fill all the kloof--

"Nay, Child of Senzangacona, age has not made me deaf, but my spirit in these latter days floats far from my body. It is like a bladder filled with air that a child holds by a string, and before I can speak I must draw it from the heavens to earth again. What did you say about the place that I have chosen? Well, what better place could I choose, seeing that it was here in this very Vale of Bones that I met the first king of the Zulus, Chaka the Wild Beast, who was your uncle? Why then should I not choose it to meet the last king of the Zulus?"

Now I, listening, knew at once that this saying might be understood in two ways, namely that Cetewayo was the reigning king, or that he was the last king who would ever reign. But the Council interpreted it in the latter and worse sense, for I saw a quiver of fear go through them.

"Why should I not choose it," went on Zikali, "seeing also that this place is holy to me? Here it was, O Son of Panda, that Chaka brought my children to be killed and forced me, sitting where you sit, to watch their deaths. There on the rock above me they were killed, four of them, three sons and a daughter, and the slayers--they came to an evil end, those slayers, as did Chaka--laughed and cast them down from the rock before me. Yes, and Chaka laughed, and I too laughed, for had not the king the

right to kill my children and to steal their mothers, and was I not glad that they should be taken from the world and gathered to that of Spirits whence they always talk to me, yes, even now? That is why I did not hear you at first, King, because they were talking to me."

He paused, turning one ear upwards, then continued in a new and tender voice, "What is it you say to me, Noma, my dear little Noma? Oh! I hear you, I hear you."

Now he shifted himself along the ground on his haunches some paces to the right, and began to search about, groping with his long fingers. "Where, where?" he muttered. "Oh, I understand, further under the root, a jackal buried it, did it? Pah! how hard is this soil. Ah! I have it, but look, Noma, a stone has cut my finger. I have it, I have it," and from beneath the root of some fallen tree he drew out the skull of a child and, holding it in his right hand, softly rubbed the mould off it with his left.

"Yes, Noma, it might be yours, it is of the right size, but how can I be sure? What is it you say? The teeth? Ah! now I remember. Only the day before you were taken I pulled out that front tooth, did I not, and beneath it was another that was strangely split in two. If this skull was yours, it will be there. Come to the fire, Noma, and let us look; the moonlight is

faint, is it not?"

Back to the fire he shifted himself, and bending towards the blaze, made an examination.

"True, Noma, true! Here is the split tooth, white as when I saw it all those years ago. Oh! dear child of my body, dear child of my spirit, for we do not beget with the body alone, Noma, as you know better than I do to-day, I greet you," and pressing the skull to his lips, he kissed it, then set it down in front of him between himself and the fire with the face part pointing to the king, and burst into one of his eerie and terrible laughs.

A low moan went up from his audience, and I felt the skin of Goza, who had shrunk against me, break into a profuse sweat. Then suddenly Zikali's voice changed one more and became hard and businesslike, if I may call it so, similar to that of other professional doctors.

"You have sent for me, O King, as those who went before you have sent when great things were about to happen. What is the matter on which you would speak to me?"

"You know well, Opener of Roads," answered Cetewayo, rather shakily I thought. "The matter is one of peace or war. The English threaten me and my people and make great demands on me;

amongst others that the army should be disbanded. I can set them all out if you will. If I refuse to do as they bid me, then within a few days they will invade Zululand; indeed their soldiers are already gathered at the drifts."

"It is not needful, King," answered Zikali, "since I know what all know, neither more nor less. The winds whisper the demands of the white men, the birds sing them, the hyenas howl them at night. Let us see how the matter stands. When your father died Sompseu (Sir T. Shepstone), the great white chief, came from the English Government to name you king. This he could not do according to our law, since how can a stranger name the King of the Zulus? Therefore the Council of the Nation and the doctors--I was not among them, King--moved the spirit of Chaka the Lion into the body of Sompseu and made him as Chaka was and gave him power to name you to rule over the Zulus. So it came about that to the English Queen through the spirit of Chaka you swore certain things; that slaying for witchcraft should be abolished; that no man should die without fair and open trial, and other matters."

