CHAPTER V

THE BOER REBELLION

Accession of Mr. Gladstone to power--His letters to the Boer leaders and the loyals--His refusal to rescind the annexation--The Boers encouraged by prominent members of the Radical party--The Bezuidenhout incident--Despatch of troops to Potchefstroom--Mass meeting of the 8th December 1880--Appointment of the Triumvirate and declaration of the republic--Despatch of Boer proclamation to Sir O. Lanyon--His reply--Outbreak of hostilities at Potchefstroom--Defence of the court-house by Major Clarke--The massacre of the detachment of the 94th under Colonel Anstruther--Dr. Ward--The Boer rejoicings--The Transvaal placed under martial law--Abandonment of their homes by the people of Pretoria--Sir Owen Lanyon's admirable defence organisation--Second proclamation issued by the Boers--Its complete falsehood--Life at Pretoria during the siege--Murders of natives by the Boers--Loyal conduct of the native chiefs--Difficulty of preventing them from attacking the Boers--Occupation of Lang's Nek by the Boers--Sir George Colley's departure to Newcastle--The condition of that town--The attack on Lang's Nek--Its desperate nature--Effect of victory on the Boers--The battle at the Ingogo--Our defeat--Sufferings of the wounded--Major Essex--Advance of the Boers into Natal--Constant alarms--Expected attack on Newcastle--Its unorganised and indefensible condition--Arrival of the reinforcements and retreat of the Boers to the Nek--Despatch of General Wood to bring up more reinforcements--Majuba Hill--Our disaster, and

death of Sir George Colley--Cause of our defeat--A Boer version of the disaster--Sir George Colley's tactics.

When the Liberal ministry became an accomplished fact instead of a happy possibility, Mr. Gladstone did not find it convenient to adopt the line of policy with reference to the Transvaal, that might have been expected from his utterances whilst leader of the Opposition. On the contrary, he declared in Parliament that the Annexation could not be cancelled, and on the 8th June 1880 we find him, in answer to a Boer petition, written with the object of inducing him to act up to the spirit of his words and rescind the Annexation, writing thus:--"Looking to all circumstances, both of the Transvaal and the rest of South Africa, and to the necessity of preventing a renewal of disorders which might lead to disastrous consequences, not only to the Transvaal, but to the whole of South Africa, our judgment is, that the Queen cannot be advised to relinquish her sovereignty over the Transvaal; but, consistently with the maintenance of that sovereignty, we desire that the white inhabitants of the Transvaal should, without prejudice to the rest of the population, enjoy the fullest liberty to manage their local affairs. We believe that this liberty may be most easily and promptly conceded to the Transvaal as a member of a South African confederation."

Unless words have lost their signification, this passage certainly means that the Transvaal must remain a British colony, but that England will be prepared to grant it responsible government, more especially if it will consent to a confederation scheme. Mr. Gladstone, however, in a

communication dated 1st June 1881, and addressed to the unfortunate Transvaal loyals, for whom he expresses "respect and sympathy," interprets his meaning thus: "It is stated, as I observe, that a promise was given to me that the Transvaal should never be given back. There is no mention of the terms or date of this promise. If the reference be to my letter, of 8th June 1880, to Messrs. Kruger and Joubert, I do not think the language of that letter justifies the description given. Nor am I sure in what manner or to what degree the fullest liberty to manage their local affairs, which I then said Her Majesty's Government desired to confer on the white population of the Transvaal, differs from the settlement now about being made in its bearing on the interests of those whom your Committee represents."

Such twisting of the meaning of words would, in a private person, be called dishonest. It will also occur to most people that Mr. Gladstone might have spared the deeply wronged and loyal subjects of Her Majesty whom he was addressing, the taunt he levels at them in the second paragraph I have quoted. If asked, he would no doubt say that he had not the slightest intention of laughing at them; but when he deliberately tells them that it makes no difference to their interests whether they remain Her Majesty's subjects under a responsible Government, or become the servants of men who were but lately in arms against them and Her Majesty's authority, he is either mocking them, or offering an insult to their understandings.

By way of comment on his remarks, I may add that he had, in a letter

replying to a petition from these same loyal inhabitants, addressed to him in May 1880, informed them that he had already told the Boer representatives that the Annexation could not be rescinded. Although Mr. Gladstone is undoubtedly the greatest living master of the art of getting two distinct and opposite sets of meanings out of one set of words, it would try even his ingenuity to make out, to the satisfaction of an impartial mind, that he never gave any pledge about the retention of the Transvaal.

Indeed, it is from other considerations clear that he had no intention of giving up the country to the Boers, whose cause he appears to have taken up solely for electioneering purposes. Had he meant to do so, he would have carried out his intention on succeeding to office, and, indeed, as things have turned out, it is deeply to be regretted that he did not; for, bad as such a step would have been, it would at any rate have had a better appearance than our ultimate surrender after three defeats. It would also have then been possible to secure the repayment of some of the money owing to this country, and to provide for the proper treatment of the natives, and the compensation of the loyal inhabitants who could no longer live there: since it must naturally have been easier to make terms with the Boers before they had defeated our troops.

On the other hand, we should have missed the grandest and most soul-stirring display of radical theories, practically applied, that has as yet lightened the darkness of this country. But although Mr.

Gladstone gave his official decision against returning the country, there seems to be little doubt that communications on the subject were kept up with the Boer leaders through some prominent members of the Radical party, whom, it was said, went so far as to urge the Boers to take up arms against us. When Mr. White came to this country on behalf of the loyalists, after the surrender, he stated that this was so at a public meeting, and said further that he had in his possession proofs of his statements. He even went so far as to name the gentleman he accused, and to challenge him to deny it. I have not been able to gather that Mr. White's statements were contradicted.

