but somehow he still contrived to dodge the patrols.

Heavy rains came down at Maquassi until the horses began to sink in the mud, but they could not wait for the grass to grow, so the animals remained hungry. Then they came to a railway line running north and south, the long trunk route through Africa, planned by Cecil Rhodes, and entered upon the Great Thirst.[7] Here then de Wet sought safety. Roads there were none, the paths were known only to the Bechuanas and the scanty portholes lay at intervals of many miles apart. Still he pinned his hopes to the hardiness of the Boer ponies and to the instinct of their riders.

At Vryburg there waited a fresh fleet of Defence Force motor-cars, brought up from Kimberley by train. In those days before highways it was a question of ploughing through sand and mud and dodging boulders. A few hours after de Wet passed into the desert, this petrol-driven caravan under Colonel Saker was at his heels: 500 yards away a volley disabled two cars and gave the Rebels another quarter-of-an-hour's start, which was sufficient to save them.

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[7] Bechuanaland and the Kalahari are almost synonymous. In a sense the word "desert" is not always correct, since, apart from the region of everlasting sand-dunes, there are vast area where game can exist on the thorn bushes, with their deep taproots, and where the natives can pasture their flocks of sheep on the hardy occasional scrub.

Covered with dust and in clothes that he had not taken off for days, General de Wet still kept his wits. After nightfall he stopped the horses. They wanted to stampede towards a distant homestead, but he first made sure that it was safe to go there. He heard a windmill pumping water and saw a small dam in the gloom; there was no holding man or beast: together they rushed to drink. The snorting and stamping of horses awoke the owner of the farm-house. A man came out. Once again the magic of the General's name did its work. Mr. Klopper had formerly been his neighbour and did not need a moment to understand what was happening. The famished men ate all the food he had ready -a pot of mealie porridge. All through the night they talked and dozed, still buoyed up by the hope that they might reach German territory. Perhaps their luck would turn. As dawn broke another Boer galloped towards the homestead. He was sent by Commandant Neser to tell them that the other fugitives had found a better place, with grazing and springs, a farm with the promising name of "Waterbury": "We must go there", said de Wet, throwing off his weariness.

For once he had made a mistake. Waterbury was familiar to everybody as the only oasis for miles. The Government also knew it. To the men who had ridden through the thirst land, the green trees, refreshed by recent rains, looked a paradise. A small shack was the only dwelling to be seen. Had he been gifted with the sight of the aasvogel that hung overhead, de Wet could have seen the columns of motor-cars making for the same place, crawling closer and closer round it. Horsemen had been sent and there were even camels, borrowed from the South African Police Stations in the Kalahari Desert.

And now de Wet was actually at Waterbury. "Does anyone live there?" he asked Commandant Neser. "Yes, there are two men - each with his family. They are professional hunters". For a whole day they remained at the

farm, resting their horses, and themselves, trying to gain strength for the rest of the journey to South West. De Wet proposed at no matter what sacrifice, to omit the intervening waterholes.

Why did the cars not reach them? The sand of Bechuanaland had proved too stubborn. It was on horseback that the last stage towards the oasis had to be accomplished by Botha's men, seventy of them under Colonel Jordaan. Night had again fallen when they arrived. Dismounting, they crawled like cats around the little encampment, hidden by trees and bushes. November 30, 1914 broke; General de Wet rose, looked around him and ordered his men to saddle-up. Putting down their rifles they commenced to collect their knee-haltered horses.

"Surrender!", came a shout through the cold air of the early morning. All around could be seen the helmets and bandoliers of the Government troops. Instinctively de Wet and Harm Oost dashed towards their horses, which had remained saddled, but found themselves gazing at rifle barrels. Not another sound had been uttered by their pursuers. Oost wanted to fight his way out but de Wet said sternly: "It is childish. We cannot resist superior numbers. It would have been different if all our burghers had been together. Then we might have tried."

Colonel Jordaan walked forward. "Do you surrender?" he asked. General de Wet nodded and smiled.

"If I didn't want to surrender", he said, "I would have shot long ago", and very slowly the men piled their guns and revolvers into a heap on the veld. They put the General into a horse-drawn trap, driven by a coloured constable, and he began his long trek back to the police station at Marokwen, and on to the railway station at Vryburg.

"It was the motor-cars that beat me", he said. "I did not think they would get through the deep

sand, but they managed to hang on to our heels all the time, and compelled us to maintain a speed that was killing to man and beast." He looked around him, full of self-possession - even with a certain light heartedness: "I will hang higher than any of you", he said to his misguided companions, as they moved towards the empty horizon. When the tin houses of Vryburg came into sight de Wet turned to the constable who driving him and felt in his pocket, but found he had nothing with him. So he pulled out his tobacco-pouch, shook an ounce or two into the palm of the coachman and in the patriarchal way of the farm said: "Goed gedryf, my jong." (Well-driven, my boy.)

CHAPTER 29
IN PRISON

For the first time in his life de Wet was in captivity. What the whole of the British army had found impossible during the Boer War had been accomplished by a troop of his own fellow-Burghers, using a few motor-cars. Even the Rebels admitted that he was treated with the greatest courtesy by Colonel Jordaan and his officers. They could see that the old man was exhausted - his strong constitution worn by the cold and rainy days in the Orange Free State. At Vryburg he allowed himself to be photographed. The picture shows his characteristic, steady eyes, his firmly-set mouth and the slightly humorous twist of his countenance. People crowded out of their houses in the village to see the legendary hero. He did not stay long at the station, where a special train waited to take him to Johannesburg. As he passed across the Transvaal de Wet recognised commandos and columns of troops still busy on the chase for Beyers; and - what was even sadder to him - the long lines of prisoners outside the police stations, bringing in their rifles and surrendering voluntarily. Even this, however, could not depress him for any length of time. His companions and guards saw him recovering, and when they drew in at

Johannesburg station, the *Transvaal Leader* reported:

"Had de Wet stepped from the train with dejected men and an apparent dread of what his fate might be, none would have been surprised. Weeks in the field and the hard life of campaigning, especially when there is daily dread of capture, are not conducive to a tranquil mind; but not a physical or mental sign did de Wet show of the hardships he had undergone through the relentless pursuit by the Union Forces.

"On the contrary, de Wet bore himself bravely as he did throughout the train and walked into the waiting motor, which was to carry him to the Fort. In fact there was a distinctly assertive, if not buoyant air about the Rebel leader, as he was unostentatiously surrounded by officers of the Defence Force. He was clad in a very presentable grey tweed suit - he had obviously had a change since he was captured - but had he worn the accepted garb of the veld, a keen observer would still have noticed the squared shoulders and the set head of a man who was determined to give no outward sign of fear, whatever his real feelings."

In cars they drove to the local prison, known as the "Fort". On the top of the Hospital Hill and above the city, this structure had been erected at the time of the Jameson Raid by President Kruger's government to over-awe the Uitlanders. Its guns had never been used, were, in fact, dismantled, but the high grass-planted ramparts, into which a doorway had been cut, remained among the landmarks of the Golden City. Since the Boer War it had served as a prison, many extra buildings having been added at the back.

