

inundation of memorials in July 1895. As the memorials came from the President's constituency it was felt that he had inspired them. When the matter of separating the posts was put to vote, however, it was defeated.

The rivalry between Kruger and Joubert had been waxing keener and livelier, and it now amounted almost to animosity. Often there had been ugly scenes between the two men in the sessions of the Volksraad and the Executive Council, when they recklessly hurled accusations and vituperative epithets at each other. But at other times, the two patriots would appear on the same platform on apparently affable terms, and compliment and almost kiss each other. But no one was deceived by these insincere manifestations. The cold under-current of rivalry and hostility was always there, and could not be disguised.

When, therefore, Kruger's friends again proposed the separation of the dual offices of Commandant-General and Superintendent of Natives in the 1896th session of the Volksraad, Joubert, the hated incumbent of these posts immediately knew whence the idea had originated and where the plot had been hatched, and when the motion was debated, he lashed out freely against his opponents in general and against the President in particular. When the matter was put to vote, as many voted for as against the motion, and the chairman gave his casting vote for separation, and this was duly done in September 1896, and so Joubert lost the Superintendency of Native Affairs with its useful salary of £1,000 per annum, retaining the post of Commandant-General with its £2,500 salary.

President Kruger's next step was the appointment of his friend Piet Cronje to the now vacant post of Superintendent of Natives. This he did on the 9th of December 1896. This post carried with it the membership of the Executive Council. This action of the President released a storm of protests from Standerton and Lydenburg as well as other districts of the Republic. It was condemned as unconstitutional, and a usurpation of the ^{authority of the} Volksraad's ~~authority~~, ^{which} ~~was~~ alone had the right to appoint members of the Executive.

← 2. An Administrative Blot.

There was much to be desired in the government of African tribes of the South African Republic about this time. In fact, the administration of the so-called 'Native Affairs' was something of a blot on the Republic. There was criminal lack of supervision with the result that minor officials were left to themselves to rob and oppress the African people. Things were bad enough during the superintendency of General Joubert, but they became much worse after Piet Cronje succeeded Joubert as Superintendent. Like Joubert he was endowed with well-nigh unlimited judicial powers as far as

Africans were concerned. Constitutionally he was the Court of appeal from the decisions of the Native Commissioner, but he gave cause for much dissatisfaction to Africans by not paying due regard to their disabilities, and they were especially bitter owing to the systematic injustices and persecution from which they suffered under Cronje's subordinate officers. Most notorious of these for cupidity and callous cruelty was one Abel Erasmus. Sir Garnet Wolseley called him 'a fiend in human form' and threatened to have him hanged (~~Carabr p. 462~~). He was Native Commissioner of Lydenburg for many years and afterwards Commandant in the war against Mampuru (~~Nixon p. 88~~). Owing to his heavy fines, floggings, systematic oppression, harshness and frequent illegal seizure of the people's stock, the Bapedi Queen Torometsane, widow of Chief Sekukuni, after exercising angelic patience, at last complained in 1897 to General Piet Cronje as Superintendent of Natives, praying that Erasmus should be removed from the post of Native Commissioner as he was uniformly cruel, and had killed some of her people. To this appeal, no answer was vouchsafed.

In October 1897, President Kruger paid a visit to Pietersburg, and was accompanied, among other people, by Piet Cronje. Messengers from the Bapedi Queen Torometsane availed themselves of this opportunity to lay their grievances before the President, but Cronje quickly intervened, and promised that he would personally visit Lydenburg to investigate the complaints. In December, General Cronje fulfilled his promise to visit Lydenburg. He was accompanied by his secretary Stiemens, Abel Erasmus (Native Commissioner), David Schoeman (Sub-Native Commissioner), and Commandant Tri ~~Richard~~. Instead of asking the Bapedi headmen to state their grievances, General Cronje read to them Abel Erasmus's letter of complaints against them and the Queen. It is legitimate to conclude that these complaints of Erasmus, and his assistant Schoeman were baselessly defensive, and intended to offset Queen Torometsane's representations. Erasmus was notorious for his desolations, extortions and shocking atrocities among the Africans of Lydenburg over a period of many years. He complained that Queen Torometsane had objected to him - Erasmus - as Native Commissioner, and that she had made use of agents and other channels to make her grievances known, ^{to the public} instead of her making them directly to him. Without calling for witnesses or making further investigations into the matter, Cronje imposed a fine of £147.10.0 on the Queen, and sentenced her counsellors Jesaija, Segole, Chief Nkwane, Jonathan and nine others to receive 25 lashes each. The sentences were duly carried out. "The backs of the innocent victims were severely lacerated, Abel Erasmus flogging one man himself, while David Schoeman flogged several others. The humorous Schoeman required each man to say 'Dank u baas' after his flogging and those who refused to say so received an extra lash." (~~J. V. Prector John: Boers and Little Englanders pp. 131, 139, 140~~) (~~FitzPatrick J: The Transvaal from within pp. 432-437~~)

~~(Nathan M. Paul Kruger pp. 255, 256) / (Wilson D. M. Behind the Scenes in the Transvaal pp. 202, 203), (Zoutpansburg Review: 13th April, 1897).~~

↑ For this hideous cruelty and oppression, Cronje and his subordinates were tried before Mr. Justice E. J. P. Jorissen. Advocate Wessels who appeared for the plaintiffs - the Bapedi Queen and her Councillors - by a searching cross examination of the officials, threw a lurid light on the travesty called 'Native Administration'.

↑ In the trial David Schoeman, Commandant Triëchard, Abel Erasmus and Cronje's own secretary Stiemens stated upon oath that General Cronje specifically gave the order for twenty-five lashes. Cronje on the other hand vehemently denied that he gave such order, and when he said "Commandant Triëchard is lying", Triëchard jumped up in the court and assumed a threatening attitude towards Cronje, very much as President Paul Kruger did in London towards Sir Hercules Robinson, when during the discussions on the London Convention in 1884 Robinson whispered to Lord Derby with reference to Kruger "He is lying". Much more to the point in revealing Piet Cronje's character is the instance of August 1865, when Cronje menaced Field Cornet B. H. Swart in the Court at Potchefstroom for giving evidence against him that he had gone to Harts River, kidnapped some coloured people and also robbed them of their cattle. There was afterwards a fierce altercation and a free use of opprobrious epithets between General Cronje and Commandant Triëchard.

