

TEN MONTHS IN THE FIELD WITH THE
BOERS

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TEN MONTHS IN THE
FIELD WITH THE BOERS ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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GENERAL DE VILLEBOIS-MAREUIL

Ten Months in the Field with the Boers

By
An Ex-Lieutenant of
General de Villebois-Mareuil

With a Map and Portrait

London
William Heinemann
1901

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To
GENERAL DE VILLEBOIS-MAREUIL

To you, General, who, from the Paradise of the Valiant, can read in my heart the sentiments of respect and affection that guide me, I dedicate these lines in token of the profound admiration of your former Lieutenant.

TRANSVAAL, 1899-1900.

'No room, sir!'

This was the phrase that greeted my friend De C— and myself at the door of every carriage we tried.

The fast train for Marseilles leaving Paris at 8.25 was, indeed, full to overflowing that night of December 23; by eight o'clock not a place was left.

Finally, after treading on a good many toes, and exchanging a good many elbowings, we installed ourselves more or less comfortably—a good deal less, to be accurate—one in the front of the train, the other close to the luggage-van.

A last clasp of the hand to the comrades who have come to the station with us, and we are off.

The lights of Paris begin to die out in the distance; conversation languishes; the monotonous rumble of the train lulls the travellers into drowsiness; heads nod and droop in the dim light of the lamp.

'La Roche! Wait here five minutes!'

We jump out. C— and I meet again.

'Well, how are you getting on?'

'Not very well. And you?'

'Very badly!'

And, much depressed, we return to our respective carriages.

At last the patience under discomfort habitual to men of our unsettled lives asserts itself, and we sleep soundly till we reach Arles, when we find two seats together.

At Marseilles we were kindly received by a pleasant cousin of mine, and by a delightful lady, also of my kindred.

The 24th we spent with some comrades, officers of the neighbouring garrison, and on the 25th we and our baggage were safely on board the *Natal*, of the Messageries Maritimes.

I make special mention of our baggage, which, in preparation for the campaign we are about to undertake, consists of two little canteens. The two together weigh exactly 38 kilos, making about 19 kilos each. They hold all our belongings, including our two revolvers and two hundred cartridges. We are not overloaded with baggage.

The *Natal* is one of the 'fine steamers' of former days, fairly large.

We first take possession of our cabin, which opens into the dining-saloon. Then we go up on the bridge, where we are introduced to Colonel Gourko, who is also on his way to the Transvaal, as Russian military attaché. We had met him the evening before at the station, for he arrived by the same train as ourselves. But his fluent French, and his rosette of the Legion of Honour, which he always wears by courtesy in France, had made us take him for some important functionary on his way to Madagascar!...

We ask his pardon. But the minutes pass. Hand-shakings, good wishes, bursts of emotion, the time-honoured formula of departure have been gone through; the gangways are taken up, the ropes cast off; we steam out of port. The handkerchiefs that flutter on the quay and on the pier gradually diminish, the houses seem to flatten, Notre Dame de la Garde dwindles, becomes smaller and smaller, till at last it is a mere speck on the horizon. Then it disappears altogether; we are on the open sea.

I shall not thrill with ecstasy, nor pour out a tribute of emotion to the 'blue immensity,' for, though I have many parts—as you, my readers, will readily believe, especially such of you as do not know me—I am no poet. The dinner-bell finds De C— and me prosaically wrangling over 150 points at piquet.

The dining-saloon is large, but there are few diners. We take a general survey.

The captain, who is supposed to preside over the meals, is not well, and does not appear. In fact, we scarcely see him at table during the passage.

Colonel Gourko, Captain Ram, and Lieutenant Thomson, the Dutch military attachés, Captain D— of the Marines, with his charming young wife and their son Guy—who is soon one of our firmest friends—an engineer, a naval doctor, a young lady on her way to set up as a milliner at Tananariva, an English journalist, and Henry de Charette, a volunteer for the Transvaal, where his health will prevent him from playing a very active part, make up the sum total of diners, or very nearly so.

We further discovered on board Messieurs de Breda, a former cavalry officer, Pimpin, Michel, a distinguished artillery officer, and a few others destined to be our pleasant comrades in the future.

As at least fifteen of us are bound for Lourenço Marques, and as we have reason to fear a visit from some English cruiser not unaccustomed to such travellers, we have all adopted the most extraordinary callings. One of us is a commercial traveller in the wine or drug trade; another is a dealer in apparatus of various kinds. I also met a bird-seller, a manufacturer of blinds, and an agent for bitumens!

C— and I are modest! We are in quest of purchasers for 'Calaya,' a febrifuge of extraordinary virtues, a specific for fever, dysentery, headache, toothache, etc.

The weather is superb; but our boat is slow, and we rarely make 300 miles in the twenty-four hours.

We reach Port Said on December 31. For New Year's Day we get up an entertainment with a lottery on board, and, thanks to Madame D—, it proves a great success.

The profits, amounting to nearly a thousand francs, were handed over to the Widows and Orphans' Fund of the Messageries Maritimes.

The prizes offered by the passengers were of the most curious description, and as we were bound for sunny climes, there were more than twenty umbrellas among them. Chance, with perhaps a little extraneous help, made a good many of these fall to the share of Colonel Gourko, who took the little joke in excellent part.

Breda undertakes the refreshment buffet, with the help of a charming young girl, and presides with great dignity.

After leaving Port Said the company is increased by the members of a Russian ambulance going to the Transvaal. They keep very much to themselves, and every evening they meet together on the lower deck to sing their vesper prayer. The sacred chant, in itself very imposing, takes on a solemn grandeur in the picturesque setting of the Red Sea.

At Aden we go on shore, and make an execrable lunch, washed down, however, by some excellent Chianti and Barolo; then we go to see the famous cisterns, in which there is hardly ever any water now.

We also pick up a new passenger, Captain B—, of the Royal Field Artillery, who also is for Durban on warfare bound. Our approaching hostility does not prevent us from being the best of friends throughout the passage. He wears the medal of the Soudan, too, which gives him a further title to our sympathies. He describes his very interesting campaigns in India and Egypt. He was present at Omdurman—'the great battle,' as he calls it.

Ever since we started we have been hearing terrific accounts of Guardafui. Few vessels, it appears, escape disaster at this point! But the sea is like oil, to the great mortification, no doubt, of all our ancient mariners.

Now we are bound straight for Madagascar. For eight days we shall be between sky and water. Let us turn them to account for a rapid retrospect of the causes which have led to the war in which we are about to take part.

It will not, I think, be necessary to dwell on the origin of the Boers.[#]

[#] Boer means peasant; Burgher denotes a citizen.

Colonists sent out in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company, they landed at the Cape of Good Hope, discovered two centuries before (1486), and settled there, employing themselves in agriculture and cattle-breeding.

At the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 300 French Huguenots joined them, bringing up the number of the colonists to about 1,000. The fusion of the two races was rapid, and the French tongue disappeared among them. Many of the French names even were corrupted—Cronje was originally Crosnier—but

many, on the other hand, have persisted in their Gallic form—Villiers, Marais, Joubert, Du Toit—and their bearers are very proud of their French descent. But England, anxious to acquire the colony when it began to prosper, sent out a number of emigrants, reinforcing them steadily, till they became an important factor in the community.

From 1815, when Cape Colony was recognised as a British possession by the Treaty of Vienna, English policy has been hostile to the Boers, who, for their part, received the English settlers in no friendly spirit.

About 1835 the Boers, under the pressure of the vexations to which they were subjected, began their exodus to the north—the Great Trek, as they still call it—and founded the Orange Free State, recognised in 1869 by Europe, and the Transvaal.

They were not left long in the enjoyment of the territory they had wrested from the Kaffirs. Diamondiferous deposits were discovered in the Orange Free State in 1871; the English promptly confiscated the find on the pretext that it belonged to a native chief under their protection.

In 1877, the Zulus having risen against the Boers, England intervened for the alleged pacification of the country, sent her troops to Pretoria, and annexed the Transvaal.

But in 1880 the Boers revolted, and under Joubert inflicted a crushing defeat on the English at Majuba Hill, on the frontier of Natal, February 27, 1881.

The treaty of August 3, 1881, recognised the independence of the Transvaal under the suzerainty of the Queen. Another treaty, signed in London, February 27, 1884, recognised the absolute independence of the Transvaal.

On January 2, 1896, the famous Jameson Raid, still fresh in men's memories, was checked at Krugersdorp.

Wishing to satisfy the claims of the Uitlanders, the President reduced the term necessary for the acquisition of electoral rights from fourteen to nine years. Finally, in 1899, England, constituting herself the champion of the foreigners, instructed Sir Alfred Milner, Governor of the Cape, to demand a further reduction of the term to five years.

This measure meant the rapid intrusion of the alien into the administration, and the gradual swamping of the Boers. It would have been the ruin of Boer autonomy. The President refused. 'Her Majesty's subjects,' he said, 'demanded my trousers; I gave them, and my coat likewise. They now want my life; I cannot grant them that.'

All these demands were but so many pretexts intended to mask the true designs of England from the European Powers. But they are manifest to the least discerning. On the one hand, there are gold-mines in the Transvaal, and speculators demand them. On the other, Cecil Rhodes has declared that 'Africa

must be English from the Cape to Cairo.' War had therefore long been foreseen, and the Transvaal quietly prepared for the struggle.

Under cover of an expedition into Swaziland, which was nothing but a march of some few hundred Burghers who had never fired a shot except at game, considerable armaments had been made from 1895 onwards.

Krupp supplied them with field-guns of 12 and 15 pound. Maxim-Nordenfeldts were bought. These quick-firing guns throw percussion-shells to a distance of about 5,000 metres; their calibre is 35 millimetres. The English have a great respect for these little pieces, which they have christened 'pom-poms,' in imitation of the noise made by their rapid fire. The same firm supplied small calibre Maxim guns for Lee-Metford cartridges. The cartridges are fixed to strips of canvas (belts), which unroll automatically, presenting a fresh cartridge to the striker the instant its predecessor has been fired.

Lastly, the Creusot factories received orders for guns of the latest pattern: four 155 centimetres long, with a range of about 10,000 metres, which the Boers call 'Long Toms,' and two batteries of 75 millimetre field-guns.

These cannon (model 95) were furnished with all the latest improvements. They fire very rapidly, and the brakes, situated on either side of the piece, absorb the recoil, the carriage being the fulcrum, and the trunnions the points of contact with the piece. They have a range of about 7,000 metres. They are loaded by means of cartridges, the whole charge enclosed in a single metal case. When efficiently served, they will fire from fifteen to twenty shots a minute.

We have advanced indeed since the year 1881, and the cannon made in the Transvaal itself, with cartwheel axle-trees riveted and braised together! [#]

[#] This is preserved in the museum at Pretoria, side by side with a mitrailleuse labelled 'Meudon,' given to the President by the Emperor William.

A large stock of Mauser, Martini-Henry and Steyr rifles (1887 pattern), with plentiful ammunition, was also bought by the Boer Government.

The weapon most in favour is the Mauser rifle of 1891, calibre 7.5 millimetres. It is sighted up to 2,000 metres. It has a magazine containing five cartridges. The movable straight-levered breech-block has a safety-bolt.

The cavalry carbine, also much appreciated, is a reduced model of the rifle. The mechanism is the same, and it also has a magazine holding five cartridges, but the movable breech-block has a bent lever. This carbine is sighted up to 1,400 metres.

These two weapons are of great precision, but I have heard it objected since

my return that the wooden grip which covers part of the barrel causes an unequal heating and cooling of the metal between the covered and uncovered parts, giving rise to occasional explosions or distortions. Personally, I saw no instance of this.

The Martini-Henry rifles, carbines, and muskets are sometimes preferred by the older Boers. They are of an obsolete pattern, and have an insignificant range of only 800 metres for carbines and muskets. They are 11 millimetres in calibre, and their leaden bullets have no casing of harder metal. To some persons they have the advantage of disabling a man more rapidly and effectually at a short range than bullets of smaller calibre.

Events now follow closely one on another. On September 26, 1899, the Volksraad issued the following proclamation from Bloemfontein:

'The Volksraad, considering paragraph 2 of the President's speech, and the official documents and correspondence submitted therewith, having regard to the fact that the strained state of affairs throughout the whole of South Africa, which has arisen owing to the differences between the Imperial Government and the Transvaal, threatens to lead to hostilities, the calamitous consequences of which to the white inhabitants would be immeasurable, being connected with the Transvaal by the closest ties of blood and confederacy, and standing in the most friendly relationship with the Imperial Government; fearing that, should war break out, a hatred between European races would be born which would arrest or retard peaceful developments in all States and colonies of South Africa, and produce distrust in the future; feeling that the solemn duty rests upon it of doing everything possible to avoid the shedding of blood; considering that the Transvaal Government during the negotiations with the Imperial Government, which extended over several months, made every endeavour to arrive at a peaceful solution of the differences raised by the aliens in the Transvaal, and taken up by the Imperial Government as its own cause, which endeavours have unfortunately had only this result, that British troops were concentrated on the border of the Transvaal, and are still being strengthened—resolves to instruct the Government still to use every means to maintain and insure peace, and in a peaceful manner to contribute towards a solution of existing differences, provided it be done without violating the honour and independence of the Free State and the Transvaal; and wishes unmistakably to make known its opinion that there exists no cause for war, and that a war against the Transvaal, if now undertaken by the Imperial Government, will morally be a war against the whole white population of South Africa, and in its consequences criminal, for, come what may, the Free State will honestly and faithfully fulfil its obligations towards the Transvaal, by virtue of the political alliance existing between the two Republics.'

On the 29th Mr. Chamberlain, more aggressive than ever, laid down certain impossible conditions:

1. The franchise to every Uitlander after five years of residence, unencumbered by any formalities that might restrict the privilege.

2. An absolute separation of the executive and judicial power in the Transvaal.

3. Abolition of the dynamite monopoly.

4. Dismantlement of the fortress of Johannesburg.

5. A special municipal government for Johannesburg.

6. Official recognition of the English language, and an equal use of it and the Dutch tongue.

During the first days of October the situation became more and more serious. Certain attempts at conciliation were still made. On October 5, President Steyn demanded that the massing of troops on the frontier should cease. But on the 6th Sir Alfred Milner replied that he could not accede to his request. Mr. Steyn accordingly wrote to the Governor of Cape Colony 'that the success of further negotiations was very doubtful, as the Transvaal would refuse any conditions whatever laid down by Her Majesty's Government if British troops continued to arrive while negotiations were in progress.'

Finally, on October 10 the Boer ultimatum was handed to Mr. Conyngham-Green. The Transvaal Executive had demanded an answer within twenty-four hours, but the delegates of the Orange Free State got the term extended to forty-eight hours.

War was declared on October 11. The Boer commandos grouped themselves in two principal centres, the Orange Free State and Natal. In the Free State, Du Toit and Kolby invested Kimberley on October 14. Cronje advanced against Methuen in the south-east, Schoeman against Colesberg, and Olivier to meet Gatacre south of Aliwal North.

In Natal, Botha, Schalk Burgher, Lucas Meyer and Prinsloo, under the Commander-in-Chief Joubert, marched upon Ladysmith.

On October 20 a desperate engagement took place at Glencoe. General Symons, himself mortally wounded, lost sixty killed, 300 wounded, and 300 prisoners. The Boers had seventy men killed.

On October 21, at Elandslaagte, the German Legion and the Scandinavians, surprised by the enemy, were slaughtered by the English Lancers after a heroic resistance.

On the 23rd, at Dundee, Generals Yule and White were obliged to fall back on Ladysmith.

Finally, on October 30, under the very walls of the town, at Lombard's Kop, General White, beaten again, lost 300 dead and wounded, 1,200 prisoners and ten guns.

On November 2 Ladysmith was invested.

To judge by the behaviour of the Boers at this juncture, it would have seemed that the siege of the three towns, Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith, was the end and object of the whole campaign.

They had at this stage of the war one of the most magnificent opportunities imaginable. Full of confidence, flushed with success, well equipped, and more numerous than they would ever be again, they might have reckoned on the co-operation of the Cape Boers, who, believing in the possible success of their brethren, were preparing to throw in their lot with them.

Against them they had some 40,000 English, half of them only just disembarked, unacclimatized, untried in warfare, the other half discouraged by recent events and scattered over a vast area.

Order and effort prolonged for one week only would have overwhelmed and annihilated the English army. Cape Colony and Natal would have thrown off the yoke, associating themselves with the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and the United States of South Africa would have been a power to reckon with. But no! Nothing was attempted. Joubert seemed to be hypnotized before Ladysmith, Du Toit before Kimberley.

And, quietly and undisturbedly, England gradually disembarked the 200,000 men Lord Kitchener thought necessary for the work in hand. Nevertheless, for two months more the incapacity of the English generals all along the line thrust the flower of the Queen's battalions under the deadly fire of the Mausers, without a chance of fighting for their lives, so to speak.

On November 10, at Belmont, Lord Methuen was repulsed with heavy loss. A month later, at Stormberg, General Gatacre ventured an advance without scouts, without a map, blindly following a guide whose course he did not even verify by a compass.

The advance took place in the utmost disorder, though it had been arranged forty-eight hours, previously. The ambulance lost touch with the detachment, and went its own way. The 2nd Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers lost its ammunition-waggon. The column advanced in close order to within 100 yards of the Boer entrenchments without any warning, and was decimated. Gatacre lost 100 men killed and 700 prisoners.

On December 11, at Magersfontein, Lord Methuen had a second disaster to deplore. Half an hour after midnight, after twenty-four hours of artillery preparations and bombardment of the Boer entrenchments, five Highland regiments advanced in line of quarter-column. The night was dark, and rain was falling in torrents. At half-past three in the morning the English halted, not very sure of their route. In an instant a deadly fire poured out from the rocks. They were less than 200 yards from the trenches occupied by Cronje's men.

The Black Watch was decimated. General Wauchope fell, crying: 'My poor

fellows! 'twas not I who brought you here!' The Marquis of Winchester was also killed.

The whole body was demoralized, and it was not possible to make the fugitives lie down till they had reached a distance of several hundreds of yards. 'It was,' says an eye-witness, 'one of the saddest sights that could wring the heart of an English soldier of our times.'

In this turmoil of confusion and indecision, Lord Methuen only gave the order to retire towards four o'clock in the afternoon. More than a thousand dead strewed the battle-field, and no help was given to the wounded till the following day.

In the last letter he wrote to England, Wauchope said: 'This is my last letter, for I have been ordered to attempt an impossible task. I have protested, but I must obey or give up my sword.... The men of the Modder River army will probably never follow Lord Methuen in another engagement.'

Finally, on December 15, the Battle of Colenso was fought. I borrow an account of it from Sir Redvers Buller's telegram despatched from Chieveley Camp in the evening:

'I regret to report serious reverse. I moved in full strength from camp near Chieveley this morning at 4 a.m. There are two fordable places in the Tugela, and it was my intention to force a passage through at one of them. They are about two miles apart, and my intention was to force one or the other with one brigade, supported by a central brigade.

'General Hart was to attack the left drift, General Hildyard the right road, and General Lyttleton in the centre to support either.

'Early in the day I saw that General Hart would not be able to force a passage, and directed him to withdraw. He had, however, attacked with great gallantry, and his leading battalion, the Connaught Rangers, I fear suffered a great deal. Colonel Brooke was severely wounded.

'I then ordered General Hildyard to advance, which he did, and his leading regiment, the East Surrey, occupied Colenso Station and the houses near the bridge.

'At that moment I heard that the whole of the artillery I had sent to that attack—namely, the 14th and 66th Field Batteries and six naval 12-pounder quick-firing guns, the whole under Colonel Long, R.A.—were out of action, as it appears that Colonel Long, in his desire to be within effective range, advanced close to the river. It proved to be full of the enemy, who suddenly opened a galling fire at close range, killing all their horses, and the gunners were compelled to stand to their guns.'

Desperate efforts were made to bring back the guns, but only two were saved by the exertions of Captain Schofield and two or three of the drivers.

It was here that Lieutenant Roberts, of the 66th Battery of Artillery, son of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, met a glorious death.

'Some of the waggon-teams got shelter for troops in a donga, and desperate efforts were made to bring out the field-guns, but the fire was too severe, and only two were saved by Captain Schofield and some drivers, whose names I will furnish.

'Another most gallant attempt with three teams was made by an officer whose name I will obtain. Of the 18 horses, 13 were killed, and as several of the drivers were wounded, I would not allow another attempt.

'As it seemed they would be a shell mark, sacrificing loss of life to a gallant attempt to force passage unsupported by artillery, I directed the troops to withdraw, which they did in good order.

'Throughout the day a considerable force of the enemy was pressing on my right flank, but was kept back by the mounted men under Lord Dundonald and part of General Barton's brigade.

'The day was intensely hot and most trying to the troops, whose conduct was excellent.

'We have abandoned ten guns, and lost by shell-fire one.

'The losses in General Hart's brigade are, I fear, heavy, though the proportion of severely wounded is, I hope, not large.

'The 14th and 66th Field Batteries also suffered severe losses.

'We have retired to our camp at Chieveley.

'The Boer losses are said to be over 700 men.'[#]

[#] This statement does not appear in the *Times* report of General Buller's telegram.—TRANSLATOR.

No, General, we did not lose 700 men that day.

General Botha's report gave 8 dead and 20 wounded, while more than 2,000 English lay on the battle-field.

Round about the batteries especially the carnage had been terrible. The Boers, ambushed on a little kopje on the further side of the Tugela, 300 metres from the cannon, kept up an unerring fire for an hour.

December 15, be it noted, has long been a day of rejoicing in the Transvaal. It is the anniversary of the Battle of Bloedriver, when Pretorius, to avenge the massacre of Pieter Retief and over 500 Boers, defied the bands of the Zulu chief Dingaun. This was on December 15, 1838, and on that eventful day Pretorius and his 400 men left 3,000 Zulus on the field, with a loss of only three wounded

themselves.

After Colenso the victors had another splendid opportunity. They might have pushed forward with the armies of Natal and the Free State. The English troops had, it is true, been reinforced, but the arms of the Republics were still victorious in every direction.

In the beginning, on the whole, the elements of success were overwhelmingly with the Boers. These were superiority of numbers, of marksmanship, a profound knowledge of the country, of which no accurate maps exist, and the great distances between their opponents and such reinforcements as the latter could depend on. It might have been said that the fortune of war, taking into account the right and justice of their cause, had been pleased to place all the elements of victory in their hands. But neither the advice offered by the most authoritative voices and based on the great teachings of military history, nor the entreaties dictated by the most generous devotion to the cause of the Boers, could rouse the superiors in command from the apathy that seemed to have overtaken them.

Christmas passed in rejoicings on both sides. The belligerents exchanged Christmas and New Year good wishes by the medium of shells specially prepared, containing sweets, chocolates, etc. New Year's Day found them all much in the same positions. The bombardment of the three towns, Mafeking, Kimberley, and Ladysmith, continued.

However, on January 6 Joubert made up his mind to attack—if, indeed, that strange encounter, aimless and incoherent, can be called an attack. Was it an assault by the besiegers or a sortie of the besieged? Perhaps both. It took place at Platrand. Four or five hundred of Prinsloo's men were seriously engaged; the others (there were 6,000 round the town) took up positions early in the morning, quitted them towards ten o'clock to come back and breakfast in camp, returned to them later, and remained for the rest of the day 1,800 yards from the town, which was no longer defended, without firing a shot, without a thought of throwing themselves against it or of going to the help of their comrades, hotly engaged close by. In the evening they went back quietly to camp, while the commandos of Zand River, Harrismith, Heilbron, and Kroonstad had fifty-four killed and ninety-five wounded. The English lost 138 killed and over 200 wounded. A little dash, decision, and cohesion, and the town might have been taken. Such was Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil's opinion.

But even in the full flush of success we shall never find among the Boers that eagerness, that scorn of death, that enthusiasm which sweep troops forward and make great victories.

The same day, at Colesberg, an *accident* (this word is a happy invention of General French's to denote a reverse) cost the English 150 lives, among them that

of Colonel Watson.

The sieges followed their—I will not say normal—course, for the ill-defended towns ought long ago to have been taken by the Boers. Such was the general situation, more or less, when we landed.

II

Time passed, the screw laboured round, and on January 12 we arrived at Diego Suarez.

'Passengers for Lourenço Marques change steamers!'

For the *Natal* is bound for Mauritius, along the east coast of Madagascar. We shall therefore spend the night on shore.

Wandering about the town, we meet Colonel Gourko, whom we invite to dinner, as we are in a French colony. I can't pride myself much on this meal, in the name of French culinary art.

The next day I lighted on a quartermaster of the Marine Artillery, whom I had known in the Soudan when he was only a gunner. He went off to find the other Soudanese campaigners of the settlement, and in a quarter of an hour I was surrounded by half a dozen old comrades. They were all in high spirits, for it had been a day of promotions, and several of them were toasting their new stripes.

I spend a full hour with them, recalling the old days spent in the colony that all who have once known regret.

The hour of parting draws near; several subalterns return to their duties, while my old friend and a newly-promoted officer come to see me off.

The *Gironde*, also of the Messageries Maritimes, plies from Diego Suarez to Durban and *vice versa*. Several artillery and marine officers, having heard of my presence, have come to wish me godspeed on board. I am much touched at this token of sympathy from unknown friends, for, setting my humble personality aside, it is a homage to the noble cause I am on my way to uphold.