Hopes had been entertained that the prisoners would be treated as political offenders, but the Government decided that the time for moderation was past. Hundreds of men from all parts of the Transvaal and Orange Free State

were coming to the Fort. One of them was de Wet's own son, another was the prophet Niklaas van Rensburg, who had taken up his gun with the others. Of this worthy a story was circulated which confirms the view that, although he was good at seeing the future, his interpretations were not always right. In one of his semi-trances during the rebellion, he foretold that he would attain a high position in the land, sit in a room of his own, in a great building, and could only be seen by written appointment. Reminded of this story, he was sportsman enough to point out that the big building was evidently meant to be the gaol, and not a government office: certainly all visitors needed a written permit.

As the motor-car drew up outside the entrance to the Fort, warders arrived to enter up the General's name and help him with his luggage.

On one side of the courtyard the old Republican coat-of-arms had been carved in stone. De Wet said little, but found time for a friendly remark to his comrades before he was taken to a cell.

It has been pointed out by the historian, Dr. G. S. Preller, that South African law in 1914 did not allow for political prisoners, and it was for this reason, rather than from any desire to humiliate de Wet, that a number of regulations were applied to him, which were meant for criminals awaiting trial. Not for weeks was it realised that he was subjected to all the ordinary prison routine, and even obliged to wear prison clothes. As he was not yet convicted, he was allowed to receive guests.

News came that Beyers had been hemmed in, and was now back on the banks of the Vaal River. Accompanied by only a handful of men, he made his way past Maquassi. His pursuers closed in from both North and South. Although warned by his companions that escape was impossible, Beyers exclaimed: "So long as I have any life in me I shall make a fight for it."

On the Transvaal bank Captain Cherry; with thirty men; saw him unstrap his gaiters, spurs, mackintosh and revolvers and, taking a horse from one of his men, as his own had just been shot, leap into the grey waters of the Vaal. The river was high, and treacherous at the best of times. Johan Pieterse, his Boer guide, swam ahead. They thought they might after all find a place on the far bank, though they could already see the commando from the Free State in the distance. Bullets splashed into the water before they were 100 feet in. The government soldiers noticed the horse turn: the next moment the General leapt off and made towards the further shore. Blood mingled with the waters of the Vaal as a bullet hit Pieterse, but he swam on to help his commander. As his friend disappeared beneath the water, Beyers shouted: "Ek kan nie meer nie". (I can't do any more). Forgetting all about politics and wars, the burghers anxiously watched the drowning man, as he tried to float. One of them held out a tree-branch, but it was too short. To a shout from one of his pursuers of: "Are you wounded?", Beyers answered: "I cannot swim, the coat is between my legs". An instant later he gave a cry and sank to the bottom ... Awe-stricken and in deep distress the last of the General's commando gave themselves up to the troops as they searched for Beyers' body. Some days later it was found washed down the river. He had not been wounded, but drowned ...

What was General de Wet himself thinking? Here is what he said to his friend, the Rev. Kestell: "Not for a single night could I sleep in peace before I acted. I had pondered and wrestled while I thought about the decision of Parliament. For nights I could not sleep. I thought of the curse of God: hence I was full of distress! But when I was out in the veld, I felt peace, and there was not a night that I was left alone that I did not sleep quietly till the following morning. In the Fort I could think back upon the path which I had followed for the

last three months, and I had no conscience to plague me." Most of his time he spent reading the Bible, and occasionally singing a Psalm, until the warder told him that it was not allowed. De Wet took no notice and continued to sing.

Dr. F. E. T. Krause, K.C., in his day a well-known Republican official and later the judge-President of the Orange Free State, had been retained as de Wet's counsel at the forthcoming trial. With him was Tielman Roos, then a young barrister, and later to become one of the most brilliant political leaders of General Hertzog's party. These two came to see de Wet in his cell. Masses of documents had to be prepared and scores of statements analysed. Under the Criminal Law of South Africa, a preparatory examination would be held by the magistrate, followed by a trial in the Supreme Court. Realising that the leaders were the only men who mattered, the amnesty was increasingly applied to the rank and file. Stray commandos under General Wessel Wessels, under General Serfontein, were still in the Orange Free State, but within a week of the capture of de Wet, the Rebellion was virtually over. Only a few stragglers managed to hold out in the wilder parts of the country until the New Year. Meanwhile the Government announced that a special court would be instituted to try the prisoners.

CHAPTER 30
IN THE DOCK

"Rex versus Christiaan Rudolph de Wet"

In his black gown Mr. S. de Jager, K.C., Attorney-General for the Orange Free State, rose from his place in the Supreme Court at Bloemfontein and turned towards Mr. Justice Lange, Mr. Justice Searle and Mr. Justice Hutton. Beside the Attorney-General sat the men who had prepared the Government's case: Mr. Nightingale, Chief Law Adviser to the Crown,

and Mr. C. C. Jarvis, Crown Prosecutor for the Orange Free State; while at their elbow was South Africa's most famous criminal lawyer, Dr. Frederick Edward Traugott Krause, K.C., with his pince-nez and his sleekly brushed hair, leaning over his stack of papers or turning to his junior-chubby-faced thick moustached, Tielman Roos.

Everybody - the Bench, the Bar and the crowding public was on the alert as the General was brought in guarded by two armed warders in the khaki uniform of the Prison Service. Somewhere up in the gallery sat his wife; a few seats further on, craning his grey head forward, was his namesake, the Minister of Justice, Mr. N. J. de Wet, (until recently the Officer Administering the Government) helping to move around some extra chairs.

"Guilty or not guilty?"

Very quietly de Wet answered:

"Not guilty of treason, but guilty of sedition."

A murmur of surprise went up, for it had been foretold that the General was going to contest each point (incidentally he was never throughout the proceedings referred to as "General").

"Do you accept the plea of accused, Mr. Attorney-General?" inquired Mr. Justice Lange, who presided.

"No, my Lord", said Mr. de Jager. "In the circumstances I cannot accept the plea."

Whereupon he proceeded to give an account of the Rebellion, beginning with the resignation of General Beyers and the shooting of General de la Rey. He mentioned the letter written by de Wet at the house of General Wessel Wessels, and another one from de Wet to Major Brand, in which he spoke of the insult which the Kaiser had offered President Kruger at the time of the Jameson Raid.

From the lobby outside the court witnesses began to troop in, to tell of the speeches at General de la Rey's funeral at Lichtenburg, and later at Kopjes in the house of the Rev. Ferreira. One of them told how at the latter place he had asked de Wet where General Beyers was, and whether he meant to see General Hertzog. De Wet had replied that he had not seen Beyers for some days, but had seen Hertzog the day before. Hertzog, he told his questioner, would not be present, but, being a lawyer, his legal assistance would be available. Then the deputation to Pretoria had been proposed. Dr. Krause wanted to know what de Wet had said, but his witness failed to recall his exact words. Counsel made a reference to the opposition of the Boers to the invasion of German South West Africa. "The place", he said, "was a wilderness, and the people could not see any value in the country. They were prepared to defend the Union, but not to attack German South West Africa." Judge Lange took a hand in the examination, and was told that the General had said: "Maritz had plenty of ammunition. There is only one thing left for us to do, and that is to go Maritz."

Various citizens of Kopjes told about the meeting in that village, and Mr. Schalk Truter, secretary of the local School Board, related how, at the farm of another de Wet, some two miles out, 200 to 300 men had gathered; nearly half were armed. They insisted that the General should say something, and he replied: "You are waiting for a word."