↑ Judge Jorissen made very scathing observations against the officials of the Native Affairs and their administration. The State-Attorney withdrew the defence, and undertook on behalf of the Government to re-imburse the Queen in the amount extorted from her, while Cronje, Erasmus and Schoeman were ordered to pay £25 to each of the men who had been flogged, and also the costs of the action. It is doubtful, however, whether this order was ever carried out. ~~Ref.~~

~~(Nathan M. Paul Kruger p. 256).~~ The irony of it all is that these same officials were appointed by the Government to investigate the complaints among the people of Queen Toremeteane, and it can well be imagined how gladly they settled old scores with those who dare point a finger at them. As if to pat its erring officials on the back, the Volksraad immediately afterwards passed a law, making it impossible for 'destitute natives' to sue the Government or any white person 'in forma pauperis'. ~~Ref.~~

In 1896 Cronje as Superintendent of Native Affairs had to settle disturbances among the African tribes in several parts of the Transvaal. First, there was a war of succession among the ^{ma}Rapulana tribe in the northern Transvaal. Makgatho chief of the tribe had three sons namely, Mpefu and Sentimula by his first or principal wife, and Maimo by his favourite wife of lower rank. He, however, nominated this last mentioned son as his successor, and thereby raised Satan in the breasts of the other two sons, and paid with his own

life...../

life for this indiscretion. This was in 1895. Mpefu with the help of Sentimula next fell on Maimo and expelled him. He then occupied the tribal headquarters as Chief. In 1896 Mpefu next attacked Sentimula who escaped to Mr. Bristow's farm near Elim Hospital.

In the same year in August the chieftainess Modjadji II of the Bakwebo-Bavenda tribe, famous throughout South Africa for her powers as a rainmaker died. The tribe unanimously nominated her daughter as her ^{heir} ~~heir~~ and successor, and it fell to Cronje as Superintendent of Native Affairs to install her as chieftainess.

Again in 1896 Timagole Mokgatla chief of the Phokeng Bakwena died at Phokeng in the district of Rustenburg. His son Molotlegi August Mokgatla being nominated as the next chief was duly installed by Cronje in his capacity as Superintendent of Native Affairs.

During this year there was a great increase in African tax, and the sum of £16,000 collected that year was so far the highest ever reached in the Transvaal.

CHAPTER XV...../

CHAPTER XV

THE ANGLO-BOER WAR 1899-1902

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1. Prodromata. If you wish to understand the roots and causes - the aetiology - of the Dutch-Afrikaner grievances against the British Government and people, you have to look down a long and dark corridor of years into the hoary past, back to the so-called capitalistic jingoism and the Jameson Raid 1886 to 1896; more back to the British closing-up of the Boers in the Kraal and defeating their every aspiration for a seaport at Kosi Bay or St. Lucia Bay and every endeavour for expansion northwards beyond the Limpopo River, southwards into Basutoland, eastwards ~~beyond the Limpopo River, southwards into Basutoland,~~ eastwards ~~in~~ to Swaziland Tongoland and westwards into Bechuanaland and the Kgalagadi Desert, 1852 to 1888; you have to go further back to the sweeping British annexation of the Transvaal (1877), of the Diamond Fields of Griqualand (1872) and of Natal (1844); still ^{further} more back to the Alliance of the British Government with Africans and Griquas in the Treaty States of Sir George Napier in 1841 against the Dutch-Afrikaners; back, back to the Great Trek 1835 to 1838 and its causes in the Emancipation of the Slaves 1833, the Fiftieth Ordinance or Hottentot Magna Charta granting freedom to the Hottentots (1828), and the British and missionary 'native policy' - the Phillipic policy of 'gelijkstelling' or equality between black and white (1818 to 1828) ^{further} more back, further back to the hoary, horrible past, to the Slachter's Nek episode and its gibbet dripping with Bezuidenhout's blood (1816). Yes, still more back, right back to the clever occupation of the Cape by the British in 1806.

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These grievances are dramatically and passionately recited, and are appropriately arranged for you in "A Century of Wrong" and there you have the reason for the climax of 1899, why "Once more in the annals of our bloodstained history has the day dawned when we are forced to grasp our weapons in order to resume the struggle for liberty and existence, entrusting our national cause to that Providence which has guided our people throughout South Africa in such a miraculous way". ~~F.W. (Reitz F.W.: A Century of Wrong. 1)~~. For it was not until the close of the 19th century that the Dutch-Afrikaner cup of bitterness overflowed, and with a renewed sense of nationality they vowed to sell their lives dearly for independence, and the success of their first essay in the First Transvaal War of 1880 revived confidence in them, and inspired them with a greater sense and ideals of nationality, while the repeated but futile attempts to frustrate their goal planted ineradicable suspicion in their minds and irreconcilable hatred in their hearts that urged them to armed peace and a defensive and aggressive psychological complex, noticeable in the re-iteration of Afrikaner sufferings and an over-emphasis of Afrikaner nationality, rights, history, culture and undoubted contributions to the world of art and science.

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The inherently superior manners of the Englishman, his
 patriotism patronising,...

patronising, condescending way of speaking from the heights, his airs of doing a duty as if it was a conferring of favour, these mannerisms were gall and wormwood to the simple Boer, who in his heart of heart^{arts} hated and despised the 'rooinek' and his affected postures.

The alleged injustice of the English, their deep-rooted prejudice against the Dutch-Afrikaner, their oppression of the Boer, these excited in the latter resentment, distrust, suspicion, contempt, opposition, resistance and hatred. The British Government was compared to the Egyptian rule of Pharoah, and the Boers likened themselves to the Children of Israel - Pharoah the ^uknowing instrument of God to fashion a new and strong nation out of the wild untutored and poor tribe whose faith in God was their only weapon. All these thoughts, at first vague and unformed in the early border Afrikaner farmer, acquired more and more shape with each succeeding generation, until, they were cardinal articles of faith, and with their constant recital at the fireside, the mealie lands and the classrooms, they became part of the mental furniture of each and every Dutch-Afrikaner child.

← 2. The Onset.