However this may be, after a pause, agitation in the Transvaal suddenly recommenced with redoubled vigour. It began through a man named Bezuidenhout, who refused to pay his taxes. Thereupon a waggon was seized in execution under the authority of the court and put up to auction, but its sale was prevented by a crowd of rebel Boers, who kicked the auctioneer off the waggon and dragged the vehicle away. This was on the 11th November 1880. When this intelligence reached Pretoria, Sir Owen Lanyon sent down a few companies of the 21st Regiment, under the command of Major Thornhill, to support the Landdrost in arresting the rioters, and appointed Captain Raaf, C.M.G., to act as special messenger to the Landdrost's Court at Potchefstroom, with authority to enrol special constables to assist him to carry out the arrests.
On arrival at Potchefstroom Captain Raaf found that, without an armed force, it was quite impossible to effect any arrest. On the 26th November Sir Owen Lanyon, realising the gravity of the situation,

telegraphed to Sir George Colley, asking that the 58th Regiment should be sent back to the Transvaal. Sir George replied that he could ill spare it on account of "daily expected outbreak of Pondos and possible appeal for help from Cape Colony," and that the Government must be supported by the loyal inhabitants.

It will be seen that the Boers had, with some astuteness, chosen a very favourable time to commence operations. The hands of the Cape Government were full with the Basutu war, so no help could be expected from it. Sir G. Wolseley had sent away the only cavalry regiment that remained in the country, and lastly, Sir Owen Lanyon had quite recently allowed a body of 300 trained volunteers, mostly, if not altogether, drawn from among the loyalists, to be raised for service in the Basutu war, a serious drain upon the resources of a country so sparsely populated as the Transvaal.

Meanwhile a mass meeting had been convened by the Boers for the 8th January to consider Mr. Gladstone's letter, but the Bezuidenhout incident had the effect of putting forward the date of assembly by a month, and it was announced that it would be held on the 8th December. Subsequently the date was shifted to the 15th, and then back again to the 8th. Every effort was made, by threats of future vengeance, to secure the presence of as many burghers as possible; attempts were also made to persuade the native chiefs to send representatives, and to promise to join in an attack on the English. These entirely failed. The

meeting was held at a place called Paarde Kraal, and resulted in the sudden declaration of the Republic and the appointment of the famous triumvirate Kruger, Joubert, and Pretorius. It then moved into Heidelberg, a little town about sixty miles from Pretoria, and on the 16th December the Republic was formally proclaimed in a long proclamation, containing a summary of the events of the few preceding years, and declaring the arrangements the malcontents were willing to make with the English authorities. The terms offered in this document are almost identical with those finally accepted by Her Majesty's Government, with the exception that in the proclamation of the 16th December the Boer leaders declare their willingness to enter into confederation, and to guide their native policy by general rules adopted in concurrence "with the Colonies and States of South Africa." This was a more liberal offer than that which we ultimately agreed to, but then the circumstances had changed.

This proclamation was forwarded to Sir Owen Lanyon with a covering letter, in which the following words occur:--"We declare in the most solemn manner that we have no desire to spill blood, and that from our side we do not wish war. It lies in your hands to force us to appeal to arms in self-defence. . . . . We expect your answer within twice twenty-four hours."

I beg to direct particular attention to these paragraphs, as they have a considerable interest in view of what followed.

The letter and proclamation reached Government House, Pretoria, at 10.30 on the evening of Friday the 17th December. Sir Owen Lanyon's proclamation, written in reply, was handed to the messenger at noon on Sunday, 19th December, or within about thirty-six hours of his arrival, and could hardly have reached the rebel camp, sixty miles off, before dawn the next day, the 20th December, on which day, at about one o'clock, a detachment of the 94th was ambushed and destroyed on the road between Middelburg and Pretoria, about eighty miles off, by a force despatched from Heidelburg for that purpose some days before. On the 16th December, or the same day on which the Triumvirate had despatched the proclamation to Pretoria containing their terms, and expressing in the most solemn manner that they had no desire to shed blood, a large Boer force was attacking Potchefstroom.

So much then for the sincerity of the professions of their desire to avoid bloodshed.

The proclamation sent by Sir O. Lanyon in reply recited in its preamble the various acts of which the rebels had been guilty, including that of having "wickedly sought to incite the said loyal native inhabitants throughout the province to take up arms against Her Majesty's Government," announced that matters had now been put into the hands of the officer commanding Her Majesty's troops, and promised pardon to all who would disperse to their homes.

It was at Potchefstroom, which town had all along been the nursery of

the rebellion, that actual hostilities first broke out. Potchefstroom as a town is much more Boer in its sympathies than Pretoria, which is, or rather was, almost purely English. Sir Owen Lanyon had, as stated before, sent a small body of soldiers thither to support the civil authorities, and had also appointed Major Clarke, C.M.G., an officer of noted coolness and ability, to act as Special Commissioner for the district.

Major Clarke's first step was to try, in conjunction with Captain Raaf, to raise a corps of volunteers, in which he totally failed. Those of the townsfolk who were not Boers at heart had too many business relations with the surrounding farmers, and perhaps too little faith in the stability of English rule after Mr. Gladstone's utterances, to allow them to indulge in patriotism. At the time of the outbreak, between seventy and eighty thousand sterling was owing to firms in Potchefstroom by neighbouring Boers, a sum amply sufficient to account for their lukewarmness in the English cause. Subsequent events have shown that the Potchefstroom shopkeepers were wise in their generation.

On the 15th December a large number of Boers came into the town and took possession of the printing-office in order to print the proclamation already alluded to. Major Clarke made two attempts to enter the office and see the leaders, but without success.

On the 16th a Boer patrol fired on some of the mounted infantry, and the fire was returned. These were the first shots fired during the war, and

they were fired by Boers. Orders were thereupon signalled to Clarke by Lieutenant-Colonel Winsloe, 21st Regiment, now commanding at the fort which he afterwards defended so gallantly, that he was to commence firing. Clarke was in the Landdrost's office on the Market Square with a force of about twenty soldiers under Captain Falls and twenty civilians under Captain Raaf, C.M.G., a position but ill-suited for defensive purposes, from whence fire was accordingly opened, the Boers taking up positions in the surrounding houses commanding the office. Shortly after the commencement of the fighting, Captain Falls was shot dead whilst talking to Major Clarke, the latter having a narrow escape, a bullet grazing his head just above the ear. The fighting continued during the 17th and till the morning of the 18th, when the Boers succeeded in firing the roof, which was of thatch, by throwing fire-balls on to it. Major Clarke then addressed the men, telling them that, though personally he did not care about his own life, he did not see that they could serve any useful purpose by being burned alive, so he should surrender, which he did, with a loss of about six killed and wounded. The camp meanwhile had repulsed with loss the attack made on it, and was never again directly attacked.