Next morning, on June 11, Dr. Krause astonished the court by withdrawing the plea of sedition, and substituted one of "not guilty", which the presiding judge declared to be most unusual, but, which he said he would allow. Senator Stewart and a Mr. Meyer gave testimony, the latter alleging that de Wet had wanted to settle everything without bloodshed.

"Have you listened to political speeches before?" asked judge Searle.

"Yes."

"Was General de Wet's speech the usual run of political speeches?"

"Oh no! I have not heard a speech of that character before."

"So it was not the ordinary political speech at all", His Lordship observed. "You should be careful what you say."

Next a storekeeper took the oath and told that his firm has lost £4,000 worth of goods, in return for which the rebels had given him a receipt to the face value of £1,700.

Dr. Krause drew the court's attention to the fact that a national subscription had been established, called the "Helpmekaar" (help each other), to make good the losses sustained in the Rebellion. £150,000 had already been subscribed to pay claims against the rebels.

"It is satisfactory to the taxpayers to hear that", said judge Lange. "I do not think", interposed the Attorney-General, "that the payment of claims makes any material difference." On this point counsel strongly disagreed. "I think it makes a very material difference, and I will in due course call ten witnesses on the point - mostly prisoners in gaol."

The fourth day was taken up with the evidence of the bank clerk, Arthur Langton, who had been assaulted by de Wet at Vrede; of the station-master, Robert Fell, who had seen the rebels in camp; and of the ambulance-driver, Charles Wood, whose services had been sought by the insurgents. One remark of Dr. Krause's, commenting on Wood's evidence, gave a valuable insight into what the General was thinking. "De Wet", he said, "complained that he was treacherously fired on." Colonel Hamilton

Fowle, Provost-Marshal for the Union of South Africa, described activities at Defense Headquarters. When the Rebellion began 10,000 South Africans had stood on the boundaries of German South West Africa, but their movements were brought to a standstill by the internal danger to which the Union itself was exposed. Commandeering notices, he said, had been issued to 32,000 men, to crush the Rebellion. Voluntary surrender went on after de Wet's capture, up to February 3, 1915, while the very last men under arms were only caught on March 23. Casualties on the rebel side were approximately 170 killed. "No men", he said in reply to Dr. Krause, "have been commandeered in the Free State". At this stage the Crown case was closed.

Counsel then called one of the rebels, de Villiers Theunissen, who denied that the accused ever told the burghers at Lindley to go into one of the stores and help themselves. General Smuts, the Union Minister of Defense, next described how on August 5, it became known that the war against Germany had been declared, and how on August 10, the Union was ready to invade German South West Africa. It was, however, necessary to consult Parliament, as it was an urgent matter. The decision to seize the German colony was taken before the incident at Nakob Frontier Post, and the resignation of General Beyers and General Kemp on September 13, 1914, came as a complete surprise to him. From the dock de Wet, who had been rather subdued through the first few days of the trial, now listened with great attention. He seemed cheerful but kept chatting with his advocates. The examination of General Smuts was becoming acrimonious until the judge-President interposed:

"The court is dealing with a case of high treason; there is no need to introduce so much politics."

"My Lord", answered Dr. Krause, "the whole case rests on politics." When the actual incidents

of the Rebellion were being analysed, General Smuts declared: "De Wet was greatly embittered through the death of his son. I cannot say who fired the first shot at the Battle of Doornberg. It was an unfortunate affair. When it was found how deep the feeling was, commandeering did not take place in the Orange Free State, but there might have been cases before. Those men who were called together at Bethlehem and Winburg could not have been under the impression that they were called to go to German South West Africa." He told the judge-President that the original order to Maritz had been to support General Lukin in an expedition against the Germans on the Cape border. His most important remark came at the end of his two hours in the box. "There is no evidence", he said, "that de Wet was in communication with the Germans."

Dr. Colin Steyn recounted how he acted as a messenger between the opposing parties, being followed by General Hertzog. He described the anger of de Wet when he heard that Beyers had been driven into the Bushveld. "It seems to me", the accused had said, "they want me to leave my commando in order to attend this meeting. I cannot agree to the war continuing; and I will not now go to Steyn." General Hertzog also disclosed that de Wet felt a grievance, because he believed that the Cape rebels, who had gone to German South West Africa after the South African War, had been left in the lurch. Finally, he referred to the visit which he had received from Mrs. Maritz on October 10, the day before de Wet was to go to President Steyn. She asked him, "What will happen to my husband if he has acted as reported?" "I said he could be shot, but I had no information about the facts, and had actually only met Maritz once in my life, in December, 1914."

Every day the crowds at the Bloemfontein court house increased, till they reached their maximum on June 17, when Christiaan de Wet himself was

sworn in. "With a wealth of quiet gesture", as an eye-witness said, "he told his own story." He had first heard of the South West expedition when the Government mobilised the Defence Forces and sent them to the Cape frontier. There was a catch in his voice as he spoke of the death of de la Rey, "one of the dearest friends I ever had on earth" and when he spoke of the funeral. He had stayed behind at Lichtenburg to prevent excesses among the 6,000 to 7,000 people present. When General Liebenberg had made a violent anti-Government speech, he had protested, and when someone had hoisted the Republican flag, he had demanded its removal. Loud laughter went up in court as Oom Krisjan told of the Potchefstroom meeting, and of a solitary bad egg aimed at him, which missed its mark. "I persuaded the burghers not to use force, to pay no heed to the behaviour of slum-dwellers. I told them that if decent gentlemen were present they would be ashamed of their behaviour." At Vrede his only reason for sending for Mr. Fraser was because "the district had become demoralised since this magistrate went there." Unfortunately for the historian, the judge-President stopped his explanation of the reasons for the famous "Five Shilling Rebellion", saying "that it had nothing to do with the case." De Wet claimed that he had never interfered with the British flag at Vrede or anywhere else.

Counsel and prosecutor examined him carefully in regard to the allegation of treachery at Doornberg. "Had there ever been a white flag?" "I could not be certain", admitted de Wet. Now he talked of Mushroom Valley, and of the time when they had been driven to Vet River, the horses being in so bad a way that he told the burghers to turn back. "I would push on with a small force to Maritz. My arrest, however, was not immediately due to weakness of the horse, but to the treachery of those on whose farm I rested for a day. Had the horse been in good form they would never have caught me. I would not have been betrayed." In reply to Dr. Krause,

who wanted to know whether he had planned to haul down the Union Jack at Pretoria, and hoist the Republican flag, the General answered: "I did not mean to do so immediately; only if other hopes failed. I knew that every Afrikaner still burned for the Afrikaner flag, however loyal he might be to the flag that he has taken over. I defy anyone to prove that I have ever been disloyal to the Treaty of Vereeniging, but if the Government would not agree to revoke the German South West African decision, then I would go to the extreme of hoisting a Republican flag."

Mr. de Jager did not take up much time with his cross-examination. Upon the Attorney-General asking whether he approved of the recent violent policy of the Rand strikers, he said: "No, I object to the action of the strikers, but there is a great difference between the grievances of the strikers and those of the rebels". He began to speak angrily of the mines, the capitalists and Dr. Jameson until he was stopped by the Judge-President, who said that no political speeches were allowed. The entire day was taken up with legal arguments, which bored the General exceedingly. The Crown particularly stressed the high status and great following enjoyed by Christiaan de Wet.

