CHAPTER III

THE ANNEXATION AND ITS REVERSAL

Upon the resignation of Pretorius the presidency of the Transvaal was offered to John Brand, who wisely declined the proffered honour, having no desire to see the Free State brought into closer contact with Transvaal politics. It was accepted by Mr. T. F. Burgers, a clergyman from Cape Colony. Burgers was a man of considerable ability and great persuasiveness. He was full of confidence in himself and his ability to make the Transvaal a great and powerful state, the nucleus of a future united Dutch South Africa. He was eager to bring it into closer relationship with the continent of Europe and more especially with Holland, so as to counteract the spread of English influence. At the same time Burgers was thoroughly liberal and progressive in his political and religious views. He threw himself with vigour into the task of reforming the State. He persuaded the Volksraad to sanction the construction of a railway from Pretoria (which had been the capital since 1860) to Delagoa Bay, and went to Europe in order to raise a loan for this railway, but only with partial success. He tried to reform the administration, to levy taxes, to establish a system of public education, and generally to elevate the country from the demoralised state into which it had fallen. He encouraged immigration, and adopted a thoroughly liberal policy towards the mining and trading population which was now being attracted by the discovery of gold in the Lydenburg and Barberton districts. He exerted his influence in the Volksraad to secure the representation of the mining districts in that body by two members elected by the Uitlanders. His policy was thus

Election of Mr. Burgers as President. July 1872.

Mr. Burgers' liberal attitude to the Uitlanders.

in striking contrast to that which prevailed afterwards when the insurrection had put the most reactionary elements in the country into power. But Burgers was not a good judge of men. He failed to realise how completely the Transvaal Boers had lapsed into barbarism and how slow and difficult a process it would be to bring about reforms. His initial popularity waned rapidly when the Boers found that he wanted to alter their whole life, to civilise them, and, worst of all, to make them pay taxes. In 1876 the Sikukuni war broke out. The first attempts to attack Sikukuni in his strongholds proved entirely unsuccessful. The Boer commandos showed a hopeless lack of spirit, and finally refused to serve in the field any longer. Burgers now tried to raise a paid force of volunteers, mainly foreigners. But this involved an increase of taxation. The burghers refused to pay or assist the Government in any way. The State owed £215,000 and there was not a penny in the treasury. The one-pound notes issued by the Government sank to one shilling. Salaries were unpaid. A strong reactionary party led by Paul Kruger declared that the misfortunes of the State were a heaven-sent visitation for the liberal religious views of the President. Without any regard for the public interest, Kruger and his faction did all in their power to make government impossible. Without money, without men, torn by the violence of factions, with a triumphant native enemy within its borders, with Zulus and other native tribes on the frontier eager to seize the occasion of avenging themselves on the hereditary foe, the condition of the Transvaal was almost desperate. The only alternative to annihilation seemed to be to place itself under British protection. A strong movement for calling in the British started in all the towns or rather villages of the Transvaal. The miners and traders, naturally enough, threw in their voice for a change which they hoped might bring good government with it. The back country Boers were indifferent. As Dr. Jorissen, one of Kruger's chief agents in the insurrection, says in his Reminiscences, "there was no such thing as Transvaal patriotism. Each Boer lived on his own farm free from any relations with

1876. The Sikukuni war. Poverty of the state. Intrigues of the Kruger faction. Pro-annexation movement.

MARTHINUS WESSELS PRETORIUS.

PRESIDENT OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE, 1859–1864.
PRESIDENT OF THE TRANSVAAL, 1864–1872.

REV. THOMAS FRANÇOIS BURGERS.

PRESIDENT OF THE TRANSVAAL, 1872–1877.

the Government." The whole country was in a state of chaos.

Change in England in favour of a more active colonial policy.

Meanwhile in England a gradual change had been coming over public opinion with regard to the colonies. The narrow little Englandism of the middle of the century was beginning to be abandoned by political thinkers, and one at least of the two great political parties now ventured openly to profess its eagerness to hold together and strengthen the British Empire. In 1859 Sir George Grey, perhaps the ablest administrator ever sent by Great Britain to South Africa, had been recalled for a time by a timorous Government for urging a scheme of South African Federation which should embrace the Republics —a scheme which met with the approval of the Free State and might at that time have been carried through without difficulty. In 1876, however, the Confederation of South Africa was a prospect warmly entertained by Lord Carnarvon, then Secretary of State for the Colonies. In view of such a federation the condition of the Transvaal and the serious prospect of its annihilation by the surrounding tribes were matters which could not but be of interest to the Imperial Government. It knew that a considerable section of the inhabitants were eager for intervention or annexation, and it was not unwilling to avail itself of an opportunity which it believed would favour the chances of confederation. Accordingly Sir Theophilus Shepstone, an able man and intimately acquainted with the character of both Boers and natives, was sent to the Transvaal with a special commission to inquire into the affairs of that state, and if he thought advisable, and a sufficient number of the inhabitants wished it, proclaim the Transvaal British territory. On December 20, 1876, Shepstone wrote to President Burgers informing him of his intention to visit the Transvaal in order to secure a satisfactory solution of its present difficulties. Shortly afterwards he started for Pretoria from Natal accompanied by an escort of twenty-five policemen. On his way he everywhere met with a hearty welcome. In Pretoria an enthusiastic crowd took the horses out of his carriage and drew him in triumph through the streets. Shepstone made no disguise of the object of his visit. At his first interview with Burgers he