But the bell rings, the anchor is weighed, and we are off. If the *Natal* was an old 'fine steamer,' the *Gironde* is a *very* old one. She was formerly one of the swift and elegant Indian liners, but now, obsolete and worn-out, is reserved for this little auxiliary service till such time as some sudden squall shall send her to the bottom.

Nevertheless, we arrived safely at Mozambique, where some few days be-

fore a terrible cyclone had destroyed part of the native village. Huts were overthrown and lying in fragments, trees torn up by the roots, telegraph-wires broken; an air of mournful desolation hung over the district.

Meanwhile, the buxom negresses of the quarter went about their daily work, apparently unmoved at the ruin of their dwellings.

We pay a visit to the fort, a very curious sight, with its mediæval battlements bristling with cannon two hundred years old, and its soldiers armed with flintlock muskets. All these excellent Portuguese warriors seem to be impressed by a sense of their lofty mission. They even demurred a little before admitting us into their 'citadel.'

We take up the Archbishop of Mozambique, I believe; he is brought on board by a military launch, with all the honours due to his rank, and saluted by the guns of the fort.

We leave Mozambique the same evening.

Every day there were superb sunsets, glories of deep purple, blue, blazing red, green, yellow and pink, vivid pieces of impressionism that beggar description.

Thus, still avoiding shipwreck, we come to Beira, where we land our prelate, who is received by a numerous staff of officers; troops line the quays, and salutes are fired!

Portugal has certainly a remarkable colonial army. Among the others there is a huge captain, bursting out of his tunic. Each of his long commands, incomprehensible to me, seems to produce consternation in his troop, followed by a series of perfectly diverse manoeuvres.

We turn away that we may avoid laughing aloud, for the moment is a serious one... Two or three trombones attack the Portuguese national air. A good many of the worthy soldiers have shouldered arms, and the majority have presented them.... His lordship passes. He gets into a little 'lorry' pushed by natives, and goes off quickly, while the troops disperse. They are worthy of those I have several times seen at Lisbon.

I think if I were the Portuguese I would prefer none at all to such as these.... And, then, the suppression of the military budget would perhaps enable them to pay their dividends. In the afternoon we embark a band of Englishmen coming from Rhodesia to enlist as volunteers at Durban and Cape Town. They invade the saloon with their friends, and sing 'God save the Queen.' Some of the Frenchmen present retort with the Marseillaise; the situation becomes strained, fists are clenched, and finally a certain number of blows are exchanged. We have on board a grandson of President Kruger's, whose home is in Holland. After having been arrested once, conducted to Durban and sent back to Europe, he is making a second attempt to enter his country. Thanks to a strict incognito, only laid aside

for two of us, he succeeds in his design.

At night we arrive off Lourenço Marques, where, without let or hindrance, we disembark on January 21.

We order a bottle of Moët in the saloon to drink the health of Captain B—, whom we are leaving, and against whom we are going to fight presently.

'Your good health,' he says, 'and I trust we shan't meet later on!'

We part with a hearty shake of the hand. At the Custom-house we easily get our artistically-concealed revolvers through, but the Customs officers fall upon the uniforms, arms and harness belonging to Colonel Gourko. They decline to pass anything, in spite of all explanations. The Colonel is obliged to go and fetch the Russian Consul and the Governor. We take up our quarters at the Hotel Continental, which, we are told, is the best. Five of us are packed into one small room on improvised beds, where we are devoured by mosquitoes ... and this costs fourteen shillings a day!

Colonel Gourko, having recovered his baggage, joins us there, and, in his turn, invites us to dinner. He does things in a princely fashion, and the bill must have been one that Paillard himself would have hesitated to present.

All sorts of obstacles are invented to prevent our departure. Firstly, of course, our passports have to be *visé*, but before this can be done we have to get stamps, which are only to be had at the opposite end of the town; we have, further, to produce a certificate of good conduct (having only arrived the night before!). Then more stamps, then a note from the French Consul, then more stamps; and the office where you get the signature or the paper is never the same as the one that sells the stamps.

At last all formalities have been carried out. Our pockets are bulging with some dozen papers covered with innumerable signatures and a shower of stamps. Cost: over 50 francs—10,850 reïs!

We go to the station at seven o'clock the following morning. There are a great many police officers on duty. By the Governor's orders no one is to be allowed to start for the Transvaal with the exception of the Russian ambulance. We all exclaim shrilly, and hurry off to the Consul.

Upon our formal declaration that this order will injure us in our business, he proceeds to the Governor and remonstrates, with the result that we are authorized to start next morning, there being only one train a day.

We spend the day wandering about the town, which is of little interest. The great square planted with trees is pleasant, however.

We see the funeral procession of an officer of the English man-of-war stationed here. The coffin, covered with the Union Jack, is placed on a little gun-carriage drawn by sailors; others line the way. Officers in full uniform follow, and a company of red-coats bring up the rear.

This is our last encounter with the 'soldiers of the Queen' before we open fire upon them. They are already numerous in South Africa, and every day brings reinforcements.

At the beginning of hostilities there were about 25,000 men distributed over Natal and Cape Colony. From November 9 to January 1 seventy-eight transports have brought 70,000 men, completing the fifth division; 15,000 volunteers have been raised on the spot, making in all 110,000 men.

The sixth and seventh divisions, a contribution from the colonies, will bring them up to 22,000; 3,000 yeomanry and 7,000 militiamen will complete the total of 152,000 promised for the month of February. The seventh division started from January 4 to January 11, bringing nearly 10,000 men and eighteen cannon.

Engagements at the rate of 3,600 francs (£124) are being made on every side—1,600 (£64) on enlistment, 2,000 francs (£80) at the end of the war. Enlistments in our Foreign Legion are affected and fall off considerably.

The City of London, by means of a public subscription of £100,000, raises a corps of volunteers. This desperate system of enlistment is severely criticised, even in England.

'What a humiliation,' says Mr. Frederick Greenwood in the *Westminster Gazette* of January 2, 'to have to cry Help! help! at every crossway to pick up a man or a horse.'

Seventeen new battalions are to be raised after January 15. The choice of men rests with the colonel or the lieutenant-colonel commanding the regimental district. They are required to be aged from twenty to thirty-five, to have gone through a course of instruction in 1898 or 1899, and to hold a certificate of proficiency in shooting. But, as a fact, many of these certificates are given by favour, and a third of the volunteers are from eighteen to twenty years old. The effort made by the country has been considerable.

On January 19 the eighth division was mobilized. It comprised the sixteenth and seventeenth brigades under the command of Major-Generals B. Campbell and J. E. Boyes; Batteries 89, 90, and 91, and the 5th company of Engineers, making a strength of 10,540 men, 1,548 horses, eighteen cannon, and eight machine guns.

The eighth division is under the command of General H. M. L. Rundle, aged forty-four, who has already served in the Zulu campaign, at the siege of Potchefstroom in the Transvaal in 1881, and in the Egyptian and Soudanese campaigns from 1884 to 1898.

III

To return to our journey. On the morning of the 24th, at 10 o'clock, we took the train and departed, happy to leave Lourenço Marques. The last station on the frontier is Ressano-Garcia; again our papers are examined. If we paid highly for them, they at least do good service.

The train rolls on again, and in a few minutes we are on the soil of the Transvaal. All along the line, at every little bridge, bands of armed Boers are posted. Komatipoort Station is also occupied by troops. Everyone gets out. There is a minute inspection of all papers, even of private letters, and we are conscientiously searched. Having satisfied our challengers, we are allowed to go on. The trains travel very slowly in this very broken, varied country. We ascend almost uninterruptedly, and the line seems to run either along the sides of rocky mountains or the edges of bottomless abysses. Many of the spots we pass are extraordinarily picturesque. In the evening we arrive at Watervaalonder, and the train stops; for in this country neither trains nor men are in a hurry.

A Frenchman, named Mathis, keeps a hotel, at which we sleep. He receives us with much affability, and talks enthusiastically of the game in the neighbourhood. He is a Nimrod.

The next day we start again, and in the evening we are at Pretoria. My friend Gallopaud is at the station, and takes us to the Transvaal Hotel, where the guests of the Government are quartered.

On the 26th, thanks to the good graces of M. Grunberg, we are presented to M. de Souza, Mr. Reitz's secretary, for whom we have letters of introduction.

We take the oath of fealty as burghers, and receive our weapons, Mauser carbines, the stock of which is getting low, cartridges and belts. Horses and saddles are already giving out. We are impatient to be off, but shops and offices are all closed on Saturday at one o'clock and throughout Sunday.

We take advantage of the holiday to inspect the town. Pretoria, as everyone knows, is the capital of the Transvaal. It is the seat of the Government, which is composed of two Chambers, the First Volksraad and the Second Volksraad. Each is composed of twenty-nine members, elected by direct suffrage. The President of the Republic and the Commander-in-Chief are elected by the members of the First Chamber, the former for five, the latter for ten years. They are eligible for re-election for any length of time.

The President, Paul Kruger, familiarly known as 'Oom Paul,' was Commander-in-Chief for a long time before he became President. The present Generalissimo, Joubert, was his rival in the Presidential elections.

The Transvaal revenue is drawn for the most part from heavy royalties on the mines, and a crushing tax on explosives; in 1897 an income of 112,005,450 francs (£4,480,218) was received, against an expenditure of 109,851,400 francs (£4,394,056).

The general aspect of Pretoria is depressing; only two or three streets show any animation. The circumstances of the moment are not certainly such as to enliven the town, but I have been told that even in times of peace it is never very cheerful.

Stretching over a wide area, it is intersected by little tramways, the cars drawn by two consumptive horses. In the centre is Government House, a huge building of freestone, massive and ungraceful, though not without certain pretensions to the 'grand style,' I believe. On each side a sentry of the Presidential guard paces up and down. Under the colonnade of the main entrance, which faces a large open space, a few steps lead up to a vast hall, with a monumental staircase at the end. On each side of the hall two wide corridors run round the building, and give access to all the different offices. We find the whole place, hall, corridors and offices, crowded with busy people, some soliciting, others solicited, all hurrying hither and thither. With the exception of some few buildings of several storeys grouped round the palace and in the main street—the post-office, the clubs, the banks, the hotels and the large shops—all the houses are little one-storey cottages surrounded by gardens.

* * * * *

On Monday morning we are able to have horses, which we go and catch ourselves in the great courtyard which serves as a dépôt. We have also some old English saddles, and after buying some rugs and some indispensable provisions, we are ready to start at about five in the evening.

Our departure is fixed for eleven o'clock, by the special train which is to take *Long Tom* to Kimberley, where we are to join Colonel Villebois. This *Long Tom*, a 155 millimetres Creusot gun, is a personage, a celebrity. It weighs 2,500 kilogrammes; its carriage weighs the same. Its fame is derived from its history.

One night last November, at Lombard's Kop, in front of Ladysmith, where the gun was mounted, sixty English, taking advantage of the slumbers of the Boer sentinels, stormed the hill, seized the cannon, and finding it impossible to displace it, damaged the two ends with dynamite. After this the burghers, coming up in force, retook the gun, brought it to Pretoria, and repaired it in a remarkable manner. It was, however, shortened by about 25 centimetres.

After these adventures it has become a sort of prodigal son, a legendary weapon beloved of those great children we call the Boers. It is, therefore, no

small honour to be called upon to escort *Long Tom*. We share this honour with a gunner named Erasmus, a strange being, who, after being severely wounded at the taking of 'his cannon,' had sworn only to return and fight in its company.

On this Monday night, accordingly, at eleven o'clock, in a downpour of rain, we and our horses take our places in the train, which, profiting no doubt by its being a 'special,' starts an hour after time. It consists of three or four first-class coaches with lateral corridors. These coaches, which are comfortable enough, and very high in the ceiling, have in each compartment two seats of three places each, covered with leather, and in the centre a folding-table about 50 centimetres wide. At night a second seat, which is raised in the day-time, or serves as a luggage-net, makes a sleeping-berth, so that four travellers in each compartment can rest comfortably, a convenience highly desirable in a country where journeys often last forty-eight hours, and even six or seven days, as from Cape Town to Buluwayo and Fort Salisbury.

Travellers install themselves as they please, without any sort of constraint. Luggage is not registered, and the carriages are invaded—I use the term advisedly—with weapons, saddles, bridles, bandoliers, provisions, dogs, if one has any, rugs, trunks and bundles. No officials, no staff, no warning cries, no notices forbidding travellers to get out while the train is in motion. A station-master, and hardly anything more.

A bell rung three times at short intervals announces the departure of the train. You get in, or you don't get in; you stand on the footboard, climb on to the roof of the carriage, leave the door open or shut it, get into a truck or cattle-van—it's your own look out. You are free, and no one would dream of interfering with you in the matter.

In the carriages passengers sleep, drink, eat, sing, shoot and gamble, and every morning a negro comes and cleans up.

There is a little of everything among the debris—old papers, empty preserve-tins, fruit-parings, tobacco-ash, cartridge-cases, empty, and sometimes broken, bottles. An inspector on the P. L. M. would go mad at the sight.

While the cleaning goes on, we go and ask for a little hot water from the engine, and make our morning coffee. On trucks that we go and fetch ourselves we load up heavy carts of provisions, ammunition, and cannon. Finally, we heap up pell-mell in open cattle-vans, mules and horses in some, oxen in another. And casualties are no more numerous than in Europe, where we arrange them like sardines in a box—'thirty-two men, eight horses.' The beasts of these regions, like the men, have apparently learnt to take care of themselves from their earliest infancy.

During the journey of Tuesday a springbock, a kind of antelope, startled by the engine, is so imprudent as to run along by the train at a distance of about

300 metres. From the tender to the last van a brisk fire suddenly opens. The engine-driver slows down, then, as the creature falls, stops altogether. A man gets down, fetches the quarry, and comes quietly back. The train goes on again, the springbock is cut up, and at the next station the engine-driver gets a haunch as an acknowledgment of his good-nature. This is indeed travelling made enjoyable!

But there are always folks who like to cut down the cakes and ale! In April, 1900, a penalty of £5 sterling was decreed for persons who fire a gun or a revolver in a railway-station or a village.

In every station—and they are legion—the whole feminine population has gathered, and sings the Boer hymn as soon as the train appears. And at every station the following ceremony takes place: A deputation comes to Erasmus, and begs him to show *Long Tom*. Erasmus mounts on the truck where the cannon is installed, and opens the breech. Each woman passes in front of it, putting either her head or her arm in, with cries of admiration. Then Erasmus closes the breech, gets down, and the Transvaal hymn, sung in chorus, alternates with that of the Orange Free State until the departure of the train.

On Tuesday evening at six o'clock we arrive at Brandfort. It is too late to unload the gun, and we spend the night in the village, where we are very well received.

Early on Wednesday we begin our task, with the help of the whole village, and to the accompaniment of the national hymn. The young girls all have sharp, forced voices, but from a distance the effect of these voices in chorus is not unpleasant. As to the male choirs, which are heard on every possible occasion, they are really charming and very impressive. Their music is very slow, and almost exclusively devotional in its rhythm.

Towards three o'clock on Thursday the convoy is ready. Thirty bullocks have been harnessed to *Long Tom*. The rest of the convoy consists of some twenty waggons of provisions and ammunition. As we set off, two or three photographers make their appearance.

The column, escorted by some sixty Boers, moves off towards Kimberley, in the midst of enthusiastic demonstrations. The waggons are heavy four-wheeled carts, with powerful brakes; the back part is covered with a sort of rounded tent stretched over hoops. This tent is the home of the travelling Boer. In it he keeps his mattress, his blankets, his utensils, his arms, while the front part is reserved for the heavy stores—millet, flour, biscuits, etc.

The driver walks beside his team, armed with a long whip, which he wields in both hands. The thick cane handle is often about 10 feet, and the lash, of strips of undressed hide, from 15 to 20 feet long. The management of this whip is no easy matter, and it is curious to see a good driver, at the moment when an effort is required, giving each of his twenty or thirty bullocks the necessary stroke in

an instant.

The Burgher himself is mounted, shabby and ragged, dressed in a faded coat, a shapeless hat, and long trousers without straps.

For some time on the march we had a neighbour whose ulster, formerly, no doubt, of some normal hue, had turned, under the rains of years (I had almost said of centuries), a pinkish colour, with green reflections, like a sunset at sea. And the happy owner of this prism seemed quite unconscious that, amidst much that was extraordinary, he was perhaps the most extraordinary sight of all.

One warrior was mounted on a wretched old English saddle, to which were slung pell-mell a mackintosh, a many-coloured rug, a coffee-pot, a water-bottle, and a bag containing a medley of coffee, sugar, tobacco, biscuit and *biltong* (dried meat). Two bandoliers, and sometimes his rifle, were slung across his body, the latter horizontally on his stomach, when he was not carrying it upright in his hand, like a taper. His braces hung down his back. He had a single spur, for the Burgher rarely uses two, thinking a second an unnecessary luxury. Indeed, he relies much more on his *shambock* (a thong of hippopotamus hide) than on his single spur for the control of his horse.

Thus equipped, he shambles along on his jade, which trots, canters and gallops at intervals, silent, his legs well forward, his feet stuck out, catching at his over-long stirrups. His military organization is on a par with his equipment.

The 'commando' is the only military division known among the Boers. A commando is a levy of the men of a district, under the leadership of a field-cornet or a commandant. These grades, which are ratified by the Government, are independent of any hierarchy, and merely imply a difference in the number of electors.

I say electors advisedly, for the field-cornets are chosen by their men, and, in their turn, take part in the nomination of the generals. This arrangement works well enough when electors and elected are of one mind. But when the leader wants to carry out some plan which his electors disapprove, he runs the risk of being cashiered and replaced by one of the majority.

I do not know what are the results of this system in politics; but, applied to an army, it is disastrous, for very often the leader, brave enough himself, dares not engage his men, lest he become unpopular; and this, I think, has been the main cause of the total absence of offensive action on the part of the Boers. Perhaps, indeed, it will prove one of the main causes of their final overthrow.

The commandant, or field-cornet, chooses among his men a 'corporal,' who acts as his auxiliary. These 'commandos,' the effective numbers of which are essentially variable, are called after the chief town of the district from which they are drawn: Heidelberg Commando, Carolina Commando. And not only do they vary considerably, according to the population of a district, but the field-cornet

himself never knows how many men he has at his disposal, for the Burghers have no notion of remaining continuously at the front; when one of the number wants to go back to his farm nothing can stop him. He goes, though he will come back later for another spell of service. Desertions of this kind often took place *en masse* the day after a reverse.

The Johannesburg Politie and the Artillery are the only troops in the Transvaal which can be described as more or less disciplined. The Politie are the police-force of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

In times of peace the men wear a uniform consisting of a black tunic, cut after the English pattern, and black trousers. On their heads they wear a little hard black cap, with a button at the end, and for full dress a white peaked cap with a badge bearing the arms of the Transvaal. On the collars of their tunics are three brass letters: Z. A. R. (Zuid Africa Republic). But during the campaign their uniform has disappeared, and they are not to be distinguished from the ordinary Burghers. A certain discipline obtains among them, and they receive regular pay, which is reduced in time of war, as their families are then in receipt of indemnities in kind.

These men are the only ones who can be relied on to hold a position they have been told to keep. The other Burghers will only fight if they choose, and if they can do so without much risk.

The fighting strength of the Johannesburg Politie is about 800 men, with four lieutenants, under Commandant van Dam, an energetic and intelligent man.

The guns, of which I have already given a brief description—four *Long Toms*, a dozen 75 millimetres Creusot guns, some thirty Krupp field-pieces and old Armstrongs—are served by a body of artillery whose barracks are at Pretoria. I do not say nineteen or twenty batteries, for there are no groups or detachments. Each gun is used separately, according to the needs of the generals or the fancy of the artillerymen.

The corps consists of thirty officers and about 400 men. They wear a black tunic and breeches, and a sort of shako much like that of the Swiss army. In the field this shako is replaced by a large felt hat looped up on one side, and the rest of the costume undergoes any modification that suggests itself to the wearer.

They were at first under the command of Commandant Erasmus, who was superseded after the affair of Lombard's Kop, below Ladysmith.[#]

[#] Commandant Erasmus must not be confused with the Adjutant Erasmus who was with our party. The same names are very frequent throughout the Republics, the natives of which are mainly sprung from the few families who originally settled there. Thus there are some twenty Bothas, thirty Jouberts, etc.

The artillery of the Free State, composed of old Armstrong guns and a few Krupp guns lent by the Transvaal, is served by a corps who look like the artillerymen of a comic opera. They wear a drab tunic and breeches with a great deal of orange braid, and are inferior even to their colleagues of the Transvaal.

All told, then, the army consists of some 40,000 to 50,000 Burghers, without cohesion and without discipline, field-cornets who do not obey their generals, and who cannot command the obedience of their men. Over them are titular generals and vecht-generals (generals appointed for the term of the campaign only), for the most part ignorant of the very elements of the art of war, and at variance one with another.

How often during this campaign are we led to ponder over the phrase we have been mechanically reciting for ten years past: 'Seeing that discipline is the strength of armies!'

* * * * *

We have a six days' march before us. The bullocks are accustomed to travel by short stages of two hours, followed by an hour's rest. At night, however, we advance by stages of four or five hours.

The soil over which we pass is bare and sandy, of a uniform grayish-yellow tint, and produces nothing but short, coarse grass, which serves as fodder for the oxen and horses.

At every halt the cattle are let loose, and when the rest is over the Kaffir 'boys' go off in pursuit of them, often to a considerable distance. Water is scarce, and generally bad.

Very often on the way we are received with delightful hospitality at the farms we pass. These houses are clean, and often even those which stand quite alone in the bush have a parlour adorned with photographs, religious prints, and Scripture texts in large characters. The furniture is simple, but there is very often a harmonium, for the singing of hymns is a frequent exercise in a Boer household.

Nevertheless, a respect for musical instruments is not carried to extremes. At Dundee, for instance, a Burgher had made a shelter for himself with a piano taken from an English villa.

The head of the family, often an old man with a white beard, is an absolute and much respected master in his home. He presides at meals, waited on by the women, who do not eat till the men have finished. The menu invariably consists of eggs and mutton cooked together in a frying-pan, bread or biscuit, and fruit. The drink is coffee with milk.

The Boer women are not well favoured. As a rule, they are thick-set and weather-beaten. They wear large pink or white sun-bonnets, very becoming to

the young girls.

The traveller is a guest, received as if he were an old acquaintance; and whatever the hour of his appearance, he is at once offered coffee with milk, and, when they are in season, peaches.

At the time of our journey a good many men were at the front; but there are often some dozen children with the women, making large households. They all live pell-mell in two or three rooms.

In time of peace the Burgher is a keen sportsman; this is, indeed, the reason of his wonderful skill as a marksman, for he always shoots with ball-cartridge; shot is never used. In time of war he is a hunter still. He fights as he hunts, the game alone is changed; but as the quarry has means of defence more efficacious and violent than those of the ostrich or the springbock, he is often less persevering in pursuit of it.

When the Burgher halts to hunt or to fight, he dismounts, shelters his horse behind some rock, and leaves it loose, taking care to pass the bridle over its neck. All the horses are trained to stand perfectly still when they see the reins hanging in front of them thus, and, no matter how heavy the fire, they will not stir.

The Boers have a way of their own of reckoning distances. When, for instance, they tell you that it is seven hours from a certain place to another, don't imagine that you will be in time for dinner if you set off at noon; the seven hours in question are a conventional term. They are hours at the gallop, and it is supposed that a swift horse, going at his utmost speed, could cover the distance in seven hours.

The immense concessions given by the Government are not cultivated, for the Boer has a rooted dislike to work; his black servants grow the necessary mealies, and keep his numerous flocks. As his wants are very primitive, this suffices him. To procure sugar, coffee, and other necessaries, he goes to town and sells two or three oxen.

The rifle and cartridges furnished by the State in time of war become the Burgher's property.

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On the march in war-time this system of halting the oxen because they are hot, and the men because they want to drink coffee at every farm, is neither very rapid nor very practical. We do not arrive at Boshof till the fifth day. This is the spot fated to be the grave of our venerated leader.

Boshof, in contrast to its surroundings, is a gay little oasis, traversed by a cool stream. It boasts green trees and pretty villas. Two ambulances are installed here, but they shelter only two or three wounded as yet.

At the end of the village is a pool, which delights us vastly. We spend the afternoon in it, after lunching with the field-cornet.

The town is *en fête*, as at Brandfort, to receive us, or rather—away with illusion!—to receive *Long Tom*.

We start again in the night, and reach Riverton Road. We are now on English territory, in Cape Colony.

Towards noon, M. Léon comes to meet the cannon, the arrival of which has been anxiously expected for the last two days.

We are only an hour from the camp, which we reach at a gallop. There, at Waterworks—the reservoir that supplies Kimberley—we find Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil.

Need I describe that frank and energetic face, with its searching blue eyes, and its benevolent smile, sometimes a little ironical, always subtle; the clear voice; the concise manner of speech, brief without being brusque? Even at that stage a look of sadness had stamped itself upon his face; he saw that the men for whom he was to lay down his life would not follow the counsels dictated by his profound knowledge and unquenchable devotion.