Not until June 21, 1915 did the court pronounce judgment. Dr. Krause's speech was as skilful as the circumstances would allow. He accused the Government of mismanaging the situation and of being too autocratic. He pointed out that de Wet was touchy and that he had never had any dealings with the Germans. He emphasised the essential honesty of his client. But it was an impossible case to win.

"You are a recognised leader of the people", began the Judge-President. "You were a General in the forces of the Republican Government during the late war, and you were during that war at one time Acting President of the Orange Free State. Some time after the war you were a

Cabinet Minister under Responsible Government. You were then the presiding member of the Executive Council and must have taken a special oath of loyalty to your Sovereign. You were a most influential man in the Orange Free State, and looked up to by the people. In view, therefore, of your position it was incumbent upon you to be extra-cautious about misleading people whom you so greatly influenced. It is safe to say that, had it not been for you and some of the others associated with you, we should have heard nothing about the Rebellion in this country, and you therefore bore very heavy responsibilities on your shoulders when you entered on Rebellion. The excuse offered in justification was that you and the people who followed you were greatly opposed to the Government's policy in engaging on an expedition to South West Africa, but that policy, as you knew at the time, had been approved of and ratified by the Union Parliament. You apparently contended, as it was set forth in the Lichtenburg resolution, that this policy, though approved of by Parliament, was an illegal one, and contrary to the provisions of the Defence Act. Even assuming that was so, it did not justify you in stirring up a rebellion and attempting to upset the Government, as your Counsel himself admits."

Guilty!

That was the verdict of the three judges. The court was crowded, as never before, on June 22. "We shall take into consideration", said Mr. Justice Lange, "that you are a man advanced in years, the position you held among the people, that you acted, not from ambition or personal motives, but on some fanatical idea, based probably on your religious views - I say this with all respect - and the dictates of your conscience". De Wet, who had sat through the dreary days in court, seemed quite unmoved. Once he even smiled to some friends, but he was attentive, even courteous, and nodded as the judge, who

referred to him as an "old warrior", mentioned the seven months he had already spent in prison, which would be set off against the sentence. Six years' imprisonment; with hard labour, and a fine of £2,000. The interpreter began to put it into Afrikaans. Then an incident of his childhood came back; the occasion when his old school-mistress had hit him till she got tired. Speaking in English, he looked at the judges and said: "Is that all?"

CHAPTER 31
UNDER SENTENCE

In the early morning men and women stood waiting outside the newspaper offices in Bloemfontein, in Cape Town, in Pretoria, and in other towns - wherever a journal was published in Afrikaans. They took their turn at the counter - tendering half-crowns. Steadily, day by day, the money was arriving that would pay the fine of General Christiaan de Wet. Sixteen thousand half-crowns had been asked for by *Het Volksblad* on June 25, 1915. On July 13, 6,945 of these had been paid and on July 23, scarcely a month after the old man had been sentenced, the total was 14,388. Like an avalanche the subscriptions continued to arrive, and when the statement was issued in October, 1915, that sum was doubled. The surplus, amounting to nearly £3,000, was used to pay the fines imposed on some of the other rebels.

Meanwhile Christiaan de Wet sat in the prison at Bloemfontein. Fortunately a precedent had just been established in the case of Dr. W. P. Steenkamp, who was arrested in the North Western districts of the Cape and, on the strength of this, the rules were sufficiently relaxed to make it unnecessary for Christaan de Wet to shave off his hair and beard. He personally demanded no treatment different to that of other offenders.

His wife had been waiting to see him, but received a shock when she was told that as he

was now convicted, she could see him only once a month. She asked that this rule should be waived and the Government agreed. "I told Christiaan", she said afterwards, "that he must be careful to let his soul suffer no injury and that he must cling to his faith."

News came that all the rebel prisoners were to return to the Fort in Johannesburg. The General was a sick man when he came back to the Witwatersrand, and it was in the middle of the South African winter.

Even his iron constitution was now beginning to give way. Mr. Oast describes how, on a bleak, rainy morning, he saw de Wet taking exercise in a stone-paved yard, and how he discovered that the old man was suffering from fever. He went and fetched a blanket, and reported it to the warders. Food, though nourishing, was no different from that of ordinary prisoners: bean-soup, bread and a little meat. De Wet, Wessel Wessels, General Conroy, Rocco de Villiers, N. W. Serfontein and J. van Rensburg are said to have refused to eat it, and to have sent a letter to the Director of Prisons, claiming that they should be treated as political prisoners, as Dr. Jameson and his men had been. For four days, said Dr. Kestell, their hunger-strike continued, till they were allowed to order their own meals. Immediately every kind of Afrikaner delicacy was forthcoming from sympathisers in Johannesburg. Besides fruit, pipes, tobacco, etc., Bibles and other books were sent in and there were daily religious services in the cells, in which de Wet participated. Curiously enough, when Dr. Preller examined the sick register in the prison, he could not find any note that de Wet had been ill, but Dr. Slater, the gaol physician, had entered up that "the prisoner is taking his sentence badly", and that de Wet was under the impression that he was suffering from melancholia, a view with which the medico did not agree. Preller states: "From General de Wet himself no public or other complaint is known to

me, concerning unsatisfactory treatment, save for a letter sent shortly after his arrival at the Fort in Johannesburg, asking for food from outside, because the prison diet did not agree with him and yet he had several opportunities after his release and even during his detention, to express his dissatisfaction ... All the other allegations, for instance, that General de Wet, while suffering from influenza, was obliged to stand for hours in the rain, are assertions for which, as far as I know, we have never heard anything during the General's lifetime."

Time passed slowly in the prison. The men kept themselves occupied with hobbies, and the Johannesburg papers reported that de Wet had become quite an expert carpenter. Others were carving walking-sticks, or making tea-trays and similar trifles. First one letter, then three letters could be written weekly and, by special permission of the Superintendent, the number could be increased still further. More and more captives reached the Fort. In November the number was given as 225, who were divided up into groups of fifty. "De Wet", said the Johannesburg *Sunday Times,* "has already made a substantial-looking suite of furniture." "The gaol authorities have stored it for me", he told a reporter. "When I leave I will have it in my parlour." Doughty General Kemp was knitting socks. Captain Normand, Superintendent of the Johannesburg Fort, said later: "General de Wet was a favourite with the staff; and he never encountered any rudeness. Ill-treatment was entirely out of the question. Everybody respected him, and many little tributes were paid to him, which he appreciated highly. Apart from the fact that General de Wet took his sentence badly, he had the misfortune to lose his youngest daughter while he was in prison, a loss which he felt very deeply, and which I think had much to do with his depression. On many occasions he expressed himself to me as pleased with his treatment. When he reported himself unwell - this was on

the occasion of Dr. Slater's first visit - he was given the room reserved for gaol officers, and there he enjoyed more than usual attention. When he was released he personally expressed his thanks to me for numerous little favours; and some time after he actually visited me at the prison, in order to renew the acquaintance."

In November, 1915 a slight break in the monotony occurred when he gave evidence in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court in a civil lawsuit. "He looked in the pink of condition", said the *Sunday Times,* "and walked with a brisk, firm step, allowing just the shadow of a smile to cross his face as he entered. Keeping his eyes on the packed public section of the court, he brought his hand to his shoulder as though he actually intended a military salute. Significantly enough, everybody rose as he came in."