1876. Lord Carnarvon and confederation. Mission of Sir T. Shepstone.

declared that it was his intention to annex the country, unless adequate and effective reforms could be introduced. Meanwhile he should wait and inquire further into the condition of the country and the sentiments of the burghers. A Joint Commission of inquiry was appointed on which the Boer members were Mr. Kruger and Dr. Jorissen, the latter a Hollander clergyman who had been recently imported by Burgers and made State Attorney. The Commission, however, did nothing. Petitions came in freely demanding annexation, some 3,000 signatures in all being sent in of a total adult male population of 8,000. Many more who did not sign petitions would have done so but for the fear of compromising themselves if the annexation did not take place. Shepstone simply waited and held his hand. The President called the Volksraad together in the hope of getting them to unite on some reasonable scheme of reform in order to avert the impending annexation. But the Volksraad was much more intent on its own quarrels than on preserving the independence of the State. Kruger, who had been nominated candidate for the presidency, was determined to upset Burgers at any cost. When the question of confederation was brought forward by Burgers, Kruger's influence secured its contemptuous rejection. A scheme of reforms was proposed by Burgers giving the President almost monarchical power. It was equally set aside. Burgers entreated and implored the Volksraad to realise the seriousness of their position. He reproached members for proclaiming views in public diametrically opposed to those privately expressed by them on the questions of confederation and annexation. His earnest appeal to them on March 3, during the discussion on confederation, has often been quoted—

1877. Shepstone in the Transvaal. Burgers vainly endeavours to induce the Volksraad to introduce any reforms.

"I would rather be a policeman under a strong government than a president of such a State. It is you, you members of the Raad and the Boers, who have lost the country, who have sold your independence for a *soupie* (a drink). You have ill-treated the natives, you have shot them down, you have sold them into slavery, and now you have to pay the penalty. . . .

"We should delude ourselves by entertaining the hope that matters would mend by-and-by. It would be only self-deceit. I

tell you openly, matters are as bad as they ever can be; they cannot be worse. These are bitter truths, and people may perhaps turn their backs on me; but then I shall have the consolation of having done my duty. . . .

President Burgers' speech on confederation.

"It is said here, this or that man must be released from taxes because the Kaffirs have driven them off their farms and occupy the latter. By this you proclaim to the world that the strongest man is master here, that the right of the strongest obtains here. (Mr. Maré: This is not true.) Then it is not true what the honourable member, Mr. Breytenbach, has told us about the state of the Lydenburg district; then it is not true either what another member has said about the farms in Saltpansberg, which are occupied by Kaffirs. Neither is it true then what I saw with my own eyes at Lydenburg, where the burghers had been driven off their farms by the Kaffirs, and where Johannes was ploughing and sowing on the land of a burgher. These are facts, and they show that the strongest man is the master here. The fourth point which we have to take into account affects our relations with our English neighbours. It is asked, what have they got to do with our position? I tell you, as much as we have to do with that of our Kaffir neighbours. As little as we can allow barbarities among the Kaffirs on our borders, as little can they allow that in a state on their borders anarchy and rebellion should prevail. . . .

"Do you know what has recently happened in Turkey? Because no civilised government was carried on there, the Great Powers interfered and said, 'Thus far and no farther.' And if this is done to an empire, will a little republic be excused when it misbehaves? . . .

"Complain to other Powers and seek justice there? Yes, thank God! justice is still to be found, even for the most insignificant; but it is precisely the justice which will convict us. If we want justice, we must be in a position to ask it with unsullied hands. . . .

"Whence has arisen that urgency to make an appeal for interference elsewhere? Has that appeal been made only by enemies of the State? Oh, no, gentlemen; it has arisen from real grievances. Our people have degenerated from their former position; they have become demoralised; they are not what they ought to be. . . .

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"To-day a bill for £1100 was laid before me for signature;

He rebukes the Volksraad. The lack of patriotism.

but I would sooner have cut off my right hand than sign that paper, for I have not the slightest ground to expect that when that bill becomes due there will be a penny to pay it with."

The President added, and his statements remained uncontradicted—

"The principal thing which had brought them to their present position was that to which they would not give attention; it was not this or that thing which impeded their way, but they themselves stopped the way; and if they asked him what prevented the people from remaining independent, he answered that the Republic was itself the obstruction, owing to the inherent incapacity and weakness of the people. But whence this weakness? Was it because they were deformed, because they were worse than other people? Because they were too few and insignificant to occupy the country? Those arguments did not weigh with him. They were not true; he did not consider them of any importance. The people were as good as any other people, but they were completely demoralised, they had lost faith in God, reliance upon themselves, or trust in each other. Hence he believed they were inherently weak.