Whilst these events were in progress at Potchefstroom, a much more awful tragedy was in preparation on the road between Middelburg and Pretoria.

On the 23rd November Colonel Bellairs, at the request of Sir Owen Lanyon, directed a concentration on Pretoria of most of the few soldiers that there were in the territory, in view of the disturbed condition of

the country. In accordance with these orders, Colonel Anstruther marched from Lydenburg, a town about 180 miles from Pretoria, on the 5th December, with the headquarters and two companies of the 94th Regiment, being a total of 264 men, three women, and two children, and the disproportionately large train of thirty-four ox-waggons, or an ox-waggon capable of carrying five thousand pounds' weight to every eight persons. And here I may remark that it is this enormous amount of baggage, without which it appears to be impossible to move the smallest body of men, that renders infantry regiments almost useless for service in South Africa except for garrisoning purposes. Both Zulus and Boers can get over the ground at thrice the pace possible to the unfortunate soldier, and both races despise them accordingly. The Zulus call our infantry "pack oxen." In this particular instance, Colonel Anstruther's defeat, or rather, annihilation, is to a very great extent referable to his enormous baggage train; since, in the first place, had he not lost valuable days in collecting more waggons, he would have been safe in Pretoria before danger arose. It must also be acknowledged that his arrangements on the line of march were somewhat reckless, though it can hardly be said that he was ignorant of his danger. Thus we find that Colonel Bellairs wrote to Colonel Anstruther, warning him of the probability of an attack, and impressing on him the necessity of keeping a good look-out, the letter being received and acknowledged by the latter on the 17th December.

To this warning was added a still more impressive one, that came to my knowledge privately. A gentleman well known to me received, on the

morning after the troops had passed through the town of Middelburg on their way to Pretoria, a visit from an old Boer with whom he was on friendly terms, who had purposely come to tell him that a large patrol was out to ambush the troops on the Pretoria road. My informant having convinced himself of the truth of the statement, at once rode after the soldiers, and catching them up some distance from Middelburg, told Colonel Anstruther what he had heard, imploring him, he said, with all the energy he could command, to take better precautions against surprise. The Colonel, however, laughed at his fears, and told him that if the Boers came "he would frighten them away with the big drum."

At one o'clock on Sunday, the 20th December, the column was marching along about a mile and a half from a place known as Bronker's Spruit, and thirty-eight miles from Pretoria, when suddenly a large number of mounted Boers were seen in loose formation on the left side of the road. The band was playing at the time, and the column was extended over more than half a mile, the rear-guard being about a hundred yards behind the last waggon. The band stopped playing on seeing the Boers, and the troops halted, when a man was seen advancing with a white flag, whom Colonel Anstruther went out to meet, accompanied by Conductor Egerton, a civilian. They met about one hundred and fifty yards from the column, and the man gave Colonel Anstruther a letter, which announced the establishment of the South African Republic, stated that until they heard Lanyon's reply to their proclamation they did not know if they were at war or not; that, consequently, they could not allow any movements of troops which would be taken as a declaration of war. This

letter was signed by Joubert, one of the Triumvirate. Colonel Anstruther replied that he was ordered to Pretoria, and to Pretoria he must go.

Whilst this conference was going on, the Boers, of whom there were quite five hundred, had gradually closed round the column, and took up positions behind rocks and trees which afforded them excellent cover, whilst the troops were on a bare plain, and before Colonel Anstruther reached his men a murderous fire was poured in upon them from all sides. The fire was hotly returned by the soldiers. Most of the officers were struck down by the first volley, having, no doubt, been picked out by the marksmen. The firing lasted about fifteen minutes, and at the end of that time seven out of the nine officers were down killed and wounded; an eighth (Captain Elliot), one of two who escaped untouched, being reserved for an even more awful fate. The majority of the men were also down, and had the hail of lead continued much longer it is clear that nobody would have been left. Colonel Anstruther, who was lying badly wounded in five places, seeing what a hopeless state affairs were in, ordered the bugler to sound the cease firing, and surrendered. One of the three officers who were not much hurt was, most providentially, Dr. Ward, who had but a slight wound in the thigh; all the others, except Captain Elliot and one lieutenant, were either killed or died from the effects of their wounds. There were altogether 56 killed and 101 wounded, including a woman, Mrs. Fox. Twenty more afterwards died of their wounds. The Boer loss appears to have been very small.

After the fight Conductor Egerton, with a sergeant, was allowed to walk

into Pretoria to obtain medical assistance, the Boers refusing to give him a horse, or even to allow him to use his own. The Boer leader also left Dr. Ward eighteen men and a few stores for the wounded, with which he made shift as best he could. Nobody can read this gentleman's report without being much impressed with the way in which, though wounded himself, he got through his terrible task of, without assistance, attending to the wants of 101 sufferers. Beginning the task at two P.M., it took him till six the next morning before he had seen the last man. It is to be hoped that his services have met with some recognition. Dr. Ward remained near the scene of the massacre with his wounded men till the declaration of peace, when he brought them down to Maritzburg, having experienced great difficulty in obtaining food for them during so many weeks.

This is a short account of what I must, with reluctance, call a most cruel and carefully planned massacre. I may mention that a Zulu driver, who was with the rear-guard, and escaped into Natal, stated that the Boers shot all the wounded men who formed that body. His statement was to a certain extent borne out by the evidence of one of the survivors, who stated that all the bodies found in that part of the field (nearly three-quarters of a mile away from the head of the column), had a bullet hole through the head or breast in addition to their other wounds.