He paused a while, then went on, "These oaths you have broken, O King, as being of the blood you are and what you are, you must do."

Here there was disturbance among the Council and Cetewayo half rose from his seat, then sat down again. Zikali, gazing at the

sky, waited till it had died away, then went on--

"Do any question my words? If so, then let them ask of the white men whether they be true or no. Let them ask also of the spirits of those who have died for witchcraft, and of the spirits of the women who have been slain and whose bodies were laid at the cross-roads because they married the men they chose and not the soldiers to whom the king gave them."

"How can I ask the white men who are far away?" broke out Cetewayo, ignoring the rest.

"Are the white men so far away, King? It is true that I see none and hear none, yet I seem to smell one of them close at hand." Here he took up the skull which he had laid down and whispered to it. "Ah! I thank you, my child. It seems, King, that there is a white man here hidden in this kloof, he who is named Macumazahn, a good man and a truthful, known to many of us from of old, who can tell you what his people think, though he is not one of their indunas. If you question my words, ask him."

"We know what the white men think," said Cetewayo, "so there is no need to ask Macumazahn to sing us an old song. The question is--what must the Zulus do? Must they swallow their spears and, ceasing to be a nation, become servants, or must they strike with them and drive the English into the sea, and after them the

Boers?"

"Tell me first, King, who dwell far away and alone, knowing little of what passes in the land of Life, what the Zulus desire to do. Before me sits the Great Council of the Nation. Let it speak."

Then one by one the members of the Council uttered their opinions in order of rank or seniority. I do not remember the names of all who were present, or what each of them said. I recall, however, that Sigananda, a very old chief--he must have been over ninety--spoke the first. He told them that he had been friend of Chaka and one of his captains, and had fought in most of his battles. That afterwards he had been a general of Dingaan's until that king killed the Boers under Retief, when he left him and finally sided with Panda in the civil war in which Dingaan was killed with the help of the Boers. That he had been present at the battle of the Tugela, though he took no actual part in the fighting, and afterwards became a councillor of Panda's and then of Cetewayo his son. It was a long and interesting historical recital covering the whole period of the Zulu monarchy which ended suddenly with these words--

"I have noted, O King and Councillors, that whenever the black vulture of the Zulus was content to attack birds of his own feather, he has conquered. But when it has met the grey eagles

of the white men, which come from over the sea, he has been conquered, and my heart tells me that as it was in the past, so it shall be in the future. Chaka was a friend of the English, so was Panda, and so has Cetewayo been until this hour. I say, therefore, let not the King tear the hand which fed him because it seems weak, lest it should grow strong and clutch him by the throat and choke him."

Next spoke Undabuko, Dabulamanzi and Magwenga, brothers of the king, who all favoured war, though the two last were guarded in their speech. After these came Uhamu, the king's uncle--he who was said to be the son of a Spirit--who was strong for peace, urging that the king should submit to the demands of the English, making the best terms he could, that he "should bend like a reed before the storm, so that after the storm had swept by, he might stand up straight again, and with him all the other reeds of the people of the Zulus."

So, too, said Seketwayo, chief of the Umdhlalosi, and more whom I cannot recall, six or seven of them. But Usibebu and the induna Untshingwayo, who afterwards commanded at Isandhlwana, were for fighting, as were Sirayo, the husband of the two women who had been taken on English territory and killed, and Umbilini, the chief of Swazi blood whose surrender was demanded by Sir Bartle Frere and who afterwards commanded the Zulus in the battle at Ihlobane. Last of all spoke the Prime Minister, Umnyamana, who

declared fiercely that if the Zulu buffalo hid itself in the swamp like a timid calf when the white bull challenged it on the hills, the spirits of Chaka and all his forefathers would thrust its head into the mud and choke it.