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"He did not believe that a new constitution would save them, for as little as the old constitution had brought them to ruin, so little would a new constitution bring them salvation.

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"The Great Powers with all their greatness, all their thousands of soldiers, would fall as quickly as this State had fallen, and even more quickly, if their citizens were to do what the citizens of this State had done; if the citizens of England had behaved towards the Crown as the Burghers of this State had behaved to their Government, England would never have stood as long as she had, not even as long as this State had stood. The State owed obligations to other countries; they knew that the fire which had nearly consumed this State would, if felt by them, very soon consume them also.

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"In several of the cities of Holland there were people who had subscribed for only one debenture, because they thought men of their own blood were living in South Africa. What was the consequence? The interest up to July last had been paid; in

January of this year, £2250 was due for interest, and there was not a penny to meet it.

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"To take up arms and fight was nonsense; to draw the sword would be to draw the sword against God, for it was God's judgment that the State was in the condition it was to-day, and it was their duty to inquire whether they should immerse in blood the thousands of innocent inhabitants of this country, and if so, what for. For an idea: something they had in their heads, but not in their hearts—for an independence which is not prized? Let them make the best of the situation, and get the best terms they possibly could; let them agree to join their hands to those of their brethren in the south, and then from the Cape to the Zambesi there would be one great people. Yes, there was something grand in that, grander even than their idea of a republic, something which ministered to their national feeling. And would this be so miserable? Yes, this would be miserable for those who would not be under the law, for the rebel and the revolutionist, but welfare and prosperity for the men of law and order.

The advantages of federation with the rest of South Africa.

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"They must not underrate their real and many difficulties. He could point to the south-western border, the Zulu, the gold fields and other questions, and show them that it was their duty to come to an arrangement with the British Government, and to do so in a bold and manly manner. An hon. member on Saturday last had spoken with fervent patriotism, but he had failed to appreciate the reference, because it amounted to this—that they must shut their eyes to everything so as to keep their independence."

Shepstone thought he had waited long enough. There were no signs of any reforms being taken in hand seriously. The native menace was growing daily and a Zulu invasion—which in fact was only just staved off by the annexation—was imminent. He told the Executive Council that the only remedy possible for the condition of the Transvaal was its absorption in the British Empire. The Volksraad, under Kruger's influence, now became suddenly active. It censured Burgers and appointed Kruger vice-president. Burgers' new constitution was hurriedly passed, together with a treason law making all public expression of opinion against the

Government, or for annexation, high treason. The Volksraad then prorogued. Agitation in the country increased, the Kruger party working actively to secure Kruger's election and to get up a movement against English interference. Meanwhile in Cape Colony and the Orange Free State the expounders of the new Afrikander nationalism in the Dutch press carried on a vigorous campaign against the proposed surrender by the Transvaal Boers of the future hopes of Afrikanderdom. On April 9 Shepstone informed the Government of the Republic that he was about to declare the Transvaal British territory without delay. He communicated the text of his proposed proclamation to President Burgers, who suggested the omission of a clause, and in his turn showed Shepstone a protest he had prepared to clear himself of any suspicion of having prearranged the annexation. On April 12 the proclamation of annexation was read out in the Market Square of Pretoria to an enthusiastic crowd. The President's protest was received in respectful silence. On the last day of its existence the Executive Council appointed two of its members, Messrs. Kruger and Jorissen, to go to England and appeal against the annexation, and in case of failure to invoke the help of the other Powers. The protest and the mission were generally regarded at the time as mere matters of form. Everybody knew that the whole business had been practically arranged beforehand between Shepstone and the Government. Here is the account given by Sir Theophilus Shepstone to his official superiors of the transaction:—

April 12, 1877. First annexation of the Transvaal. The prearranged protest. The first deputation to England.

"There will be a protest against my act of annexation. . . . You need not be disquieted by such action, because it is taken merely to save appearances and the members of the Government from the violence of a faction that seems for years to have held Pretoria in terror when any act of the Government displeased it.

"You will better understand this when I tell you privately that the President has from the first fully acquiesced in the necessity for the change, and that most of the members of the Government have expressed themselves anxious for it, but none of them have had the courage openly to express their opinions. . . .

Yesterday morning Mr. Burgers came to me to arrange how the matter should be done. I read to him the draft of my proclamation. . . . He brought to me a number of conditions which he wished me to insert, which I have accepted and have embodied in my proclamation. He told me he could not help issuing a protest to keep the noisy portion of his people quiet. . . . Mr. Burgers read me, too, the draft of his protest and asked me if I saw any objection to it or thought it too strong. I said that it appeared to me to pledge the people to resist by-and-by, to which he replied that it was to tide over the difficulty of the moment, seeing that my support—the troops—were a fortnight's march distant, and that by the time the answer to the protest came all desire of opposition would have died out. I therefore did not persuade him from his protest."