The Administrator in the Transvaal in council thus comments on the occurrence in an official minute:--"The surrounding and gradual hemming in under a flag of truce of a force, and the selection of spots from

which to direct their fire, as in the case of the unprovoked attack by the rebels upon Colonel Anstruther's force, is a proceeding of which very few like incidents can be mentioned in the annals of civilised warfare."

The Boer leaders, however, were highly elated at their success, and celebrated it in a proclamation of which the following is an extract:--"Inexpressible is the gratitude of the burghers for this blessing conferred on them. Thankful to the brave General F. Joubert and his men who have upheld the honour of the Republic on the battlefield. Bowed down in the dust before Almighty God, who had thus stood by them, and, with a loss of over a hundred of the enemy, only allowed two of ours to be killed."

In view of the circumstances of the treacherous hemming in and destruction of this small body of unprepared men, most people would think this language rather high-flown, not to say blasphemous.

On the news of this disaster reaching Pretoria, Sir Owen Lanyon issued a proclamation placing the country under martial law. As the town was large, straggling, and incapable of defence, all the inhabitants, amounting to over four thousand souls, were ordered up to camp, where the best arrangements possible were made for their convenience. In these quarters they remained for three months, driven from their comfortable homes, and cheerfully enduring all the hardships, want, and discomforts consequence on their position, whilst they waited in patience for the

appearance of that relieving column that never came. People in England hardly understand what these men and women went through because they chose to remain loyal. Let them suppose that all the inhabitants of an ordinary English town, with the exception of the class known as poor people, which can hardly be said to exist in a colony, were at an hour's notice ordered--all, the aged, and the sick, delicate women, and tiny children--to leave their homes to the mercy of the enemy, and crowd up in a little space under shelter of a fort, with nothing but canvas tents or sheds to cover them from the fierce summer suns and rains, and the coarsest rations to feed them; whilst the husbands and brothers were daily engaged with a cunning and dangerous enemy, and sometimes brought
home wounded or dead. They will, then, have some idea of what was gone through by the loyal people of Pretoria, in their weak confidence in the good faith of the English Government.

The arrangements made for the defence of the town were so ably and energetically carried out by Sir Owen Lanyon, assisted by the military officers, that no attack upon it was ever attempted. It seems to me that the organisation that could provide for the penning up of four thousand people for months, and carry it out without the occurrence of a single unpleasantness or expression of discontent, must have had something remarkable about it. Of course, it would have been impossible without the most loyal co-operation on the part of those concerned. Indeed, everybody in the town lent a helping hand; judges served out rations, members of the Executive inspected nuisances, and so forth. There was

only one instance of "striking;" and then, of all people in the world, it was the five civil doctors who, thinking it a favourable opportunity to fleece the Government, combined to demand five guineas a-day each for their services. I am glad to say that they did not succeed in their attempt at extortion.

On the 23d December, the Boer leaders issued a second proclamation in reply to that of Sir O. Lanyon of the 18th, which is characterised by an utter absence of regard for the truth, being, in fact, nothing but a tissue of impudent falsehoods. It accuses Sir O. Lanyon of having bombarded women and children, of arming natives against the Boers, and of firing on the Boers without declaring war. Not one of these accusations has any foundation in fact, as the Boers well knew; but they also knew that Sir Owen, being shut up in Pretoria, was not in a position to rebut their charges, which they hoped might, to some extent, be believed, and create sympathy for them in other parts of the world. This was the reason for the issue of the proclamation, which well portrays the character of its framers.

Life at Pretoria was varied by occasional sorties against the Boer laagers, situated at different points in the neighbourhood, generally about six or eight miles from the town. These expeditions were carried out with considerable success, though with some loss, the heaviest incurred being when the Boers, having treacherously hoisted the white flag, opened a heavy fire on the Pretoria forces, as soon as they, beguiled into confidence, emerged from their cover. In the course of the

war, one in every four of the Pretoria mounted volunteers was killed or wounded.

But perhaps the most serious of all the difficulties the Government had to meet, was that of keeping the natives in check. As has before been stated they were devotedly attached to our rule, and, during the three years of its continuance, had undergone what was to them a strange experience, they had neither been murdered, beaten, or enslaved. Naturally they were in no hurry to return to the old order of things, in which murder, flogging, and slavery were events of everyday occurrence. Nor did the behaviour of the Boers on the outbreak of the war tend to reconcile them to any such idea. Thus we find that the farmers had pressed a number of natives from Waterberg into one of their laagers (Zwart Koppies); two of them tried to run away, a Boer saw them and shot them both. Again, on the 7th January a native reported to the authorities at Pretoria that he and some others were returning from the Diamond Fields driving some sheep. A Boer came and asked them to sell the sheep. They refused, whereupon he went away, but returning with some other Dutchmen fired on the Kafirs, killing one.

On the 2d January information reached Pretoria that on the 26th December some Boers fired on some natives who were resting outside Potchefstroom and killed three; the rest fled, whereupon the Boers took the cattle they had with them.

On the 11th January some men, who had been sent from Pretoria with

despatches for Standerton, were taken prisoners. Whilst prisoners they saw ten men returning from the Fields stopped by the Boers and ordered to come to the laager. They refused and ran away, were fired on, five being killed and one getting his arm broken.

These are a few instances of the treatment meted out to the unfortunate natives, taken at haphazard from the official reports. There are plenty more of the same nature if anybody cares to read them.

As soon as the news of the rising reached them, every chief of any importance sent in to offer aid to Government, and many of them, especially Montsoia, our old ally in the Keate Award district, took the loyals of the neighbourhood under their protection. Several took charge of Government property and cattle during the disturbances, and one had four or five thousand pounds in gold, the product of a recently collected tax given him to take care of by the Commissioner of his district, who was afraid that the money would be seized by the Boers. In every instance the property entrusted to their charge was returned intact. The loyalty of all the native chiefs under very trying circumstances (for the Boers were constantly attempting to cajole or frighten them into joining them) is a remarkable proof of the great affection of the Kafirs, more especially those of the Basutu tribes, who love peace better than war, for the Queen's rule. The Government of Pretoria need only have spoken one word, to set an enormous number of armed men in motion against the Boers, with the most serious results to the latter. Any other Government in the world would, in its extremity,

have spoken that word, but, fortunately for the Boers, it is against English principles to set black against white under any circumstances.