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We had been expected for two days, and twice the Colonel had had good luncheons prepared. Then, giving us up, he had ordered nothing, and we took his kitchen by surprise.

We find with him Baron de Sternberg, that charming Viennese, whose inexhaustible good spirits are famous throughout London and Paris. In the evening he works in his tent at a history of the war, and composes the most delicious verses in German. The Colonel also works hard.

Long Tom arrives some time after us.

Our laager at Waterworks is a large square, measuring some 200 metres on every side, planted with trees, and containing the machinery for distributing the water. It looks like an oasis in the midst of the vast yellow plain. In the distance are a few kopjes. We are about 700 metres from Kimberley. The camp is commanded by General du Toit.

Kampferdam, where the cannon has been taken, is 3 kilometres to the south, and 5,500 metres from Kimberley. It is a kind of whitish peak, about 50 metres high, formed of the refuse from the diamond mine below.

The night of Tuesday to Wednesday is spent in the construction of the wooden platform on which *Long Tom* and his carriage are to be mounted.

The English searchlights fix their great round eyes upon us from time to time, but there is nothing to show that the enemy has noticed anything abnormal

in our proceedings.

All night long the work goes on with feverish activity, for Léon, who is superintending the operations, wants to fire his first shell at daybreak. But it is no easy task to hoist up that mass of 5,000 kilos, especially with inexperienced, undisciplined, and obstinate men, and the cannon is not ready till ten o'clock.

One of our party, Michel, an old artilleryman, the holder of some twenty gunnery prizes, gives the workers the benefit of his experience, and as he cannot find any sights, Erasmus artlessly proposes to make one of wood!

At last the first shot is fired! I am certain that at this moment not a single Boer is left in the trenches. Everyone has rushed out to see the effect produced. It is of two kinds. Firstly, our shell, badly calculated, bursts far off in the plain; then, no sooner has it been fired, than an English shell from the Autoskopje battery, 3,500 metres to our right, falls and explodes among the machinery of the Kampferdam mine. This exchange of compliments goes on till near twelve o'clock. This is the sacred hour of lunch. The fire ceases.

As coffee is a liquid which has to be imbibed slowly, firing does not begin again till nearly four o'clock. It is very hot, for it is the height of summer.

During this interval, the Colonel has been several times to General du Toit, to ask for fifty volunteers.

The Colonel's plan is to batter the town with a storm of shells (we have 450) for two hours, from four to six, and thus demoralize it; then, with fifty men, whom the French contingent would lead, to seize the Autoskopje battery, which is but poorly defended, at nightfall, and thence to gradually creep up to the town through a little wood, which would mask the advance. The plan was very simple, requiring but few men, and had every chance of success, because of the surprise it would have been to the English, who had never been attacked hitherto.

'Wait a bit,' said Du Toit; 'I will lay your plan before the council of war to-morrow.'

In vain the Colonel tells him that the success of the plan depends on its immediate execution. He can get no answer. The evening is wasted.

General du Toit is a big, bronzed man, with a black pointed beard and a straight and penetrating gaze. Though very brave personally, he has never dared to engage his men.

The latter are very well pleased with their role of besiegers. They will appreciate it less when the *Long Cecil* comes upon the scene. Hitherto, the long *far niente*, comparatively free from peril—the town, under the command of Colonel Kekewich, was defended by such a small garrison that *sorties* were impossible—has only been broken by the singing of hymns, the brewing of coffee and cocoa, and the occasional pursuit of a springbock.

Every evening a guard, composed, I fancy, of anyone who chose to go, went

off, provided with a comfortable stock of bedding, to do duty round the camp.

Others, the valiant spirits, remained at the three batteries where were installed *Long Tom*, the three Armstrongs, and the Maxim.

Long Tom's battery was by far the most popular, for several reasons. In the first place, its processes were much more interesting than those of the small guns; then, its defenders were much more sheltered, owing to the proximity of the mining works; and finally, a good many former miners were always on the look-out for a stray diamond or two.

Among the besiegers of Kimberley, indeed, we met with a good many adventurers who took no other part in the campaign.

Men of all nationalities, many of them familiar with the town, having worked in the mines here, they came in the hope of finding some diamond overlooked in the sudden cessation of mining operations.... Then, too, they knew that Cecil Rhodes was in the town, having had no time to fly or to carry off his treasure.

Then, again, there are bankers and jewellers in Kimberley, and if the Boers had taken the town....

It appears that Cecil Rhodes was quite aware of this danger, and I have heard that he attempted to manufacture a balloon which was to have carried 'Cecil and his fortunes' to a safer city.

In any case, his gratitude to his defenders was very lively. And, in addition to other liberalities, he presented a commemorative medal to them all.

IV

Failing an assault, we resume the bombardment. The firing is slow and inaccurate. The English reply in much the same fashion, when suddenly their new cannon appears on the scene, not altogether to our surprise, for some intercepted letters had warned us of its manufacture. It was the famous *Long Cecil*.

The *Long Cecil* was a gun of about 12 centimetres, made in Kimberley itself during the siege with a piece of steel taken from the machinery of the De Beers mine.

The piece was drilled and rifled with the means at the disposal of the besieged.

The closing of the breech, a somewhat fantastic arrangement, was based

on the Canet system. In default of a trial field, the range was arrived at from observations of actual firing against us.

Long Cecil accordingly began to speak, and to speak very much to the point. Several times we were covered with earth, and I am certain that out of twenty shells, the extreme error was not more than 200 metres. One fortunately fell diagonally on *Long Tom's* very platform, rebounded, and burst a little way off. Seven men were killed.

The next day, Thursday, passed in almost precisely the same fashion. Towards five o'clock the interchange of amenities between *Long Tom* and *Long Cecil* began, and lasted till 8.30; at 8.30, breakfast. After breakfast, the guns went to work again till 11. At 11, lunch, rest. From 4 to 6, another cannonade. At 6, dinner.

This respect for meal-times is charming, and greatly facilitates life in the field.

It is a pity the attention of the Powers is not called to this subject by an international convention! Many affections of the stomach would be hereby avoided.

Encouraged by the example of their big brothers, the little 12 and 15-pounder Krupps and Armstrongs join in the concert.

The English have five, and we have four. It is delightful, and one can't complain of a single second of boredom.

On Friday, the Colonel's request is still unanswered.

'Wait a little while!'

Sternberg has had enough of it. Recognising the impossibility of persuading Du Toit to take decisive action, he starts off to Jacobsdal, where the English make him a prisoner. He was a great loss, for he had an extraordinary repertory of adventures, which he told in a very amusing manner, and, besides, he was a capital cook.

The 'boys' in these regions, greatly inferior to those of the Soudan in this respect, claim to be cooks as soon as they know how to light a fire. Accordingly, we prepare our meals ourselves. Tinned meat, a bit of roast mutton, or a stew, are the usual dishes.

The Colonel eats very little, and only takes grilled meat; he drinks tea or milk, and never touches wine or spirits. He does not smoke. He is a striking contrast to the rest of us, who eat like ogres, drink like sponges, and smoke like engines!

Our contingent, consisting of Breda, Léon, Michel, Coste, my friend De C— and I, remain with Villebois.

Michel has calculated the ranges, and we fire all Friday night. The points aimed at are: the searchlights, Cecil Rhodes' house, the Grand Hotel, the last high

chimney on the left, and that on the right.

Erasmus was unable to suppress a gentle amusement at the sight of our preparations for night-firing. But when he grasped the idea that we were in earnest, and that his *Long Tom* was being loaded, the benevolent smile with which one would watch a spoilt child engaged in some innocent folly changed to a look of real anxiety. He thought poor Michel had gone mad. He finally got used to the novel proceeding.

Firing ceased on both sides about 12.30 a.m. Early on Saturday morning it began again. One of our shells fell on the De Beers magazine, transformed into an ammunition factory, and caused an explosion and a fire.

The English, despairing of silencing our *Long Tom* with their *Long Cecil*, replied to every shot at the town by a shell into our laager. The accuracy of their fire with this gun at a range of about 7,000 metres was remarkable. We were indeed a capital target: a green rectangle of 200 metres in the midst of a yellow, arid plain.

The shell arrived in thirty-four seconds, but did no great damage, for a watchman gave the alarm, 'Skit!' each time when he saw the smoke, and we retreated into shelter.

The telegraphists of the staff, who were working in a little house, were placed in communication with the watchman by means of a bell, and, warned half a minute before the arrival, they had time to take refuge in a neighbouring trench.

We learnt later that a similar system had been adopted in Kimberley as a protection against *Long Tom*, and hence the small number of killed during the siege. One of the first victims of *Long Tom*, however, was the engineer of the *Long Cecil*, who had just finished his work. A shell burst on his house and killed him in his bedroom. Another cause of the slight mortality on both sides was the bad quality of the fuses for the projectiles, which often burst imperfectly, or not at all. Thus, one of the English shells fell in the machinery of the waterworks, only a few inches from our reserve of a hundred shells, and happily failed to explode. Another went through a cast-iron pipe, over a centimetre thick, and buried itself in the earth without exploding; its fuse was completely flattened on the projectile by contact with the pipe.

Nevertheless, a good many, too many indeed, *did* burst with satisfactory results—to those who fired them.

A good many of the Boers accordingly took the precaution of digging a sort of tomb several feet deep, in which they piled mattresses and blankets. They spent all night and part of the day lying in this shelter.

On Saturday morning, on arriving at the battery, we were surprised by a whistling sound. The English, harassed by the fire of *Long Tom*, had dug trenches

during the night to a distance of about 1,200 yards, and had manned them with riflemen. Their fire was not yet very galling, because of the distance between us.

Colonel de Villebois, seeing clearly what would happen, renewed his request for a party of men. He now only asked for twenty-five to make an assault that very night, for he pointed out that the *shanjes* (trenches) would be pushed forward during the night, and that our battery would become untenable. But he was repulsed by the eternal 'Wait a little while!'

Long convoys of Kaffirs that the English could no longer feed came out of the town every day, preceded by huge white flags. Some were allowed to pass after a parley, others were sent back again.

The Colonel feared that an attempt would be made against *Long Tom* by night, as a sequel to the offensive movement on the part of the garrison indicated by the making of the trenches.

Everyone goes to spend the night at the battery, and we take the opportunity of firing at the town. It proves to be merely a pastime. The English reply, but do not attack us.

On Sunday, February 11, we rest all along the line. The Burghers sing hymns in chorus, and do not cease till late in the evening. A sort of patriarchal simplicity obtains among them. Yesterday the Colonel was shaving. A Boer entered without saying a word, sat down on his little camp-bed, and remained there motionless. The Colonel, used to their ways, took no notice, but waited for the visitor to explain his visit. As this was prolonged considerably, the Colonel continued his toilet by a tub taken *puris naturalibus*. The Boer remained, staring silently at him. At last, his toilet ended, the Colonel explained to the visitor that he must go, as he wanted to close his tent. The Boer departed without a word. About ten minutes afterwards he came back with a friend, who explained that he wanted the Colonel's razor. He would bring it back *afterwards*. It was very hard to make him understand that the Colonel wished to reserve the implement for his private use.

On this Sunday, the day of rest, we accordingly went off to bathe at a spring four kilometres from our laager. We enjoy this peaceful pastime in the company of a young clergyman who was at one time in the camp. When *Long Cecil* began to bombard us, he judged its war-like thunders to be incompatible with his sacred function, and set up his tent beyond its range.

On Monday morning the firing began again early. Léon and the Colonel went off to the battery. Our horses had been turned out to graze by mistake, so we did not start till an hour after them. On arriving, we found the balls whistling more smartly than on Saturday. We could plainly distinguish the buzz of the dum-dum bullets amidst the whirl of the ordinary charge.

During the two nights, the English had pushed forward their trenches to a

distance of from 700 to 800 yards from us. We went up on the platform, where the Colonel, his glass in his eye, was talking imperturbably to General du Toit. At the same moment we saw Léon, who was standing behind them, spin round and fall across the gun-carriage. The poor fellow had been shot right through the forehead just above the eyes.

The Colonel at once raised him in his arms, others started off in haste for an ambulance; but the bullets were now falling round us like hail. Two horses were wounded in an instant, and a Burgher fell, a bullet clean through his body.

Poor Léon was still conscious. He bid us all good-bye calmly, taking a particularly affectionate leave of the Colonel, to whom he was greatly attached. The Colonel took a little water to wash the blood from his face, and placed the empty pannikin on the parapet of sacks filled with earth behind which we were sheltered. So heavy was the English fire that the pannikin instantly fell to the ground pierced by a bullet.

At last a cart appeared with an attendant and a stretcher. The wounded, who numbered about a dozen by this time, received first aid; then Léon was carried off on a stretcher.

What a journey was that march of three kilometres, the first part of which was performed under a rain of bullets! The head of the wounded man was swathed in cloths, which we kept wetting continually, holding an umbrella over his head, for the heat was intense—it was eleven o'clock in the morning. Blood poured from his mouth and nose. Poor fellow! we made up our minds that it was all over with him.

We reached Waterworks in two hours. But the little house that had been turned into a hospital was no longer safe since the bombardment of our camp had begun. A telegram had therefore been sent to Riverton Road, where there was an ambulance-station with a good doctor. Towards one o'clock an ambulance-carriage arrived and carried off our comrade.

On Tuesday, the 13th, we missed the salute *Long Tom* had been in the habit of giving the enemy at daybreak. What had happened? We sent off for news. General du Toit replied that Erasmus declared the gun was broken, and could not be fired. He himself had not been to inquire into the damage, and seemed to be no more concerned than if he had been told it was raining at Chicago. We set off to Kampferdam in great distress, expecting to find the gun a wreck.

As we approached, however, we saw that it was still in place, apparently wondering at its own silence. We examined it carefully all over, but could find nothing to account for the catastrophe, and, in despair, we sent for Erasmus.

Standing back a couple of paces, he showed us that one of the beams of the platform, which had received the full force of the recoil, had sunk some few centimetres. It was a matter of no importance, and did not interfere with the

firing in any way. But Erasmus, I suppose, did not feel inclined to work the gun that day. He had told Du Toit that it was broken, and the General had at once accepted the statement. After a severe reprimand to the recalcitrant gunner, the firing recommenced as usual.

Our provisions began to run out in camp, in spite of a stock of potatoes we had discovered at the waterworks. It was accordingly arranged that we should start off with two others of the party to get fresh stores, and a cart and mules, at Pretoria.

The Colonel, believing that the lack of offensive action among the Boers would prolong the siege indefinitely, determined to set out himself on the 15th for Colesberg, where we were to rejoin him in a few days. We started on the 14th, bound for Brandfort and Pretoria.

On setting out, my mare, an excellent mount, but very fiery, brought me suddenly to the ground, to the great amusement of the Colonel. The same accident having happened to Breda a day or two before, it began to be looked upon as a special privilege of the ex-cavalry officers!

At nightfall we arrived at Riverton Road, where Léon was lying. During the evening the Colonel himself came over to inquire for him. He had had a good day, and the operation that was judged necessary had been fixed for eleven o'clock that night, to avoid the heat of daylight. We waited about the door of the baggage-shed, which had been converted into an ambulance.

The operation, which proved perfectly successful, lasted an hour and a half. The doctor, a Scotchman called Dunlop, assured us that our poor friend was out of danger.

At daybreak on the 15th we started, the Colonel for the camp, we for Brandfort. It was terribly hot, and we were in a hurry, for a rumour of Lord Roberts' arrival had got about. It seemed likely that there would be some more lively work on hand very soon, and we were anxious to get through the drudgery of revictualling as quickly as possible.

In the evening we reached Boshof, where a good many wounded had been brought since our last visit. We rode all day on the 16th, slept in the bush, and started again at daybreak on the 17th. Towards noon we took a rest of an hour and a half, and consumed a tin of corned beef.

It was nearly two when we mounted again under a sky of fire, not to draw rein till we reached Brandfort at ten o'clock on Sunday morning, save for a compulsory halt of two hours from three to five in the morning, when the darkness made it impossible for us to continue our journey in the trackless sand and tangled bush.

We had been in the saddle twenty-six hours out of thirty to accomplish our journey of 120 miles, and had taken three and a half days, riding over sixty

kilometres a day, in average heat of from 38° to 40° (centigrade), without fodder and almost without water, in a wild, unknown country.

Our horses were dead-beat, and we entered the village on foot, dragging the poor brutes by their bridles. What was our stupefaction to hear that the siege of Kimberley had been raised without any engagement the very day after our departure!

The surprise, it seems, had been complete. There was a cry of 'The English!' and then a panic, which barely left time to carry off the guns and waggons. Part of the ammunition was left behind, some provisions, *Long Tom's* break and its platform. The Colonel had escaped with Breda. But in the confusion one of our comrades, Coste, was lost, and eventually joined Cronje.

A story which amused us all at the time may be told here. A volunteer, no longer in his first youth—well over fifty, in fact—had come to join the Colonel just at the time of the English attack. A very eccentric character, and slightly bemused by drink, he found himself in the thick of the stampede, without any clear idea of what it was all about.

Suddenly the Burghers, who had never seen him in the camp before, struck by his odd behaviour, demanded his passports. Not understanding a word of Dutch, he had some difficulty in making out what they wanted.

At last he produced the necessary paper. The pandours of the moment scrutinized them carefully, then, shaking their heads in the fashion which among all races implies negation, they said:

'No good! *Obsal!* (mount).

Two men ranged themselves on either side of the unlucky wight, a complete novice in horsemanship, and galloped off with him to a farm several miles off.

'Dismount! Your passports!'

About fifteen persons, men, women and children, were grouped round a table. The passport, handed round once more, is discussed by the assembly, each person present giving an opinion. The general verdict is unfavourable, for heads are again shaken.

'No good! *Obsal!*

The poor volunteer, aching from his furious gallop, begins to think things rather beyond a joke; but, anxious to conciliate, he remounts, and gallops off again under escort. On arriving at another farm another inspection, also unfavourable, takes place.

'No good! *Obsal!*

This time the worm turns. Pale, exhausted and racked with pain, he opposes the force of inertia to the rigour of his tormentors, who, convinced that he is a spy, set him against a wall and load their rifles. This argument is so convincing that he remounts, and finally makes them understand that he will be able to

find someone to answer for him at Brandfort.

Two days later he arrived there, fasting, exhausted, and still guarded by his escort. Fortunately he was recognised and released. He never returned to the front.

* * * * *

We leave for Pretoria by the first train, and arrive on the evening of the 20th. We at once set to work on our re-victualling mission.

Two days later, I got a telegram from Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil. Having heard of the arrival of a good many French volunteers at Pretoria, he agrees to take the command of them, and orders me to get them together. A letter to M. Reitz, sent off at the same time, explains the project.

Among the new arrivals are ex-petty officers, ex-sailors, ex-legionaries ... a motley crew. Their equipment will take several days, and it is arranged that they are to join us at Colesberg, for which we start by that evening's train.

During this short sojourn at Pretoria I was presented by Colonel Gourko to Captain D—, the French military attaché, one of the most charming men I have ever met.

We noticed numerous placards on the town walls, giving notice of thanksgiving services for February 26 and 27. It is the anniversary of Majuba Hill, which is celebrated every year with great pomp. This year, in spite of the national pre-occupation in current events, the traditional custom is to be kept up. The usual review of the troops by the President and the Commander-in-Chief cannot, of course, take place; but the shops and offices will be closed for forty-eight hours, and the whole population will flock to the churches.

Shortly after our departure, at a station the name of which I forget—perhaps intentionally, for I feel a qualm of remorse at the recollection of it—a little fox-terrier playing about the train jumped into our carriage. We were just starting.... It would have been cruel to throw the poor little beast on to the platform at the risk of maiming it or causing it to be run over.... In short, we kept her, and christened her Nelly. She was very pretty, pure white, with a black patch on her head and another on her back. I felt remorseful—until the next station; then I overcame my scruples. I am so fond of dogs.

At Brandfort, a counter-order awaits us, directing us to go to Bloemfontein, where the Colonel awaits us, in consequence of Lord Roberts' latest operations. We land our cart, our mules, and our provisions. But our worn-out horses have to be replaced. The Colonel, impatient to be gone, will not wait for us, and starts for Petrusburg, where we are to join him as quickly as possible.

On the 28th, the news of Cronje's capitulation reaches us. We know noth-

ing of the details, but the moral effect is terrible.

We had got together hastily at Pretoria a cart, harness, mules, and three black boys. Individually, each of these acquisitions is highly satisfactory. The cart is a superb omnibus, freshly painted gray; the harness is almost new, the mules very handsome—a little black one in particular. The boys were chosen to suit all tastes: one tall, one short, and one of medium height. But it proves very difficult to establish any sort of cohesion between these various elements.

At the first attempt the harness breaks, the mules bite and kick. It needs the cunning of an Apache even to approach the little black one. The boys are stupid, and speak neither Dutch nor English, nothing but Kaffir. The omnibus alone remains stationary, but it creaks and groans in a pitiable fashion when touched.

A second experiment is no more successful than the first. The third gives a better result: the vehicle moves, and even goes very near to losing a wheel.

This remarkable result is achieved, firstly, because all the rotten leathers of the harness are in pieces, after a double series of joltings and strainings; only the solid ones are left. Secondly, the pretty little black mule has run away, after breaking some dozen halters, so that we are saved the trouble of harnessing her. Lastly, we have stationed the three boys at a safe distance, begging them on no account to help us, and Michel, who as an old artilleryman is an adept in harness, does wonders. Finally we get off, escorting our omnibus, which groans aloud at every step.

We look like 'The Attack on the Stage Coach' in Buffalo Bill!

V

On the morning of the 7th, the road to Petrusburg was blocked, and the guns were roaring in front of us. Marais, Botha's adjutant, joined us. At the first sound of the guns we left the waggons, and galloped off in the direction he pointed out. The battle of Poplar Grove was about to be fought under our eyes, though we were unable to take a very active part in it.

The engagement went on mainly on our right; we were on the left of the Boer lines. In front of us was a kopje occupied by a hundred rifles.

About 11 o'clock the English cavalry charged at the guns, about two miles away. The firing slackened. Then about 2 o'clock the English began to shell us furiously with shrapnel, also the kopje forming the Boer centre. An outflanking

movement completed the demoralisation of the Boers, and at 3.30 the retreat became general.

President Kruger came by this morning to announce that he had made the following peace proposals:

'BLOEMFONTEIN,

'*March 5, 1900.*

'The blood and tears of the thousands who have suffered by this war, and the prospect of all the moral and economic ruin with which South Africa is now threatened, make it necessary for both belligerents to ask themselves dispassionately, and as in the sight of the Triune God, for what they are fighting, and whether the aim of each justifies all this appalling misery and devastation.

'With this object, and in view of the assertions of various British statesmen to the effect that this war was begun, and is being carried on, with the set purpose of undermining Her Majesty's authority in South Africa, and of setting up an administration over all South Africa, independent of Her Majesty's Government, we consider it our duty solemnly to declare that this war was undertaken solely as a defensive measure to safeguard the threatened independence of the South African Republic, and is only continued in order to secure and safeguard the incontestable independence of both Republics as sovereign international States, and to obtain the assurance that those of Her Majesty's subjects who have taken part with us in this war shall suffer no harm whatsoever in person or property.

'On these two conditions, but on these alone, are we now, as in the past, desirous of seeing peace re-established in South Africa, and of putting an end to the evils now reigning over South Africa; while, if Her Majesty's Government is determined to destroy the independence of the Republics, there is nothing left to us and to our people but to persevere to the end in the course already begun, in spite of the overwhelming pre-eminence of the British Empire, confident that that God who lighted the inextinguishable fire of the love of freedom in the hearts of ourselves and of our fathers will not forsake us, but will accomplish His work in us and in our descendants.

'We hesitated to make this declaration earlier to your Excellency, as we feared that, as long as the advantage was always on our side, and as long as our forces held defensive positions far in Her Majesty's colonies, such a declaration might hurt the feelings of honour of the British people; but now that the prestige of the British Empire may be considered to be assured by the capture of one of our forces by Her Majesty's troops, and that we are thereby forced to evacuate other positions which our forces had occupied, that difficulty is over, and we can no longer hesitate clearly to inform your Government and people in the sight of

the whole civilized world why we are fighting, and on what conditions we are ready to restore peace.'

Lord Salisbury replied as follows:

'FOREIGN OFFICE,

'*March 11, 1900.*

'I have the honour to acknowledge your Honours' telegram, dated the 5th of March, from Bloemfontein, of which the purport is principally to demand that Her Majesty's Government shall recognise the "incontestable independence" of the South African Republic and Orange Free State "as sovereign international States," and to offer on those terms to bring the war to a conclusion.

'In the beginning of October peace existed between Her Majesty and the two Republics under the Conventions which were then in existence. A discussion had been proceeding for some months between Her Majesty's Government and the South African Republic, of which the object was to obtain redress for certain very serious grievances under which British residents in the South African Republic were suffering. In the course of these negotiations the South African Republic had, to the knowledge of Her Majesty's Government, made considerable armaments, and the latter had, consequently, taken steps to provide corresponding reinforcements to the British garrisons of Cape Town and Natal. No infringement of the rights guaranteed by the Conventions had, up to that point, taken place on the British side. Suddenly, at two days' notice, the South African Republic, after issuing an insulting ultimatum, declared war upon Her Majesty; and the Orange Free State, with whom there had not even been any discussion, took a similar step. Her Majesty's dominions were immediately invaded by the two Republics, siege was laid to three towns within the British frontier, a large portion of the two colonies was overrun, with great destruction to property and life, and the Republics claimed to treat the inhabitants of extensive portions of Her Majesty's dominions as if those dominions had been annexed to one or other of them. In anticipation of these operations, the South African Republic had been accumulating for many years past military stores on an enormous scale, which, by their character, could only have been intended for use against Great Britain.