Satisfaction in the Transvaal with the annexation.

The annexation was received with almost universal satisfaction in the Transvaal. The *Volksstem* and other Transvaal newspapers all agreed that it was inevitable and that the Boers had better acquiesce and make the best of the new situation. The Cape and Free State papers alone protested. A few weeks later a Dr. Jooste, writing to the editor of the *Zuid Afrikaan* (since become *Ons Land*), stated that he had just returned from a tour through the whole Transvaal and that his opinion was that fully ninety-six per cent. of the burghers were satisfied with the annexation. Even Dr. Jorissen confesses in his Reminiscences that "Shepstone convinced almost everybody that his action was a blessing and that England was annexing the Transvaal out of sheer philanthropy." Elsewhere he suggests that if it had not been for the subsequent incredible blunders of the British Government there would have been no revolution and the "cause of Afrikanderdom" would have suffered a premature decease. Even those who protested most before the annexation acquiesced readily when it was completed. The Executive Council, the officials of the old Government, with the single exception of Piet Joubert, found no difficulty in accepting office under the new *régime*. When the commission of protest left for England on May 9, Shepstone wrote: "Mr. Paul Kruger and Dr. Jorissen leave to-day. I do not think that either of them wishes the act of annexation to be

cancelled; Dr. Jorissen certainly does not." In England the envoys took their mission lightly. Finding Lord Carnarvon determined they acquiesced cheerfully in his decision and returned to South Africa to take up their positions under the British Administration, without wasting time in going round Europe to plead a cause that they themselves scarcely believed in. It has often been said that Shepstone's action was too hasty, and that if he had waited a few months the Transvaal would have asked for annexation of its own accord. It is easy to make such a criticism after the event. The fact remains that by annexing, Shepstone was in time to forestall a Zulu invasion, which would in all probability have been combined with a general native outbreak, and that if the policy he had desired to carry out had not been abandoned, there would never have been any revolt. The Boers revolted, not because they had been annexed against their will, but, partly, because the causes that led them to acquiesce in annexation were removed, and still more because the British administration was harsh and unsympathetic, and because the promises made to them were dishonestly evaded. The same causes would have produced the same effect even if the annexation had been by formal request of the Volksraad. What is true, perhaps, is that if the annexation had come by request, the pro-Boer agitation in England would never have reached such a height. But it is surely too much to hold Shepstone responsible for the subsequent vagaries of a misguided and factious public at home. The annexation was carried out with remarkable tact and skill after three months' deliberation, in concert with the Government of the state which was being annexed, and by general consent of the people. It was amply justified by the situation in the Transvaal, by its hopeless bankruptcy, by the general anarchy prevailing, by the decay of civilisation, by the failure of the Boers to hold their own against the natives in the Transvaal, by the danger of Zulu invasion, and by the legitimate desire of the Imperial Government to bring about a South African confederation.

Discussion of Shepstone's action. Its justification.

The first result of the annexation was a general revival of prosperity. British gold paid the interest on the public debt,

and the salaries of the officials. British troops secured the country from the fear of local native risings. The protection of the British flag induced a large immigration of traders and others who wished to settle in the country. The value of land increased enormously. The revenue doubled itself. In two years the trade of the country rose from almost nothing to two millions a year. In 1879 the Zulu power was broken and Sikukuni subdued. The Boers had obtained to the full the benefits of annexation. The causes which prompted them to submit to it no longer existed. The new Government was in many ways irksome and unsympathetic. The Boers began to regret the loss of their independence. That regret was quickened into an active desire to get rid of the British Government, by the mistakes of the latter, and by the persistent agitation carried on by Mr. Kruger and his supporters.

Rapid recovery of the Transvaal under British rule. The Boers nevertheless regret their independence.

Some description of that extraordinary man, whose history has been so largely the history of the Transvaal, may not be out of place here. Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger was born at Rustenburg, near Colesberg, in 1825. He took part in the Great Trek as a boy of twelve—old enough to be fully imbued with the spirit of the "voortrekkers," and with their hatred of England. His family, after many wanderings, settled at Rustenburg, in the Transvaal. Endowed with exceptional bodily strength, and skill in the use of the rifle, brave, iron-willed, persuasive, resourceful and unscrupulous, he soon distinguished himself among his fellows. He took a prominent part in wars against the Kaffirs and in the civil wars of the Transvaal. His part in Pretorius' raid into the Free State has already been referred to. In 1864 he was elected the first Commandant-General of the united Republic. On all questions of politics or religion—and these in the Transvaal have always been intimately connected—Mr. Kruger represented the narrow pietism, the mediæval conservatism, and the anti-foreign prejudices of the "Dopper" sect to which his family belonged. When Burgers became President, Kruger put himself at the head of the extreme reactionary party, and did all in his power to thwart him and make government an impossibility. Burgers afterwards

Character and position of Mr. Kruger.