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It was on the 9th of October 1899 that Paul Kruger, the president of the puny South African Republic threw down the gauntlet before the proud and mighty British Empire, "upon which the sun never sets".

With the reckless manner of a strong power imposing its will upon a small poor and weak nation, the Transvaal surprised the world by reversing the order. Kruger peremptorily demanded the fulfillment of three conditions, namely. (1) That all British troops be withdrawn forthwith from the borders of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State borders, (2) That all British troops of recent arrival in South African be sent back to England, and (3) That all British troops at sea be sent back whence they came. Failing compliance with these three conditions within 48 hours, the governments of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State would be at war with Great Britain. With a light heart and a withering smile Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, answered through Lord Milner the High Commissioner accepting what was considered an impertinent challenge. There was really no alternative. The British Government could neither compromise nor temporise without grave injury to its prestige throughout the World.

After dark thunder clouds had been steadily gathering and rumbling ominously for months, if not for years, over the horizon of South Africa, the storm eventually burst in fell fury upon its population. Conferences, palaver and diplomacy had failed. Direct action in the shape of war was now to be the sole arbiter, and the Transvaal and the Orange Free State on the one side, and Great Britain on the other side, jumped murderously at each other's throat. Meantime the belligerents agreeably deluded themselves by indulging in much wishful thinking. The British said it would be a short snappy war of about three months, in which the Dutch farmers would be taught

a signal lesson and brought to their knees. How could a few thousand untrained men stand before the disciplined soldiers of the greatest empire in the world, and the British soldiers themselves had an exaggerated opinion of their ^{prowess} ~~efficiency~~, and they very much underrated the Boers as fighters. The lessons of the Transvaal War of 1880-1881 were comfortably forgotten.

The Boers also had a poor opinion of the British soldier as a fighter. He could not shoot ^{straight} ~~and~~ and was obliging in making himself an easy target. They recalled their experiences in the "First War of Independence 1880-1881, when in three short months they overwhelmed the much vaunted British army. They would do the same now, and if the worst should come to the worst, why, Germany, France, Holland, and America would come to their assistance, and baulk bullying Britain of her kill. Hadn't the German Kaiser implicitly promised President Kruger German's moral and military assistance at the time of the Jameson raid in 1896 ?

3. Mafeking.

As early as the 2nd of October, the Dutch Afrikaners had massed large forces - some 6,000 men, on the western border of the Transvaal at Polfontein, these being the commandos of Rustenburg (Commandant P.J. Snyman), Potchefstroom (Commandant M. Wolmarans) Marico (Commandant J.D.L.Botha), Wolmaranstad (Commandant F.J.Potgieter) Litchtenburg (Commandant H.C. Vermaas) all under the supreme command of General Piet Cronje, the hero of Potchefstroom now appointed also Assistant Commandant-General of the South African Republic, and considered the best and ablest of the Boer generals. To assist Cronje, the following subordinate officers were appointed namely, Vecht-General Jacobus (Koois) ^{de} ~~de~~ la Rey of Litchtenburg, General Jacobus (Kotie) Snyman of Zeerust, General A.R. Lemmer, and General Sarel du Toit.

Cronje was entrusted with the reduction of Mafeking. Mafeking in common with Kimberley and Natal furnished an additional reason and motive as a Boer military objective, being regarded as property of which the Transvaal was cheated ~~of~~ by the Keate award (1871); Kimberley, by the annexation of Griqualand 1871 and Natal by ^{its} annexation in 1843. This key point was defended by Colonel Baden-Powell, who had come in July with a few special service officers to raise two regiments of mounted police for service on the western Transvaal border, under Colonel Plumer and Colonel Hore respectively. Baden-Powell's orders were to protect the borders of Bechuanaland in case of war, and with a soldier's instinct he had at once realised the strategic importance of Mafeking to the Boers as a depot for operations northwards, and to the British as a base for operations against the Transvaal and southwards. Accordingly with the imminence of war, Baden-Powell moved from Ramatlabama into Mafeking with all his troops, and put it into a state of defence. He had about 750

trained...../

trained men. To these he added 400 civilian volunteers. He also enrolled 400 to 500 Africans, chiefly of the Barolong tribe of Mafeking and armed them to defend their sector, and others to act as spies, scouts, cattle guards, trench diggers and to help in building forts. Baden-Powell's Artillery (Major Panzera) was ridiculously inadequate. It consisted of Four Muzzle-loading 7-Pounders with a range of about 2,500 yards, one 1-Pound Hotchkiss, one 2-Pound Nordenfelt and one 7-Pound Maxim.

During the three days before the expiry of the Ultimatum, Cronje's forces occupied a line of about twenty-five miles on the western Transvaal border. He had two main objectives, the first was to isolate Mafeking, and make it impossible for it to receive any help from without. This was to be effected by destroying the Railway line on the north and south of the town, and also by cutting the telegraph wires. His next intention was to storm the town and overpower it, clear the western Transvaal border of all opposition, and then go south to join hands with the Free State commandos.

Early on Thursday morning the 12th of October 1899, a strangely cold morning for that time of the year, (as sometimes happens when snow has fallen on the Drakensbergen and cold winds travel thence inland) (~~J. H. Conradie F. Met Cronje aan die Wesfront~~) the commandos to the number of 6,000, in high spirits, crossed the western Transvaal border into the Cape Colony, at Rooigrond and Ramatlabama. The Marico and Runstenburg Commandos under Botha crossed at Ramatlabama while the main commando under Cronje crossed at Rooigrond.

~~The British were...~~
De la Rey thought the forces under General Cronje's command were unnecessarily large, and that some of them could have been more usefully employed elsewhere. He more than once expressed that opinion to Cronje, (~~J. H. Braytenbach J. H. Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog II. 31~~) but at this time, Koos De la Rey was an unknown quantity and his opinion counted for next to nothing, and Cronje characteristically paid no heed to it and acted according to his own thoughts, especially as he was backed by Commandant General Joubert and President Kruger. Later in the course of the war, however, it became obvious that this concentration of large forces around Mafeking was a serious tactical blunder on the part of the Transvaal war,^{Lords,} and that the little known De la Rey was right in regarding it as a waste of time and opportunities in the vital initial stages of the war.