When all had finished Cetewayo spoke, saying--

"That is a bad council which has two voices, for to which of them must the Captain listen when the impis of the foe gather in front of him? Here I have sat while the moon climbs high and counted, and what do I find? That one half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say Yes, and that the other half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say No. Which then is it to be, Yes or No? Are we to fight the English, or are we to sit still?"

"That is for the king to decide," said a voice.

"See what it is to be a king," went on Cetewayo with passion. "If I declare for war and we win, shall I be greater than I am? If victory gives me more land, more subjects, more wives and more cattle, what is the use of these things to me who already have enough of all of them? And if defeat should take everything from me, even my life perhaps, then what shall I have gained? I will tell you--the curse of the Zulus upon my name from father to son for ever. They will say, 'Cetewayo, son of Panda, pulled down a House that once was great. Because of some small matter he

quarrelled with the English who were always the friends of our people, and brought the Zulus to the dust.' Sintwangu, my messenger, who brought heavy words from the Queen's induna which we must answer with other words or with spears, says that the English soldiers in Natal are few, so few that we Zulus can swallow them like bits of meat and still be hungry. But are these all the soldiers of the English? I am not sure. You are one of that people, Macumazahn," he added, turning his massive shape towards me, "tell us now, how many soldiers has your Queen?"

"King," I answered, "I do not know for certain. But if the Zulus can muster fifty thousand spears, the Queen, if there be need, can send against them ten times fifty thousand, and if she grows angry, another ten times fifty, every one armed with a rifle that will fire five bullets a minute, and to accompany the soldiers, hundreds of cannon whereof a single shot would give Ulundi to the flames. Out of the sea they will come, shipload after shipload, white men from where the sun sets and black men from where the sun rises, so many that Zululand would not hold them."

Now at these words, which I delivered as grandly as I could, something like a groan burst from the Council, though one man cried--

"Do not listen to the white traitor, O King, who is sent here to

turn our hearts to water with his lies."

"Macumazahn may lie to us," went on Cetewayo, "though in the past none in the land have ever known him to lie, but he was not sent to do so, for I brought him here. For my part I do not believe that he lies. I believe that these English are as many as the pebbles in a river bed, and that to them Natal, yes, and all the Cape is but as a single, outlying cattle kraal, one cattle kraal out of a hundred. Did not Sompseu once tell us that they were countless, on that day when he came many years ago after the battle of the Tugela to name me to succeed my father Panda, the day when my faction, the Usutu, roared round him for hours like a river in flood, and he sat still like a rock in the centre of a river? Also I am minded of the words that Chaka said when Dingaan and Umbopa had stabbed him and he lay dying at the kraal Duguza, that although the dogs of his own House whom his hand fed, had eaten him up, he heard the sound of the running of the feet of a great white people that should stamp them and the Zulus flat."

He paused; and the silence was so intense that the crackling of Zikali's fire, which kept on burning brightly although I saw no fuel added to it, sounded quite loud. Presently it was broken, first by a dog near at hand, howling horribly at the moon, and next by the hooting of a great owl that flitted across the donga, the shadow of its wide wings falling for a moment on the king.

"Listen!" exclaimed Cetewayo, "a dog that howls! Methinks that it stands upon the roof of the House of Senzangacona. And an owl that hoots. Methinks that owl has its nest in the world of Spirits! Are these good omens, Councillors? I trow not. I say that I will not decide this matter of peace or war. If there is one of my own blood here who will do so, come, let him take my place and let me go away to my own lordship of Gikazi that I had when I was a prince before the witch Mameena who played with all men and loved but one"--here everybody turned and stared towards me, yes, even Zikali whom nothing else had seemed to move, till I wished that the ground would swallow me up--"caused the war between me and my brother Umbelazi whose blood earth will not swallow nor suns dry--"

"How can that be, O King?" broke in Umnyamana the Prime Minister. "How can any of your race sit in your seat while you still live? Then indeed there would be war, war between tribe and tribe and Zulu and Zulu till none were left, and the white hyenas from Natal would come and chew our bones and with them the Boers that have passed the Vaal. See now. Why is this Nyanga (i.e. witch-doctor) here?" and he pointed to Zikali beyond the fire. "Why has the Opener of Roads been brought from the Black Kloof which he has not left for years? Is it not that he may give us counsel in our need and show us a sign that his counsel is good, whether it be for war or peace? Then when he has made divination

and given the counsel and shown the sign, then, O King, do you speak the word of war or peace, and send it to the Queen by yonder white man, and by that word we, the people, will abide."