openly accused him of having assisted the agitation to bring in the English, simply to upset the existing *régime*. When the annexation was actually imminent, he did all he could to oppose it, hoping to make it fall through, to get the blame of Shepstone's intervention thrown upon Burgers, and then to get elected President himself. He was much too ambitious and headstrong to rest content with a subordinate position under the British administration. He held that he had been unjustly cheated of the Presidency by the annexation, and he determined that the annexation should yet be reversed, and he become President. He had, as a young man, seen the English Government abandon the Free State because it was a troublesome possession, and he made up his mind that he should make the Transvaal troublesome too. In November, 1877, his appointment as member of the Executive Council expired. The Government refused to re-appoint him because of his hostile attitude, and because he had by misrepresentation or possibly owing to a misunderstanding added an extra £100 to his salary. The refusal was a mistake. Henceforward he was irreconcilable. The anti-British agitation was worked up with tremendous vigour. The majority of the Boers were terrorised by Kruger's followers into attending at the great meetings which were held from time to time during the annexation. One can safely say that, without Kruger's incessant and untiring activity, the Boers would never have revolted, and that, up to the actual outbreak of hostilities, a secret ballot would have shown a majority against revolting. At the same time, Kruger discouraged a resort to force as long as he had the slightest hope that the policy of alternate entreaty and intimidation might succeed.

He determines to secure the reversal of the annexation.

The British administration, meanwhile, committed blunder after blunder. Shepstone, in his proclamation, had promised the Boers free representative institutions, and had sent home a scheme, which was at once pigeon-holed. Nothing was done, no Volksraad was called together, and the Boers had good reason to complain that they were deprived of their liberties. Our policy was as weak as it was unjust. Shepstone's proclamation against seditious agitation could not be enforced,

Folly and injustice of the British Government.

MR. KRUGER IN 1867.

COMMANDANT-GENERAL OF THE TRANSVAAL, 1864-1873.

From Photo in the Possession of the Right Hon. J. Chamberlain.

as there was no proper garrison, and only made things worse. The old error of trying to do a great thing "on the cheap" proved fatal once more. An adequate police force could have suppressed the agitation and protected outlying farmers from being terrorised into joining it. But the British Government was resolved that, having gained possession of the Transvaal for nothing, it should disburse nothing to make that possession secure. The agitation went on vigorously. In 1878 Kruger again went to London with Joubert on a deputation to Sir M. Hicks-Beach, who had succeeded Lord Carnarvon as Colonial Secretary. The second deputation was as fruitless as the first. Early in 1879 came the disaster of Isandhlwana. The Transvaal malcontents saw that the absence of troops in Zululand and the dejection of the British public were their opportunity. A petition had been signed in the preceding year by over 6500 signatures, protesting against the annexation. If the figures were genuine, a number of those who signed must have been among those who signed pro-annexation petitions. A mass meeting of over 3000 Boers was collected near Pretoria in March, and practically besieged the town. To make matters worse, Shepstone, who enjoyed the confidence and respect of the Boers, by whom he was regarded almost as one of themselves, was at this juncture called home and succeeded by Colonel [afterwards Sir Owen] Lanyon, whose injudicious conduct and arrogant military manner still further estranged the Boers. In April Sir Bartle Frere, the High Commissioner, came and parleyed with the Boer leaders, offering to consider their reasonable grievances, but refusing absolutely to discuss the restoration of independence. The assembly eventually dispersed peacefully, but Kruger, Joubert and Pretorius, who now emerged as the leaders of the irreconcilables, saw clearly that the British Government was much too feeble to prevent the outbreak of a rising. Frere, during his stay in the Transvaal, had convinced himself of two things: first of all, that the majority of the Boers, even of those who were camped with Kruger and Joubert, were at heart against the annexation, but dared not proclaim their real sentiments because they still dreaded

1879. Recall of Sir T. Shepstone. Appointment of Colonel Lanyon.

the possibility of a reversal of the annexation by the British Government; and, secondly, that the Boers had a genuine grievance in the failure of the British Government to keep its promise and establish some proper form of representative Government. In his despatches to the Colonial Office, Frere insisted on the necessity of leaving no doubt on the former point. As regards the latter he drew up the outlines of a liberal constitution for the Transvaal, in consultation with President Brand, Sir H. de Villiers, Chief Justice of Cape Colony, Mr. (afterwards Sir Gordon) Sprigg, Prime Minister of Cape Colony, and other statesmen of South African experience. But before his recommendations could be carried into effect, he was succeeded, in June 1879, in the control of Transvaal affairs by Sir G. Wolseley (now Viscount Wolseley). An Executive Council and Legislative Assembly were now created with powers so limited, and so completely at the mercy of the Governor, that the Boers were only the more convinced that there was no intention ever to fulfil Shepstone's promise. To crown all, the end of the year brought out to South Africa Mr. Gladstone's Mid-Lothian speeches, which were freely distributed in the Transvaal as pamphlets. In terms of the most unmeasured invective, Mr. Gladstone, for the benefit of the Mid-Lothian electorate, denounced the annexation as a hideous and treacherous crime. What did that gifted demagogue care whether his reckless words stirred up rebellion in Africa, led to the defeat of British troops or the humiliation of the British Government, if only they might help to turn the tide of a general election? Mr. Gladstone's speeches and the efforts of the English Transvaal Committee convinced the Boers that their independence would be restored the moment the Liberal Party came into power, provided only they kept up the agitation with sufficient vigour. The expected change took place, and Mr. Gladstone announced that the Queen could not be advised to relinquish her sovereignty over the Transvaal. Worse still, nothing was done to fulfil the oft-repeated promise of free government. From that moment the Transvaal revolt was a certainty. The attempt to seize the waggon of a farmer