Having crossed the border, the commandos went straight towards Mafeking. At their head was the formidable Piet Cronje, not in uniform and belts and medals and epaulettes, but on the contrary,..... /

contrary, wearing his bowler hat, and his black morning coat, and carrying his inseparable horsewhip, and sitting quietly and meditatively in his 'spider', drawn by four dapple grey horses. Across the ten miles that separate Mafeking from the western Transvaal border he led his men to the south side of the town, and there, after himself conducting prayers for the success of the Republican arms, he directed the burghers to destroy the railway line, and cut the telegraph wires about two miles north and south of Mafeking. Then he made his dispositions with characteristic coolness and confidence. He fixed his headquarters or "Cronje's laager", composed of the Potchefstroom commando, at Jackal Tree, a slight eminence 5,000 yards or about three miles to the south of the town. On the east at MacMillan's Post about three miles from town he placed General Jacobus Snyman with the Marico and the Wolmaransstad commandos.

At Signal Hill, about three and a half miles to the north east of the town, he placed Steenkamp with the Rustenburg commando, while Commandant Eloff was directed to occupy a point known as Game Tree about a mile ^{and} a half to the north-west of Mafeking. Another main laager manned by the Rustenburg commando was placed on the west of the Barolong town. Between these main laagers there were connecting smaller laagers.

The siege of Mafeking now began in dead earnest, and neither the besiegers nor the besieged guessed, much less knew that it was to be for seven long weary months. Irreproachable wisdom after the event, and tea table tacticians have loudly proclaimed that Cronje should or could have over-run and crushed Mafeking at once and thus released 6,000 fighting men for operations in other and more important sectors, as if Cronje could possibly know the unknowable before hand, and what the world only knew long after, namely that Mafeking was one big bluff, and its defender Colonel Baden-Powell a past master in the art of Camouflage.

The first shot of the war was fired on the evening of the 12th of October at Kraaipan - forty miles to the south of Mafeking, whither General De la Rey, in command of a strong patrol of 800 men of Lichtenburg, Schoonspruit and Gatsrand from ^CKronje's commandos had gone on 11th October from Polfontein (Bodibe) on reconnaissance to discover and hinder any possible British movements from the south. He had just torn up the railway line and cut the telegraph wires when an armoured train carrying a small force and two 27 Pound Guns and a Maxim under the command of Captain R.H. Nesbitt approached from Vryburg and fell into the gap. De la Rey at once attacked it. After a night of fighting, the British officer and several of his men were wounded. At sunrise (13th October), Captain van der Merwe who had brought up the artillery to reinforce De la Rey directed his cannon at the armoured train and blew it up. Realising the futility of their resistance, Captain Nesbitt and his thirty comrades surrendered...../

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surrendered to De la R y, and were taken prisoners. The official report of this engagement was the first of the war, and was by General Cronje with his usual brevity to the Government at Pretoria.

The curtain went up at Mafeking on Saturday the 14th October. On that day there was sharp skirmishing, the musketry, Maxims and heavy guns being all brought into action from the early morning. In the afternoon, the besieged sent a party of stretcher bearers with two ministers of the gospel, preceded by a Red Cross flag to render assistance to the wounded and recover the bodies of the slain. To their dismay they were fired upon and had to retire. On the following day (Sunday) Dr. Pirow - General Cronje's army surgeon and father of ^{Mr} Oswald Pirow of the "New Order", came into Mafeking in his landau drawn by two smart grey horses, and under protection of the Red Cross flag, to tender to Colonel Baden-Powell General Cronje's apologies for inadvertently firing upon the Red Cross flag on the previous day, and to explain that the mistake was committed by young and ignorant recruits, whom Cronje undertook to shoot if they had killed any one. ~~(F. N. Breytenbach J. H.: Die Tweede Vryheids Oorlog 11 p. 52).~~ The incident passed off agreeably.

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On Monday (16th October) the besiegers occupied the Mafeking town water-works and cut off the water supply to the town. They then placed their 12 Pounder guns in such a way that the shells would fall in the centre of the town. After shelling the town for some hours in the forenoon, Cronje sent a messenger under a flag of truce, demanding the surrender of Baden-Powell and the garrison, "to avoid further blood shed". To this, the impertubable Baden-Powell answered - "Certainly, but when will the bloodshed begin?"

After taking stock of the situation, Cronje came to the conclusion that Mafeking could be taken by a determined assault. He therefore wired to Pretoria, suggesting that he could take the town in a hand-to-hand fight, but President Kruger would not hear of it. He stormed and said "the place is not worth the lives of fifty burghers". He had heard that Mafeking was surrounded with a net of dynamite mines, and he issued orders to Cronje to continue the siege and simply to see it to it that Colonel Baden-Powell and his troops do not escape. The Executive Council was divided. Some thought that Cronje should be allowed to storm the place.⁷³ ~~(F. N. Harpers Monthly Magazine, May 1900 p. 827, quoted by Captain A. T. Mahan: The Story of the War in South Africa 1899 - 1900 p. 122).~~ He directed that one of the big siege guns be sent to Cronje. Cronje was however convinced that 'it would have cost less in lives to storm Mafeking than to besiege it, and thought that his being over-ruled by Headquarters and being forced to dilly-dally and sit ineffectually around Mafeking with nearly a third of the Republican forces did not increase his reputation, and was one of the greatest errors of the campaign. ~~(F. N. Brandwag 1/10/1913 p. 262).~~

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Cronje...../

Cronje next sent a note to the Barolong Chief ~~Wessels~~ Montshiwa, warning him not to embroil himself in a war which was primarily between white people. He also advised the chief to remove the Barolong women and children away from the shell-swept area to a place of safety, preferably out of Mafeking. To this, the Chief after consultation with the magistrate G.C. Bell, replied that his cattle posts had been raided and his people killed by the Boers, that he was a subject of Queen Victoria, and though he was told not to fight, he was allowed to protect himself, and to return violence for violence. (~~J. Aitken W.F.: Baden-Powell p.118) (F.N. Review of Reviews Vol. 1 p.218).~~

On the 24th of October, the siege gun - a veritable monster in the shape of a 15 cm Creusot, a breech loading gun with a range of 10,000 yards (nearly six miles) and throwing 94 lb shells arrived at Cronje's laager much to the hilarious excitement of the besiegers and the pallid terror of the besieged. It was quickly re-christened 'Long Tom' and 'Creaky' and "Big Ben" by the garrison.