'Your Honours make some observations of a negative character upon the object with which these preparations were made. I do not think it necessary to discuss the questions you have raised. But the result of these preparations, carried on with great secrecy, has been that the British Empire has been compelled to confront an invasion which has entailed upon the Empire a costly war and

the loss of thousands of precious lives. This great calamity has been the penalty which Great Britain has suffered for having in recent years acquiesced in the existence of the two Republics.

'In view of the use to which the two Republics have put the position which was given to them, and the calamities which their unprovoked attack has inflicted upon Her Majesty's dominions, Her Majesty's Government can only answer your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the independence either of the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State.'

It was to be war, then, to the bitter end.

* * * * *

At the beginning of the retreat, a field-cornet came to ask my advice, as often happened. He disregarded it, as always happened. I wanted them to destroy the reservoirs, burn the forage, and poison the wells all along the line of retreat.[#] He would never consent.

[#] The writer apparently made this monstrous suggestion quite seriously.—TRANSLATOR.

Later on, when I was a prisoner, an English officer of rank, who had taken part in the march across the Orange Free State, told me he had suffered terribly from thirst, and he assured me that if the measures I had advised had been taken, Roberts' 40,000 men, for the most part mounted, would never have achieved their task.

But at the moment time failed me to prove to the brave field-cornet, by the teaching of history in general, and of the wars in Spain in particular, what excellent results might be obtained by such a method of defence. Minutes were becoming precious, and we made off as fast as we could, while in the distance we saw half our convoy blazing, fired by bursting shells.

Towards half-past nine we lay down on the veldt, without pitching any tents, and keeping a sharp look-out. By eleven the last of the Boer stragglers had passed. Colonel Gourko and Lieutenant Thomson had been made prisoners.

On the 8th we were astir at daybreak. Our three boys went off to find our beasts, which had strayed far in search of pasture, on account of the scanty herbage, in spite of their hobbles. They were all recovered, however, with the exception of one mule, which remained deaf to every summons, a most incon-

siderate proceeding on his part, seeing that the English were at our heels.

Time being precious, we started off as well as we could with our reduced convoy. Suddenly one of our boys, big John, stood tiptoe on his long feet, gave a sweeping glance around, and went quietly on his way. Half an hour later, he began again to increase in height and to study the horizon.... We could see absolutely nothing. As my acquaintance with John was slight, I imagined that he probably suffered from some nervous affection. But this time he sniffed the air loudly, and, without a word, darted off obliquely from our track.

An hour passed, and he did not return. Grave doubts of his fidelity began to afflict us. At last, two hours later, we noticed a speck on the horizon, then two. It was John with the missing mule. John is an angel—a black angel!

All the farms we passed on the road had hoisted the white flag. At noon we reached the point where the road to Bloemfontein bifurcates. A few Burghers were gathered there. We pitched our tents.

During the evening the French military attaché, Captain D—, passed, and told us that Colonel de Villebois was only about an hour distant from us.

On March 9 we set out to join him. We found him with about fifty men, coming from Pretoria. These men were divided into two companies, the first under Breda, the second under me. Directly we arrived it was agreed to start at ten o'clock. We stopped long enough to add our cart to the Colonel's convoy, which we were to pick up near the farm of Abraham's Kraal. The 'French Corps' was formed!

About four o'clock we arrived on the height of Abraham's Kraal. The farm so-called lies along the Modder River, which flows from east to west. Its steep, bush-entangled banks are bathed with yellow, turbid water, whence its name—Modder (Mud) River. A line of kopjes, starting from the edge of the river, stretches several miles south of it. In front of them, to the west, lies a barren yellow plain. Far off on the horizon lie the kopjes of Poplar Grove, where we were forty-eight hours before.

The Colonel, who has gone off on a scouting expedition with his troop, is not to be found. We wait for him vainly all the evening with General Delarey's staff, in company with Baron von Wrangel, an ex-lieutenant of the German Guards. In this expedition a young volunteer named Franck, a quartermaster of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, whose term had just expired, distinguished himself by his coolness and his boldness under fire. He was a brave fellow, as he was to prove later on.

Night came on fast, our chief was still absent, and we went off to sleep at a little deserted farm, with the officers of the Johannesburg Politie. We lay down beside them and slept like men who have been in the saddle for twelve hours.

On March 10, at 5 a.m., we started for General Delarey's bivouac. It might

have been 6.30, when Vecht-General Sellier passed us at a gallop, crying: '*Obsal! The English!*'

Our positions, chosen the night before, were as follows: Our right, with the Modder River beyond, consisted of about 400 men of the Johannesburg Politie, with a Krupp gun, an Armstrong, and two Maxims. Then a space in the plain, where a commando of 200 men, with three cannon and a Maxim gun, constituting our centre, had taken up a position early in the morning. Finally, to the south, on our left, 300 men on a round kopje, fairly high.

At Poplar Grove two days before we had numbered several thousands; but the Boers, discouraged by the check they had undergone, had returned to their farms, refusing to fight. This was a proceeding very characteristic of these men, slow physically and morally, profoundly obstinate, astute rather than intelligent, distrustful, sometimes magnanimous. Easily depressed and as easily elated, without any apparent cause, they are a curious jumble of virtues and failings, often of the most contradictory kinds. The sort of panics frequent among them are due, I think, rather to their total lack of organization than to their temperament; for, not to speak of individual instances of valour, by no means rare among them, the Johannesburg Politie, with their very primitive discipline, have shown what might have been done by the Boers with some slight instruction and some slight discipline.[#]

[#] Ten years ago the Duc de Broglie, in his '*Marie-Thérèse Impératrice*,' wrote as follows of the campaign of 1744 against Frederick the Great:

'Prince Charles had not even all his force at his disposal.... All that had been left him were the Hungarian levies, who had indeed been the main strength of the Austrian army; but these irregular troops, passing from ardour to discouragement with that mobility proper to men with whom enthusiasm does duty for experience and discipline, now thought of nothing but of a speedy return to their homesteads, and entered reluctantly upon every enterprise that retarded this return. Whole companies deserted the flag and took the road for Hungary.'

These words, written of the Hungarians of the seventeenth century, are literally applicable to the Boers of to-day, and it is curious to note—though I do not for a moment compare Lord Roberts to Frederick the Great—that the Hungarians often inflicted a check on the King of Prussia, just as the Boers have occasionally stopped the English Marshal.

They alone had remained, with a handful of foreigners and some stray men from various commandos.

The Heilbron Commando, consisting of over 200 men, was represented by the corporal and three men. All the rest, the commandant at their head, had gone

home; hence their reduced fighting strength. At last all the remnant of the force was in its place, behind little rocky entrenchments hastily thrown up.

In the distance a long column of 'khakis' defiles, marching from north to south, presenting its left flank to us from a distance of seven or eight miles, and preceded by a body of mounted scouts.

We go to inspect the mounting of our guns, which are arriving on our left and in the centre of our line. Then we return to the kopje where we were before with the Johannesburg Politie. Captain D—, the French military attaché, is there following all the movements.

About eight o'clock an English detachment essays a movement against us, and we open fire with our Krupp gun. English regiments defile against the horizon till eleven o'clock. Some Maxims and a battery of field-guns have been mounted against us.

Between the English and Boer lines a herd of springbock are running about in terror under the shells. The poor beasts finally make off to more tranquil regions and disappear.

The Maxims fire short, but after a few seconds the field-guns find the range, and fire with a certain precision. Two shrapnel-shells fired one after the other burst over our heads. My right-hand neighbour gets a bullet just below his right eye, and falls against me; I am covered with his blood. He died soon after.

As I bathe his face, I see Captain D— hobbling back. I go to him. He has been struck on the hip by a ball, which, having fortunately spent most of its force, has not penetrated the flesh. The wound was not dangerous, but it swelled a good deal at once, and caused a numbness in the leg. I hastily applied the necessary dressing, which the Captain had with him, and then went to fetch his horse.

After his departure, we return to the kopje. The Mounted Rifles advance in force. We wait till they are about 500 metres off, and then open a heavy fire upon them, supported by the two Maxims. They retreat rapidly, leaving some dozen of their number on the field. We make four prisoners. They are sailors who have been mounted, lads of barely twenty. There is a lull after this attempt.

About four o'clock the artillery fire begins again with redoubled fury, heralding a violent charge by the infantry, who have been concentrated under the shelter of the field-guns. A simultaneous charge is made on our left wing. All along the line and on both flanks we sustain a heavy fusillade from the enemy. Although protected to some extent by our rocks, our losses are pretty heavy.

The English come up to be killed with admirable courage. Three times they return to the charge in the open, losing a great many men. At nightfall they are close upon us.

I go in search of Colonel Villebois, who means to rest his men in a little wood behind a kopje on the banks of the Modder. We have eaten nothing since

the night before.

At eight o'clock comes an order for a general retreat. We learn that an outflanking movement is to be attempted against us. In the evening General Delarey telegraphed as follows:

'The English are advancing upon our positions in two different directions. They have begun to bombard General Sellier, and are keeping up a sharp rifle-fire. We have been heavily engaged from nine o'clock this morning till sunset. The federated troops fought like heroes. Three times they repulsed a strong force of the English, who brought up fresh troops against us every time. Each attack was repulsed, and at sunset the English troops were only about forty metres from us. Their losses were very heavy. Our own have not yet been ascertained. A report on this point will follow.'

We found afterwards that Roberts' entire army was present, some 40,000 men, and that he had engaged over 12,000. Our losses were 380 men out of about 950.

At 8.30 we set out hastily for Bloemfontein, carrying off our prisoners and wounded on trolleys drawn by mules. About eleven o'clock we pass some English outposts, which are pointed out to us on our right at a distance of only a few hundred metres.

At three in the morning we arrive at the store where we had bivouacked two nights before. We leave our horses to graze in a field of maize, and take a short rest. About five we are greeted by distant volleys.

'Obsal!

But my horse is dead lame in the right hind-leg. I try to bind it up with the remains of an old waistcoat. Impossible. He cannot drag himself along. I am forced to 'find' another which is grazing near by.

I seem to be forming predatory habits. Here I am now with a dog I 'found,' which follows me faithfully, on a horse I also 'found'! But it is in the cause of liberty.

Besides, these habits are so much in vogue among the Boers. I could tell a tale of one of my comrades, to whose detriment some half-dozen horses had been 'found' by the Burghers (the process is called by them *obtail*). And, to conclude, my find was no great acquisition.

We finally arrive at Bloemfontein about three o'clock in the afternoon. Here we meet numbers of English men and women, smartly dressed in summer costumes, smiling and cheerful, starting out in carriages to meet the victors. They are not aggressive, however; our sullen bearing perhaps warns them that a misplaced exuberance might have unpleasant consequences.

We find our convoy at the entrance of the town, and we pass through to

our camp on the east.

Poor capital! What terror, what disorder shows itself on every side! The shops have been hurriedly shut; men, carriages, riders pass each other in every direction, and the two main streets are encumbered with an interminable string of bullock-waggons. In the market-place and in the market itself an improvised ambulance has been set up, and the wounded are being tended. On every threshold stand women and children, whose anxious eyes seem to ask: 'Where are they?'

VI

We start again on the 12th, at three in the morning. Not a Burgher remains with us. They have all gone off in the directions of Wynburg and Kroonstad.

On the 13th we are on the bridge of the Modder River. We establish ourselves in a deserted farm, and execute some stray ducks, which would no doubt have died of hunger but for our timely appearance—a most painful end, I believe.

Scouts are sent out. In about an hour the English are suddenly sighted. We rush to the road, and in ten minutes a barricade is thrown across it. I am in the centre with the others. But the English hang back, and finally go off.

Towards noon we start in the direction of Brandfort, where our convoy, which was to travel day and night, is expected to be by this time. It is about 4.30 when we come in sight of the village.

There is a cloud of dust on our left, then two despatch-riders on bicycles fly past us. The Lancers!

We set off at a gallop to get to the houses before them. It is a steeplechase between us. After an hour's ride we arrive at the same time as the head of the enemy's advanced guard, which falls back at a gallop. We try to pursue them, but our broken-down horses can carry us no further.

We rush into the village, while our men hastily harness our carts. The Colonel sends us to take up a position to cover their retreat, for there are two squadrons of Lancers in the little wood 500 metres from the village. The Landdrost, fearing reprisals, comes to beg me not to fire. I give him these alternatives—to hold his tongue or to be shot. He prefers the former, and I see him no more.

Meanwhile, C— and Michel get down a cannon from a truck at the railway-station. The terrified artillerymen refuse to work it. But the English, not knowing

what our numbers are (we are barely twenty-five), dare not attack us, and we get away in the night.

Our rallying-point is Kroonstad, the new capital of the Free State.

On the 15th we are at Wynburg. We leave it again on the morning of the 16th by the last train, setting fire to the railway-station and destroying the reservoirs. Comfortably installed in a train we made up ourselves, at Smaldeel we are invaded by a whole commando.... Six men to every carriage, with their six saddles, six bridles, six rifles, six cloaks, a dozen blankets, and some twenty packages.... Ouf!

These good Burghers, who smoke as long as they can, are without the most elementary ideas of ordinary civility of behaviour. Their familiarity of manner is extraordinary; happily, they show no resentment if one retorts in like fashion. One of them, to steady himself during his slumbers, thrusts his foot—and such a foot!—into the pocket of C—'s coat. C—, put quite at his ease by this proceeding, does not hesitate to increase the comfort of his own position by a reciprocal thrusting of his foot into the waistcoat of his sympathetic *vis-à-vis*. They form a touchingly fraternal group, and in this position they sleep for ten hours. At every sudden stoppage, the rounded paunch of the good Burgher acts as a buffer, deadening the violence of the jolt for my friend.

My *vis-à-vis*—I had almost said my opponent—much more formal, is content to plant a bag on my knees, and a box on my feet.... How beautiful is the simplicity of rustic manners!

At last, on March 17, we reach Kroonstad and establish our camp there. We take advantage of this sojourn to pursue the education of our 'boys.'

In consequence of our having 'chummed' with other comrades, our suite has taken on alarming proportions; we look like a company of slave-dealers.

The biggest and oldest of our boys is called John. He seems to have an inordinate affection for straws, with which he delights to adorn the calves of his legs.

The second is also called John; he is one of the best. We have christened him 'Cook,' in allusion to his functions. An old stove, found in a house that had been burnt, gives him quite an important air when he prepares our meals.

The third is called Charlie. He is very intelligent, an excellent mule-driver, but a thorough rascal.

The fourth, who is chocolate-coloured, is good at guarding the mules at the pasture. He is called 'Beguini,' which means little.

The fifth is not of much use for anything, but he is very fond of his master, a sympathetic survivor of 'Fort Chabrol.'

The sixth belongs to no one. But noting that his compatriots seem happy enough with us, he has established himself in our kitchen, and serves us more or

less like the others.

The Walsh River, a very remarkable stream, for there is water in it, [#] flows past Kroonstad, and we occupy our leisure moments with the bucolic occupation of fishing.

[#] Most of the rivers are dried up in summer-time.

All the members of the Government have assembled at Kroonstad; the two Presidents, the generals, the military attachés, and Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil are present at their deliberations.

There seems to be a tendency to energetic measures. A martial law decreeing the death-penalty against deserters is passed and proclaimed. Unfortunately, it was never enforced. The confidence of the Burghers has been somewhat shaken. The Executive begins to understand that he who foretold the consequences of their blunders so unerringly may perhaps be able to remedy them.

On the 20th, accordingly, Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil is appointed Vecht-General, and all the Europeans are placed under his command. But scarcely had this just and intelligent resolution been passed, when jealousy, pride, and fear of seeing a stranger succeed where they themselves had failed took possession of the Burghers, and the orders to concentrate were never carried out.

It is much to be regretted that sentiments so injurious to the national cause should have deprived the Government of the inestimable services that might have been rendered by a corps of 1,500 or 2,000 resolute Europeans, all formerly soldiers, under the command of a man of the science, the valour, and the worth of General de Villebois-Mareuil.

Nevertheless, about 200 men of all nationalities, drawn by the confidence such a leader alone could inspire, came of their own free will to place themselves under his orders. With these he organized the 'European Legion.' It included the two divisions of the French corps, a Dutch corps, and a German corps.

Everything General de Villebois asked for was promised, but nothing was carried out. His plan consisted primarily of raids like those which marked the War of Secession.

On the 20th he addressed this stirring proclamation to us and to those who were scattered further afield:

'To the Legionaries who have known me as their comrade:

'Officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers! I know you have not forgotten me, and that we understand each other, hence this appeal to you.

'We see around us a worthy people, who are threatened with the loss of their rights, their property, and their liberty, for the satisfaction of a handful of capitalists.

'The blood which flows in the veins of this people is partly French blood. France, therefore, owes them some manifestation of sympathy.

'You are men whose martial temperaments, to say nothing of the great obligations of nationality, have brought together under the banner of this people. May success and victory attend their flag! I know you as the ideal type of a corps made for attack, and ignorant of retreat.'

Influenced mainly by the unfriendly attitude of certain generals to whom his promotion had given umbrage, Villebois determined to strike a great blow in all haste.

Without waiting to complete the organization of the Legion, he formed us into a corps of 100 men, which he made up by the addition of twenty-five Afrikanders, under Field-Cornet Coleman; and as soon as the cartload of dynamite he had been awaiting arrived, he set out on the 24th, at eight o'clock in the evening.

His parting orders to me were to hold myself in readiness, with the rest of the men (about 100) and the new arrivals, for Saturday next, March 31, and to collect horses and provisions. On the 31st, he would come back and explain the second part of the operation he was then beginning.

Absolute secrecy was preserved as to the object of his expedition. To Breda's question as to the direction he proposed to take, he replied: 'To the right.'

Our poor General was very nervous. On March 23, the eve of his departure, he telegraphed to a wounded friend who was returning to France: 'You, at least, know your fate, whereas I am uncertain what lies before me!' A dark presentiment, perhaps. In any case, what melancholy underlies that short phrase! I do not say *discouragement*, for there are some stout hearts who know not the feeling, and Villebois was of these.

Two days after, one of my men returned in the evening; his horse had broken down on the road. They had made a very rapid march, taking only four hours' rest at night and four in the day, in two fractions. Nevertheless, after thirty-six hours of marching at this rate, this man, unmounted, and separated from the rest of the column, had found a horse in a kraal, and had been able to return to Kroonstad in two hours.

Where then had the guide led them? If I could have communicated with the General, I would have warned him, but this was out of the question. On the 31st, there was no news; on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of April, still none. On the 4th, after a notice from Colonel Maximoff, our detachment moved to Brandfort.

We are at a loss to account for the delay in the return of our comrades. But in a campaign delays are so common, the unexpected happens so constantly, that our anxiety is not very great.

The special train that takes us to Smaldeel consists of fifty-three coaches, the number found necessary for the men, waggons, and horses of our contingent. We found that the railway had been cut beyond Smaldeel, and we were obliged to go on to Brandfort by the road.

Brandfort had been occupied by the Lancers for several days, but they had fallen back. The village is now the centre of Generals Delarey, Kolby and Smith.

We arrive on April 7 at 8.30. In the afternoon a telegram is posted up announcing that General Christian de Wet, who is operating to the east of Bloemfontein, has arrived near Sanna's Post, cutting off the water-supply of the Bloemfontein garrison, and carrying off 375 men, 7 cannon, 1,000 mules and 400 waggons. Three days later, on April 4, at Dewetsdorp, he took 459 more prisoners and 12 waggons.

This was the beginning of that series of *razzie* and surprises he has been carrying on incessantly ever since, astonishing the most audacious by his audacity, and by the rapidity and suddenness of his movements defeating the most scientific and elaborate devices for his capture. Broadwood, Rundle, Hunter, even Kitchener have been forced to give up the chase, and to wait till Fortune, unfaithful for a day, shall deliver the valiant Burgher into their hands.

We met the Landdrost of Brandfort again, now more patriotic than ever; but he seemed slightly embarrassed when he saw us.

On April 7, the day of our arrival, we made a reconnaissance towards the south with four men. As we left the Boer lines we met a man, who, hearing us talking French, came to bid us 'Bon jour!' We entered into conversation, and he seemed to take a great interest in European news. At last he told us he was a Belgian, and suddenly asked:

'You had a war with the Germans one time, didn't you?'

The war of 1870 was news to him. He had been on the Veldt since 1867.

'Do you know if our Leopold is still on the throne?'

After assuring him of the health and even vigour of his Sovereign, we continued our reconnaissance, not without moralizing a little over a man who had so completely broken with Europe and the old civilization.

The English positions were visible from Brandfort, on Tabel Kop and Tabel Berg, the other side of the plain that stretches south-east of the little town. Towards five o'clock we received a few volleys, hastily fired, which did no damage. But our object was attained: we had discovered that the enemy's positions extended a good way to the south.

The 8th was a Sunday. In the evening I received this telegram from Presi-

dent Steyn:

”The Landdrost of Hoopstad sends me the following: ”Field-Cornet Daniels reports that the troops under Methuen’s command at Boshof have marched upon Hoopstad, and I have received from Methuen himself the letter I communicate below. The native who brought the letter tells us that an engagement took place with General de Villebois in the neighbourhood of Boshof, that ten men were killed on our side, and fifteen on that of the enemy, among them a superior officer, but that all our force was finally made prisoner. Field-Cornet Daniels supposes that the enemy will march upon Christiana and Hoopstad, and thence upon Kroonstad.”

”HEADQUARTERS, SWARTZ KOPJEFONTEIN,

”April 8, 1900.

”To THE COMMANDANT OF THE FREE STATE LAAGER.

”SIR,

”I have the honour of sending you a copy of Lord Roberts’ proclamation to the Free State, laying down the conditions under which you are invited to surrender.

”Two days ago the Foreign Legion was taken prisoner by me, and their General, Villebois, was killed.

”The English army is advancing on every side, and I beg you to consider the very liberal conditions now offered you, which would not be renewed at a later date.

”I have the honour to be, sir,

”Your obedient servant,

”METHUEN,”

”Lieutenant-General commanding the 10th Division.”

This telegram was a thunderbolt for us. The anxiety we had felt at the General’s delay had not been such as to have caused us to dream of such a catastrophe. Yet we could not doubt the news.

’Two days ago the Foreign Legion was taken prisoner by me, and their General, Villebois, was killed,’ said the telegram.

That evening two reconnoitring parties were sent out; the first, from the Tabel Kop direction, came in next morning with a wounded man. The second, under Wrangel, started for the neighbourhood of Hoopstad, and could not return for several days.

On the 9th we made an inventory of the property belonging to the General, to Breda, and to the rest of our poor comrades, all of which was packed for

transmission to Pretoria. The same day I received the following telegram from Colonel Gourko:

'Thomson unites with me in the expression of our profound grief at the cruel loss you have sustained in the person of Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil, a valiant soldier and distinguished leader.'

This homage from the Russian and Dutch attachés to the memory of our great compatriot touched us deeply.

On the 10th one of Ganetzki's men was killed in a reconnaissance. Comte Ganetzki had his day of Parisian celebrity in connection with *La belle O—*.

On the 11th I had a telegram from Wrangel:

'I reached here (Hoopstad) at 5.30 this evening, with five men. The English are at Knappiesfontein, an hour and a half's march from Boshof. There are no Burghers at Hoopstad. I shall start for Boshof to-morrow, and send you a report later on. I await your orders.'

I at once communicate this news to General P. Botha. He believes that the environs of Hoopstad are occupied by the Burghers, and that the English will march upon Smaldeel to cut off communication (April 12). Events proved him to have been entirely mistaken; but I might have talked to him for hours without altering his convictions an iota.

Cannon had been thundering all the evening in the distance, but we had not been able to determine in what direction they were. On April 13, Commandant Delarey, brother of the General, was appointed honorary commander of the European Legion—'honorary' because he could not act save in concert with the heads of the different corps—Rittmeister Illich for the Austro-Hungarians, Captain Lorentz for the Germans, myself for the French.

An official telegram announces that General de Villebois was buried at Boshof with military honours. Lord Methuen was present, and the prisoners of the Legion were represented. There was even a funeral oration, to which Breda replied.

In the engagement of April 5 there had been 11 killed, the General being one, and 51 wounded, out of 68. The rest had been made prisoners.

Easter Day, 1900.—A second telegram from Wrangel, dated from Hoopstad, reports as follows:

'1. Braschel (a former officer of the German artillery) informs us that 10,000 men and 700 cavalry are marching from Boshof on Bultfontein. He counted

thirty-six gun-carriages, cannon, and waggons.

'2. There are about 700 Burghers at Landslaagte.'