Mischief done by Mr. Gladstone's Mid-Lothian speeches.

called Bezuidenhout for refusing to pay his taxes only hastened its outbreak.

On December 15, 1880, the Republic was formally proclaimed at Paardekraal, now Krugersdorp, and the elected triumvirate, Kruger, Joubert, and Pretorius, established themselves at Heidelberg, and from there on the 16th, Dingaan's Day, sent an ultimatum to Sir Owen Lanyon. On the same day an attack was made on the garrison of Potchefstroom. On December 20 the Boers laid an ambush at Bronkhorst Spruit for two companies of the 94th Regiment, under Colonel Anstruther, on their way from Lydenburg to Pretoria. At a carefully prepared point on the road Colonel Anstruther was told to halt, and the moment he had given his refusal to the messenger, a murderous volley was poured in on the troops from all sides. In a few minutes 56 men were killed and 101 wounded and the little force surrendered. Whether Bronkhorst Spruit was a justifiable attack or a treacherous massacre is a point on which opinions will always differ. There can be no difference of opinion with regard to the atrocious murder of Captain Elliot, one of the officers who surrendered on that occasion, who was sent across to the Free State on parole and shot by his guards while crossing the Vaal River. The loyalists and the small British garrisons were shut up in the villages, where they held their own till the conclusion of the war. Potchefstroom was the only exception, but in that case Commandant Cronje induced Colonel Winsloe's surrender by withholding the news of the armistice concluded with Sir Evelyn Wood—a doubtful piece of sharp practice. In the open country the large section of Boers who were against rebellion were left at the mercy of the revolutionists, and after the first victories the coercion was too strong to be resisted. Having isolated and invested the British garrisons the Boers now invaded Natal and seized and intrenched Laing's Nek, at which point they meant to dispute the advance of the small relieving force which was marching up from Maritzburg under Sir George Colley. On January 28 Colley, with 500 men of the 58th regiment and 70 mounted infantry, made a desperate attack on the 2000 Boers on the Nek. It was repulsed with

December 15, 1880. Outbreak of the Transvaal insurrection. Ambush at Bronkhorst Spruit.

British defeated at Laing's Nek and Ingogo.

the loss of 190 men. On February 8, while patrolling the road towards Newcastle with some 300 men, Colley was surrounded and attacked by a large force of Boers on Ingogo heights. After losing some 150 men he managed to escape back to Mount Prospect camp that night. On February 27 came the crowning disaster of Majuba Hill. Majuba is a flat topped mountain towering some 2000 feet over the western side of Laing's Nek. Colley conceived the idea of ascending it and thus turning the flank of the Boer position. With 554 men, selected from various regiments, the ascent was made on the night of the 26th. In the morning the Boers saw the force on Majuba and for a moment thought of abandoning their position. On second thoughts they determined to make a bold attempt to drive Colley off the hill. Less than 200 volunteers under General Nikolas Smit carried out the feat of actually storming the top of Majuba. Creeping up under cover of the steep hill-side they gradually worked their way up, shooting every man that exposed himself on the summit. No attempt had been made to occupy the lower slopes which commanded the approach, and the bayonet charge which might have saved the day at the last moment was never carried out. The British troops broke and rushed headlong down the hill. Sir G. Colley and 91 men were killed, 134 wounded and a number of prisoners taken. Of the Boers one man was killed outright and another died afterwards of his wounds. It was a splendid feat of arms on the part of the Boers. To Englishmen Majuba will always recall humiliating memories, not because of the actual defeat of half a battalion of infantry by a handful of Boers, but because of the abject surrender which followed. It has sometimes been asserted that in the present struggle Great Britain went to war in order to avenge Majuba. If by that is meant that Great Britain has crushed a small people to chastise it for having dared to fight gallantly, the assertion is untrue. But if what is meant is that the Imperial Government, at the eleventh hour, showed that it was ready to shrink from no sacrifice of blood and treasure in order to maintain its supremacy in South Africa, and to keep its faith with those who had relied on its

February 27, 1881. Battle of Majuba. Death of Sir G. Colley.

protection, then it is true that it has worthily avenged, or rather redeemed, the national disaster that followed so soon after Majuba.

Dismay of the Ministry.