Besides the main garrison at Pretoria there were forts defended by soldiery and loyals at the following places:--Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, Lydenburg, Marabastad, and Wakkerstroom, none of which were taken by the Boers.[*]

[*] Colonel Winsloe, however, being short of provisions, was beguiled by the fraudulent representations and acts of the Boer commander into surrendering the fort at Potchefstroom during the armistice.

One of the first acts of the Triumvirate was to despatch a large force from Heidelberg with orders to advance into Natal Territory, and seize the pass over the Drakensberg known as Lang's Nek, so as to dispute the advance of any relieving column. This movement was promptly executed, and strong Boer troops patrolled Natal country almost up to Newcastle.

The news of the outbreak, followed as it was by that of the Bronker's Spruit massacre, and Captain Elliot's murder, created a great excitement in Natal. All available soldiers were at once despatched up country, together with a naval brigade, who, on arrival at Newcastle, brought up the strength of the Imperial troops of all arms to about a thousand men. On the 10th January Sir George Colley left Maritzburg to join the force

at Newcastle, but at this time nobody dreamt that he meant to attack the Nek with such an insignificant column. It was known that the loyals and troops who were shut up in the various towns in the Transvaal had sufficient provisions to last for some months, and that there was therefore nothing to necessitate a forlorn hope. Indeed the possibility of Sir George Colley attempting to enter the Transvaal was not even speculated upon until just before his advance, it being generally considered as out of the question.

The best illustration I can give of the feeling that existed about the matter is to quote my own case. I had been so unfortunate as to land in Natal with my wife and servants just as the Transvaal troubles began, my intention being to proceed to a place I had near Newcastle. For some weeks I remained in Maritzburg, but finding that the troops were to concentrate on Newcastle, and being besides heartily wearied of the great expense and discomfort of hotel life in that town, I determined to go on up country, looking on it as being as safe as any place in the Colony. Of course the possibility of Sir George attacking the Nek before the arrival of the reinforcements did not enter into my calculations, as I thought it a venture that no sensible man would undertake. On the day of my start, however, there was a rumour about the town that the General was going to attack the Boer position. Though I did not believe it, I thought it as well to go and ask the Colonial Secretary, Colonel Mitchell, privately, if there was any truth in it, adding that if there was, as I had a pretty intimate knowledge of the Boers and their shooting powers, and what the inevitable result of such a move would be,

I should certainly prefer, as I had ladies with me, to remain where I was. Colonel Mitchell told me frankly that he knew no more about Sir George's plans than I did; but he added I might be sure that so able and prudent a soldier would not do anything rash. His remark concurred with my own opinion; so I started, and on arrival at Newcastle a week later was met by the intelligence that Sir George had advanced that morning to attack the Nek. To return was almost impossible, since both horses and travellers were pretty nearly knocked up. Also, anybody who has travelled with his family in summer-time over the awful track of alternate slough and boulders between Maritzburg and Newcastle, known in the Colony as a road, will understand, that at the time, the adventurous voyagers would far rather risk being shot than face a return journey.

The only thing to do under the circumstances was to await the course of events, which were now about to develop themselves with startling rapidity. The little town of Newcastle was at this time an odd sight, and remained so all through the war. The hotels were crowded to overflowing with refugees, and on every spare patch of land were erected tents, mud huts, canvas houses, and every kind of covering that could be utilised under the pressure of necessity, to house the many homeless families who had succeeded in effecting their escape from the Transvaal, many of whom were reduced to great straits.

On the morning of the 28th January, anybody listening attentively in the neighbourhood of Newcastle could hear the distant boom of heavy guns. We were not kept long in suspense, for in the afternoon news arrived

that Sir George had attacked the Nek, and failed with heavy loss. The excitement in the town was intense, for, in addition to other considerations, the 58th Regiment, which had suffered most, had been quartered there for some time, and both the officers and men were personally known to the inhabitants.

The story of the fight is well known, and needs little repetition, and a sad story it is. The Boers, who at that time were some 2000 strong, were posted and entrenched on steep hills, against which Sir George Colley hurled a few hundred soldiers. It was a forlorn hope, but so gallant was the charge, especially that of the mounted squadron led by Major Bronlow, that at one time it nearly succeeded. But nothing could stand under the withering fire from the Boer schanses, and as regards the foot soldiers, they never had a chance. Colonel Deane tried to take them up the hill with a rush, with the result that by the time they reached the top, some of the men were actually sick from exhaustion, and none could hold a rifle steady. There on the bare hill-top, they crouched and lay, while the pitiless fire from redoubt and rock lashed them like hail, till at last human nature could bear it no longer, and what was left of them retired slowly down the slope. But for many, that gallant charge was their last earthly action. As they charged they fell, and where they fell they were afterwards buried. The casualties, killed and wounded, amounted to 195, which, considering the small number of troops engaged in the actual attack, is enormously heavy, and shows more plainly than words can tell, the desperate nature of the undertaking. Amongst the killed were Colonel Deane, Major Poole, Major Hingeston, and Lieutenant

Elwes. Major Essex was the only staff officer engaged who escaped, the same officer who was one of the fortunate four who lived through Isandhlwana. On this occasion his usual good fortune attended him, for though his horse was killed and his helmet knocked off, he was not touched. The Boer loss was very trivial.