On the 16th, we take horse at noon with every man available to join Kolby. This excellent General, one of the best men that ever lived, is not remarkable for the originality of his combinations. He witnessed our arrival with delight, smiling—he is always smiling—received us very cordially, and asked us what we had come for! He had had no instructions about us; however, it was all the same to him whether we slept there or elsewhere, so we remained. We came in for a perfect deluge of rain all night, and at four the next morning we started to take up a position with Delarey's, Botha's, and Kolby's commandos.

We number from 1,000 to 1,200 Burghers, with two Creusot guns, a Krupp and a Nordenfeldt.

At 4.30 in the evening, orders are given to retire to the different camps. We arrive at 10 o'clock.

On the 18th, it rains again in torrents. In the evening, about 9 o'clock, Wrangel's reconnoitring party comes in. I will transcribe the account given me by one of his men, Meslier, that it may lose nothing of its interest by a paraphrase.

'Starting on Monday, the 9th, in the evening, we marched secretly and rapidly towards Hoopstad, following first the Vedula and then the Wet River across the veldt. We crossed rivers without any fords, passing through a country without roads or paths, and through the dense bush that grows on the banks of the water-courses. Out of ten picked horses two died, and three men fell out on the road exhausted. One of them went into hospital at Smaldeel.

'On Wednesday, the 11th, we reached Hoopstad at five o'clock in the evening, and slept at the President Hotel, which is kept by a German.

'At six o'clock next morning (April 12) I started with Braschel and Bros-tolicky in the direction of Boshof. The English, after having advanced upon Bultfontein, as reported in our telegram of the 15th, returned for the most part towards Boshof. We slept that night at Landslaagte, where the Johannesburg Politie are encamped. They number about 200, and expect a reinforcement of 300 men.

'We left again on the morning of the 13th, separating at a given point, Braschel and his companion going towards the camp of Commandant Cronje (brother of the General taken prisoner at Paardeberg), and I towards Boshof.

'Towards noon I passed Driefontein, which was supposed to be occupied by the English. The inhabitants of the farm told me that when Colonel de Villebois arrived an English corps had been in the neighbourhood for several days, apparently waiting. The people at the farm heard the noise of the battle, which lasted about four hours, and helped to collect the dead and wounded afterwards.

Among our men they noticed one who had a handkerchief bound round his head and a very large nose. Another had a very long beard.

'Towards one o'clock I arrived at Muyfontein, where there was a little outpost of thirty Lancers under an officer. I sheered off to the east, and arrived near Boshof about half-past four.

'Boshof was full of troops. From the neighbouring kopjes one could distinctly see the "khakis" moving about in the village. Skirting Boshof, I arrived at Kopjefontein on the south-west. There I was a good deal disturbed by strange hissing noises coming from about 800 metres away, and the pursuit of a party of twenty Lancers, who followed me for about half an hour.

'I returned to Rothsplaats Farm, where I spent the night. I had fastened my horse to a cart, and had laid down myself under a tree. About ten o'clock eight marauders approached from the path. Not seeing me, some of the party installed themselves in the farm, while the rest chased a young pig, which, flying in terror before them, came quite close to the corner where I was lying in ambush. Fortunately he changed his mind, and made off in another direction. Finally, to my great satisfaction, they caught him, and the whole party returned to the farm. They stayed about two hours, and then departed.

'At four in the morning I continued my journey, and at eight o'clock I arrived at Landslaagte, where I joined the Johannesburg Politie.

'Between Landslaagte and Driefontein I met Cronje with about 2,000 men, a Krupp and a Nordenfeldt gun. His intention was to attack Kopjefontein. I reported what I had seen, and went on towards Hoopstad; but my worn-out horse fell when we were still some four hours distant from the town. I was obliged to sleep at a farm, and was unable to reach Hoopstad till the afternoon of Sunday, the 15th. All our seven horses had broken down. We asked for others, which the Landdrost refused. Wrangel accordingly telegraphed to President Steyn, who replied by an order to give us everything we required.

'We took some excellent horses and a few necessary garments, for a three days' journey through the thorns and bush that border the Wet River had reduced us to absolute rags.

'These negotiations and a brief rest occupied Monday and Tuesday. We started on Wednesday at one o'clock, and knowing the road to be safe, we passed through Bultfontein, accomplishing our return journey in a day and a half.

'At Hoopstad we were told that when the Villebois contingent had passed through, all had remarked the gaiety of the General, who had kept the piano going all the evening, and the depression of Breda.'

These last words gave a fresh poignancy to our regrets. Just as the General had been the ideal of the brilliant and revered leader, so had Breda been the ideal of the devoted friend, the good comrade, the man of sound judgment and

charming amenities.

* * * * *

From this report we gathered certain facts hard to explain. We group them here together with others which reached us from a different source.

1. Wrangel and his men, who left Brandfort on the evening of the 9th, arrived at Driefontein at noon on the 13th—in four nights and three and a half days. The General, under the conduct of his Afrikaner guide, took twelve nights and eleven days (from the evening of March 24 to the morning of April 5) to cover an equivalent distance. Now, the length and irregularity of this march were utterly irreconcilable with the object the General had in view, with the dates he had himself fixed, and with the length and severity of the distances he was in the habit of exacting from his men.

2. Numerous desertions took place among the Dutch and the Afrikanders, men who spoke the same language.

3. Finally, and this is a very serious coincidence, a whole English brigade, which retired as soon as it had made the *coup* determined on, was lying in wait for the contingent, the itinerary of which had been kept so strictly secret that only the guide could have known it exactly.

This fact was confirmed by the following statement made to me by an English officer present at the engagement. The General, finding himself surrounded at daybreak, after having marched all night, took up a position on a kopje near the farm of Driefontein. Artillery fire began almost immediately, opened by Battery No. 4 of the Royal Field Artillery.

Throughout the four hours of the engagement the General was seen walking up and down, encouraging first one and then another, and pointing out the spots at which his followers were to fire. His death was followed by the surrender of the decimated band.

The General wore the costume he always put on for expeditions and for the field—a brown hat, fastened up on one side with a badge bearing the arms of the Transvaal; an old black tunic, the large metal buttons of which had been replaced by large black ones; brown corduroy trousers, and shooting-boots, laced in front and buckled at the sides; his revolver in a cross-belt, and at his waist a yellow leather case, containing a chronometer, a barometer and a compass. He always wore brown kid gloves, and carried a bamboo cane. I will not yet express the melancholy thought which, with me, has become a firm conviction; but when I learned the fate of my revered chief, 'the La Fayette of South Africa,' as one of the most distinguished Generals of the French army called him, how could I but remember the disappointments he had suffered during the last six months,

the petty jealousies by which he had been pursued, and the ill-will which had hampered all his bold and intelligent initiative?

Pondering these things, I recalled the day when, before Kimberley, the General had received from France a little gold medal, which he showed me with proud emotion. It bore this inscription: 'To a great Frenchman, from the companions of his daughter.'

Yes, a great Frenchman! For in him flourished all high thoughts of duty and abnegation, all the noble virtues that make up a great leader and a great patriot. He was a man and a soldier.

In this connection it will be of interest to record what my friend and comrade Breda told me, on his return from Saint Helena, of the engagement of April 5. He cannot believe that there was treachery, yet he cannot explain certain strange coincidences.

'We started, as you know,' he said, 'on the evening of March 24. Our guide began by losing his way the first night and the first day. (This confirmed the story told by my man, who came back in two hours, after marching out for thirty-six.)

'At last we arrived at Hoopstad, where an important group of the Dutch contingent refused to advance.

'The General, determined to advance with the French alone, ordered the names of the Dutch who remained faithful to be taken down. A sudden revulsion of feeling made the majority of them give in their names, and the detachment set off in the direction of Boshof.

'At the farm of Driefontein a messenger came in search of the General. A most important communication from a distinguished personage awaited him at Hoopstad. A serious scheme was on foot for the formation of a large legion.

'This project appealed strongly to the General, who left me at Driefontein with the detachment, returning himself to Hoopstad to confer with the envoy. He returned in three days, and the march towards the south was resumed.

'The General supposed that there might be about 200 or 300 men at Boshof, and, on being assured of this, a Boer commando of about 200 men joined us. But on the 4th, information was received that Boshof was much more strongly occupied, and that it might hold from 800 to 1,000 men. The General, believing this story to be an invention of the Burghers to excuse their defection—of which they immediately gave notice—disregarded it, and continued his march.

'We arrived near a farm where, it appears, the English officers at Boshof were in the habit of coming to picnic on Sundays. The General made for a point a little way from this, and halted beside a small kopje. We unsaddled the horses and sent them to graze, and the tired men lay down to sleep.

'I remained talking with General de Villebois, when we suddenly caught sight of a few horsemen.

”The English!”

I went off to wake the men quietly, for we hoped to surprise this little reconnoitring party. There were so few of them that we did not fetch in our horses.

They came nearer. All of a sudden, behind them in the distance a long column of ”khakis” came in sight. It was no longer a question of surprising a patrol. We had to defend ourselves.

The General at once recognised the gravity of the situation. He arranged his men on two little kopjes, the Dutch on one, the French on the other, remaining himself with the latter. Each man had his place assigned him, his rock to defend.

And the battle began—a furious, hopeless encounter. For three hours we replied as well as we could to the tremendous fusillade that soon made gaps among us.

Almost at the outset the Dutch hoisted the white flag and surrendered. Two or three of them who chanced to be with the French contingent came and asked General de Villebois to surrender. He pointed to the kopje where their compatriots had already laid down their arms.

”Here we do not surrender,” he said.

By degrees, however, the first shelters were abandoned, and the men fell back on some rocks beyond. The General noticed this.

”Return to the first positions!” he ordered.

Bullets were falling like hail. There was a moment’s hesitation.

”Shall I go myself?” cried the Chief, advancing.

But a brave fellow springs forward. It is Franck, who had already distinguished himself at Abraham’s Kraal. Waving his rifle with a grand gesture, he cried: ”Vive la France!”

He fell instantly, struck by two bullets. But the impulse had been given; the positions were resumed.

On all sides, however, the ”khakis” were closing in upon us. They fixed their bayonets and charged. Suddenly the General fell back without a word. He was dead.

* * * * *

Whatever the strength and vitality of a man may be, the inert body will fall when the soul takes flight. Villebois was the soul of the legion. Accordingly, when he was killed, the survivors surrendered, after four hours of heroic resistance.

Out of twenty-seven Frenchmen, the General, Le Gilles and Robiquet were killed, Bardin, Bernard, Franck and the others were wounded.

The English officers told us that they had been informed several days before

of the arrival of 100 Frenchmen at Hoopstad, thus confirming the story of the Driefontein farmers.

The Comte de Villebois, one of the youngest colonels in the French army, had been severely wounded as a sub-lieutenant in the army of the Loire in 1870. His conduct had been such as to merit the Cross of the Legion of Honour at the age of twenty.

I will transcribe here, as a touching homage to his memory, the order of the day which Colonel de Nadaillac addressed to his regiment, informing them of the glorious death of their former chief:

'Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil, who had the honour of commanding the 130th Regiment, has died a soldier's death in the Transvaal, shot through the breast by the fragment of a shell.

'Retiring at an early age, at his own request, he took his sword and the resources of his fine intelligence to the aid of the little Boer nation.

'His chivalrous soul could not resist the appeal of those generous sentiments which have so long been a tradition in our fair France. He wished to defend the weak against the strong.

'Let us respectfully salute this victim of the noblest French virtues, this valiant soldier who has fallen on the field of honour.

'The former Colonel of the 130th will be held in loving remembrance by us, and we offer the just tribute of our patriotic regrets to his memory.

'May God have mercy on the brave man who left child, friends, and fortune, to defend the oppressed.

'The death of Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil will be recorded in the regimental annals of the 130th.'

VII

On the 18th we heard that De Wet, after his successes at Taba N'chu and Sanna's Post, was at Wepener, where he had surrounded 2,000 men of Brabant's Horse.

* * * * *

Without orders, and without precise tidings of any kind, we remain five days

longer at Brandfort.

General Delarey seems uncertain what to do. While he is casting about for a plan of action, we may take a glance at our enemies, and study them a little.

In this campaign the English army has collected together elements the most diverse. About one half of it consists of regular troops, the other half of volunteers, colonial troops, and contingents from every country. Their behaviour under fire varies greatly, according to their origin.

Tommy Atkins the regular, cold, calm, advances under a hail of projectiles, marching steadily in time, as if on the parade-ground. Scornful of danger, his head held high, he seems to say: 'Make way! I am an Englishman!'

The colonial, on the other hand, the cowboy, the volunteer from the Cape, from Rhodesia, and from Australia, a hunter by profession, fights in the same fashion as the Boers. He has their qualities and their defects: great precision as a marksman, but a lack of cohesion and of discipline. Crouching behind a rock, taking advantage of every scrap of cover, like his adversary, he hunts rather than fights.

But a good many militiamen, volunteers from various towns, and yeomen are even less brilliant, and exchange perils, privations, and fatigue for a sojourn in a Boer prison with great readiness. Some of the regular regiments, too, brought up to their fighting strength by hasty recruiting at the last moment, are not exempt from the shame of unnecessary capitulations.

But such proceedings are not characteristic of Tommy. The Englishman knows very little of the art of war, but he is brave, very brave.

The officers, with some few exceptions, are ignorant of everything an officer should know. The operations (?) of Sir Charles Warren, Lord Methuen, and Sir Redvers Buller seem to be a sort of competition of lunatics.

General Buller appears to have some inkling of it himself; on December 28 he writes as follows from the camp of Frere:

'I suppose our officers will in time learn the value of scouting; but in spite of all one can say, up to this our men seem to blunder into the midst of the enemy, and suffer accordingly.'

These words from the pen of the General who, on January 24, was to 'authorize' the Spion Kop fiasco are delicious!

The profession of arms in England is an occupation not at all absorbing, but very fashionable, very 'sporting.'

War itself is a sport, which has its special costume, its accidents proper to the soldier, but which is not supposed to engross the man. The fact that a great many officers brought with them, in addition to their khaki uniforms and braided tunics, tennis, football, and polo costumes, dress-coats and smoking-jackets, is significant of this state of mind.

The programme they had mentally drawn up was something of this sort: From 7 to 8 a.m., football, breakfast; from 9 to 10, lawn tennis; from 10 to 11, a battle; then a rest, a tub, massage, lunch!

The English officer is a gentleman, always perfectly well bred, often very well educated, and extremely affable; but he is a gentleman, and not an officer.

War entered upon by men of this type demands neither serious preliminary study nor effective progress in an army; and as regards military art and science, the English are still at the stage of the pitched battle.

It is but just to add that they have also preserved the cool, tenacious courage and the indomitable energy of their race, qualities which none can deny them. I saw some superb charges by English troops in Africa, but they always reminded me of Marechal Pelissier's remark after the heroic charge at Balaclava: 'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre!'

I am no Anglophile, as my campaign of over eight months on the Boer side sufficiently proves, but it is the duty of a loyal soldier to recognise the qualities and the courage of his adversaries.

After this short digression, let us resume our survey of the English army.

During the first months, up to March, their artillery ammunition seems to have been very defective, often exploding imperfectly, or not at all. The fire took a long time to regulate, and was nearly always independent, rarely in salvos. Nevertheless, I several times saw guns served in a remarkably efficient manner.

The horses are superb, and were constantly renewed; throughout the campaign they had from five to six quarterns of oats a day.

Their artillery equipment consists of a variety of very ordinary patterns. They have not yet any field-guns with breaks. The mounted artillery (Royal Horse Artillery) is a picked body of men. Its officers must have served four years in the Field Artillery, and must also be possessed of a certain private income.

Their guns, Armstrongs of 76.2 millimetres, are called 12-pounders (from the weight of the projectile). The Field Artillery uses 89 millimetre guns with 22-pound shells. The breech-blocks are screwed in. The mountain-guns (1882 pattern) are loaded at the muzzle.

The batteries consist of six pieces, with the exception of the volunteer batteries, which have only four.

Their shell-guns, of which even during their operations on the open plain they had a certain number of batteries (notably No. 61 Battery at Spion Kop, and No. 65 Battery at Paardeburg), are howitzers of the latest pattern; they are loaded at the breech, and are specially constructed for fire at a high angle of elevation.

Their naval guns and siege guns, dragged about by teams of from twenty to thirty oxen, were able to follow the troops in a satisfactory manner.

The lyddite shells did not prove very effective. They explode with a loud

and violent report. The green smoke has a stupefying effect; objects such as stones or fragments of shell that come in contact with the explosive take on a sulphur-green tint.

The English used over 300 guns; and if we add to these thirty-five large naval guns, mounted upon siege-gun carriages, and those of the volunteer batteries, we get a total of about 400.

The cavalry has played but a secondary part; but the charges of General French's division at Poplar Grove were vigorously executed, and cost the lives of two officers and some fifty men. The relief of Kimberley by this same division was rather a raid of great rapidity than a cavalry action properly so-called.

The Boer method of warfare explains the powerlessness of the cavalry to take any prominent part in the operations; reconnaissances were carried out by Kaffir spies and Afrikaner irregulars. Cavalry pursuit would, I think, have been perfectly useless, for the Boers would have immediately taken up defensive positions in kopjes inaccessible to horses, and the precision of their fire would soon have proved extremely harassing to the horsemen.

The infantry, to give it greater mobility, was relieved of every kind of impedimenta. The uniform is extremely practical as a whole.

The foot-soldier wears a khaki tunic with pockets, made in the summer of canvas, in the winter of cloth; trousers to match, the lower part bound up in strips of khaki flannel, on the same pattern as those of our Chasseurs Alpins. His helmet is absolutely unsuitable; heavy and ugly, it does not even protect him from the sun.

A big dark-gray cloak, a blanket, and a waterproof tent canvas, which theoretically are supposed to be carried on the back in two little rolls, are as a fact transported on trolleys drawn by mules marching on the left of each company.

The man carries only his canteen and his bandolier. The latter seemed to me too large and heavy to be practical, but the canteen, the lid of which makes a saucepan, seems convenient. It is the same for officers and privates. Each battalion is followed by a little Maxim gun, firing Lee-Metford cartridges.

The Mounted Infantry is, theoretically, an arm of the first importance. In practice it has its partisans and its detractors. I leave the task of authoritative pronouncement to critics more expert than myself, and shall only say that Colonel Martyr's and General Hutton's Mounted Rifles rendered very considerable service to Lord Roberts. The Mounted Rifle has an ordinary cavalry saddle, with a black cloak rolled up on the holsters before him. His uniform is the same as that of the infantry: a tunic, trousers, and flannel bandages. He wears the felt hat of the country. He carries two bandoliers and is armed with the Lee-Metford rifle and with a short bayonet like that of our artillery-men. The butt-end of his gun rests in a bucket hanging on the right of his saddle, and the stock is supported

by a leather thong round the right arm like a lance.

The Mounted Rifle fights on foot, sheltering his horse behind a piece of rising ground. His horse to him is merely a rapid means of transport.

Belts and straps, swords, sheaths and hilts, guns and waggons, are all painted khaki colour.

After enumerating all the weapons used by the belligerents, it would be an unpardonable omission to say nothing of the famous dum-dum bullets.

Have they been much used? Yes, certainly, and on both sides.

The story that the Boers only used those they had captured from the English is quite inadmissible, for the Mauser rifles, which were used exclusively in the Transvaal, were largely provided with them.

I will try to describe the patterns chiefly used:

1. Section in the nickel casing, leaving the extremity of the leaden bullet exposed; the lead, getting very hot, emerges partly from the casing, flattens at the slightest resistance, and expands.

2. Four longitudinal sections in the nickel casing allow the bullet to flatten at the moment of contact, and to exude lead through the apertures.

These two first patterns, the ones most in use, are made for Lee-Metford and Mauser rifles.

The English also use hollow-nosed bullets, the extremity of which is cut or rubbed off.

The Boers, for their part, have manufactured solid projectiles, which show the lead through a straight section, and have the four longitudinal slits.

A few expansive Lee-Metford cartridges, hollow, and filled with fulminate, certainly existed, but I do not believe that they were ever in general use.

I need not insist upon the terrible injuries inflicted by all these projectiles. I have seen the whole of the back of a man's hand carried away by a bullet entering the palm, where it had only made a hole of the normal dimension.

During this war, in an arid country without any towns, Tommy has suffered terribly. Accustomed to the comfort of English barracks and to abundant meals, he was ill-prepared to spend his nights on the hard ground in cold and rain, with stones that bruised his ribs for his only bed, and half a biscuit for his dinner.

Now that we have inspected the English army, let us see what it has accomplished since our arrival.

First of all in Natal. In January, Ladysmith was still invested. The garrison of nearly 10,000 men and the inhabitants were decimated more by disease than by the occasional shells the Boers threw into the town every day as a matter of duty. Provisions had become scarce. An officer's ration was two biscuits and 240 grammes of horseflesh a day.

A dozen eggs cost £2 8s.; a dozen tomatoes, 18s.; a tin of preserved meat,

£3; a tin of condensed milk, 10s.; a pot of jam, £1 11s.; a quarter of a pound of English tobacco, £3; a case containing a dozen bottles of whisky, £140, nearly £12 a bottle.

Nevertheless, a newspaper published by the besieged, the *Lyre*, is still facetious. It publishes the following notes:

'*Telegram from London.*—A shell thrown by *Long Tom* fell in the War Office. General Brackenbury received it with resignation.... A good many reputations have been damaged. The 2nd Army Corps has been discovered in the War Office portfolios.'

Meanwhile, Buller was still trying to cross the Tugela and relieve Ladysmith. Without any definite plan, perplexed and irresolute, he runs up and down the bank of the river like a cat afraid of the water.

At last he 'permits' Warren to attack Spion Kop. It is strange indeed to find Warren's 15,000 men (the 5th Division) and Buller's 25,000 setting out without a map, without information, and without a guide.

On January 16 Lieutenant Flood luckily discovered a ford, by which two battalions crossed the river; but then the Engineers were obliged to await the arrival of Lieutenant Mazzari's sailors to make a ferry.

At Trichardt's Drift two pontoon bridges were built, and the whole of Warren's division crossed.

On the 19th this General essays an out-flanking movement in the direction of Acton Homes; but this manoeuvre at the base of escarpments occupied by the enemy is found to be too dangerous; the division falls back upon Trichardt's Drift with its convoys and the 420 bullock-waggons intended for the Ladysmith garrison.

A frontal attack, facing east, is decided upon for January 20. The infantry is engaged 800 yards from the Boer trenches. It is three o'clock; an assault is about to be made on the position. But a counter-order arrives, the reason for which has never yet been explained.

On the 21st, 22nd and 23rd the English try to gain a few hundred yards. Clery and Warren confess themselves powerless, and turn the attack towards the south-east.

On the night of the 23rd General Woodgate receives orders to seize Spion Kop. General Woodgate, commanding the 9th Brigade, took part in the Abyssinian campaigns of 1868, the Ashanti campaign of 1873, and the Zulu campaign of 1879. Later he was in command of the English forces in West Africa, during the rising of 1898.

He took with him eight companies of the 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, six companies of the 2nd Battalion Royal Lancashire Regiment, two companies of the 1st Battalion South Lancashire Regiment, 194 men of Thorneycroft's Mounted

Infantry, and a half-company Royal Engineers. To these were added two battalions from General Lyttelton's Brigade.

At 3.30 in the morning, after mounting the hill in silence, Lieutenant Audrey, in command of the advance-guard, took two of the Boer trenches with the bayonet. They were held by Boers of the Vryheid commando, who were few in number, and had been completely surprised.

But the Heidelberg and Carolina commandos, under Schalk Burger, came to the rescue. Urged forward by a German commando and by Ricciardi's Italians, they crossed an open space under a hail of bullets and lyddite shells, and established themselves on one of the three spurs formed by the kopje at this point.

The struggle was very fierce. Between nine and eleven the English charged three times with the bayonet and were repulsed. Under the deadly fire of the Mausers and the Maxim-Nordenfeldts they were obliged to fall back gradually, before any serviceable reinforcements had reached them.

Woodgate, mortally wounded, was replaced by Colonel Thorneycroft; the latter received neither orders nor instructions, though it would have been easy to have established optical telegraph communication, as the heliograph was working between Mount Alice and Bester Farm (Redvers Buller and White).[#]

[#] A heliograph was working on the height, but 'the signallers and their apparatus were destroyed by the heavy fire' (*vide* Sir Charles Warren's report).-TRANSLATOR.

His position had become most critical; a council of war was hastily called, on the decision of which the height was evacuated under cover of night.

On January 25 Sir Redvers Buller, who had hastened to Warren's camp, was informed of this catastrophe, which upset all his combinations. A general retreat was determined on, and the troops recrossed the Tugela.

After this bloody check, General Buller's report of the movement is delicious:

'The fact that we were able to withdraw our ox-waggon and mule transports over a river 85 yards broad and with a rapid current, without any interference from the enemy, is, I think, a proof that they have learnt to respect the fighting powers of our soldiers.'

The 'lesson' he had given the Boers had cost him 307 killed, thirty-one of whom were officers; 175 wounded, of whom forty-nine were officers; and 347 prisoners and missing, among them seven officers.