The outbreak of the war created the greatest dismay in the minds of the Ministry—a dismay heightened by the succession of British reverses, by the news that the excitement in the Free State and Cape Colony was growing rapidly, and that a general rising of the Dutch all over South Africa was not impossible, and by the clamour of the peace party among its own supporters. Although Sir Evelyn Wood was now in command of a considerable force in Natal, and Sir Frederick Roberts was arriving in South Africa with additional reinforcements, the Ministry dreaded the prospect of a prolonged, costly, and unpopular war. It had already trifled with the idea of generously giving the misguided Boers an opportunity for submission. President Brand's offers of mediation, accompanied by no obscure hints of the possibility of the Free State's throwing its weight into the scale in case of refusal, were eagerly snatched at. On February 8 Lord Kimberley telegraphed to Brand that, if the Boers desisted from further armed opposition, all reasonable guarantees would be given as to their treatment after submission. After Ingogo the word submission disappears. On February 16 a telegram was sent to Sir Evelyn Wood telling him to inform Mr. Kruger that if the Boers desisted from armed opposition, Her Majesty's Government would consent to appoint Commissioners to develop a scheme of self-government, and would suspend hostilities. When the news of Majuba reached England, Mr. Gladstone, who at all times had a morbid horror of war, and to whom the idea of continuing a war for the sake of recovering lost prestige seemed too outrageous even to discuss, insisted that that reverse should not affect the course of negotiations already begun. It was a plausible argument, but the real charge against Mr. Gladstone is, not so much that he neglected the value of prestige, but that he did let Majuba affect the course of negotiations. The terms which the Boers secured after Majuba were not the terms the British Government was prepared to grant in the beginning of February. No amount of pompous pretence could

Armistice agreed upon, March 6.

disguise the fact that after Majuba the British Government sued for peace as the beaten party. On March 6 an eight days' truce was entered upon, and provisions were sent to the beleaguered garrisons. The truce was prolonged from day to day, and on March 21, after a series of meetings, Messrs. Kruger, Joubert, and Pretorius agreed to disperse their followers on condition that the independence of the Transvaal was recognised subject to the suzerainty of the Queen, the presence of a British Resident with considerable powers, and the reservation of foreign relations. The territory east of the 30th degree of longitude, viz., the districts of Utrecht, Wakkerstroom, Ermelo, Barberton and Lydenburg, and most of Zoutpansberg, which adjoined on powerful native tribes, were to be retained by Her Majesty's Government. When the mass of the Boers heard of this last clause, they declared they would fight sooner than accept it, and the Ministry, which had made up its mind to submit to anything sooner than face the prospect of war again, hastily dropped the question. To have adhered to it might have avoided all subsequent complications. The Commissioners sent to settle the affairs of the Transvaal, viz., Sir Hercules Robinson, the successor to Frere, whom the Government, yielding to the clamour of the Exeter Hall party, had recalled in disgrace, Sir H. de Villiers, and Sir Evelyn Wood, got through their sorry task as best they could, assisted by the advice of President Brand as the honest broker. As Mr. Gladstone was resolved on peace at any price, the Commissioners had on practically every point to give in to the demands of the Boers, but not till their ineffectual haggling and threatening had, as Mr. Fitzpatrick remarks in his 'Transvaal from Within,' robbed concessions of all appearance of grace and justice. On August 3 the Pretoria Convention was signed. The Suzerain Power reserved the right to march troops through the country in time of war, to control the Transvaal's foreign relations, and to appoint a Resident. The Resident was to exercise a general supervision over native affairs, and to be the channel of communication with foreign Powers. There were other provisions against slavery, securing freedom of trade, and general equality of treatment of foreigners en-

The Pretoria Convention signed, August 3.

tering the State. While the Convention was being signed the loyalists of Pretoria, followed by some of the native chiefs, took part in a strange funeral ceremony—the solemn burial of the British flag. On the lid of the coffin was inscribed the prophetic word "*resurgam*."

Disgraceful character of Mr. Gladstone's surrender.

The surrender of Mr. Gladstone's Government was marked by every circumstance which could render it discreditable. It was dictated by cowardice. When the revolution broke out, Mr. Gladstone had declared in the strongest language that the annexation could not be revoked and that the Queen's authority must be vindicated. When the Boers began to be successful and Mr. Gladstone found himself face to face with a difficult and expensive war, he capitulated abjectly. Nearly a million natives, who relied on promises made again and again that the annexation should never be revoked, were abandoned to their fate, in spite of the bitter protests of their chiefs. The loyalists were left to the tender mercies of their exultant neighbours or driven into exile. Their claims to compensation were derided as impudent attempts at extortion by "interested contractors and stock-jobbers." Their earnest appeals were met by disingenuous evasions and finally left unanswered. What they felt may be seen from an extract of the last letter addressed by Mr. White, president of the Transvaal loyalists' committee, to Mr. Gladstone:—