Before commencing the bombardment of the town, Cronje gallantly gave Baden-Powell notice of his intention, and warned him to remove women and children from the town to a place of safety. The siege gun took its position on a mound in the centre of Cronje's laager at Jackal Tree on the south side of Mafeking, from whence it roared and growled and belched, throwing that day no less than forty shells, now into the European, and now into the African town, and thus it performed intermittently for seven long weary months.

On the 25th of October, the Boers made a sharp attack on the Barolong town from the west. The Barolong men had been provided with guns and ammunition by the local British authorities, to defend themselves and their homes. Under Captain Marsh and their chiefs, they met the assault bravely and repulsed it.

Cronje then made a determined attempt to carry Mafeking by storm. He had twelve different kinds of ordinance at his command - a 94-lb Creusot, a 64-lb Howitzer, a 12-lb, a 9-lb and a 7-lb high velocity Krupp, a Maxim Nordenfeld (pom-pom), a Vickers Maxim etc. at his disposal, and on that day, they were all brought into play, and threw no less than four hundred shells into the besieged town. The boom and deep-throated roar of heavy artillery, and the growl and bark of smaller guns, accompanied by the rit-i-ti-ti-ti-ti of Maxims and Nordenfelds, the 'geknetter' or crackling and rustle of musketry, the whir-r-r of balls and the shrieking of bullets in their flight through the air, the explosion of shells, the crash of their impact against buildings or the heavy thud of their fall, the flying pieces of rock and the fragments of ricocheting steel set in violent motion by such ~~set in violent motion by such impact~~ ^{impact} of the heavy thud of their steel ~~set in violent motion by such impact~~, all this was at once spectacular, dramatic and terrific, and was calculated to make the stoutest heart quail, while Mafeking shook upon its foundations 'like a thing unfirm', and seemed to be on the very verge of collapse. The name of Cronje became terrible and the Barolong called him 'Ra-Nthoyakgale' (The Terror of Ages).

Elsewhere, President Steyn was unhappy. He realised that
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the Orange Free State forces on the western border were far from sufficient to hold the line from the Orange River on the south to Fourteen-Streams on the north (2,300 men), and at the same time to effectively invest Kimberley (2,500 men). He represented this to President Kruger and Commandant-General Piet Joubert, who accordingly instructed Cronje at Mafeking to send some of his burghers south. Cronje, therefore, on the 22nd of October ordered De la Rey to proceed south to Kimberley with 1,500 men of the Lichtenburg, Wolmaransstad and Bloemhof commandos.⁹⁶ (~~J. V. Breyrenbach: Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog Vol. 11 p.80~~) On his way south De la Rey captured the town of Vryburg.⁹⁷ (~~F. H. Davitt M: The Boer Fight for Freedom p.182~~).

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4. Lord Methuen

Soon after this, to wit, on the 18th of November, Baden-Powell's observers noticed a strange activity at Cronje's laager, wagons were being packed, men assembled, teams of oxen inspanned to wagons and big guns, and orders given as if in readiness for an exodus, and on the following day there was a cloud of dust, indicating a southward transport trek.⁹⁸ (~~J. V. Bailey: Diary of the Mafeking Siege p.223~~). Cronje had received orders from Pretoria to go and take charge of more important operations south of Kimberley.⁹⁹ (~~J. P. Kemp: Vir Vryheid en vir Reg. p.223~~) to which town Lord Paul Methuen was painfully creeping from the Orange River. Cronje took with him some 5,000 burghers of the Krugersdorp, Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom commandos, and also the Scandinavian Corps, thus leaving about 2,000 burghers of the Marico commando around Mafeking under the command of General J.P. Snyman. Cronje also took with him most of the artillery, leaving however the 15 cm Creusot (or Long Tom) for his successor.

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The whole of the northern Cape between Mafeking and Kimberley was in possession of the Republics, therefore their forces could move freely without fear of much opposition. It is probable therefore that if the railway had been intact, Cronje and his whole force would have taken the direct route to Kimberley (250 miles).

As it is, Cronje and his staff and 200 men went by road to Klerksdorp. There they entrained on the 21st November. Here an incident happened, a negligible domestic incident, which had however very important bearing on later events.

Mrs. Hester Cronje, the General's wife asked to go with him to the front. The General shook his head and said firmly that it could not be done; she would be in great danger from the colossal English force to be met. Mrs. Cronje begged and beseeched with a woman's force, whimpering and a flood of tears, and was supported by her daughter who said that she would only fret to death. Cronje softened, stroked her head and agreed to take her along. "Pieter Cronje sit sy hand op sy vrou se hare en begin dit streel: Stil maar, Hessie, ek sal jou saam neem".¹⁰⁰ (~~J. V. Visser S: Die Wit Flag. p.99~~) Cronje and his staff and about 200 men and his wife entrained at...../

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at Klerksdorp, on the 21st of November and went via Johannesburg to Bloemfontein and thence to Edenburg, arriving at the last place on Friday the 24th of November.

To thoroughly understand General Cronje's activities and life at this time, it is necessary to go back to the 31st of October, when Sir Redvers Buller, the newly appointed British generalissimo arrived at Cape Town from England to assume chief command of the British forces in South Africa. It was assumed that he would attack the Boers at Norvals Pont, force his way across the Orange River and march on Bloemfontein; and Cronje, still looked upon as the ablest Boer general had been selected to oppose Buller, while De la Rey and Jacobus Prinsloo were delegated to bar Methuen's progress to Kimberley. When, however Buller proceeded to Natal, Cronje was appointed to assume the command in the west opposing Methuen.

Lord Methuen arrived at the Orange River on the 12th of November ~~of November~~, and at once began to organise the force with which he was ordered to relieve ^{ie} Kimberley. It was as perfect an army as could be raised anywhere in the British Empire except for its want of mounted men, and Methuen was considered one of the best British soldiers, eminently suited to lead such an army. His assumed knowledge of South African conditions, gained in 1885, when he was in command of a cavalry division in Griqualand West and Southern Bechuanaland further qualified him for the high command in the same sector.