The Boers had 168 men killed. And, as Ricciardi has pointed out, but for the incomprehensible opposition of General Joubert, this retreat across the Tugela

would have been, not a proof that the enemy had learnt to respect the fighting powers of the English, but a terrific rout. For General Louis Botha, surrounded by a dozen guns, was watching the English passing over their pontoons from the heights he had defended the night before. They were well within range, and the gunners were at their posts. It wanted but an order, the pontoons would have been destroyed, and Warren's division, hemmed in by the river, would have been massacred to a man. Why was this order not given?

In March, even before the death of the Generalissimo, a terrible word had been whispered—treason! At any rate, his inaction was highly culpable, for if the struggle seems hopeless now, there was a time when he might have turned it into victory, and made it another Majuba Hill campaign.

We know that Joubert's ignorance was almost incredible, that he could not even use a map, and that he stubbornly refused to learn. His attitude at the time of Warren's retreat and in certain other circumstances no doubt gave colour to the rumours of poisoning which followed the General's sudden death in March. It is conceivable that some Burgher, carried away by patriotic zeal, did not hesitate to commit a crime that the supreme command might pass into more faithful or bolder hands....

Later on, when I was a prisoner in the English camp, I said one day in jest to a young sub-lieutenant:

'You lost one of your best generals in March.'

'Who do you mean?'

'Joubert.'

Seeing his air of surprise and annoyance, a superior officer who was present said, with a smile:

'You are right!'

On February 1 the positions of the belligerents had undergone no very notable modification since the beginning of the war. We will recapitulate them for the last time, for English reinforcements were arriving from every side. Lord Roberts had assumed the supreme command, the besieged towns were shortly to be delivered, and the war was to enter upon an active phase.

In the north, in Rhodesia, General Carrington was at Marondellas, and Colonel Plumer at Safili Camp, near Buluwayo.

At Mafeking, Colonel Baden-Powell is made a Lieutenant-General. 'The Wolf who never sleeps,' as his men call him, is still besieged by Snyman.

Colonel Kekewich at Kimberley is surrounded by the troops of Du Toit, Kolby, Delarey, and Ferreira.

General Cronje, to the south of Kimberley, is well informed as to Lord Roberts' preparations, but he pays no heed to them, and meets all Villebois' far-

seeing counsels with the stock phrase: 'I was a general when you were still a child.'

Schoeman is near Colesberg, facing General French.

Olivier, to the north of Burghersdorp, confronts Gatacre.

Botha and Schalk Burgher, on the north bank of the Tugela, hold in check Buller and Warren on the south bank, near Colenso.

Finally, Joubert, Prinsloo, and Lucas Meyer are round Ladysmith, where General White is still imprisoned.

On February 5 Buller, after deploying his troops as if for a frontal attack in the direction of Potgieter, at last crossed the Tugela at the foot of Dorn Kop. If perseverance deserves a reward, he has certainly earned one.

But the period of sieges draws to a close. The war is entering on another phase. Lord Roberts has completed his concentration, his orders are given, the invasion begins.

VIII

On February 10 the Field Marshal concentrated three divisions on the Modder River: Kelly-Kenny (6th), Tucker (7th), and Colvile (9th). Then he secretly assembled the cavalry, grouped into three brigades (those of Broadwood, Porter, and Gordon), under General French. The latter, supported by seven mounted batteries and six field batteries, started in the night of the 11th-12th, reached Rooidam, continued by way of Potgieter's Farm, brushed aside General Ferreira, and entered Kimberley on Thursday, February 15, at half-past five in the evening.

The surprise was complete, as we know!

Meanwhile, Lord Roberts had not been idle. On the 15th, Maxwell's Brigade occupied Jacobsdal, and Lord Kitchener was pressing Cronje, who was retiring upon Paardeburg.

French, his raid accomplished, joined Kitchener by way of Koodoesrand, and on the 17th the whole of Roberts' force surrounded the Boer General.

After a ten days' defence, more heroic than reasonable—for he might have broken through with De Wet's help—Cronje, crushed by the terrible fire of 90 cannon,[#] bore out Colonel de Villebois' prediction, being forced to surrender unconditionally on February 27, at 7.30 a.m.

[#] Lord Roberts had 6 field batteries, 1 howitzer battery, 7 horse batteries, and 5 naval guns—90 pieces in all, to be exact.

Lord Roberts telegraphed as follows to the War Office:

'PAARDEBURG, 7.45 a.m.

'General Cronje is now a prisoner in my camp. The strength of his force will be communicated later. I hope Her Majesty's Government will consider this event satisfactory, occurring as it does on the anniversary of Majuba.'

It was afterwards announced by the War Office that the General had surrendered two Krupp guns, one belonging to the Orange Free State, and two Maxims, one of these also belonging to the Orange Free State, 4,000 men, of whom 1,150 were Free Staters, and 47 officers, 18 of them Free Staters. Among the officers was the artillery commandant Albrecht, formerly an Austrian officer.

In Natal, on the 28th, Lord Dundonald entered Ladysmith, the siege of which had been raised at six in the evening, preceding a convoy of provisions which arrived on the morning of March 2.

Lord Roberts did not linger long on the banks of the Modder River. After giving his troops a short rest while he went with Kitchener to visit Kimberley, where he was the guest of Cecil Rhodes, he continued his march upon Bloemfontein. On the 7th he was at Poplar Grove, on the 10th at Abraham's Kraal—he called the battle fought here Driefontein—and on the 13th he entered the capital of the Orange Free State.

'BLOEMFONTEIN,

'*March 13, 8 p.m.*

'By God's help, and thanks to the bravery of Her Majesty's soldiers, the troops under my command have taken possession of Bloemfontein. The British flag is now flying over the President's house, which was last night abandoned by Mr. Steyn, the late President of the Orange Free State.

'Mr. Fraser, a member of the former executive, the mayor, the secretary of the late Government, the Landdrost and other functionaries, came to meet me two miles out of the town, and handed me the keys of the Government offices.

'The enemy has retired from the neighbourhood, and all seems calm. The inhabitants of Bloemfontein gave our troops a hearty reception.

'ROBERTS.'

Lord Roberts's first operation was accomplished; he established a solid base at

Bloemfontein, accumulating a great quantity of provisions there, a very wise measure to take before throwing his troops into a hostile country, impoverished by five months of warfare, the resources of which had already been heavily laid under contribution by the Boers. At the same time his troops radiated round the former capital to drive off the little commandos that were still hovering about in the neighbourhood.

The 9th Division, under General Colville, was broken up to keep communications open, and its chief returned to England.

Such was the situation when, on Monday, April 23, we received orders to saddle at seven in the morning. We started at 8.30, with two days' rations.

The direction is the same as before, towards the south. But after the counter-order of last Monday, we feel no great confidence as to the object of this new manoeuvre. We have christened these starts 'the Monday morning exercises.'

This time, it seems, that while De Wet is busy at Wepener with Brabant's Horse, which he is still surrounding, a strong column is to attempt to cut him off from the north, by establishing a line between Bloemfontein and the frontier of Basutoland. We are to oppose this movement and enable De Wet to pass.

We arrive in the plain watered by the Onspruit about five in the evening. We bivouac there with Lorentz's Germans, with whom we are still grouped. The nights begin to be cold. During the evening 1,000 men and two 75 millimetre Creusot guns arrive.

In Botha's camp, close by, there are still from 300 to 400 men, a Krupp gun, an Armstrong, and a Nordenfeldt.

On the morning of the 24th a reinforcement of from 200 to 300 men arrives. Our total strength is from 1,500 to 1,800 men.

We remain in bivouac, but on the 25th our provisions are exhausted, and they re-victual us by driving a flock of sheep across the plain. Each group of five or six men takes one. Part of the flesh is grilled over a fire of cow-dung—the only fuel available in the Veldt—and the rest, cut into quarters, is slung on the saddles for next day.

For the last two days the luminous balloon of the English has been visible all the evening till midnight.

In the afternoon we get orders to start for the Waterworks, to the east of Bloemfontein, which the English have recaptured from General Lemmer. We are to take provisions for several days; but the English, it seems, are close behind us. They have come down into the plain, and the road from here to Brandfort is very insecure.

At three o'clock in the afternoon Wrangel, two former officers in the German army, Couves, De Loth, and I, set out to fetch a trolley loaded with neces-

saries for the two corps.

We arrive at Brandfort towards midnight. Captain D—, whom we meet here, gives us the news from France. The Théâtre Français was burnt down on March 9, and Mdlle. Henriot was one of the victims of the catastrophe. We also hear of the explosion at Johannesburg. A telegram says that the fort blew up on the 24th. But we learn later that it was Begbie's factory and not the fort that exploded. Another telegram, relating to the fight at Boshof, says that Prince Bagration is not dead, but wounded only. A lieutenant of marines named Gilles was killed. This is all we have in the way of details, for the official list of the losses of April 5 has not yet appeared.

As regards the explosion, the following information may be of interest.

The citadel of Johannesburg was not constructed with a view to defending the town, but, on the contrary, with the idea of bombarding it. This curious arrangement calls for some explanation.

On January 1, 1896, Dr. Jameson, coming from the east, was checked at Krugersdorp with his contingent, which prevented the execution of his *coup de main*. But at the news of his arrival a number of Uitlanders, for the most part English, had armed. Forming themselves into commandos, and reinforced by a battery of Maxims smuggled in among machines for use in the mines, they bivouacked on the heights of Yeoville, commanding Johannesburg, to await and join the men of the Chartered Company.

After this escapade the Transvaal Government, in order to work upon the loyal sentiments of its good city of Johannesburg, presented it with a fort, which, situated in a prominent position in the town, would have been capable in a very few minutes of correcting any ill-timed manifestations of sympathy to which its inhabitants might be inclined to give way in the future.

The Begbie factory was used for the manufacture of projectiles. With comparatively primitive methods and absolutely inexperienced workmen, the making and charging of shells of all the patterns in use in our own artillery had been carried on here. Every evening from 700 to 800 were despatched in every direction.

For a long time past, directly after war was declared, the English who had been expelled had publicly predicted an explosion at this factory. On February 2 a telegram from Durban announced that this explosion had taken place. The manager, Mr. Grünberg, had even vainly called the attention of the police to a house close to the powder magazine.

To be brief, a terrible explosion took place on the 24th, killing some hundred persons, and destroying a quarter of the town.

This was in the main what the inquiry that took place afterwards brought to light:

A little mine containing black powder had been dug in the suspected house, close to the dynamite reserve of the powder magazine. The authors of the explosion had afterwards connected the mine with the electric light of their rooms; then they had departed quietly to a place of safety, having still half a day to spare. In the evening, at five o'clock, when the electric light works turned on the current to distribute light in the town, the explosion was produced automatically. The guilty persons were never discovered.

* * * * *

We spent our evening discussing all this news, and then went to bed in our encampment. On the morning of the 26th we loaded a trolley, to which we had harnessed eight strong mules, with cartridges, biscuit, and a few other necessary provisions. We started at two o'clock in the afternoon, and arrived late in the evening at a farm where an ambulance was installed.

We bivouacked several hundreds of metres off, as we were urgently recommended to do by the doctor, who was accompanied by his wife. He took advantage of the Geneva Convention to protect his domestic peace, no doubt with an eye to Wrangel, who is a very pretty fellow!

I do not know if the legislator foresaw such a case as this!

Our dinner was furnished by the roosters of the farmyard, which three of our number had initiated in the laws of hospitality. Certain protestations are raised by the victims, during which I call and scold my poor Nelly, who is lying perfectly innocent at my feet. But the ambulance men will think it was she who was pursuing the poultry.... One should always try to save appearances.

We take a very light sleep, and towards three o'clock a Kaffir comes to tell us that he has just met a numerous band of English. We harness up rapidly, and make off still more rapidly at a hand-gallop, while in the dawning light we make out the scouts of the enemy on the neighbouring kopjes.

All day we marched across the plain without a guide, and at six in the evening we reached Botha's camp. Our comrades, who had gone off on a little reconnaissance, which proved to be fruitless, came in at about 8.30.

A rumour that we had been taken prisoners together with the trolley had preceded us; it had been brought in by the Irish Americans, and confirmed by a heliographic message from the commissary at Brandfort.

On the 28th all the Europeans were told to hold themselves in readiness to start as an advanced guard. I meet with a very cordial reception from the officers of the staff, for I find among them the Adjutant,[#] Marais, who was with us at Poplar Grove. The order to start was given at two in the afternoon.

[#] The title of Adjutant to a Boer General often corresponds to that of head of the staff, and not to the subordinate rank implied by the grade in France.

We have just heard that Von Loosberg, an ex-lieutenant of the German army, whom we knew at Abraham's Kraal, and who had since taken service in the artillery, had received seven Maxim bullets at Dewetsdorp, two in the head and five in the body. He recovered!

At five o'clock we reach a little stream. Here we are to encamp for three days. From 1,200 to 1,500 are gathered here with Botha, Delarey and Kolby. The tents are set up a little apart. We are very comfortable.

At about 8.30 we had finished dinner, and were about to seek a well-earned repose; several of the party were already rolled up in their blankets. Suddenly there was a noise of the tramp of horses and strange murmurs. We went in search of information. All the camp was astir, and the Boers were making off quietly.

'The English! Be off!'

We struck our tents hastily, saddled our horses, and harnessed the mules, without getting any more precise information, and then we joined in the general retreat. The questions we ask call forth answers precisely like those given by young recruits at their first manoeuvres.

'The enemy!'

'Where?'

'Over there!'

A sweeping gesture embraces the whole horizon; the indication is all the more vague in that it is ten o'clock, and that the night is very dark.

'Are there many of them?'

'I don't know.'

'Which way are they going?'

'I don't know.'

I almost think that if one asked rather sharply, 'Did you see them?' the man would answer, 'No.'

Nevertheless, the convoy takes an easterly direction, and the men are so disposed as to cover the retreat. We are on a rocky kopje swept by an icy wind. Thinking we were to bivouac again further on, we had packed up our cloaks and rugs on the trolley. Our benumbed fingers can no longer grasp our rifles; we shiver, swear, and sneeze in chorus. It was a horrible experience!

After a night that seemed interminable, dawn and sunlight put an end to our torture. During the morning certain information is brought in. The camp has been broken up, 1,500 men have been mobilized, and have spent the night on the *qui vive*. A patrol of thirteen Lancers passed close by.

The 29th is a Sunday. The Boers sing hymns. We pitch our tents again about two hours' distance from our camp of the night before.

On the 30th, at eight o'clock, orders are given to transport our laager to the foot of the high kopjes we see four or five miles off in the direction of Taba N'chu.

Towards 9.30 the Maxim suddenly opens fire, without our having seen or heard anything to account for it. We gallop off to the kopjes straight in front of us, making for one of the highest, which is called Taba N'berg. But a field-cornet comes after us at a gallop, and sends us more to the left to join General Kolby. It is all the same to us, as we know nothing of what is on hand. We take up a position on a little rocky peak.

The kopjes form a large semicircle, slightly oval, the curve of which lies to the north-east and the opening to the south-east. A group of trees in the midst of the arid yellow basin is Taba N'chu. To the west of our position twenty miles off is Bloemfontein. All the bottom of the vast hollow is full of men in khaki.

It is ten o'clock. We have one cannon on our left, and on our right, between us and the big kopje, another cannon and a Maxim gun. Later in the day two or three Grobler guns appeared on the scene. One English battery took up a position about 4,000 metres from us, then another, distributing common shell and shrapnel all along our line. A brisk fusillade was also brought to bear upon us at a long range (about 2,500 yards).

Judging the distance to be too great for effective rifle-fire, we did not respond to this, but did our best with our guns. At eleven o'clock, however, our Maxim was silenced.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Volunteers and the Royal Irish charged our right wing four times, and finally succeeded in establishing themselves on the flank of the incline, which was relatively slight on their side.

Von Braschel was killed, and Brostolowsky, both former officers in the German army; also Baudin, a former sergeant of marines, who had served his fifteen years, and had come to the Transvaal while waiting for the liquidation of his retiring pension.

About 4.30 we were ourselves vigorously charged by the infantry, but a brisk fire, unerringly delivered, dispersed those who did not fall.

The fighting ceased with the day. In the evening, owing to the unexpected nature of the engagement, we had neither provisions nor coverings. A box of sardines between ten of us was our dinner, and the intense cold debarred us from the sleep that would have consoled us for our missing meal.

We remained in position, and at daybreak on May 1 the battle began again.

With the Germans, we were sent to occupy the big kopje against which the English attack had been most violent the night before. Its dominant position

made it of great strategic value; but the Boers who had held it were guilty of the disastrous negligence, only too habitual with them, of retiring from it in order to sleep comfortably, instead of strengthening their position upon it.

The English, on the other hand, had spent the night digging trenches, and were firmly established on the ground they had gained in the two days. From the very beginning, therefore, our position was less favourable.

The ascent of Taba N'berg by a rocky, steep, and almost precipitous incline took about thirty-five minutes. So rugged was the hillside that it was impossible to use litters to bring down the wounded. We were forced to drag them down by the feet, or to make them slide down sitting. Our shelters were therefore often stained with long trails of blood.

Our horses were left at the bottom of the hill, without anyone on guard as usual. On reaching the top, we were greeted by steady infantry fire and by a few shrapnel shells, which we received without responding till ten o'clock. Then, leaning a little upon our right, we began to fire. We numbered about a hundred-fifty foreigners, and as many Boers; for the majority of those who had been with us the night before—perhaps 500 Europeans, and a rather smaller number of Burghers—had returned to the laager, and had not come back.

It is true that the day had been a hard one for them, and that they had had to bear the brunt of the battle under a heavy artillery fire.

Up to this moment nothing serious had been attempted. But about eleven o'clock the whole of the Royal Canadian contingent arrived in open formation. They were greeted on their passage by our two 75 millimetre guns, which had taken up a position on our left at the foot of the kopje.

I heard afterwards that the guns, though they had been remarkably well laid, had not been very effective, the shells with fuses having fallen without exploding. In consequence of this, only two or three men, who had been struck full by the shells as if they had been bullets, had been killed. Several others were knocked over by the shock, but picked themselves up unharmed. I got this information later from a superior officer of an English regiment who had been present in the engagement.

About one o'clock, without any order and without any reason, the Boers, who were occupying another little kopje on our left, forsook their position. The English artillerymen at once rushed forward, and now began to fire upon us at a distance of 3,500 metres. Then, all at once, there was a cry of, 'To the horses!' At our feet, behind us in the plain, a regiment of Lancers, who had come round the big kopje where we were stranded as on an island, sweep forward in loose order, to seize our horses which are sheltered below.

There is a rush to protect them. A few Boers, coming from I know not whence, took ambush in a little spruit, and drove off the Lancers by a withering

fire; but while this feint was being carried out, the English made another rush forward, more serious than the first. A fierce fusillade was kept up on both sides.

We are now only hanging on to the kopje by the left corner.

Suddenly, not having been able to seize our horses, the enemy open a terrible artillery fire upon them obliquely. The Boers retreat before it, and the position becomes untenable; we have only just time to reach our horses. As we come down the kopje, one of my comrades, who is a great declaimer of verse, recites 'Rolla'; but his memory fails him at a certain verse, and he asks me to help him out. I reply that I don't know 'Rolla,' but my answer is cut short by a shell which, passing between us, bursts and carries off the head of a Burgher clean from the nape of the neck.

And through the crash of shells and the whistle of bullets I hear a few metres off the voice of my friend De C— speaking to someone I cannot see:

'It was at Tabarin, you know.'

At last we reach the horses; Buhors arrives, bringing the water-bottles he has filled at a little spring a hundred metres off under a hail of projectiles. An ambulance is on the spot, riddled with bullets, and the doctor, admirably calm, tends the wounded, while the natives hastily harness the mules. We see two or three more men fall; a horse drops disembowelled by a shell; then we are in the saddle.

Four or five men, who were firing at us from a distance of about 200 metres on top of the kopje we had just abandoned, and the battery which was working away unceasingly 3,000 yards off, had got us in an angle of fire. The ground was ploughed up by a hail of projectiles, and the shower of bullets raised thousands of little clouds.

A hard gallop of 2,000 metres under these convergent fires carried us pretty well out of danger.

A German, with a long fair beard, whom I knew well, galloped past me. He had no coat, no hat, no arms; his horse had neither saddle nor bridle; he was guiding it by a halter. Pale, with staring eyes, his face contracted, he dashed past me. There was a large blood-stain on his shirt. He had been shot right through the body!

It was half-past two o'clock.

These two days cost us twenty killed, among them six Europeans, and about fifty wounded, of whom twenty were Europeans.

Scarcely had we got beyond range, when we met Botha, who posted us on a little slope. There were about sixty of us. Then Botha went off. When he had disappeared, a Burgher went slowly up to his horse, mounted it, and left the field. Another followed him, just as slowly, then a third. Soon there were only about fifteen Europeans left.

We could see nothing on the horizon, neither convoy nor retreating troops. We in our turn departed, saluted by a few shells.

Here and there a few wounded, and one or two men who had lost their horses, were going away. No one knew what had become of the army.

IX

At last we meet General Olivier's troops, marching to the north-west. They appear to know nothing of the battle. Scarcely have we gone 100 metres with them before we are stopped by a battery, which opens fire upon us. The English form a semicircle round us. The situation is serious. We make off across the Veldt, towards the east, till far on in the night. We sleep on the ground, keeping a sharp look-out.

On the next day, Tuesday, at dawn, we set out again, describing a wide circle, first to the east, then to the north, and finally to the west. It proved lucky for us that we had done so, for we were behind the English columns marching on Brandfort and Winburg.

Finally, always making our way across the Veldt, we arrived at Brandfort on the 4th about eight o'clock in the morning.

Oh, how thankful we were to be in our camp and in our tents again! What a tub we had! what a breakfast! and what a sleep we look forward to when night comes!

While waiting for the preparation of a serious meal, we set to work to grill a few chops. They have scarcely been on the embers more than two minutes, when we hear Pom! pom! pom!

There is no time for breakfast. To horse! We swallow our raw cutlets, and gallop off.

Four men stay behind to strike the camp, and we take up a position to the south-east of Brandfort, on the kopjes that command the plain.

In the distance, about eight kilometres off, we see the English convoys already making for Brandfort. They are pretty confident.

To the right, a battery, of which we can distinguish the escort, silences the cannon nearest us by killing the gunners. Then a second battery advances at a trot on the left in the plain, and crosses the fire of the first.

The Boers watch this manoeuvre with great interest, discussing it and giv-

ing their opinions on it. Then, as the battery halts and takes up a position, slowly but surely, they all make for their horses.

Scarcely are the first shells fired before they are in their saddles, decamping at full speed.

Our two 75-millimetre guns come up, and throw a few shells from a distance, with no result.

It is always the same. They watch the enemy's operations without interfering, and when they want to act, it is too late.

It is two o'clock. Our waggons went off long ago, but the road is encumbered with a long string of vehicles.

The roads to Smaldeel and Winburg are cut off. There is an indescribable throng on the Veldt; each person is going in his own direction. The confusion is complete.

C— and I go off to try and find our baggage, for since the 1st we have had no news of the trolley, which is with Michel and a few comrades. The rest of the carts may very well have been captured, like so many others, either near Winburg or near Smaldeel.

My friend, always full of foresight, had taken the precaution of putting a pot of peach jam in his pocket when we started in the morning. On this we dined without a scrap of biscuit.

Late in the evening we arrived at a farm, from whence we were shown the English outposts on a kopje opposite. During the night the owners of the farm went off in a cart. Kaffirs kept watch to warn us should any attempt be made on our refuge. We slipped away at daybreak, and arrived at Smaldeel towards noon on the 5th.

The retreat continued. Each day was marked by a skirmish, though no serious engagement took place except at Zand River on the 9th. There the fighting was pretty hot. The Boers of our right wing were driven back, while the Germans, who were in front, held the bed of the river, which makes an angle at this point. The English column advanced, greatly outnumbering the Germans, who were very nearly taken. They ordered the Boers to stand firm to allow them to disengage themselves, but the panic-stricken Burghers would not stop. Then, without receiving any orders, the Germans, moved by a feeling of deep and legitimate anger, once more summoned the fugitives to fight, and on their refusal, poured a volley into them at a distance of about 200 metres. Several fell; the rest, cowed by this prompt action, returned to their positions, held the English column in check for a few moments, and gave the Germans time to disengage themselves.

On the 12th French had arrived first at Kroonstad by one of his usual outflanking movements. The surprise had been complete. Fortunately our carts had

left the day before.

Since the 8th Heilbron had become the seat of government of the Free State.

The Irish Brigade,[#] nearly all of whom were drunk after the sacking of the stores, had been made prisoners for the most part.

[#] A certain number of Irish, commanded by Colonel Blake, had taken service with the Boers under the name of the Irish Brigade.

The railway-station, which served as a commissariat store, had been burnt to the ground with all the provisions, which there had been no time to save.

Everyone was worn out. Lorentz had been shot in two places at Zand River; Wrangel too was wounded. Everywhere where resistance had been necessary the Boers had not stood against a dozen shells.

The retreat continued to Vereeniging; we arrived there on the 14th. The most contradictory rumours were freely circulated. On the 12th, Mafeking was said to have been taken by the Boers; on the 13th the news was confirmed; on the 14th it was denied.

The town, it appeared, had very nearly been taken by a hundred foreigners; but getting no support from the Boers, they had failed in their attempt, and seventy-two of them had been killed.