Rumours went about that van Rensburg had just had another vision, involving the trumpeting of an elephant, which he interpreted to mean that his release from gaol was imminent. But Oom Krisjan looked dubious. Every word of news from the Fort was being snapped up, and subscriptions for comforts were now averaging £163 a month. At an Auckland Park wedding a congratulatory message from de Wet was read which created great joy: "The ladies cried and the gentlemen sang the 'Volkslied'."

CHAPTER 32
RELEASED

A strange procession entered the great stone amphitheatre that forms the central portion of South Africa's capitol, the Union Buildings, Pretoria. In plumed hats and in close-fitting toques, in hobble-skirts, and in feather boas, as the fashion of 1915 dictated, thousands of women stepped along to interview the Government of their country. It was exactly one year since the Great War had commenced. The gravity of the times was reflected in the faces of those wives and mothers who, belonging to

every class of the community, from the farms, from offices and from comfortable city homes, had decided that they must support the great demonstration to secure the release of Christiaan de Wet. Eight abreast, the procession marched through the tree-lined suburbs of Pretoria, along Church Street and up through the gardens adorning the lower slopes of Meintjes Kop. Each province kept its representatives together--those of the Transvaal had rosettes of white and green, those of the Cape white and blue, those of Natal white and red, and those of the General's own Orange Free State of white and orange. At the very head of the invaders walked an old lady dressed in sober black, as is the custom of Boer housewives - Mrs. Christiaan de Wet.

In a panelled office, designed by the great Sir Herbert Baker, sat Lord Buxton, Governor-General of the Union of South Africa and, while the women waited on the cold stone seats of the amphitheatre, their deputation presented their petition.

"We, the undersigned mothers, approach Your Excellency with the request to forestall still greater sorrow from following on the recent distress which afflicts the wives and daughters of South Africa. We approach Your Excellency, as representative of the South African Sovereign, with the humble and seriously-considered request to exercise mercy towards him who is the darling of his nation, and the hero of many an honest and chivalrous fight - to the grey-headed General Christiaan de Wet and likewise to his fellow-prisoners. It is not our purpose here to adduce reasons which may go towards modifying the sentence or justifying their actions or to make excuses. That would not only be foreign to our feelings as women and to the position which we occupy in society, but also is subordinate to the overwhelming feeling which brings us today before Your Excellency.

"When sorrow is to be undergone, suffering and pain to be endured, it is always the women who suffer most. Heavily though the men have undoubtedly suffered, what is their sorrow compared to the grief which for months past has filled the hearts of their children? What is their punishment compared with the want and distress, which so many of those nearest to them must endure?

"As mothers, who have suffered themselves, and who know sorrow from their own experience, and who are oppressed by the misfortune which has afflicted our nation, our hearts go out to them who are suffering today and their grief is our grief.

"For the sake of peace in our nation, for which all of us pray so intensely, for the sake of the future and for mutual understanding in this country in which we live, and in which our children will live after us, we approach Your Excellency, in all humility, to ask for the suspension of the punishments that have been imposed.

"Further, we ask Your Excellency, as soon as the court shall have pronounced sentence, to grant a pardon to those upon whom sentence has not yet been passed.

"Not alone those who sign this petition, and the thousands whom we directly represent under letters of authority, but our whole nation will owe thanks to Your Excellency."

Politely, but cautiously, the grey-headed English peer listened to the words as they were interpreted to him, and also to the letters from the wife of President Steyn in which she said:

"No one has ever shown more veneration and respect towards the Afrikaans women than General de Wet. It is therefore only fit, in his hour of trial, that we should raise our voice in his favour, respectfully but unmistakeably. I am convinced that His Excellency will not lend a

deaf ear to the thousands of Dutch-speaking mothers and daughters in their plea for one of Africa's greatest sons."

"I must submit this to my Ministers", said Lord Buxton to the ladies, and with this decision they had to content themselves.

Through the dreary months Christiaan de Wet had sat in gaol in Johannesburg. Despite all his strength of mind the confinement was wearing him down. He, who had found the whole of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal too small for him, was now fretting away within a cell and a small paved yard. Privileges might be granted to him by sympathetic officials, yet what were they compared to freedom. He sturdily, however, refused to ask concessions himself. The editor of *Die Volkstem* was rung up by the gaol superintendent after de Wet's arrival, asking him to forward him this newspaper daily. The General had said he could not do without it, and when he was at liberty again he personally called on the editor to express his thanks. Five callers a week were allowed to him and the regulation prohibiting visits by ex-prisoners was waived. Smoking was also authorised and the demands concerning fingerprints and photographs were abandoned.

The year drew to a close, but no official answer had yet been received from Earl Buxton. When the November session of Parliament began, rumour had it that the Government was considering the question of an amnesty. De Wet was not advised of the truth of these reports. Along with his friends, Harm Oost and Carl van Duchteren, he decided to set down for future generations the facts of the Rebellion as he knew them. Illness was to carry off van Duchteren and the scheme never developed, save that Mr. Oost preserved a great deal of valuable material. Officials called on de Wet, instructed by the Premier, General Botha. They asked whether he was prepared to sign "an undertaking of good

conduct", on the condition that he would refrain from taking part in politics, and in public meetings, and not leave the district where he had his home, until the war ended. Christiaan de Wet agreed and on December 20, 1915, he was set free.

CHAPTER 33
SUNSET YEARS

It was a much older man who looked down on Johannesburg from the entrance to the Fort on Hospital Hill than the de Wet who had gone in - so long, long ago, as it seemed. Friends in numbers were there to welcome him, but he did not want to talk. The busy city streets, with their motor-cars and tram-cars, disturbed him as nothing had in his cell. He longed to get back to his farm at Allandale, where his wife was waiting for him. Moreover the place was much neglected, and of the 450 head of cattle which he had formerly possessed, he could now only trace fifty. Fortunately he still had some sheep, and with these he began to rebuild his fortunes. In terms of his parole he was not allowed to move away without the permission of the magistrate of the district. When General Smuts happened to be in the neighbourhood he succeeded in obtaining an interview with his old comrade in arms. Eagerly he pleaded for his friends who were still in prison, and his arguments contributed much towards the policy of leniency which the Government gradually adopted. Many of the rebels came to him on his farm to talk about the future. One of them arrived and spoke at length of his hopes and doubts. "What do we do now?" he asked Oom Krisjan.

"Preach peace again." The man took his leave and, as he was moving away de Wet, with a whimsical smile called after him in

Afrikaans: "When the cow calls the calf comes running up."

He was poorer now than he had been for many years and he could not even keep a servant. Visitors described the simple suppers, at which they and the youngsters would assist in washing-up. Within the last four years he had lost three children. All kinds of schemes were afoot, mostly dependent upon the outcome of the overseas conflict. There were long discussions in the living room, with references to Afrikaans newspapers to bear out the facts.