At sunrise on Wednesday the 22nd of November, just a week after his arrival, Methuen and his force of 8,000 men moved on their perilous adventure northwards. Between them and Kimberley lay, more or less along the railway line, Belmont, Graspan, Enslin or Rooilaagte, Klokkfontein, Modder River and Riet River, Magersfontein, Scholtznek and Spytfontein.

As soon as there were signs of activity in the British camp at the Orange River, the Free State forces prepared themselves for action and on the 20th of November, Jacobus Prinsloo moved with 1,500 men from the Free State depot of Jacobsdal to join Van der Merwe with his 250 men around Belmont, and a day or two later, General Wessels, in charge of operations around Kimberley detailed De la Rey with 800 men from the Transvaal commandos to go and re-inforce Prinsloo in stopping Methuen's advance from the Orange River.

Early in the morning of the 23rd November, Methuen came in touch with the Boers, and on the dry and sandy country around Belmont, a country dotted with rocky hills, there was an encounter, from sunrise till late afternoon, the British, at high cost, dislodging the Boers from one Kopje after another, until, for some unaccountable reason Prinsloo, the Free State Commander panicked and ordered a retreat in the centre and thus compelled his left wing under De la Rey also to fall back, leaving the British in possession of the battle field of Belmont.

On Friday the 24th November Methuen moved again, steadily through/

through Graspan on to Enslin, ten miles beyond Belmont. Another row of low hills covered with ironstone boulders confronted him, and the soldiers knew from the Belmont experience the danger lurking behind those boulders. On Saturday the 25th, the naval guns threw some thousand shells on the main kopjes in the line of advance along the railway, until it was confidently thought that not a lizard could be alive on it. When however, Methuen's Naval brigade rushed up the hill, they were met by a blizzard of Mauser bullets, and before the hill was taken, nearly fifty percent of the invaders were either killed or wounded. Here, as at Belmont, and as Conan Doyle says, 'the British won the kopjes but lost the men'.¹⁰¹ (~~P. H. The Great Boer War p. 109~~). These were pyrrhic victories in the true sense of the expression. Tired, hungry, thirsty, and suffering from the intense heat of the South African sun by day, and the sudden change into intense cold by night, the British soldiers welcomed the well-deserved rest of Saturday and Sunday.

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← 5. The Battle of Modder River

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Arriving at Edendale on Friday the 24th, Cronje hurried on to his new sphere of action and arrived at Jacobsdal on Saturday the 25th November just at the close of the battle of Enslin in which Methuen had advanced another few miles towards his objective - Kimberley, ~~pa~~ paying a heavy penalty of 230 casualties for De la Rey's twenty miles of retreat on the Modder River. Cronje had come to take over from the pusillanimous Prinsloo, whose pitiful performance at the Battle of Belmont two days previously had surprised and angered his countrymen, and ~~lest~~ ^{led} them a battle they had virtually won. Such in fact was the murmur^u of discontent against Prinsloo that he effaced himself from the command, and De la Rey now took charge after Belmont until the arrival of Cronje.

Cronje's arrival at the Modder River was preceded by his name. It was a name to conjure with. Sixty-five years old, of middle height, swarthy countenance and brusque manner, Cronje was at this time still the most popular Boer general. He had built for himself a solid reputation by his exploits of 1880 and 1881 at Potchefstroom, and again in 1896 against Jameson. His friendship ^{with} ~~for~~ Kruger, his intense patriotism, his utter fearlessness, his dogged determination, his hatred for the English and his contempt for their fighting powers, all these were known to every burgher, and Cronje was aware of the esteem in which he was held. Already the burghers were inspired by the mere mention of this name, and the men who had retired at Belmont and were so sullen and dejected after Enslin were now transformed into giants by the magic presence of Piet Cronje, "the man capable, crafty, iron-hard, magnetic, who lay with a reinforced and formidable army across the path of Lord Methuen's tired soldiers."¹⁰² (~~Conan Doyle: The Great Boer War p. 111~~).

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After retiring from Enslin, De la Rey first blew up the railway bridge on the Modder River, and then with intuitive strategy selected his positions, dug his trenches in the banks of the river, and made his dispositions on Sunday the 26th of November, all which met the whole-hearted approval of his new chief - Piet Cronje on Monday. Early on Monday the 27th, the British army left Enslin, marched 15 miles and bivouacked at Klofontein, six miles south of the Modder River. On the afternoon of that day, both the British and the Boers could see in the east a dense cloud of dust caused by Cronje's long convoy and forces as they laboured across from Fauresmith to Jacobsdal. In one of those wagons was Mrs. Hester Cronje - the wife of the redoubtable general. At the same time other Boer forces could be seen coming from Jacobsdal towards the Modder River close to the right flank of Methuen's army. These were a force of 1,200 men of the Klerksdorp and Ppchefstroom commandos under Andries Cronje, the brother of the general. They had two Krupp guns and three Maxims. They took their position on the left(East) flank of the Boer line on the Riet River as De la Rey occupied the centre on both sides of the railway with the Lichtenburg commando, and Prinsloo the right or west flank with the Free State commandos.

That night, Methuen's patrols and scouts went further than Klofontein to reconnoitre towards the Modder and Riet Rivers and were fired upon, yet with all these evidences before him, Lord Methuen felt sure that it was further on, at Spytfontein beyond the Modder River, that his next encounter would be. ¹⁰³ (~~The Times History of the War in South Africa p. 345~~). He contemplated that encounter with equanimity, and had been heard to remark to one of his subordinate officers "My good fellow, I intend to put the fear of God into those people" ¹⁰⁴ (~~Ibid p. 322~~).

After the Battle of Enslin, Methuen had been reinforced, bringing his strength to 12,000 men. But what of that? The Boers had their 3,500 men and they had their newly discovered strategist Koos De la Rey, but above all they had the invincible Cronje for their commander, and in any case one Boer was equal to four Englishmen.

The Battle of Modder River was impending, and yet Methuen, although he had been in this district with Charles Warren in 1885, did not know the topography of the place, and was entirely deceived by the flatness of the landscape and the casualness of his scouts, with the result that he was unaware of the existence of the Riet River, and the positions of his adversaries. For this military sin he had to pay heavily.