Sir George Colley, in his admirably lucid despatch about this occurrence addressed to the Secretary of State for War, does not enter much into the question as to the motives that prompted him to attack, simply stating that his object was to relieve the besieged towns. He does not appear to have taken into consideration, what was obvious to anybody who knew the country and the Boers, that even if he had succeeded in forcing the Nek, in itself almost an impossibility, he could never have operated with any success in the Transvaal with so small a column, without cavalry, and with an enormous train of waggons. He would have been harassed day and night by the Boer skirmishers, his supplies cut off, and his advance made practically impossible. Also the Nek would have been re-occupied behind him, since he could not have detached sufficient men to hold it, and in all probability Newcastle, his base of supplies, would have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The moral effect of our defeat on the Boers was very great. Up to this time there had been many secret doubts amongst a large section of them as to what the upshot of an encounter with the troops might be; and with this party, in the same way that defeat, or even the anxiety of waiting to be attacked, would have turned the scale one way, victory turned it

the other. It gave them unbounded confidence in their own superiority, and infused a spirit of cohesion and mutual reliance into their ranks which had before been wanting. Waverers wavered no longer, but gave a loyal adherence to the good cause, and, what was still more acceptable, large numbers of volunteers,--whatever President Brand may say to the contrary,--poured in from the Orange Free State.

What Sir George Colley's motive was in making so rash a move is, of course, quite inexplicable to the outside observer. It was said at the time in Natal that he was a man with a theory: namely, that small bodies of men properly handled were as useful and as likely to obtain the object in view as a large force. Whether or no this was so, I am not prepared to say; but it is undoubtedly the case that very clever men have sometimes very odd theories, and it may be that he was a striking instance in point.

For some days after the battle at Lang's Nek affairs were quiet, and it was hoped that they would remain so till the arrival of the reinforcements, which were on their way out. The hope proved a vain one. On the 7th February it was reported that the escort proceeding from Newcastle to the General's camp with the post, a distance of about eighteen miles, had been fired on and forced to return.

On the 8th, about mid-day, we were all startled by the sound of fighting, proceeding apparently from a hill known as Scheins Hoogte, about ten miles from Newcastle. It was not know that the General

contemplated any move, and everybody was entirely at a loss to know what was going on, the general idea being, however, that the camp near Lang's Nek had been abandoned, and that Sir George was retiring on Newcastle.

The firing grew hotter and hotter, till at last it was perfectly continuous, the cannon evidently being discharged as quickly as they could be loaded, whilst their dull booming was accompanied by the unceasing crash and roll of the musketry. Towards three o'clock the firing slackened, and we thought it was all over, one way or the other, but about five o'clock it broke out again with increased vigour. At dusk it finally ceased. About this time some Kafirs came to my house and told us that an English force was hemmed in on a hill this side of the Ingogo River, that they were fighting bravely, but that "their arms were tired," adding that they thought they would be all killed at night.

Needless to say we spent that night with heavy hearts, expecting every minute to hear the firing begin again, and ignorant of what fate had befallen our poor soldiers on the hill. Morning put an end to our suspense, and we then learnt that we had suffered what, under the circumstances, amounted to a crushing defeat. It appears that Sir George had moved out with a force of five companies of the 60th Regiment, two guns, and a few mounted men, to, in his own words, "patrol the road, and meet and escort some waggons expected from Newcastle." As soon as he passed the Ingogo he was surrounded by a body of Boers sent after him from Lang's Nek, on a small triangular plateau, and sharply assailed on all sides. With a break of about two hours, from three to five, the

assault was kept up till nightfall, with very bad results so far as we were concerned, seeing that out of a body of about 500 men, over 150 were killed and wounded. The reinforcements sent for from the camp apparently did not come into action. For some unexplained reason the Boers did not follow up their attack that night, perhaps because they did not think it possible that our troops could effect their escape back to the camp, and considered that the next morning would be soon enough to return and finish the business. The General, however, determined to get back, and scratch teams of such mules, riding-horses, and oxen as had lived through the day being harnessed to the guns, the dispirited and exhausted survivors of the force managed to ford the Ingogo, now swollen by rain which had fallen in the afternoon, poor Lieutenant Wilkinson, the Adjutant of the 60th, losing his life in the operation, and to struggle through the dense darkness back to camp.

On the hill-top they had lately held, the dead lay thick. There, too, exposed to the driving rain and bitter wind lay the wounded, many of whom would be dead before the rising of the morrow's sun. It must, indeed, have been a sight never to be forgotten by those who saw it. The night--I remember well--was cold and rainy, the great expanses of hill and plain being sometimes lit by the broken gleams of an uncertain moon, and sometimes plunged into intensest darkness by the passing of a heavy cloud. Now and again flashes of lightning threw every crag and outline into vivid relief, and the deep muttering of distant thunder made the wild gloom more solemn. Then a gust of icy wind would come tearing down the valleys to be followed by a pelting thunder shower--and thus the

night wore away.

When one reflects what discomfort, and even danger, an ordinary healthy person would suffer if left after a hard day's work to lie all night in the rain and wind on the top of a stony mountain, without food, or even water to assuage his thirst, it becomes to some degree possible to realise what the sufferings of our wounded after the battle of Ingogo must have been. Those who survived were next day taken to the hospital at Newcastle.

What Sir George Colley's real object was in exposing himself to the attack has never transpired. It can hardly have been to clear the road, as he says in his despatch, because the road was not held by the enemy, but only visited occasionally by their patrols. The result of the battle was to make the Boers, whose losses were trifling, more confident than ever, and to greatly depress our soldiers. Sir George had now lost between three and four hundred men, out of his column of little over a thousand, which was thereby entirely crippled. Of his staff Officers Major Essex now alone survived, his usual good fortune having carried him safe through the battle of Ingogo. What makes his repeated escapes the more remarkable is that he was generally to be found in the heaviest firing. A man so fortunate as Major Essex ought to be rewarded for his good fortune if for no other reason, though, if reports are true, there would be no need to fall back on that to find grounds on which to advance a soldier who has always borne himself so well.

Another result of the Ingogo battle was that the Boers, knowing that we had no force to cut them off, and always secure of a retreat into the Free State, passed round Newcastle in Free State Territory, and descended from fifteen hundred to two thousand strong into Natal for the purpose of destroying the reinforcements which were now on their way up under General Wood. This was on the 11th of February, and from that date till the 18th, the upper districts of Natal were in the hands of the enemy, who cut the telegraph wires, looted waggons, stole herds of cattle and horses, and otherwise amused themselves at the expense of Her Majesty's subjects in Natal.