Early in 1916 a letter arrived in Pretoria. It was from General Botha, and read as follows:

"I beg to inform you that the attention of the Government has been called to certain utterances by yourself of a political nature, and of reports of demonstrations by various people, at which *you* were presumed to be the central figure. My Ministers desire to call your attention to the fact that any participation in such meetings or speeches by you is a breach of the conditions under which you were released. The large deputation which saw His Excellency the Governor-General in reference to your release, and many speeches in Parliament report that such a step would have a calming and pacifying effect on the public. Although you were the most important leader in recent Rebellion, the Government decided upon your conditional release, not only out of personal consideration for you, but in the sincere hope that the conditions of release accepted by you would be carried out in letter and in spirit. Speeches made by you since your release, at Johannesburg, Germiston, Heidelberg and Dewetsdorp, are, however, calculated seriously to disturb large sections of the public, and unrest and excitement are already appearing as a result of public reports

of these utterances. My Ministers are confident that on consideration you will realise the grave harm which will be done to our country should the people be kept in a state of excitement and unrest by such action, and trust you will realise your responsibility in the matter, and will do your utmost do discountenance all demonstrations and meetings of this nature. The Ministers must issue a warning to you of the serious consequences which may ensure, should this action be continued, and the terms and conditions of your release not be strictly adhered to."

On January 18, 1916, de Wet forwarded his answer:

"I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 12th instant through Mr. George Nussey. I was surprised to see that the Government had taken it the wrong way. I was kindly permitted by Government to visit Dewetsdorp in order that Mrs. de Wet might see her parents, who are in their old age, and I was bound to let them know, in order that they could come and fetch us. But I did not expect the concourse of people, who came of their own accord. Even then I was astonished at the quiet and orderliness which reigned there. It is true they gave Mrs. de Wet and myself a few addresses, wherein no single word of politics occurred, nor was there the slightest political speech made. In my speech of thanks, I kept away from politics. It is true I did say the people must make themselves ready for great things, which I believed God would give us in this year. I said that in the hope that God would end the bloody war this year, and who may doubt that God may give us our freedom back this year, without force (zonder geweld)? I am powerless to accede to the request of the Government that I should prevent such concourses of people, but the Government possesses the power to do it, and to prevent me attending such meetings. To any such order I will strictly attend."

Still General Botha was not satisfied. He followed up the answer on January 19:

"The Government does not wish to make any conditions and stipulations other than those to which you are now bound. When you were released on probation, you gave several promises strictly to carry out the following conditions: i.e.,

(a) That you would not take part in any political meetings;

(b) that you would not take part in any public meeting or gathering;

(c) that you would not leave your district without first obtaining permission of the Minister of Justice.

"These promises and the terms of your release are very simple, and you can thus not have the slightest doubt as to their meaning. Under condition (b) it is a breach of the conditions and your pledge for you to attend any public meeting or gathering, whether in your own district or elsewhere; and the Government must therefore request you strictly to adhere to the conditions. Your sense of honour must show you the direction in which you must go to carry out your solemn promises."

This correspondence had the effect of keeping the old General very quiet for many months, and he was at pains to show that his word had not been idly given. Actually the meetings to which Botha had referred had been very tame affairs, but in those days misinterpretations were easily made. With one man, however, he was anxious to maintain contact, and that was President Steyn. That venerable statesman was visibly in his decline. Although his brain remained unclouded, seventeen years of illness were having their effect and the end was obviously near. The Orange Free State's Women's Association had invited the statesman to address them on November 28, 1916, but that very

morning, while in the middle of his speech, he suddenly collapsed, and was carried out dying. His affectionate Free Staters chose their most sacred spot to bury the President, at the foot of the Bloemfontein Monument to the mothers and children who had died in the concentration camps. Here an English woman, Emily Hobhouse, was to find her last resting place and here the General himself was one day to be interred. Hostilities and politics were forgotten for a time. Louis Botha came down from Pretoria and his main antagonist in Parliament, General Hertzog, the leader of the Opposition, stood by his side. So did the other Free State President, F. W. Reitz; and so did Christiaan. The special permission that had been given to him to come went far in healing the spirit of bitterness that still survived. Eloquent though the speeches were, reference need only be made to that of de Wet.

"Dear Mrs. Steyn, beloved brothers and sisters", he began, "my old heart is growing very weak lately, so that I no longer have the voice which I had when we were last here together.[8] My heart is sad, is weak, and what has happened here is enough to affect one's nerves.

All the burghers who are present know that in the last war, Martinus Steyn was the father of Christiaan de Wet. The burghers know me; they know that I am but a hasty-tempered man, but for President Steyn I always had the greatest respect and veneration, because he was worthy of it. It was the respect of a child for his father. Now that he is gone, let us not mourn as if we had *no* hope. Yes, let us mourn, but let it be the mourning which one must feel when such a husband, such a father, and such a statesman is taken from us. His example and work will not

[8] A reference to the ceremony when the Monument was consecrated, three years earlier.

perish and so long as this survives, he will still live among us. He was in the real sense of the word ‘a man of the people’. In the difficult times through which we passed he sacrificed everything for his nation. Even with his last words he tried to help his people and to raise them, and it is as though to-day we hear a voice call: ‘Work while the day lasts, make the people of South Africa great - it does not matter what their descent is, as long as they regard South Africa as their country.’ These were the feelings of the great statesman whom we have come to mourn to-day. My friends, we are now passing through a critical period. We stand at the point of either becoming a great nation, or ceasing to be one. Let us therefore work while there is time. Let us build up our people. Once more I say: ‘Work while the day lasts’."

The silent thousands watched the old man under the hot sun, standing beside the marble shaft of the monument. They knew that they might not have many more opportunities to hear him speak. His eyes were still sharp and piercing, but he now looked more than his 62 years.

The urge to trek was upon de Wet again and he decided to buy another farm. He sold Allandale, seeking a warmer district, which he found in the neighbourhood of Reddersburg, where he owned a bleak property, known as Puntjesfontein. Erysipelas began to trouble him and, when the close of the Great War brought with it the world-wide influenza epidemic he fell a victim. For many days there were doubts as to whether he would recover, for double pneumonia had set in. His English doctor, a good friend in whom he firmly trusted, managed to pull him through. To obtain better nursing he was brought to Dewetsdorp and not until March, 1919 was he pronounced cured. He obtained yet another farm, "Klipfontein", and by a strange chance it was within a short distance of Nieuwejaarsfontein, where his boyhood had been passed.

At long last he was a free man again with the end of the war his parole had expired. Members of the Provincial Council of the Orange Free State in their capacity as electors of the South African Upper House, asked him to come forward as a candidate for the Senate of the Union. Rightly regarded as a haven for elderly statesmen, it was thought the proper position for him, but neither he nor his wife felt that his strength would allow for the frequent travelling, and the long debates. Among many addresses to his fellow-Burghers from time to time his most characteristic message was dated September 23, 1919, soon after the Treaty of Versailles:

"To my people:

"In the last four years I have repeatedly had influenza: twice during the last six months, so I feel very weak. It is my desire to address a word to my Afrikaner people, including any whites who regard South Africa as their fatherland, for they belong to us.

"Peace has been signed in Europe, but we must not think that peace is a sign that everything is now over, and we can go to sleep. The jackal is lying in ambush for the lamb, in order to murder him, and we must be awake in order to preserve the treasure we have inherited, as was done by President Kruger, President Brand, President Reitz and by the last President of the Free State, President Steyn, who did so much for his nation. I address a strong appeal to every Afrikaner not to let the spirit of freedom die."

The General urged his listeners to remember "how the nation of Israel has remained standing to the present day".