Early on Tuesday, the 28th of November, the British army left Klofontein and marched to the Modder River Bridge. Unknown to them General Cronje was standing at the window of the Hotel on the Modder River, and by the help of field glasses was observing their every

movement, while thanks to their shockingly careless reconnoitring, ^{muzzles of Boer guns trained on them from the thickly-wooded} they were walking right into the three thousand banks and the well concealed trenches of the Modder River. Soon after sunrise, there was a fierce encounter over a line of four miles from the southward bend of the Riet River on the east, westwards beyond the railway line. The British army, forming a ^{target, silhouetted} on a rising plain at 800 yards against the clean ^{blue} sky could not ^{target, silhouetted}, advanced against the invisible enemy, who were pouring a hail of lead on them, and they were unwilling to retire, and so they fell upon their faces, each man trying to find an ant-hill or a shrub behind which to conceal himself, and there to lie motionless for ^{hours} on end under the scorching rays of the November sun, or until their ant-hill 'fortresses' were blown to smotherings and pulverised by the merciless shot and shell of Boer Mausers and guns, when the unhappy British soldiers were then over-run by thousands of disturbed and homeless white ants, but dare not make the slightest motion on pain of their being located and blown to pieces. (F. J. Conradie F: Met Cronje aan die Westfront pp.39, 40). In the course of the day, British activity became largely confirmed ⁱⁿ to their ^{which swept every house kraal and bush on the opposite} artillery bank of the Modder River. Meantime, amidst the tremendous noise occasioned by the boom and roar of large guns, the patter and peppering of Maxims and Pom-poms, and the rattle and crackling of Mausers and Lee-Metfords, Cronje was to be seen, whip in hand, moving up and down on the Boer left sector, now pointing this way and now that way, shouting out his commands in his somewhat strident voice, directing and encouraging his men, and quite careless and unconcerned about the blizzard of bullets that whizzed past him, and the shells that burst around him, and others that ploughed the ground before him.

So long as the British faced the Boers frontally, they were pinned down on the south bank of the Modder River. On the right (east) Henry Colville's repeated attempt to turn the Boer left was frustrated by the southward bend of the Riet River, and as the battle became stationary, Lord Methuen became mad with desperation, and at great personal risk courageously led a charge on the left flank. Later on in the day, a column under Pole-Carew succeeded in turning the Boer right wing at the little hamlet of Rosmead held by the Free State commandos under Jacob Prinsloo. As Pole Carew established a foot-hold on the northern bank, the Free Staters were siezed with panic, and fled from the field in spite of De la Rey's and Cronje's attempts to rally them. This second exhibition of the "white liver" by the Free State commandos was to be a standing taunt against them by their Transvaal comrades. This led to friction between the burghers of the two sister Republics especially as some of the Free Staters had remained in the laager and refused to go to the firing line.

Once the Boer flank was turned and forced to give way, De la Rey in the centre and Cronje in the left were compelled to fall back,

and...../

and as the day wore into the afternoon and evening, the Boers evacuated their trenches and retired across the Modder River. In the night Cronje stealthily removed all his army and his artillery from the scene of battle, and retired eastwards along the northern bank of the Riet River towards Jacobsdal. His purpose was to meet the rest of his commandos from Mafeking. Cronje's decision (to completely) evacuate the Modder River entrenchments and withdraw to Jacobsdal met the bitterest opposition from De la Rey, ^{whose} In his view the British could not have succeeded in forcing back the Boers, but on the contrary would themselves be forced back to the Orange River to find water for man and beast. ¹⁰⁵ (~~F. J. Conradie P. Met Cronje aan die W^efront p.43~~). It is of course questionable whether the Republican forces once forced as they were from their prepared entrenchments, could have successfully resisted the onslaught of the large British army with its untrammelled reinforcements. ¹⁰⁶ (~~The Times History of the War in South Africa p.358~~).

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This night move of Cronje was unknown to the British, who were exhausted after the heavy strain of three hard fights in one week, under the broiling sun, and with very little water and food. In the morning, the artillery threw shells on the positions last occupied by the Boers when darkness set in the previous night, but there was no reply, and it was soon discovered that the positions were completely evacuated.

The Battle of Modder River had been, so far, the fiercest battle of the war. In it Lord Methuen was wounded in the thigh, and General De la Rey's son, a lad of 18 years, was mortally wounded, being one of the hundred casualties of the Republics as against five hundred British casualties. As at Belmont on the 23rd of November, and as at Enslin on the 25th, so at Modder River on the 28th, the British drove back the Boers, but lost heavily in men. In those three engagements in one week, the British casualties amounted to the (then) hideous figure of 1,000. The Boers achieved part of their main purpose to delay Methuen's advance and to reduce his strength. ¹⁰⁷ (~~F. J. The Times History of the War in South Africa Vol.11 p.340~~). But Cronje was not happy. He was so annoyed at the cowardly behaviour of the Free State commandos and the ⁷reptitude of their commander - Jacobus Prinsloo - that he at once reported the matter to President Kruger, who in reply wrote a characteristically biblical epistle to President Marthinus Steyn of the Free State, urging him to strengthen and exhort his burghers, and commend them to sacrifice themselves for the fatherland. "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori". President Kruger's letters reads: "Geerde Heer en Broer, Die saak is te gewigtig vir mij om die stilswe te bewaar. U Hoog Edele moet al u offisiere en burghers onder die oog bring/vyand wil uitlewer nie, ons, selfs ten koste van ons lewe, moet besluit om hardnekkige weerstand te bied en nie terug te trek nie, maar ons te verweer totdat ons die oorwinning hehaal het. Die Here het getoon dat Hy met ons is, daar die vyand die verlies

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verlies van honderde betreur, terwyl ons slegs die verlies van enkele te jammer het.

As ons terugtrek, is dit uit lafhartigheid. Ek hat opgemerk dat gebrek aan samewerking die oorsaak was dat ons stellings ontruim het. My leeftyd veroorloof my nie dat ek ^{my} by my seuns kan voeg nie, anders sou ek tans aan die front gewees het.

Die raad en lasgewing van UH Ed. moet hulle geduriglik vergese want die beslissende stryd wat sal uitmaak of ons die land sal oorgee of nie, nader snel. In geen geval moet ons die land oorgee nie, selfs al kos dit ons die helfte van ons mense.