"Every care—even the most tender care—is being taken of those who have obtained by force of arms liberal concessions from the Government; but I am afraid very little care and very little sympathy is taken or shown for us, who have borne sorrow and suffering, and have done our duty against the common enemy, who buried all our political animosities when we saw English troops attacked, and who stood forward at the call of the imperial authorities to fight and some, alas! to die, for the maintenance of British supremacy. Whatever our faults may have been, however much we have erred otherwise, we ask you to give us credit for our loyalty. Some of us were deeply opposed to the autocratic system of imperial rule which prevailed in the Transvaal, and which helped, in the judgment of some of us, towards the war. . . . But when the sword was drawn, when it

The protests of the loyalists.

came to being an enemy or being loyal, we all of us came to the front, and strove to do our duty in full dependence on the pledged and, as we hoped, the inviolate word of England. And now it is very bitter for us to find we trusted in vain; that, notwithstanding our sufferings and privations, in which our wives and children had to bear their share; and that, notwithstanding our losses, including for many of us the irreparable loss of valuable lives, we are dealt with as clamorous claimants at arm's length, and told, as I was told by a member of the Government, we are 'too pronounced' in our views. If, sir, you had seen, as I have seen, promising young citizens of Pretoria dying of wounds received for their country, and if you had the painful duty, as I have had, of bringing to their friends at home the last mementoes of the departed; if you had seen the privations and discomforts which delicate women and children bore without murmuring for upwards of three months; if you had seen strong men crying like children at the cruel and undeserved desertion of England; if you had seen the long strings of half-desperate loyalists, shaking the dust off their feet as they left the country, which I saw on my way to Newcastle; and if you yourself had invested your all on the strength of the word of England, and now saw yourself in a fair way of being beggared by the acts of the country in whom you trusted, you would, sir, I think, be 'pronounced'; and England would ring with eloquent entreaties and threats which would compel a hearing. We, sir, are humble subjects of England, from the other side of the equator it is true, but none the less subjects, and perhaps the more entitled to consideration for that reason. We have no eloquence but the eloquence of our sufferings, of our losses, and our cruel desertion; but we urge our claims upon you as a matter of justice, of right, and of national morality; and we submit that if you do not listen to them you will incur the danger of offering a larger premium to rebellion than to loyalty; of alienating for ever the cordial respect of a number of loyal persons; of forfeiting all confidence in the national honour and justice; of utterly destroying the normal influence of England in South Africa—an influence which means more and is worth more than mere military prestige; and of handing down to posterity the name of your administration as one which was guilty of one of the greatest acts of national perfidy towards faithful subjects ever perpetrated."

The attempt to gloss over the surrender of British interests and the betrayal of British subjects by cant about the "magnanimity" of restoring a brave little nation to freedom, and the "bloodguiltiness" of continuing an unjust war, only puts Mr. Gladstone's action in a worse light. There were Englishmen who from the first had denounced the annexation as an unnecessary and unjustifiable act and had urged the immediate and unconditional restoration of the Republic to the full independence it had enjoyed before 1877. Such a policy might have had some claim to be considered magnanimous, and its effects would have been far less mischievous than those of the policy which actually was pursued. But it was not Mr. Gladstone's policy. Mr. Gladstone's policy was first to refuse, then to give in after defeat from fear of further defeat, and finally to haggle with the victors for the best terms that they might be disposed to grant to the vanquished. It was a policy of pusillanimity, not of magnanimity. To try and veil the disgrace of it by fine phrases was the most contemptible form of hypocrisy. The pretence imposed on nobody in South Africa, least of all on the Dutch. The effect such "magnanimity" had on the Boers themselves may be judged by General Joubert's well-known letter to Lobengula, a letter written six months after the signing of the Convention. In this letter one of the most progressive of the Boers and one who had good opportunity of judging the motives of Mr. Gladstone's Government thus sums up the situation:—

The cant of magnanimity.

"Now you must have heard that the English took away our country, the Transvaal, or, as they say, annexed it. We then talked nicely for four years and begged for our country. But no; when an Englishman once has your property in his hand, then he is like a monkey that has its hands full of pumpkin-seeds—if you don't beat him to death he will never let go—and then all our nice talk for four years did not help us at all. Then the English commenced to arrest us because we were dissatisfied, and that caused the shooting and fighting. Then the English first found that it would be better to give us back our country."

General Joubert's letter to Lobengula.

There was more truth in this brief summary than in the disingenuous explanations of the surrender made by Mr. Gladstone in Parliament. In the minds of the Englishmen in South Africa that surrender left a bitterness and a contempt of the Imperial Government which have hardly yet been effaced. When it has been said that the capitulation was pusillanimous, faithless, and dishonest it is only a natural consequence that it was impolitic. Its outcome has been feverish unrest in South Africa for eighteen years, culminating in a long and desperate struggle for supremacy between the Transvaal and the Imperial Government. If politicians are to be held responsible for the natural consequences of their actions, however long deferred, no small share of the guilt of the blood shed in the present war lies at Mr. Gladstone's door.