At this suggestion, which I had no doubt was made by some secret agreement between Umnyamana and Zikali, Cetewayo seemed to grasp. Perhaps this was because it postponed for a little while the dreadful moment of decision, or perhaps because he hoped that in the eyes of the nation it would shift the responsibility from his shoulders to those of the Spirits speaking through the lips of their prophet. At any rate he nodded and answered--

"It is so. Let the Opener of Roads open us a road through the forests and the swamps and the rocks of doubt, danger and fear. Let him give us a sign that it is a good road on which we may safely travel, and let him tell us whether I shall live to walk that road and what I shall meet thereon. I promise him in return the greatest fee that ever yet was paid to a doctor in Zululand."

Now Zikali lifted his big head, shook his grey locks, and opening his wide mouth as though he expected manna to fall into it from the sky, he laughed out loud.

"O-ho-ho," he laughed, "Oho-ho-ho-o, it is worth while to have lived so long when life has brought me to such an hour as this. What is it that my ears hear? That I, the Indwande dwarf, I whom

Chaka named 'The-Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born,' I, one of the race conquered and despised by the Zulus, am here to speak a word which the Zulus dare not utter, which the King of the Zulus dares not utter. O-ho-ho-ho! And what does the King offer to me? A fee, a great fee for the word that shall paint the Zulus red with blood or white with the slime of shame. Nay, I take no fee that is the price of blood or shame. Before I speak that word unknown--for as yet my heart has not heard it, and what the heart has not heard the lips cannot shape--I ask but one thing. It is an oath that whatever follows on the word, while there is a Zulu left living in the world, I, the Voice of the Spirits, shall be safe from hurt or from reproach, I and those of my House and those over whom I throw my blanket, be they black or be they white. That is my fee, without which I am silent."

"Izwa! We hear you. We swear it on behalf of the people," said every councillor in the semi-circle in front of him; yes, and the king said it also, stretching out his hand.

"Good," said Zikali, "it is an oath, it is an oath, sworn here upon the bones of the dead. Evil-doers you call them, but I say to you that many of those who sit before me have more evil in their hearts than had those dead. Well, let it be proclaimed, O King, and with it this--that ill shall it go with him who breaks the oath, with his family, with his kraal and all with whom he has to do.

"Now what is it you ask of me? First of all, counsel as to whether you should fight the English Queen, a matter on which you, the Great Ones, are evenly divided in opinion, as is the nation behind you. O King, Indunas, and Captains, who am I that I should judge of such a matter which is beyond my trade, a matter of the world above and of men's bodies, not of the world below and of men's spirits? Yet there was one who made the Zulu people out of nothing, as a potter fashions a vessel from clay, as a smith fashions an assegai out of the ore of the hills, yes, and tempers it with human blood.* Chaka the Lion, the Wild Beast, the King among Kings, the Conqueror. I knew Chaka as I knew his father, yes, and his father. Others still living knew him also, say you, Sigananda there for instance," and he pointed to the old chief who had spoken first. "Yes, Sigananda knew him as a boy knows a great man, as a soldier knows a general. But I knew his heart, aye, I shaped his heart, I was its thought. Had it not been for me he would never have been great. Then he wronged me"--here Zikali took up the skull which he said was that of his daughter, and stroked it--"and I left him.

[*--The old Zulu smiths dipped their choicest blades in the blood of men.--A. Q.]