On the morning of the 17th we were said to have captured eighteen guns at Mafeking. The following telegram, signed by General Snyman, had even been published:

'This morning I had the good fortune to take prisoner Baden-Powell and his 900 men.'

In the evening it was reported that we had suffered a check, and had lost ten guns.

The last report was, unhappily, the only true one.

Baden-Powell, whom Lord Roberts had asked in April to hold on till May 18, had been relieved on the 17th, after a siege of 118 days.

The last few days, it seems, had been very hard ones, for on April 22 the ration had been reduced to 120 grammes of meat and 240 grammes of bread a day.

The little garrison had been greatly tried, losing more than half of its numbers during this siege, the longest in modern times after those of Khartoum (341 days) and Sebastopol (327 days), though a trifling affair as compared with the ten years of Troy, or the twenty-nine years of Azoth recorded by Herodotus.

We found our waggons awaiting us at Vereeniging on the 15th; we were

thoroughly disgusted, as may be supposed. We had been retreating and retreating continuously, without a struggle, without an effort, offering no resistance.

However, we found that a *Long Tom* had been brought up, mounted on a truck. It was protected by a steel shield and a rampart of sandbags. A second truck, also casemated with logs and sandbags, served as a magazine for powder and shell. But the kind of armoured train thus formed remained idle in the railway-station.

I inquired whether we were to attempt an attack and push forward. The answer was that we could not venture to cross the Vaal with the gun, because it was feared that the Free State Boers, who were displeased at the war, might blow up the railway bridge while the 'armoured train' was in the Orange territory, and thus deliver it into the hands of the English. Such was the spirit of confidence that reigned!

In spite of all this, we wished to try once more to organize an effective foreign legion. De Malzan, a former officer in the German army, was appointed Adjutant of the Uitlanders' Corps under Blignault, by the Government of Pretoria; his commission was signed by Reitz and Souza. He went, his jaw still bandaged for a wound received at Platrand, to confer with General Botha. He was very badly received.

'I do not recognise anyone's right to make appointments. Blignault is not a General, and you are nothing at all. The Europeans can all go back to their own countries. I don't want them. My Burghers are quite enough for me'—a remark he might have spared the European legion, which, out of about 280, had in the last two months lost fifteen killed, nineteen prisoners and eighty-seven wounded on the battlefields of Boshof, Taba N'chu, Brandfort and Zand River.

Anxious to clear up the question definitively, I left my camp on the other side of the Vaal, and made for Pretoria on the evening of the 18th in a coal-truck.

On the 19th I found Lorentz there. He had been made a Colonel. We held a council of war—Lorentz, still lame from his two wounds; Wrangel, with his arm in a sling; Rittmeister Illich, the Austro-Hungarian, and myself. It was decided that we should lay before the President a scheme of organization, from which I will quote a passage, as it shows the state of mind in which we all were:

'We earnestly hope that on the lines we have laid down, and with the active support of the Government—which no one has yet obtained—a good result may be achieved.

'This plan, taking into account the rapidity with which events are following one upon another, depends for its success on the swiftness with which it is carried out. But we much fear that a fresh rebuff from the Government, after so many others, would irrevocably discourage its well-wishers.'

* * * * *

We obtained an interview with De Korte, who had influence. He approved the plan, but feared to see it fail, like so many others. Our representations became more and more pressing.

On the 24th I went to Johannesburg to see Dr. Krause, who is also influential. He was very amiable, but irresolute, and did not know what to say.

* * * * *

The English continued to advance. A despatch-rider came to tell me that my convoy had arrived. It joined me, indeed, at Johannesburg on the 26th, without any 'boys,' all of them having deserted; the waggons battered and broken by fording the rivers, the beasts dead or exhausted by a journey without rest or food, the men worn out by continual vigilance, and by their double duties as 'boys' and combatants, disgusted at the retreat and the disorder.

Many of them laid down their arms, and found work at the cartridge-factory and in the mines at from twenty-five to thirty shillings a day. One, more desperate than the rest, left his arms with us, and went off to the English lines to surrender. Only a very few remained, waiting for the President's decision as a last resource.

The Landdrost allots a piece of waste ground to the twenty mules, twenty-one oxen, thirty-two horses and two 'boys,' which constitute the debris of our convoy. The men find lodging where they can.

On Sunday, the 27th, one of my men arrived from Pretoria with a letter from Lorentz, dated Saturday morning. The scheme had been signed and approved. Afterwards he handed me a proclamation by Lorentz, dated the evening of the same day. At two o'clock everything was retracted and refused. Furious and despairing, Colonel Lorentz adjured all the foreigners to lay down their arms:

'As the honourable Government of the Z.A.R. cannot accede to our modest but just demands, we, the foreigners of various nationalities, being without means of livelihood, are no longer in a position to sacrifice our lives for the maintenance of the Federated Republics.

'I, the under-signed, hitherto commandant of the international corps, hereby invite all persons who voluntarily joined me to lay down their arms on Tuesday, May 29, 1900, at ten o'clock in the morning, at the Old Union Club at Pretoria, or at any other place where they may happen to be.

'(Signed) C. LORENTZ.

'HAUPTMANN v. L.'

I hesitated to show the proclamation to my companions, they were already so depressed.

On the morning of Monday, the 28th, a policeman, furnished with an order from the Landdrost, requisitioned our beasts at the grazing-ground without even giving us notice. I believe he sold them. I had almost certain proof of this later on. We never found them again.

In the night three of our waggons out of the five were pillaged in spite of the man on guard. Such behaviour to Europeans who were being cut up into mincemeat for them! ... It was too much! The cup was full. I handed Lorentz's proclamation to the men. It did not raise a regret; they were all sick of the business.

Those in authority had refused them a few shillings, scarcely the pay of a Kaffir, of which they were sorely in need, for they were utterly destitute, and had not the means to escape from the English and return to their countries.

And now the authorities were taking advantage of our exhaustion to steal our horses—under a pretext of legality—to give, or, rather, to sell them to Boers who were going back quietly to their farms. For if a few thousand still stood their ground, the majority had lost heart, and had returned to their homes, only leaving them when their wives, more patriotic than themselves, drove them back to the front.

It was generally the old men, those who had taken part in the 'Great Treks,' who set the example of resistance. These men have inherited the virtues of their ignorant and rustic ancestors. If they can read at all, the Bible is their only book; and even if they cannot read it, they know its grand pages, and try to live up to its precepts.

Many Burghers of the younger generation, on the other hand, have inhabited towns; they have become greedy of gain, very English in their habits and customs, and have lost the principal virtues of their race, substituting for them the faults, often much aggravated, of those who have given them the shady civilization of South African cities.

In the army of Natal, round about Amajuba, there were seven guns and about 200 men. Of these just *six were Burghers*, the rest were Afrikanders and foreigners. And while former officers and non-commissioned officers of the European artillery were begging for cannon, two of these seven guns were idle for want of men to serve them.

They prefer to leave them thus rather than to give them over to foreigners. I was told this by a Burgher, an artilleryman of twenty, who was going to his post. I travelled with him from Pretoria to Elandsfontein on the morning of May 24. He himself did not conceal his indignation at this method of proceeding.

At Pretoria the Government had given up all pretence of action. A general

panic seemed to reign. Rumour reported that influential persons were mainly occupied in dividing the public money among themselves.

It is a fact that none of the tradespeople, whether they were hotel-keepers who had lodged and fed troops on presentation of requisition warrants, or dealers in clothes and provisions, had been paid. They all now declined to lodge persons or provide goods for the State.

A woman, Mrs. S. D., who had had a contract for saddles, was obliged, after many fruitless appeals, to enter the Government offices horsewhip in hand, like Louis XIV. when he intimidated his Parliament.

Thanks to this vigorous proceeding, she received a credit-note, on which a certain number of bars of gold were given her, for the national bank-notes had fallen to about two-thirds of their nominal value. But this was an exceptional case, and most of the trades-people were less fortunate.

What became of the gold that for eight months was taken out of seven mines working for the State? No one knows!

It is true that, from the highest functionary to the humblest Burgher, all were intent on the most shameless pillage. I saw army contractors, on whom no sort of check existed, charged with the provision of every kind of necessary, food, clothing, horses, oxen, etc., and making fine fortunes in no time; while the honest and worthy Boer received from the State horses and harness which he afterwards sold to it again with the utmost coolness.

I know, too, that very large sums were devoted to a press propaganda in favour of the South African Republics. And how many skilful middlemen, by means of round sums judiciously distributed, secured orders for the most expensive and useless commodities!

In all countries and in all ages it is notorious that out of ten army contractors nine are thieves and one is a rogue, especially in war-time. Their depredations date back to the institution of armies, and the Boer contractors had only to follow on a path already clearly marked out for them by their European confrères. But few of these have displayed such a degree of proficiency in their calling.

I might quote the case of a famous Parisian firm of balloonists, to which nearly 10,000 francs were paid in ready money for waterproof silk, cord, and various utensils for the construction of a balloon. An aeronaut was also engaged at a salary of 2,000 francs a month, all expenses paid, and when he arrived at Machadodorp, where the President was at the time, he was greeted with:

'A balloon? What for?'

After awaiting a solution for three weeks, the aeronaut returned to France, noting on his return journey a number of stray packages on the quay at Lourenço Marques. They contained the silk and the rest of the apparatus.

It was by a scientific application of these Boer principles that Mrs. S. D.

came by the very pretty sum we have seen her collecting with her horsewhip!

She had engaged to deliver 500 saddles a week at £10 each; but a good many of the Burghers to whom the saddles were distributed sold them back to the worthy lady's agents for £4 or £5, and she then sold them again to the State, after changing the more conspicuous of them a little. So that these wretched saddles were always reappearing on the scene, as in a review at the Châtelet; but each of their migrations brought in a solid sum to Mrs. D—.

It is not difficult to see why there was no money for the combatants.

X

After forty-eight hours of fighting from Elandsfontein to Florida, on May 29 and 30, we were cut off from the road to Pretoria by General French and his cavalry.

Without horses it was impossible for us to follow the retreat, and we found ourselves shut up in Johannesburg. We succeeded in enrolling ourselves among the police of the mines, which gave us a temporary shelter, and perhaps saved us a sojourn at St. Helena; for we were determined not to take the oath of neutrality, but to begin fighting again as soon as possible.

On May 31 the English entered Johannesburg. The English flag was hoisted with great pomp at noon in the great square, in the presence of Lord Roberts. Dr. Krause had been empowered to surrender the town.

Johannesburg is a very English town. Its behaviour at the time of Jameson's raid sufficiently proved this, and many of the more irreconcilable Burghers who had been brought into hospital there wounded ran away before they were cured rather than remain in the hostile town.

The Union Jack was accordingly greeted with loud shouts of 'Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!'

Nevertheless, we often met Burghers in the crowd who, like ourselves, were only biding their time to return to the front. I saw one old man weeping silently. I am not sentimental, but I have rarely felt a more poignant emotion than this mute and dignified despair excited in me. I hurried away. I think I should have wept myself.

The entry of the troops began at about 10.30, and lasted four hours. About 12,000 men marched through the town, and in the environs, as far off as Elandsfontein, some 50,000 passed, it was said.

But what a procession it was! There was no order; the men barely marched in ranks. No uniforms, officers and soldiers huddled together, dirty, and many of them in rags. They had eaten nothing since the day before, when the ration had been two biscuits.

On they came, or rather dragged themselves, with drooping heads, one with his rifle on his shoulder, another with his slung across his back, one with the butt-end uppermost, some without bayonets, others with bayonets fixed. Some officers had our Mauser rifles, others Lee-Enfields, others sporting rifles. Nearly all, both officers and soldiers, walked with the help of sticks.

From Bloemfontein to Johannesburg they had covered 250 miles, fighting every day, and sometimes marching 45 kilometres without a halt across country.

A few days earlier, at Kroonstad, their convoys had not come up. Lord Roberts, anxious to continue his forward movement by forced marches, asked the commissariat-officer:

'Can you serve the ration?'

'No, sir.'

'Half ration, then?'

'No, sir.'

'Quarter ration?'

'Yes, perhaps.'

On receiving this problematic reply, the Marshal explained the situation to his men. They immediately replied with acclamations: 'For Lord Roberts we would march without any ration at all!'

The Black Watch, out of a thousand men, their strength on landing, mustered about sixty behind their pipers. The others lie in the trenches of Magersfontein and at the foot of Dorn Kop.

Save for a few battalions that have arrived recently, the regiments are skeleton corps.

As we watched these haggard, exhausted troops dragging themselves along, involuntarily we called to mind him who once marched our fathers through all the capitals of Europe. In spite of fatigue, privation, and hard fighting, it was in a very different guise that the Grand Army entered Vienna and Berlin behind the Emperor and his glittering staff.

The artillery was in better form. Some fifteen batteries were drawn by magnificent horses, and I saw men on cobs that looked well worth from two to three hundred louis.

There were also some siege-guns, and some 15 centimetre naval guns—one from the *Monarch*—drawn by thirty-two oxen. It was behind this powerful artillery, devastating the whole region with it on principle, whether occupied or not, that the English army had advanced from Bloemfontein.

If we had had a body of cavalry, I believe that rapid and energetic action would have resulted in a considerable loss of *matériel* to the English army; for, relying on the absolute lack of offensive measures on our side, they often left their batteries defenceless.

Next came a strong train—telegraph apparatus, balloonists, engineering implements for digging wells, pumps, etc.

The troops merely passed through the town, leaving in it a garrison under the command of Colonel Mackenzie (Seaforth Highlanders), who was appointed Governor of Johannesburg.

The next day a proclamation by Frederick Sleigh, Baron Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford, K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C., Field-Marshal, commanding Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa:

'Assures the non-combatant population of his protection.

'All Burghers who have committed no act of violence contrary to the laws of civilization against any of Her Majesty's subjects are authorized to return to their homes, after giving up their arms and pledging themselves to take no further part in hostilities. Passports will be given them.

'Her Majesty's Government will respect the private property of the inhabitants of the South African Republic, as far as is compatible with the exigencies of war.

'All individual attempts upon property will be severely punished.

'GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

'Given under my hand and seal at Johannesburg, May 31, 1900.'

At the same time, regulations fixing the prices of provisions for the troops were issued: 30s. for a sack of 168 lb. of oats; champagne-tisane, 160s. a case; tobacco, from 3s. to 7s. a pound, etc.

Let us take advantage of our ephemeral functions as policemen to explore the town a little. Johannesburg was not the first mining centre in the Transvaal. The first workers established themselves at Barberton in 1886. A few years later the Brothers Strubens, whilom prospectors, discovered an auriferous vein in the Witwatersrand near the farm of Landlaagte. Johannesburg then consisted of a few scattered huts. It now numbers over 100,000 inhabitants (I mean, of course, before the war).

It is a town given over to business. The centre is occupied by the post-office, a huge building, in front of which is a vast marketplace. Here in normal times trains of carts bring in all the necessaries of life—fruit, vegetables, mealies, etc. The principal streets, Commissioner Street, Market Street, Pritchard Street and President Street, are wide, clean, and bordered by handsome shops. The whole

town is lighted by electricity.

The blocks of houses, three and four stories high, are called 'buildings'; often several of them belong to the same owner or to the same society, and bear their names: Ægis Building, Commissioner Street; S.A. Mutual Building; Standard Building; Heritier Building.

The houses are not numbered, but this does not inconvenience the postmen, for they do not exist. Each inhabitant pays a small sum for his own box at the post-office, and goes to fetch his correspondence when he likes.

Johannesburg has a very well organized fire-brigade, with engines, ladders and fire-escapes of the latest pattern. The captain, who is, I believe, an Englishman, served for a time in Paris, London, and New York, and wears the honorary medal of our Paris brigade. The men wear the same uniform as English firemen.

The hosiers, tailors, French milliners, dressmakers, saddlers, and music-sellers of the town are on a par with the best European specialists. Life is very expensive, and all luxuries command tremendous prices. Cabs, dirty and ill-harnessed, drawn by two miserable horses and very badly driven, cost 7s. an hour. Little light cabriolets drawn by negroes are therefore generally used for locomotion. These are much cheaper and fairly rapid, for the negroes—Kaffirs or Zulus—are in excellent training, and can go extraordinary distances at the double.

The currency was for a long time English, but in 1892 the Transvaal struck her first coins (pounds and shillings) with the effigy of President Kruger.

The Free State has no coinage of her own, and uses English or Transvaalian money.

Bronze money, of which the President only allowed a few specimens to be struck, is not current; the monetary unit is the 'ticket,' a small silver coin worth 3d.[#]

[#] Some English officers, it seems, saw for the first time at Elandsfontein a Kruger's penny, and bought it for £2. The current price of a Kruger's penny is from two to three shillings.

The Johannesburg journals, the *Standard and Diggers' News* and the *Wolkstrem*, the official organ, therefore cost 3d.

At Johannesburg much more than at Pretoria, because the town is more English, the houses in the centre of the town are mainly offices, for all the inhabitants who are comfortably off live in the suburbs, either on the height beyond the fort, or at the end of Main Street, in the great park of Belgravia.

Most of these suburban dwellings are very expensive, and are comfortably and luxuriously arranged. A garden more or less large is considered an absolute

necessity.

The majority of the population speculate and gamble, and it is not rare in times of peace to recognise in some barman or miner a gentleman who had dazzled the town by the magnificence of his carriages and horses a few months back. No surprise is felt by anyone, for the next 'boom' will perhaps make him a wealthy man of fashion once more.

I could quote the case of a young man I knew well who was twice a millionaire, and who, after having been ruined for the second time, was gradually building up a third fortune. He is very little more than thirty.

Johannesburg, however, is merely a city of passage. Men stay here just long enough to make money, and directly this is done, they return to their own countries. The end and aim of everything here is to make money, and to make it quickly.

Based on this principle, and composed of a number of adventurers, the cosmopolitan society one finds here hardly offers a guarantee of irreproachable morality.

Antecedents are of little account, indeed. A merchant who has been convicted of fraud in France, here enjoys the consideration due to the £500,000 he has gained with the money he stole in his fraudulent bankruptcy.

I have even heard that some years ago the extradition of a rogue was the signal for disorderly scenes and an expostulatory address, because he had not been convicted of theft since his arrival at Johannesburg. He had made a considerable sum of money there, and was accompanied to the station by a number of friends.

* * * * *

No sketch of Johannesburg would be complete without a few words about the gold-mines.

I am no authority on the subject, but I will describe what was told me and what I saw; and as the engineer who was good enough to give me some information knew me to be ignorant, my precis will be a little 'Manual on Mining' for the use of novices.

In the first place, there is an essential difference between the manner in which gold is found in Witwatersrand and in other districts, such as Klondyke, Senegal, or the Soudan. In the latter, the gold is in grains, either embedded between the frozen stones, or rolling in the beds of rivers. The auriferous mud is taken up and washed, and the gold is retained. Nothing could be simpler.

In the Rand, however, the working of the mines is purely scientific. The mineral is found in blocks of quartz and silicious clay containing pyrites of au-

riferous copper and gold.

After calculating the direction of the reef, one must dig down to a greater or less depth to find it. Dynamite is then used to detach the gold-bearing quartz, which is brought to the surface. It has the appearance of very hard white stone, slightly veined with blue. It is carried off to the batteries in Decauville trucks, and there a crushing-mill, which looks like a gigantic coffee-mill, and sledge-hammers combined into groups of five, reduce it to a very fine powder. A current of air spreads this powder over copper-plates covered with mercury.

A large proportion of the gold, about 60 per cent., amalgamates with the mercury, and once a fortnight the amalgam is scraped off. After fusion the mercury in the amalgam volatilizes, leaving a deposit of almost pure gold.

The residuum of the first process is afterwards poured into huge vats of from 10 to 12 metres in diameter, in which cyanide of potassium has been placed. A solution of cyanide of gold is thus obtained, and this is put into cases lined with strips of zinc, on which the gold is precipitated. The 40 per cent. lost in the first process is thus recovered.

The gold thus collected is melted down into ingots, the transport and verification of which are the objects of interminable regulations.

So much for the scientific part. The rest is simpler.

The heavy labour is mainly done by Kaffirs or Zulus under the supervision of white miners who earn about twenty-five pounds a month, and live in the boarding-house connected with the mine.

The natives live in a compound where no alcohol is allowed. Their rations are given them, and they live on very little. Their ambition is to earn enough money to return to their native place, buy two wives, and do no more work; the wives work for them thenceforth. It takes them about two years to realize this dream. When the time is up, it is impossible to keep them in the mines.

The first year of working (1888) yielded about £1,000,000. In 1895 about £8,000,000 was extracted. Finally, from January 1 to August 31, 1899, the harvest was nearly £13,000,000. The net profits of exploitation are considerably diminished by the enormous expenses resulting from the dearness of European labour, and the heavy taxes imposed by the Transvaal Government on mining rights and on the importation of explosives.

At the time of my sojourn all the works were closed. In the town, as every hospital and ambulance was full to overflowing, the hotels were requisitioned for the sick. In front of the Victoria Hotel there were often strings of ten and twelve waggons bringing in the wounded.

Often at dusk a dray would pass, into which long, heavy cases of deal were furtively slipped.... The *avowed* losses were terrible enough. What were they in reality?

About the middle of December the War Office confessed to 7,350 men. At the beginning of February this number was doubled, and Buller's three attempts on the Tugela cost 1,046 killed, 3,785 wounded, and over 1,500 missing.

In March the numbers had swelled to 14,000. It was the unhealthy season, and sickness—enteric fever especially—made wider gaps in the English ranks than bullets. On May 10 over 18,000 men were missing, 5,000 of whom were dead.

On the Boer side the statistics are much more difficult to check, especially when one is confronted with such discrepancies as these: Rumours and reports stated the Boer losses at the Battle of Colenso, on December 15, to have been 8 killed and 14 wounded. But I find a report drawn up by the Red Cross Society in which the numbers are given as 77 killed and 210 wounded.

What is one to believe? In all ages belligerents have tried to conceal their losses, and this kind of juggling is, of course, much easier among incoherent groups like the commandos than in regular battalions.

* * * * *

One day—it was June 10, I think—all the police of the mines were requisitioned to transport the wounded from the station to the hospitals. There were a great many, and they had been forbidden to say whence they came; the police were also forbidden to speak to them on any pretext whatever. Had something very serious happened? We never knew exactly what it was.

Pretoria had been occupied on June 5. The news that reached us came at long intervals, after manipulation by the censor, and was often of the most fantastic order.

The police regulations were most stringent. Everyone was ordered to be indoors, at first by seven o'clock, later by 8.30. The streets and squares were guarded by troops. Jewellers' and wine-merchants' shops and bars were closed by order. No one was allowed to draw money without a permit from the military authorities, and a limit—of £20 a week, I think—was enforced as to the amount, unless a special permission had been granted.

Finally, residents in the town were required to get a pass and to take an oath of allegiance. Those who, like ourselves, had resolved not to do this, were obliged to hide like outlaws, to avoid being marched off to the fort, and thence to Ceylon. We give a reproduction of this police regulation[#] which was posted on the walls of the town.

[#] See pp. 216, 217.

A few days back a German had gone into Government Place at noon and hauled down the English flag. The sentry looked on aghast at first, and then began to question him.

'It has no business here,' replied the German, going on with his work. He was arrested at last, and condemned to nine months' hard labour.

The life of inaction had become unbearable to me. At the end of June, still on the lookout for a means of returning to the front, I at last 'found' the papers of an English police-officer. And now for liberty!

* * * * *

V. R. POLICE NOTICE,

1. All Civilians are required to remain in their houses between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6.30 a.m. unless provided with a pass signed by the Military Commissioner of Police.

2. No Natives are allowed in the town except such as are permanently employed within its limits.

3. All Liquor Stores, Bars, and Kaffir Eating Houses are closed until further orders. No liquor will be sold except on the written order of an Officer of Her Majesty's Forces. 4. All Jewellers' Shops are closed.

5. No Civilian is allowed to ride or drive, or ride a bicycle within the town unless provided with a pass signed by the Military Commissioner of Police.

6. Any person disobeying these regulations is liable to arrest, and will be dealt with under Martial Law.

By Order,

FRANCIS DAVIES, MAJOR GRENADIER GUARDS,

Military Commissioner of Police.

JOHANNESBURG, 1ST JUNE, 1900.

POLITIE KENNISGEVING.

1. Alle Inwoners worden hierbij bevolen om in hun huizen te blijven van 7 uur 's avonds tot 6.30 uur 's morgens indien niet voorzien van een Paspoort, geteekend door de Militaire Commissaris van Politie.

2. Geen Kleurlingen mogen in de Stad zyn indien zy geen vast werk hebben daarin.

3. Alle Bottel Stores, Bars en Kleurling Kosthuizen moeten gesloten worden

tot nadere kennisgeving. Geen Drank mag verkocht worden indien niet voorzien van een Permit van den Officier van Harer Majesteit's Troepen.

4. Alle Jewelier Winkels moeten gesloten worden.

5. Geen Inwoner mag ryden te Paard, Rytuig of Bicycle in de Stad, zonder voorzien te zyn van een permit, geteekend door de Militaire Commissaris van Politie.

6. Eenig persoon die deze Regulaties niet opvolgt, zal gestraft worden onder de Krygswet.

By Order,

FRANCIS DAVIES, MAJOR GRENADIER GUARDS.

Militaire Commissaris van Politie.