"U Hoog Edele moet die offisiere en burghers laat vorstaan dat hulle hul tot die dood toe moet verdedig. In die Naam van die Here vertrou ek dat ons met hierdie besluit, en gesterk deur die gebed voor die aanval, die oorwinning sal behaal. Want Christus het gese: Want wie su lewe wil behou, hy sal dit verloor; maar wie sy lewe verloor om My ontwil, hy sal dit behou. (Honoured Sir and Brother; The matter is too weighty that I should remain silent. You Honour must bring all your officers and men to the realisation that if we are to retain our independence, and not to surrender our land to the enemy, we must, even at the cost of our very lives, resolve to put up a stubborn resistance, and not to retreat, but to defend ourselves until we shall have won the victory. The Lord has shown that He is with us in that the enemy mourn the loss of hundreds, while we, on the other hand, regret the death of few individuals.

If we retreat it ^{would} ^{be} is purely due to cowardice. I have noticed that the want of cooperation has been the cause of our evacuating our positions. My age precludes me from joining my burghers, otherwise I could at this very time be at the front.

Let the constant advice and orders of Your Honour accompany the burghers, for the decisive encounter, which will determine whether or not we must surrender our land draws near. Under no circumstances must we surrender our land even should it cost us the half of our population. Your Honour must impress upon officers and men that they must hold out to the death in the name of the Lord. With this resolve and strengthened by prayer, I trust that we shall win the victory. For Christ hath said - he that will save his life shall lose it, and he that loseth it for the truth's sake shall save it" ¹⁰⁹ (~~The Times History of the War in South Africa Vol. II p. 384-5~~).

On hearing of the unsoldierly conduct of his commandos, President Steyn also administered a veiled rebuke by letter:-
Dear Officers and Burghers,

While we cannot sufficiently thank our God for the assistance He has thus far lent us, and while with thankful hearts we acknowledge the courage of our burghers in their facing the tremendous odds of the enemy, it is nevertheless my urgent duty to show you that we can only expect continued help from above if there is co-operation and love between officers and men, and if every one performs his duty faithfully.

We have learned with pain that only 1,000 men of the Free State commandos took part in the last battle, and that many others stayed in their laagers while their kinsmen faced the enemy and conquered him. Such action can only lead to tragic results for the freedom of our nation.

Let us never forget that we are fighting for all that is dear to us."

President Steyn had no sooner sent off the above letter or telegram than he decided to proceed himself to the front to instil courage into the faint-hearted of his commandos, to compose the quarrel that had arisen between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State commandos, and to give whatever advice might be necessary or might be asked of him. Accompanied by his chief adviser Abraham Fischer, he arrived at Scholtz Nek on the 3rd of December and after accomplishing all that he had set out to do, he returned to Bloemfontein on the 7th. Perhaps, if Steyn had not visited the Republican forces, there might never have been a Battle of Magersfontein with the lustrous credit it reflected upon Cronje.

At the close of the Battle of Modder River, both the British and the Boers had learnt to respect each other. Both Cronje and Methuen realised that they must receive reinforcements before facing each other, and therefore while the one retired to Jacobsdal, the Boer ammunition depot, the other was content to encamp and recuperate on the Modder River, the field so hardly won by the British.

The correspondence between Kruger and Steyn at this time also betrays the anxiety which weighed upon their minds.¹⁰⁹ (Waters Col. H.H. German Official Account of the War in South African p. 85).

6. The Battle of Magersfontein..../

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6. The Battle of Magersfontein.

On Wednesday the 29th of November, Cronje removed his commandos from the vicinity of Jacobsdal and went across Magersfontein to Scholtznek and Spytfontein. These are three most southerly of a group of hills between Kimberley and Modder River. Magersfontein, the highest and most easterly of them is nearly 200 feet high, and lies five miles north of the Modder River, and three miles east of the railway line from De Aar and Orange River to Kimberley. Between the hills and the Modder River, the country is of flat lime stone formation, covered with tufts of grass, brushwood, stunted mimosa trees and prickly pear, and rises gently northwards. Thanks to President Steyn, Cronje received reinforcements in men of the Bethlehem, Heilbron and Kroonstad commandos from the Natal theatre, the Ficksburg and Ladybrand command stationed along the Caledon to watch Basutoland, as well as the Transvaal men of the Bloemhof and Wolmaransstad besieging Kimberley. Cronje had thus at his command about 8,000 men to dispute Methuen's further advance towards Kimberley. ¹¹⁰ (~~Times History of the War in S.A. p.385~~). He at once prepared himself to meet the expected clash with Methuen at Scholtz Nek and Spytfontein. He had trenches and rifle pits dug ^{on} both sides of the railway, along which he felt sure Methuen was going to make the attempt to break through. On the 4th of December, however, Cronje, at the advice and insistence of De la Rey left the Spytfontein and Scholtz Nek defences and had new trenches made further forward in the plain below Magersfontein Hill at a distance of about three miles from the Modder River. These trenches, when completed extended in a deliberately interrupted line from 1 mile north-west of the railway line at Merton siding across the front or south of Magersfontein and eastwards to Mosdrift on the Modder river. Though they were themselves only three miles in extent, the full line which the Boers ultimately held as a precautionary measure was twelve miles long. They were concealed with branches of the mimosa trees and vaal bosch, shrubs and tufts of grass to approximate as near as possible the trenches of the Modder River, which had proved so useful to the Boers and so fatal to the British on the 28th of November. This ^{bold} step in the choice of the next battle ground, and in the disposition of the trenches was a prophetic inspiration on the part of De la Rey, and stamps him as a master tactician and strategist, and one of the greatest military geniuses South Africa has produced. It was a position calculated ~~to~~ ^{to} completely ~~deceive~~ his adversary so as to pounce upon him when he was himself crouching for a decisive pounce, and as a military critic has said "In war, it is of the utmost importance to gauge correctly the adversary, and what he is likely to do in any given case." (~~Waters H.H.: German Official Account of the War in South Africa p.132~~). In his Memoirs ¹¹² (~~Brandwag 1st October 1913 p.262~~) General Cronje does not rise to the desirable grace and greatness of according De la Rey this deserved honour of having selected the position before Magersfontein, but actually appropriates it for himself.

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