"He was not wise, he should have killed one whom he had wronged, but perhaps he knew that I could not be killed; perhaps he had

tried and found that he was but throwing spears at the moon which fell back on his own head. I forget. It is so long ago, and what does it matter? At least I took away from him the prop of my wisdom, and he fell--to rise no more. And so it has been with others. So it has been with others. Yet while he was great I knew his heart who lived in his heart, and therefore I ask myself, had he been sitting where the King sits to-day, what would Chaka have done? I will tell you. If not only the English but the Boers also and with them the Pondos, the Basutos and all the tribes of Africa had threatened him, he would have fought them--yes, and set his heel upon their necks. Therefore, although I give no counsel upon such a matter, I say to you that the counsel of Chaka is--fight--and conquer. Hearken to it or pass it by--I care not which."

He paused and a loud "Ow" of wonder and admiration rose from his audience. Myself I nearly joined in it, for I thought this one of the cleverest bits of statecraft that ever I had heard of or seen. The old wizard had taken no responsibility and given no answer to the demand for advice. All this he had thrust on to the shoulders of a dead man, and that man one whose name was magical to every Zulu, the king whose memory they adored, the great General who had gorged them with victory and power. Speaking as Chaka, after a long period of peace, he urged them once more to lift their spears and know the joys of triumph, thereby making themselves the greatest nation in Southern Africa.

From the moment I heard this cunning appeal, I know what the end would be; all the rest was but of minor and semi-personal interest. I knew also for the first time how truly great was Zikali and wondered what he might have become had Fortune set him in different circumstances among a civilized people.

Now he was speaking again, and quickly before the impression died away.

"Such is the word of Chaka spoken by me who was his secret councillor, the Councillor who was seldom seen, and never heard. Does not Sigananda yonder know the voice which amongst all those present echoes in his ears alone?"

"I know it," cried the old chief. Then with his eyes starting almost from his head, Sigananda leapt up and raising his hand, gave the royal salute, the Bayete, to the spirit of Chaka, as though the dead king stood before him.

I think that most of those there thought that it did stand before him, for some of them also gave the Bayete and even Cetewayo raised his arm.

Sigananda squatted down again and Zikali went on.

"You have heard. This captain of the Lion knows his voice. So,

that is done with. Now you ask of me something else--that I who am a doctor, the oldest of all the doctors and, it is thought--I know not--the wisest, should be able to answer. You ask of me--How shall this war prosper, if it is made--and what shall chance to the King during and after the war, and lastly you ask of me a sign. What I tell to you is true, is it not so?"

"It is true," answered the Council.

"Asking is easy," continued Zikali in a grumbling voice, "but answering is another matter. How can I answer without preparation, without the needful medicines also that I have not with me, who did not know what would be sought of me, who thought that my opinion was desired and no more? Go away now and return on the sixth night and I will tell you what I can do."

"Not so," cried the king. "We refuse to go, for the matter is immediate. Speak at once, Opener of Roads, lest it should be said in the land that after all you are but an ancient cheat, a stick that snaps in two when it is leant on."

"Ancient cheat! I remember that is what Macumazahn yonder once told me I am, though afterwards--Perhaps he was right, for who in his heart knows whether or not he be a cheat, a cheat who deceives himself and through himself others. A stick that snaps in two when it is leant on! Some have thought me so and some

have thought otherwise. Well, you would have answers which I know not how to give, being without medicine and in face of those who are quite ignorant and therefore cannot lend me their thoughts, as it sometimes happens that men do when workers of evil are sought out in the common fashion. For then, as you may have guessed, it is the evil-doer who himself tells the doctor of his crime, though he may not know that he is telling it. Yet there is another stone that I alone can throw, another plan that I alone can practise, and that not always. But of this I would not make use since it is terrible and might frighten you or even send you back to your huts raving so that your wives, yes, and the very dogs fled, from you."

He stopped and for the first time did something to his fire, for I saw his hands going backwards and forwards, as though he warmed them at the flames.

At length an awed voice, I think it was that of Dabulamanzi, asked--

"What is this plan, Inyanga? Let us hear that we may judge."

"The plan of calling one from the dead and hearkening to the voice of the dead. Is it your desire that I should draw water from this fount of wisdom, O King and Councillors?"