It was a very anxious time for those who knew what Boers are capable of, and had women and children to protect, and who were never sure if their houses would be left standing over their heads from one day to another.

Every night we were obliged to place out Kafirs as scouts to give us timely warning of the approach of marauding parties, and to sleep with loaded rifles close to our hands, and sometimes, when things looked very black, in our clothes, with horses ready saddled in the stable. Nor were our fears groundless, for one day a patrol of some five hundred Boers encamped on the next place, which by the way belonged to a Dutchman, and stole all the stock on it, the property of an Englishman. They also intercepted a train of waggons, destroyed the contents, and burnt them. Numerous were the false alarms it was our evil fortune to experience. For instance, one night I was sitting in the drawing-room reading, about eleven o'clock, with a door leading on to the verandah slightly ajar,

for the night was warm, when suddenly I heard myself called by name in a muffled voice, and asked if the place was in the possession of the Boers. Looking towards the door I saw a full-cocked revolver coming round the corner, and on opening it in some alarm, I could indistinctly discern a line of armed figures in a crouching attitude stretching along the verandah into the garden beyond. It turned out to be a patrol of the mounted police, who had received information that a large number of Boers had seized the place and had come to ascertain the truth of the report. As we gathered from them that the Boers were certainly near, we did not pass a very comfortable night.

Meanwhile, we were daily expecting to hear that the troops had been attacked along the line of march, and knowing the nature of the country and the many opportunities it affords for ambuscading and destroying one of our straggling columns encumbered with innumerable waggons, we had the worst fears for the result. At length a report reached us to the effect that the reinforcements were expected on the morrow, and that they were not going to cross the Ingagaan at the ordinary drift, which was much commanded by hills, but at a lower drift on our own place, about three miles from Newcastle, which was only slightly commanded. We also heard that it was the intention of the Boers to attack them at this point and to fall back on my house and the hills beyond. Accordingly, we thought it about time to retreat, and securing a few valuables such as plate, we made our way into the town, leaving the house and its contents to take their chance. At Newcastle an attack was daily expected, if for no other reason, to obtain possession of the stores collected there.

The defences of the place were, however, in a wretched condition, no proper outlook was kept, and there was an utter want of effective organisation. The military element at the camp had enough to do to look after itself, and did not concern itself with the safety of the town; and the mounted police--a Colonial force paid by the Colony--had been withdrawn from the little forts round Newcastle, as the General wanted them for other purposes, and a message sent that the town must defend its own forts. There were, it is true, a large number of able-bodied men in the place who were willing to fight, but they had no organisation. The very laager was not finished until the danger was past.

Then there was a large party who were for surrendering the town to the Boers, because if they fought it might afterwards injure their trade. With this section of the population the feeling of patriotism was strong, no doubt, but that of pocket was stronger. I am convinced that the Boers would have found the capture of Newcastle an easy task, and I confess that what I then saw did not inspire me with great hopes of the safety of the Colony when it gets responsible government, and has to depend for protection on burgher forces. Colonial volunteer forces are, I think, as good troops as any in the world; but an unorganised colonial mob, pulled this way and that by different sentiments and interests, is as useless as any other mob, with the difference that it is more impatient of control.

For some unknown reason the Boer leaders providentially changed their

minds about attacking the reinforcements, and their men were withdrawn to the Nek as swiftly and silently as they had been advanced, and on the 17th February the reinforcements marched into Newcastle to the very great relief of the inhabitants, who had been equally anxious for their own safety and that of the troops. Personally, I was never in my life more pleased to see Her Majesty's uniform; and we were equally rejoiced on returning home to find that nothing had been injured. After this we had quiet for a while.

On the 21st February, we heard that two fresh regiments had been sent up to the camp at Lang's Nek, and that General Wood had been ordered down country by Sir George Colley to bring up more reinforcements. This item of news caused much surprise, as nobody could understand, why, now that the road was clear, and that there was little chance of its being again blocked, a General should be sent down to do work, which could, to all appearance, have been equally well done by the Officers in command of the reinforcing regiments, with the assistance of their transport riders. It was, however, understood that an agreement had been entered into between the two Generals, that no offensive operations should be undertaken till Wood returned.

With the exception of occasional scares, there was no further excitement till Sunday the 27th February, when, whilst sitting on the verandah after lunch, I thought I heard the sound of distant artillery. Others present differed with me, thinking the sound was caused by thunder, but as I adhered to my opinion, we determined to ride into town and see.

On arrival there, we found the place full of rumours, from which we gathered that some fresh disaster had occurred: and that messages were pouring down the wires from Mount Prospect camp. We then went on to camp, thinking that we should learn more there, but they knew nothing about it, several officers asking us what new "shave" we had got hold of. A considerable number of troops had been marched from Newcastle that morning to go to Mount Prospect, but when it was realised that something had occurred, they were stopped, and marched back again. Bit by bit we managed to gather the truth. At first we heard that our men had made a most gallant resistance on the hill, mowing down the advancing enemy by hundreds, till at last, their ammunition failing, they fought with their bayonets, using stones and meat tins as missiles. I wish that our subsequent information had been to the same effect.

It appears that on the evening of the 26th, Sir George Colley, after mess, suddenly gave orders for a force of a little over six hundred men, consisting of detachments from no less than three different regiments, the 58th, 60th, 92d, and the Naval Brigade, to be got ready for an expedition, without revealing his plans to anybody, until late in the afternoon: and then without more ado, marched them up to the top of Majuba--a great square-topped mountain to the right of, and commanding the Boer position at Lang's Nek. The troops reached the top about three in the morning, after a somewhat exhausting climb, and were stationed at different points of the plateau in a scientific way. Whilst the darkness lasted, they could, by the glittering of the watch-fires, trace from this point of vantage the position of the Boer laagers that lay 2000

yards beneath them, whilst the dawn of day revealed every detail of the defensive works, and showed the country lying at their feet like a map.