JOHANNESBURG, 1 JUNI, 1900.

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XI

With a brief but resolute gesture, I took off my hat in farewell to the City of Gold. With a few necessaries rolled up in a cloak, I succeeded in passing through the English lines at Boksburg, after journeying for three days, sometimes in friendly carts, sometimes on foot, to escape attention.

Near the level crossing of the railway at Boksburg a party of Lancers was encamped. Putting on the tranquil and indifferent air of a man whose conscience is at ease, I passed through them without molestation. Further along the road there were two small outposts, which I was able to avoid by passing over a dried-up pond.

When night came on, I slept at Benoni. Commandant Derksen, of the Boksburg commando, was in the neighbourhood. I hoped to fall in with him in the north-east. The nights began to be terribly cold.

At 4 a.m. on July 4 I was once more on my way. I walked till nine in the evening. My feet were sore and bleeding.

I arrived at last at a farm, where I was coldly received at first; for they took me for a spy. But when I showed the papers that constituted me a Burgher, I was petted as if I had been a son of the house. They gave me eggs, milk and biscuit, and offered me shelter for the night. As I had no rug, and the cold was terrible, I

accepted the offer with joy.

My hostess had three sons with Derksen, and a fourth with De Wet. The fourth was Baby, as she called him, showing me the photograph of this little Benjamin, who may have been about forty, and had a beard down to his waist.

They were worthy folks, Boers of the old school, hospitable and patriotic. They made me up a bed in a kind of old travelling carriage in the coach-house, and after half an hour of fierce conflict with a swarm of mice, I fell asleep.

Twice I was roused by further attacks from the rodents, and a third time by a man with a long beard, who said:

'Obsal!

I was a little surprised at first, but finally I grasped the situation. A patrol commanded by one of the Bothas (a cousin of the Generalissimo), had come to the farm at three in the morning. My hostess explained my case, and they had sent to ask me if I would join them.

I agreed eagerly, and rapid preparations were at once made for my equipment. They found me a lean hack, gave me a rug by way of saddle, and two pieces of cord for stirrups, and armed me with a Lee-Metford rifle, taken from the English a little while before! Don Quixote!

We consumed the usual coffee and biscuit, and started, taking a zigzag route northwards towards Irene. Derksen was rather more to the east.

Towards nine in the evening we lay down to rest on the Veldt. I think I never suffered as I did from the cold that night. It was freezing hard, and I had nothing to cover me but the rug, which, soaked through with the horse's sweat, was as stiff as a board in ten minutes. It was impossible to sleep for a moment, and the pain became so intolerable that I was obliged to walk about to warm myself a little; and then the wounds on my feet, which were quite raw, made me suffer cruelly.

A few days later an officer of the first brigade of Mounted Infantry was found frozen to death on bivouac, in spite of his blankets.

We started at daybreak on the 6th, making for a Kaffir kraal. At about 7.30 we heard three cannon-shots fired, but could not tell exactly from what direction. Then there was silence again.

Towards eight o'clock a group of about fifteen horsemen in felt hats and long dark overcoats came towards us, then, suddenly wheeling, went off at a gallop. We were fourteen, all told.

When it reached the top of the kopje, the party disappeared, and when, in our turn, we rose above the crest, we were received with a fusillade. There were about forty men, some 400 metres from us. We turned back hastily, to put our horses in shelter on the other side, and then replied.

A Burgher was wounded in the head. We had the cover of the rocks to

protect us, and, in spite of our inferior numbers, the two sides were about equal. Then another Burgher and my neighbour were wounded almost simultaneously, the latter in the thigh, probably by a ricochet. His wound was serious. I took his Mauser and his cartridges from him.

I am not very sure how long this little game had been going on, perhaps ten minutes. Suddenly we heard shots behind us. One of our horses fell; Botha got a bullet right through him. We were surrounded by about 300 men of the Imperial Light Horse. There was nothing to be done. A Burgher named Marais held up a white handkerchief. There were only ten of us left. I was handed over to some English officers, who received me with the greatest possible courtesy. As the action had now extended all along the line, I was taken to the rear.

In the evening I was confided to the Connaught Rangers, who had been kept in reserve. Hearing of my nationality and my former rank in the French army, they said: 'We are allies now! We are making common cause in China!' I made many inquiries about the events in the Far East, of which we knew nothing, having held no communication with Europe since April.

Hoping to be able to take part in the Chinese Expedition by joining the Foreign Legion, I made up my mind to give my parole to General H—, who was in command of the column.

Meanwhile I heard the most interesting details from the English officers of the campaign in which we had lately been fighting against each other. There were among them survivors of Colenso and Spion Kop, and men of the Ladysmith garrison.

The Connaught Rangers were commanded by Colonel Brooke, who was seriously wounded at Colenso, near the railway bridge. He was acting as General in command of the Irish Brigade. He invited me to dine with him, and at night, though most of the officers were sleeping in the open air, he offered me half of the little shanty which formed his bedroom, and himself fetched a bundle of straw for my bed. Then I had innumerable offers of rugs, cloaks, and capes, till at last I believe I was better wrapped up than anyone in the camp.

During the evening a telegram came telling Colonel Brooke that he had been promoted and was a general. I willingly joined in the toasts that were drunk in his honour, for it is a fine and noble feature of a military career that one feels no bitterness to an adversary. When the battle is over, foes can shake hands heartily, though they are ready to slash each other to pieces again a few hours later.

On July 7 we rose at six. A captain brought me some hot water in an indiarubber basin, sponges, and soap. Then breakfast was served. We had porridge, red herrings, butter, jam, biscuits, coffee and tea.

But the Irish Brigade had received orders to saddle up, and I was handed over to the staff of the first brigade of Mounted Infantry. I was very politely

received by General Hutton's staff-officer, a lieutenant. The superior officer who took me to him, Major M. D—, of the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers, asked him if he spoke French. I was delighted to hear him answer in the affirmative. I went to lunch with him in his tent. Conversation languished. For a long time he did not open his lips, if I may so express it, for he was eating the grilled mutton his orderly had given us with evident appetite. Suddenly he addressed me:

'Navet du pon.'

I bowed amiably, thinking we were to have a dish of turnips of some kind. 'Du pon' puzzled me a little; but perhaps there were 'Navets Dupont' just as there are 'Bouchées Lucullus' and 'Purée Soubise.' I was astonished at my host's culinary knowledge. At last, later on, when I had heard the phrase a great many times without ever seeing any turnips, I found out that he wished to say, 'N'avez-vous du pain.' This was the highest flight of which he was capable in French.

Nevertheless, my sojourn with Colonel Hutton's staff was extremely interesting. I heard that we had killed the day before Captain Currie and Lieutenant Kirk of the Imperial Light Horse, and I was present at an engagement that lasted three days. On the third day, indeed, shells burst so near me that I ran a fair chance of being killed by my friends.

I will give a brief journal of events hour by hour, so to speak.

On the 7th fighting began early towards the east. We could hear it, though we could see nothing. From noon to three o'clock the cannonade was very lively towards Olifantsfontein. This was the engagement at Witklip, I believe. The English lost some fifty men, among them ten killed.

On the morning of July 8 twenty mounted men went out with picks and spades to bury the dead. They were preceded by a large white flag. At 10.30 cannon-shots were heard east-south-east, then suddenly, at 11.5, three detachments of the Mounted Rifles went off.

Officers and despatch-riders were galloping up and down everywhere. I think the English had been completely surprised by a return of the Boers.

There was rapid harnessing and saddling. All round the bivouac horsemen were bringing in oxen, mules, and horses from grazing.

The Mounted Rifles galloped off to take up a position on the crest a mile away about which there had been fighting the day before.

At 11.15 another large detachment of Mounted Rifles passed, returning the salute of the sentry on duty at headquarters.

In all they may have been from three to four squadrons. It was difficult to form any idea of actual numbers, for they were not marching in strict order, and taking into account the reduction in the strength of certain corps, a column of two or three hundred men may well have represented a whole regiment.

A captain of the Irish Brigade told me that his company consisted of

seventy-eight men, completed by yeomanry, and he called his adjutant to verify the figures he had given me.

At 11.20 a battery of the Royal Field Artillery went off in the same direction at a trot. A fraction of about fifty returned at a walk.

About 100 metres from my point of observation—an old waggon—the Irish Brigade and the Borderers stood at ease. At 11.30 a battalion was moved forward. Five minutes later a second battery, a great naval 10-centimetre gun, drawn by twenty oxen, joined the fighting line with the rest of the Irish.

Everything had been done very rapidly. One could see that the men had been trained to sudden alarms by six months of warfare. Thirty-five minutes before the men were busy in camp, and the beasts were grazing. Now more than half the men were engaged, and all were ready awaiting orders to advance.

The skirmishers came back at a gallop, and a man arrived to hasten the advance of the naval gun, the oxen of which were almost trotting already.

At 11.55 two other naval guns, also drawn by twenty oxen each, went forward to join the others. A large ambulance-waggon followed.

In the camp a dog was howling dismally. The cannonade slackened a little.

At noon an ammunition-waggon, drawn by ten mules, went off to supply the line of combatants.

It is lamentable that the Burghers, clinging obstinately to their defensive tactics, know nothing of rear or flank movements.

There are no sentries either right or left. All the troops have gone off in the direction of the cannon—that is to say, towards the east—and in that immense camp, containing some hundreds of waggons, there are only a platoon of Mounted Rifles and a half-battalion of infantry. A handful of men could carry the camp and sack it.

In addition to the material result, what a moral effect would be produced on the troops engaged a mile and a half off, if they knew that an enemy, however feeble, was in possession of the road of retreat, and engaged in plundering the stores and ammunition!

It is true that the Boers did not know the state of the camp, but if they had they would have done nothing. This circumstance, confirming many other instances, would have convinced me more firmly than ever, if that were possible, that the great secret of warfare is to *dare!* This, I think, was the sole science of Murat, Lassalle and many another famous *sabreur*. And the Emperor himself, was not he, too, a type of audacity in the conception of his most brilliant campaigns, in the conduct of his most glorious victories?

About 12.30 the firing ceased. It recommenced again about 3 and 4.30. At three o'clock another great ammunition waggon was despatched. No losses were announced that evening.

The staff was at work till one o'clock in the morning, and a long telegram in cipher was sent off to Pretoria. In the evening rather late I heard the movements of troops, which recommenced the next morning at dawn.

July 9.—From 7 a.m. to 7.30 a battery and several detachments of the Mounted Rifles, ten or fifteen, moved off to the east-south-east, strongly flanked on the right (south) by other Mounted Rifles and by a battery.

In the early morning there were two centimetres of ice on the artillery buckets, and towards noon we were glad to be in our shirtsleeves. This great variation, more than 37 degrees in twenty hours, is very trying. We were now in mid-winter, and the sun set at five o'clock. At eight the firing, which was very brisk, seemed nearer than the day before. The Boer shells, carrying too far, burst between the camp and the line of the English artillery, which we could see perfectly. The infantry was posted towards the east-south-east.

The staff-officer told me that the English were engaged with General Botha's 5,000 men. I offered no opinion, but I was sure he was wrong, and information I received later justified this belief. I was rather inclined to think that it was the worthy Derksen, who had collected some 500 or 600 men, and who, by rapid and unexpected movements, was trying to make the enemy believe in the presence of a very considerable force. My staff-officer further told me that General Hutton was in command of 6,000 men, three batteries, and four naval guns. This, to judge by what I saw, may very probably have been correct. At any rate, a formidable convoy was on the spot. The guns were still booming.

An old sergeant with four stripes was introduced to me. He was the senior member of Battery 66, which had been kept in reserve. He had been serving under Lieutenant Roberts, who was killed at Colenso.

During the day four ambulance-waggons were sent out to the lines. It was at first intended that I should be taken to Pretoria, but as the route of the convoy had been changed, I was conveyed to Springs. I was one of fifteen prisoners, not counting the wounded.

At 4.30 the firing was much closer, but we had to start; the convoy was ready. It consisted of fifty bullock-waggons, eight or ten of them filled with wounded men. We, the prisoners, were at the head of the convoy, strongly guarded by infantry and mounted men. A few mounted irregulars preceded us as scouts. These men, recruited chiefly among the Afrikanders, sometimes even among the Boers, know the country very well.

Our guide was a native of Boksburg, and knew all the men with Derksen, the leader of the Boksburg commando. I made no attempt to conceal the disgust I felt for this renegade. But nothing distracted him from his duties, for he had a holy horror of falling into the hands of the Boers.

During the night fires in the bush reddened the horizon on every side. They

came to ask us several times if these were signals. I really had no idea, but I was inclined to think not.

On account of the meagre fuel afforded by the short dry grass of the veldt, the fires we saw in these regions had none of the grandeur of the bush-fires in the Soudan, where the high grass is from 6 to 10 feet high. In those whirlwinds of fire the flames seem to lick the sky, and the tallest trees are twisted and calcined like straws. Numerous as the fires were, they did not warm the atmosphere, and the cold was terrible.

At last we arrived, supperless, at Springs, at 1.30 in the morning, so frozen that we were obliged to look and see if our feet and hands were still in place. We slept huddled in the guard-room at the railway-station.

Early on the morning of the 10th, Major Pelletier, of the Royal Canadian Regiment, came to fetch me to breakfast at mess. But Captain Ogilvie, the commandant of the station, would not let me leave his jurisdiction till I had been to his quarters to make my toilet.

After this process I went off with the Major. He was a charming fellow, a French Canadian, as his name indicates, and a native of a little village in Normandy. I spent the day with him. He told me the most interesting things about Canadian life, spoke enthusiastically of the fine sport there, and invited me to come and pay him a visit later on. At the same time he confided to me that both he and his men were suffering terribly from the heat. I then, being almost frozen, make up my mind never to accept his kind invitation.

I met a young doctor, too, whose name I forget, also a French Canadian. All the French Canadians, who form the majority of the contingent, speak excellent French, interlarded with old-fashioned expressions and marked by a strong Norman accent. Many of them do not know a word of English.

At six o'clock I start for Johannesburg, in the carriage reserved for officers. My pockets are full of French Canadian papers, which, though some two months old, are full of news fresh to me.

On my arrival, I presented myself to Major Davies, the commandant of the military police. He speaks French very correctly, was very agreeable, and gave me leave to go about the town on parole. I had only to leave my address with him, and to report myself at his office every morning at eleven o'clock.

On the 13th a plot was discovered to seize the town. About 500 arrests took place during the evening. As I had taken the oath of neutrality, I was not among the conspirators, and while hostilities last I can say no more on this subject.

On the 14th I received a permit to return to France, and I started by the two o'clock train that very day.

All along the line the railway-stations had been converted into entrenched camps. We continually passed trains loaded with horses, guns, and men—some

twenty in all, perhaps. We arrived at Kroonstad at eleven in the morning on the 15th. Nothing remained of the sheds and the goods-station which we had burnt on May 12, with all the stores.

Involuntarily I took out my pocket-book, and read the names of the men who then composed the French corps. We were not forty altogether. Three had been killed, five had disappeared, the others were dispersed.

I tried to go out of the station to revisit all those places in the town where we spent a fortnight, gay, full of hope, almost complete in numbers. But the station was surrounded by sentries, and no one was allowed to pass.

From a distance the prospect was dismal enough. The streets were deserted, and, as if to emphasize the fact that everywhere there is suffering, the Red Cross flag floated sadly over the town. In the foreground, close to us, on the line, and in the sidings, were deserted railway-carriages, half burnt, overturned, and broken.

All round the town were field hospitals and vast camps. There were about 11,000 men in all, I was told. A feverish activity reigned at the station, a continuous bustle and movement. Convoys of provisions and arms followed each other in rapid succession. We counted sixteen during the day on the 16th.

Horses and mules were entrained in some, others brought back the worn-out horses. Many of these poor beasts had died on the road; most of them could hardly stand. They were dragged along a few steps, and a non-commissioned officer put a bullet through their heads inside the station. Thirty or forty thus executed lay heaped one on another in a pool of blood, which ran in a little stream towards the line.

On the platform stood cases of ammunition and arms. Several placed together contained Lee-Enfield cavalry carbines, and were marked 'Very Urgent.'

On the 16th we were still at Kroonstad, and a trainful of prisoners passed going to East London. It became one of the daily exercises of the garrison to walk to the station and see the travellers.

Two questions were to be heard perpetually:

'Do you think it is nearly over?' 'Have you any Kruger pennies?'

And Tommy is quite happy when they tell him that, as to being nearly over, it's not quite that; but that as to going on much longer, it won't go on much longer—at least, it depends on what you mean by much longer; or when someone gives him one or two Kruger pennies.

At last we left Kroonstad at ten o'clock in the evening, passing through Brandfort, that village to which, feted and acclaimed, we had come with *Long Tom* in January. All along the route the railway had been destroyed, and we travelled on rails laid on unballasted sleepers by the Royal Engineers.

Trenches had been dug to enable the train to pass over the shallow, dried-up streams without any very artistic labour, and sometimes the little half-destroyed

bridges had been repaired with logs and made to do duty again.

It seemed wonderful that it could all hold. But it appeared—I heard this at the camp at Springs—that one of the chief engineers of the railway service was a civilian, a French Canadian, who had already distinguished himself in America by the construction of very daring railways.

He must have been extraordinary indeed to have astonished the Americans!

It is certain that the English successfully re-established railway communication with very restricted means in a very rapid manner—not that this prevents it from being constantly re-cut, however.

On July 17, at 8.30 in the morning, we were at Bloemfontein. Poor old capital of the Orange Free State! It is now the chief town of the Orange River Colony. Here again there was an immense camp, a large proportion of the Kelly-Kenny division.

We only stayed half an hour, and, after changing trains at Springfontein, we passed Norval's Pont at 6.35 in the evening. We were in Cape Colony! Here we were no longer on an improvised railway, and we got on faster. On the 18th, about 7.30 a.m., we were in the environs of Cape Town.

In accordance with English custom, many of the merchants have offices in the town, and live in little houses which give a gay and smiling aspect to the suburbs. We therefore took up a number of passengers who looked like men of business. In a few minutes we were in the town. We left the train at 8.30.

My permission to return to France was confirmed by the General commanding the garrison. I was almost a free man!

* * * * *

Vague rumours reached us from the front, always carefully doctored by the censor. Prinsloo was taken prisoner with several thousand men; but on the line to Lourenço Marques Botha was still defending himself vigorously. After the taking of Pretoria the Government, incarnating itself, so to speak, in the person of President Kruger, installed itself in a special train. There Oom Paul slept, received, ate, and lived. There the official printing-press was also set up, and the money that was circulated was minted there. As in the hurried departure from Pretoria it had not been possible to carry off a complete set of weights, the sovereigns issued were simple gold discs, quite plain, without image or inscription.

It was on this line, too, that the last great battles were fought, at Middelburg, Belfast, and Machadodorp, after which, renouncing all attempts at defence, the Boers began that guerilla campaign which De Wet had already successfully essayed.

In a few days our steamer sailed. It was not without a pang that we quitted

the land we had hoped to see free, for which we had fought for seven months, and which had proved the grave of a venerated leader and of beloved friends.

CONCLUSION.

An inexperienced writer, more expert with arms than with the pen, I do not know if I have described all these events in a manner sufficiently clear and coherent to convey a distinct impression. I shall therefore try to sum up on a few broad lines the ideas I have been able to form after the experiences I have recorded.

First of all, two great questions seem to present themselves: Why, in spite of all their qualities, have the Boers been beaten? Why are the English, with over 250,000 men, held in check by a handful of peasants?

These two questions are closely connected, for, though this seems a paradox, the chief cause of the defeat of the Boers is also the cause of their long resistance. I will explain.

I think we must attribute the defeat of the federated troops mainly to their absolute lack of military organization, for in spite of the legend of the volunteers of 1792, no undisciplined force, however brave, will ever prove a match for a regular army.

Resistance may be more or less prolonged, phases more or less heroic, but the issue is foredoomed.

This lack of organization, of discipline—that is the great thing—explains the absence of cohesion, of combined action, of rational leadership.

I have already sufficiently pointed out the evils of suffrage as applied to the election of commanders. In addition to this, what enthusiasm or confidence can these feel, when they know that half the men of their commando will leave them on the road if they feel so inclined? And even if they do not actually do so, the leader's confidence is put to a rude test!

Yet these same Boers who have fought like lions on occasion, and on occasion have fled without firing a shot, are capable of education in the art of war.

The Johannesburg Politie is a striking proof of this. With the elementary discipline that obtains among them, this corps held their own for a whole day against Lord Roberts's 40,000 men on two occasions, at Abraham's Kraal on March 10, and near Machadodorp on August 27, almost unsupported. And each time at the price of a third of their number!

* * * * *

To this chief and primordial cause we must add another, not altogether inexcusable, but very harmful under the circumstances. I mean the dread and hatred of the foreigner.

Not inexcusable, I say, for, for nearly a century, the foreigner has been to the Boer the invader, the robber, and the enemy!

The Boers therefore, as a whole, could never believe that for love of a noble cause, or a passion for adventure, men of every nation should have come to espouse their cause against the United Kingdom quite disinterestedly.

In the unfortunate state of mind that prevailed among them, the eulogies of a well-intentioned but maladroit press had the most disastrous effect.

What sort of respect, indeed, could these primitive people feel for Europeans when Lombroso and Kuysler had written in all good faith: 'As 63 per cent. of Boer blood is Dutch, 12 per cent. French, 12 per cent. Scotch, and 3 per cent. German, this mixture of the best nations of Europe ought to constitute a centre of liberty and civilization, a race superior to any in Europe!'

Why, when one belongs to 'a race superior to any in Europe,' should one follow the advice of officers of the European armies, and, consequently, of the inferior races?

And, indeed, when we consider the remarkable campaign now being carried on by De Wet and Botha, we may well ask whether Europeans could obtain better results. Under present conditions, I think, it would be hard to do better.

But if General de Villebois' advice had been taken from the first, it is very probable that the guerilla war would never have been inaugurated. The campaign would have been over long ago; for whereas the Boers were content to hold the English in check, the Europeans wanted to beat them.

Not satisfied with successful engagements that gave no solid advantage, they wanted to push forward, with the enthusiasm that surprises a demoralized enemy, creates a panic, and results in total rout.

Haunted by the names that gleam in the folds of our banners—Jemmapes, Valmy, Marengo and Austerlitz—we dreamed of great victories. And if the Boers had wished it, this dream might have been realized!

We now come to the reason why the English, with over 250,000 men, are held in check by a handful of peasants.

I have said that this question is closely bound up with the cause of the Boer defeat—the absence of discipline. For how is it possible to surround, to conquer, and to crush adversaries who will never be drawn into a battle, and who make off directly a blow is struck at them?

Are they closely pressed by the enemy? Each man goes off as he chooses

in a different direction, and the commando of 500 men which attacked a little convoy yesterday has melted away before the column of 2,000 sent in pursuit of it.

Far away in the bush, to the east, a horseman disappears on the horizon, another on the west—and that is all.

If one of these men should have been too closely engaged in the English lines, the first farm he comes to offers him an asylum. His rifle is thrust under a plank in the flooring, his horse turned out to graze, the white flag floats over the house, and Her Majesty has no more inoffensive subject than my Burgher—for the next twenty-four hours.

If need be, when the English authority is too near, an old gun—I once saw a flintlock—will be handed to him in sign of submission, and the oath of neutrality taken.

This explains the enormous number of arms that have been given up, while the Burghers have retained their good Mausers and Martini-Henrys, and still use them.

But as soon as the English, pleased at a fresh submission, have gone off, the rifle—the good one this time—is brought out, the horse stealthily mounted, and the Burgher is abroad once more.

The dispersions are merely momentary, and very often a rallying-point among the hills has been fixed on in advance. Eight days later the commando, concentrating again, appears on the scene with some unexpected stroke. This kind of thing may go on for a long time.

'Egaillez-vous, les gas!' was the cry of the Vendéen chiefs; and it is this manoeuvre, and the rally which follows it, that regular troops cannot execute.

This kind of warfare is obviously very painful and fatiguing for the invader. But it is a purely defensive method, and cannot have any decisive success, unless the invading army should give up the struggle.

For which side does Fortune reserve her final favours? It is certain that the English are weary, very weary, and that they have been so for some time.

Ten months ago, at the beginning of January, a soldier of the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment wrote with mournful resignation:

'We shall all be thankful when this war is over, and this horrible butchery at an end!'

Another, less disciplined and more easily discouraged, a yeoman, wrote after Colenso:

'If I come through alive, the army will have seen the last of me! I have had enough of it, and I bitterly regret having rejoined my regiment.'

I do not say that these sentiments are general, but they indicate the weariness of the combatants. And this lassitude seemed to me to be creeping over all,

from the general to the private, among those I met between Springs and Cape Town.

The army itself will not be consulted, of course, but I wish to note this state of mind, which seems to me serious.

On the other hand, British prestige is too deeply engaged for the English to retreat without losing caste.

What will happen? It would be foolhardy to prophesy. 'If in doubt, refrain,' says the sage. I will take his advice, offering for the consideration of those who have followed me so far this melancholy sentence from the Westminster Gazette of last March:

'Each Boer will have cost us £2,000 to subdue, and no one can yet say what each will cost us to govern.'

October, 1900.

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[image]

Map of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State (small version)

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