"The fiery test through which we have passed and which we are still undergoing, must serve to weld us all closer together. The time has come for the Afrikaner people to live peacefully together in one kraal". He warned the Afrikaner people against neglecting their language and tradition, for, said he, if they did so, "the nation

stands on the edge of the grave, and will finish in it:"

"I will further like to ask my people with particular emphasis to support Nationalist papers. They are worthy of being read, so that we can learn truth and justice. It is the lack of news of what concerns us which makes it easier for our nation to be kept from the right path. We can thank God that we have such steadfast, competent, reliable men to defend our cause in all four provinces. Even if our party is in the minority in Parliament, this does not mean that our party, which stands on a firm foundation, will remain in the minority. My prayer for my people is to strive unitedly for the good fortune for which our ancestors suffered and fought, and for which they died!"

Obviously the spirit of discontent was by no means dead in Christiaan de Wet, and his mixture of arguments, ranging from the Bible to local newspaper did not contribute much towards re-popularising him with the Government. At the same time he was left in peace, and those who visited him declared that he bore no personal animosities. One curious present which he received and kept on show in his dining room was a painting by a local Hollander, showing General Botha waving a flag and holding a sword dripping with what was presumably blood of the Afrikaner. Yet such a sturdy political opponent as Colonel Deneys Reitz confirms that he regarded the canvas more as a decoration than anything else, and had no serious anger against the man whom it represented.

As South Africa slowly began to settle down again, to what it hoped would be peace-time conditions, signs appeared that de Wet was trying to revive his friendship for the English. Of this fact striking evidence was given at a lecture on the history of the South African Dutch Churches by the Reverend A. Dreyer

on September 17, 1920. Ex-President Reitz was in the chair and after the close of the principal address, de Wet stood up in the body of the hall, where he made a few remarks, entirely extempore.

"I think", he began, "we ought to thank the[9] Reverend Dreyer - for his work, which I hope the nation will value properly. This evening my heart is so full that I hardly know where to begin, for it sometimes happens that I begin to put the cart before the horse. A gathering such as this is of educational value, and for me it is a great pleasure to see our beloved old President again among us. The time for violence", he continued, "is past. We must set to work with a deliberation. I think that England later on will be so proud of us that she will decide that we Afrikaners and Englishmen are proved worthy to be independent. Our liberty shall then prevail from the Cape to the Zambezi, but if we want this to happen, we must not sit quiet with folded arms. Let us take care when the time comes that we are all together, Englishmen as well as Boers. In the old days, those of any other nation who came to settle here were free: their language and customs were respected. What we ask is that at least this right should be granted to Afrikaners."

During the same year South Africa had her first post-war General Election and de Wet, who was taken so ill again that he thought his end was near, prepared two messages, one to the Nationalists under General Hertzog and the other to the members of the South African Party under General Smuts, (successor after the death of General Botha in 1919.) The messages, not published at the time, were given to a restricted audience after his death.

[9] The Rev. Dreyer was the official historian of the Dutch Reformed Church.

"To the Nationalists:

"Tell my brother Nationalists in Parliament that if the worst should happen, I shall go in peace, for I know that the future of my own people is saved, and that our people will govern. I cherish the welfare of my nation in my heart, and there was a time when I was troubled about the future; but day has broken, and I see clearly that the awakening has arrived and when I turn away I am convinced that there are men in Parliament who are able and who possess the necessary patriotism and love of the people to guide the nation on to the right path, and my advice to them is to continue on the path they have taken till our cause has triumphed."

A shorter message to his political opponents bore the same stamp of his personality:

"Message to my brothers who belong to the S.A.P.: "Tell them that I know it is human for every man to endeavour to keep his party in control. My advice to them is however that they must open their eyes before it is too late. The door is open for them to come back. My wish and prayer is that our nation will soon be united again."

"We can trust General Hertzog in the dark", was one of de Wet's favourite sayings. He did not live to see the passing of the Statute of Westminster, which laid down for all time that "the Crown is the symbol of the free association of the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, who are in no way subordinate to each other." His old friend was responsible for having that recognition of South Africa's freedom embodied in the law.

CHAPTER 34
THE LAST TREK

Oom Krisjan Sat on the stoep of his homestead, deep in thought. His mind was far away as he

talked to his companion, a young Jewish artist, who was leaning over a lump of clay set on a sculptor's mount. Moses Kottler had come to Klipfontein to make a bust of the old General for the students and professors of the Afrikaans University of Stellenbosch. It was not the first time that he had posed for a sculptor. Joseph Mendes da Costa, the renowned Hollander, had made a bust of him at the time of the Boer War, which was later set in the National Park near Arnhem, and of which a duplicate is on the Kroller-Muller collection at The Hague. He had also sat for Therese Schwarze, and someone had made a likeness in bas relief. The great Russian sculptor, Aronson, had modelled his head, but only from photographs. Anton van Wouw had sketched him and now another artist was to make a bronze. "I hope I will live till you finish it", he said to Mr. Kottler. It was just before Easter, 1921. The old man looked poorly; his neck was swollen, he wore slippers and at times his memory failed him. "I have gone through a lot", he told his guest. "When there was a battle, I always felt strong, but the gratitude of the People - that is what takes it out of me." In spite of this the old liveliness and magic of his personality had not disappeared. Although he could only sit for a short time, the head was still magnificent, with its white beard and hair still black, save for a few silvery patches.

"He spoke to us in English", Mr. Kottler told me; "and it was quite evident that he bore not the slightest personal animosity to those who were not Afrikaans. When his English doctor came over from the neighbouring village of Dewetsdorp and discussed his illness in Afrikaans, de Wet, with his, unique courtesy, insisted on replying in his medico's own language. He always chose his words carefully. I would not call his speech perfect, but it was good to listen to, with his fine deep voice, already affected by throat trouble, and with his neat expressions. By day he usually felt so

uncomfortable that he spoke little and was restless, but at night he seemed to recover, to collect his wits, and for many hours we would sit together - he talking, and I listening. He needed only a few hours sleep."

The house possessed but little furniture, and there was hardly a tree between his front door and the distant hills. Only his wife and youngest son now lived with him, but the number of visitors was greater than ever. Dozens of men, women and young people called during the fortnight that Kottler was on the farm and were received with the same invariable dignity and politeness. When a party of students arrived, he would say to them: "I am always fond of young folk and good horses." Many of his guests were old fellow-fighters, including Commandant Theron, and there were endless talks about the campaigns of yesteryear: De Wet's eyes lit up again while the excitement of his past stirred his bones. With typical Boer hospitality he and his wife asked their callers to stay to meals, and often even overnight. There was not much to distinguish his style of living from that of other farmers. The General, wearing glasses, would read the Bible at daily prayers; there was meat three times daily but few vegetables and the doctor warned him that this was bad for his heart, like the quantity of strong coffee which he drank.

Several times during the artist's stay he had attacks, and there were anxious hours, when the family sat up, awaiting the worst. His iron constitution still triumphed, and his eyes again became shrewd and wide awake, as he lay in his bed, while someone read the Bible to him. There were other books in the house, sent to him by people in many parts of the world, but he rarely looked at them. Through ill-health too stacks of letters remained unopened. Sitting up in the watches of the night, Christiaan de Wet revealed his true nature to Moses Kottler, as he had rarely

done to anyone. He talked as a philosopher, and gave his views about his beliefs, about events and places and, more rarely, about people. Tolerance was the keynote of his inner self. Often he miscalled the artist by the name of a young Russian Jew who had been his secretary for a while during the Boer War, and who had been killed. "The bravest man I knew", said the old General. Then he would talk about an old Russian Jewish storekeeper and particularly about the old wife who had given him shelter during the Rebellion. When Mrs. de Wet said anything derogatory about the English he flared up: "Don't say anything about them. Who treated me badly? My own people." Another time he declared: "It is my own people who have given me trouble. I have no trouble with the English. The English are here to stay."