On arrival at the top, it was represented to the General that a rough entrenchment should be thrown up, but he would not allow it to be done on account of the men being wearied with their marching up. This was a fatal mistake. Behind an entrenchment, however slight, one would think that 600 English soldiers might have defied the whole Boer army, and much more the 200 or 300 men by whom they were hunted down Majuba. It appears that about 10.15 A.M. Colonel Steward and Major Fraser again went to General Colley "to arrange to start the sailors on an entrenchment" . . . "Finding the ground so exposed, the General did not give orders to entrench."

As soon as the Boers found out that the hill was in the occupation of the English, their first idea was to leave the Nek, and they began to inspan with that object, but discovering that there were no guns commanding them, they changed their mind, and set to work to storm the hill instead. As far as I have been able to gather, the number of Boers who took the mountain was about 300, or possibly 400; I do not think there were more than that. The Boers themselves declare solemnly that they were only 100 strong, but this I do not believe. They slowly advanced up the hill till about 11.30, when the real attack began, the Dutchmen coming on more rapidly and confidently, and shooting with ever-increasing accuracy, as they found our fire quite ineffective.

About a quarter to one, our men retreated to the last ridge, and General Colley was shot through the head. After this, the retreat became a rout, and the soldiers rushed pell-mell down the precipitous sides of the hill, the Boers knocking them over by the score as they went, till they were out of range. A few were also, I heard, killed by the shells from the guns that were advanced from the camp to cover the retreat, but as this does not appear in the reports, perhaps it is not true. Our loss was about 200 killed and wounded, including Sir George Colley, Drs. Landon and Cornish, and Commander Romilly, who was shot with an explosive bullet, and died after some days' suffering. When the wounded Commander was being carried to a more sheltered spot, it was with great difficulty that the Boers were prevented from massacring him as he lay, they being under the impression that he was Sir Garnet Wolseley. As was the case at Ingogo, the wounded were left on the battlefield all night in very inclement weather, to which some of them succumbed. It is worthy of note that after the fight was over, they were treated with considerable kindness by the Boers.

Not being a soldier, of course I cannot venture to give any military reasons as to how it was, that what was after all a considerable force, was so easily driven from a position of great natural strength; but I think I may, without presumption, state my opinion was to the real cause, which was the villanous shooting of the British soldier. Though the troops did not, as was said at the time, run short of ammunition, it is clear that they fired away a great many rounds at men who, in storming the hill, must necessarily have exposed themselves more or

less, of whom they managed to hit--certainly not more than six or seven,--which was the outside of the Boer casualties. From this it is clear that they can neither judge distance nor hit a moving object, nor did they probably know that when shooting down hill it is necessary to aim low. Such shooting as the English soldier is capable of may be very well when he has an army to aim at, but it is useless in guerilla warfare against a foe skilled in the use of the rifle and the art of taking shelter.

A couple of months after the storming of Majuba, I, together with a friend, had a conversation with a Boer, a volunteer from the Free State in the late war, and one of the detachment that stormed Majuba, who gave us a circumstantial account of the attack with the greatest willingness. He said that when it was discovered that the English had possession of the mountain, they thought that the game was up, but after a while bolder counsels prevailed, and volunteers were called for to storm the hill. Only seventy men could be found to perform the duty, of whom he was one. They started up the mountain in fear and trembling, but soon found that every shot passed over their heads, and went on with greater boldness. Only three men, he declared, were hit on the Boer side; one was killed, one was hit in the arm, and he himself was the third, getting his face grazed by a bullet, of which he showed us the scar. He stated that the first to reach the top ridge was a boy of twelve, and that as soon as the troops saw them they fled, when, he said, he paid them out for having nearly killed him, knocking them over one after another "like bucks" as they ran down the hill, adding that it was

"alter lecker" (very nice). He asked us how many men we had lost during the war, and when we told him about seven hundred killed and wounded, laughed in our faces, saying he knew that our dead amounted to several thousands. On our assuring him that this was not the case, he replied, "Well, don't let's talk of it any more, because we are good friends now, and if we go on you will lie, and I shall lie, and then we shall get angry. The war is over now, and I don't want to quarrel with the English; if one of them takes off his hat to me I always acknowledge it." He did not mean any harm in talking thus; it is what Englishmen have to put up with now in South Africa; the Boers have beaten us, and act accordingly.

This man also told us that the majority of the rifles they picked up were sighted for 400 yards, whereas the latter part of the fighting had been carried on within 200.

Sir George Colley's death was much lamented in the Colony, where he was deservedly popular; indeed, anybody who had the honour of knowing that kind-hearted gentleman, could not do otherwise than deeply regret his untimely end. What his motive was in occupying Majuba in the way he did, has never, so far as I am aware, transpired. The move, in itself, would have been an excellent one, had it been made in force, or accompanied by a direct attack on the Nek--but, as undertaken, seems to have been objectless. There were, of course, many rumours as to the motives that prompted his action, of which the most probable seems to be that, being aware of what the Home Government intended to do with reference to the

Transvaal, he determined to strike a blow to try and establish British Supremacy first, knowing how mischievous any apparent surrender would be. Whatever his faults may have been as a General, he was a brave man, and had the honour of his country much at heart.

It was also said by soldiers who saw him the night the troops marched up Majuba, that the General was "not himself," and it was hinted that continual anxiety and the chagrin of failure had told upon his mind. As against this, however, must be set the fact that his telegrams to the Secretary of State for War, the last of which he must have despatched only about half-an-hour before he was shot, are cool and collected, and written in the same unconcerned tone,--as though he were a critical spectator of an interesting scene--that characterises all his communications, more especially his despatches. They at any rate give no evidence of shaken nerve or unduly excited brain, nor can I see that any action of his with reference to the occupation of Majuba is out of keeping with the details of his generalship upon other occasions. He was always confident to rashness, and possessed by the idea that every man in the ranks was full of as high a spirit, and as brave as he was himself. Indeed most people will think, that so far from its being a rasher action, the occupation of Majuba, bad generalship as it seems, was a wiser move than either the attack on the Nek or the Ingogo fiasco.

But at the best, all his movements are difficult to be understand by a civilian, though they may, for ought we know, have been part of an elaborate plan, perfected in accordance with the rules of military

science, of which, it is said, he was a great student.