"He gave me a message", said Kottler, "which I never published because I felt people would not believe it, and I myself was too unimportant a person to convey it. Today there is no harm in repeating it: "Tell the people", said the General, "that what we want is peace. If we have our equal language rights and other freedom, we want no more." But the most impressive incident of the sculptor's stay occurred when a deputation of no fewer than forty-six Dutch Reformed Church clergymen, accompanied by several women, waited upon de Wet to tell him that they were praying for his recovery, and referred to him as a national hero. "I wish I could give verbatim that wonderful impromptu reply", said Mr. Kottler. "It was a masterpiece. Amongst other things he declared: ‘I do not want to be referred to as a national hero. I am a sick old man, a nobody, but fond of my own people.’ What he told them of true religion was worthy of a Tolstoy. There was a wonderful depth and sweep of thought about what he had to say, and when it was over, the people were crying."

There was no pose about all this. At heart he was not genuinely interested in soldiering; it was a job necessary for the sake of his country. Even the making of the bust was distasteful to him, though he regarded it as something to be undergone. "His clear, metallic voice and his strong personality no one could ever forget, and whenever the sickness came on again, and he felt his way along the walls with his hands he still held himself upright as usual. I could not help feeling the pain of it; he was like a wounded lion." In spite of all ailments Kottler contrived to convey the true de Wet of an earlier day in a way that was truly masterly, and the bronze likeness of the old man, proudly exhibited at the Stellenbosch University, is something that South Africa will always cherish.

About this time unusual visitors came to him. Michael Collins, the "Irish de Wet", as he had been called, the first Prime Minister of the new Irish Free State, had sent him his sincerest greetings from Dublin. Led by its Vice-President, the Irish Republican Association of the Orange Free State called upon him at his farm. "You were right to accept the Treaty", said Oom Krisjaan. "Freedom will enable you to become strong and organise yourselves. A nation which, after 700 years of English occupation can still remain Irish and produce men like Alderman McSweeney is unconquered. I could always tell in the Boer War when I was brought up against an Irish regiment, from the way in which it was fought. The Irish people have my best wishes in the Irish Free State."

And so time went on, and the unconquerable commander was glad to wander round his farm and talk with native herd-boys. Somewhere in the desk was the beginning of a book on scouting which he was fated never to finish. His family had entered upon another

generation. Of his eight sons and eight daughters, only six were living: Kotie, was still on the farm, Isak, a civil servant, and the others, Christiaan, Johannes, Piet and Hendrik were all farming in various parts of the country. There were twenty-three grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. Like the true Boer patriarch he had already chosen a place where he wanted to be buried, somewhere on the farm. "That is where I want to lie", he said to his wife, but she answered: "I tell you straight out that your place is next to the Monument." He said: "Oh, well, I live for my people, and am willing to die for them and if they want me after my death, they are welcome, as long as you don't mind."

He decided to draw up what he called his political testament and sent it to his old friend, Harm Oost:

"I feel my end is coming. It is as the Lord wishes. Be just, but remain Afrikaners. If only I could unite my people and all who are with us in spirit, though they may be Englishmen, then we will put our arms around them in friendship, as though they were true Afrikaners.

Christiaan de Wet."

Now it was 1922: it could only be a matter of weeks, perhaps of days. General Hertzog and Senator Brebner came to visit the old man and, to his own intense surprise, his bitterest political opponent, Deneys Reitz, received a message that Oom Krisjan would also like him to come. "I went to the farm", Colonel Reitz told the writer. "He was sitting at his table, with a picture of General Botha and the sword hanging above him. His legs were very swollen, his boots unlaced, and he held his head in his hands. It was clear that he was going soon. He could not remember what he wanted to tell me. ‘There is no chance for me’, he said, ‘beyond the mercy of God’." On

Friday, January 14, his wife found him lying on the floor. Next day he felt slightly better and struggled to walk about. Then came Sunday. Mrs. de Wet took prayers at family worship instead of her husband and read to him from the Bible. She wanted him to eat something, but he said: "You should know that death is not far off now", and he lay down again. For the next few days he managed to spend a few hours, sitting round, and then, alone with his wife on the Tuesday, he said good-bye to her. "Don't worry about me", she said, and he answered: "I am not worried - but this does not change the fact that when I am gone there will be an empty place." "Certainly", said Mrs. de Wet, "but the Lord will provide", and those were the last words they exchanged after forty-eight years of marriage.

Another week was approaching its end. It was Friday, February 3, 1922. In the streets of Bloemfontein people stood together in groups - the natives said that old General de Wet had died. Everybody knew that it might happen any time, that the family had been sent for, but when his friends tried to telephone to Dewetsdorp, the line was out of order and had been so for some time. Later in the day the newspapers carried the news. "General de Wet died at eight minutes past two this afternoon." By some mysterious African means the natives in Bloemfontein had known it eight minutes after the event."[10]

CHAPTER 35
AT THE MONUMENT

Rebel though he was, Christiaan de Wet was to have a State funeral. From Pretoria, General Smuts, the Prime Minister, who had been so largely responsible for his capture, now

[10] Dewetsdorp is 42 miles distant from Bloemfontein.

telegraphed his widow: "A prince and a great man has fallen to-day." On all public buildings the flag flew at half-mast. From far and near, from Europe and America the tributes of the world to this old farmer flowed in. There was general approval when in due course it was announced that Mrs. de Wet was to receive a Government pension, which she lived to enjoy for another fourteen years. It was decided that the General must lie at the foot of the Memorial to the Women and Children, next to President Steyn and Emily Hobhouse. Political opposition was forgotten, and the English newspapers vied with those in Afrikaans in praising the departed. *The Friend,* in Bloemfontein, paid its tribute "in affectionate memory".

Never had the Orange Free State seen such a funeral as began on February 7th, 1922. He had lain in state for nearly a week in the memorial hall of the Dutch Reformed Church, when tens of thousands of his fellow-burghers, their wives, their sons and daughters, filed past the impassive face. Across his body lay the flag of the dead Republic, for which he had fought so long. It was a blistering hot South African summer's day. Smuts, Hertzog, President Reitz, Dr. Kestell, General Wessel Wessels, General Kritzinger, A.W. McHardy, friend and foe walked in that procession. Commandos of burghers bearing the Free State banner followed the police and the Defence Force units. Something glistened on the coffin as the hearse went by - a sword of honour, given to him in Germany during the Boer War, and the only bit of military trappings which they could find in his home. "The greatness of de Wet", said General Hertzog, "is recorded in history for all time, no less in the history of Great Britain than in that of South Africa." A burgher blew the Last Post.

Nothing is more typical of true English ideals than the fact that the Dictionary of National Biography contains a long article on Christiaan de Wet. He who had fought harder against the Union Jack than any other man, who had lived to be one of its Cabinet Ministers, and again to be a rebel, is counted today among the heroes of the British Commonwealth of Nations.