

CHAP XVI. THE SURRENDER:

After the destruction of the chain ^Tbridge and ^{when} the casualties caused by the British shells, ^{had been attended to} the burghers, feeling more disheartened than ever dispersed unceremoniously, each one taking his way to his dug-out. That evening a momentous krygsraad was held. In it Cronje exerted his powers and influence to the utmost in trying to persuade the commandants to fight to the last and not ^{to} give in. But they would not hear of any more resistance. They were almost unanimous in the decision to surrender. The men of the Free State commandos declared as one man that with or without Cronje's consent, they were determined to lay down their arms on the following day. All the officers, with exception of Commandant Britz, or Roos or Schutte (Authorities differ as to the name of the one man who supported Cronje against surrender.) *valid for Swereunders.*

- Foot-N/*
1. Davitt M: The Boer Fight for Freedom p.396 gives the name of Roos.
 2. Conradie F: ^Mmet Cronje aan die Wesfront p.163 mentions Schutte or Roos.
 3. Hillegas H.C.: With the Boer Forces p.192- 193, mentions Schutte.
 4. Breytenbach J.H: Huisgenot 7/1051949 p.19 mentions Britz.
 5. Cronje himself Herineringen (Die Brandwag 15/10/1913 mentions Britz.
- Foot-Note*

Cronje then begged his comrades that the surrender should not be on the morrow - the 27th February, for that was Majuba Day. They must ~~be on~~ hold out a day longer, till the 28th, and thus save the Republic the chagrin of its principal general and army having to surrender to the very enemy who surrendered to it on that self-same date nineteen years previously. Cronje's pleading and prayer were in vain. The officers and men told him, point-blank that if at sunrise of the following day - the 27th February, he did not surrender to the British, they would themselves hoist the white flag.

It was not to be imagined that the British soldier would sit

quietly on the 27th of February - the anniversary of the British reverse at Majuba. For these nineteen years since 1881 "Avenge Majuba" had been their cry and their song, and every little difference between Boer and Briton had been avidly seized upon by the latter, and exaggerated as a god-sent opportunity to satisfy that elemental feeling of revenge, to wipe out the stain of the Majuba reverse from the Imperial escutcheon. Over that day there hung a shadow, and no British soldier could rest content until it had been lifted. ^u(Brooke-Hunt V: Lord Roberts p.311) and ^ufugitive fate, or fortuitous circumstances conspired to bring about this tragic and ironical coincidence.

Meanwhile, during the last few days and nights from the 21st to the 25th of February, the British had been drawing the noose tighter and narrower around the Boer trenches until they had advanced to the proximity of 700 yards. During the night of the 26th Generals H. Colvile and Smith-Dorrien arranged to rush the Boer trenches with six companies of Canadian volunteers, supported by some Highland and English regiments. They were arranged in two ranks, the front carrying their rifles and ammunition only, while of the rear rank all had their rifles slung, and some carried picks while others carried spades. Under cover of the gross darkness before the rising of the moon they ^{advanced} stealthily for about 500 yards until they were about 90 yards from the Boer trenches, when suddenly a Boer "brandwag" or sentinel fired upon them. They had no sooner thrown themselves upon their faces than there was a furious blaze of ^Mmausers along a line of 600 yards and a hail of lead from the Boer trenches ^{was discharged upon them} in the proper Magersfontein style. To this the Canadians in the front line replied, while those in the second line dug themselves in. On the left side of the line, the men withdrew ^wwith some disorder, and as the moon rose, they made their way back in somewhat jumbled fashion. Fighting continued till dawn, when the Boers found the British entrenched about 90 yards from them and in position to enfilade their ^B(boer) trenches along

the Modder River.

At sunrise, the Boers in the closest proximity to the enemy threw down their arms and surrendered. Soon after, several white flags ^{were} fluttering from various parts of the Boer trenches, and then a large white flag was hoisted over Cronje's dug-out, and several Boers came out to surrender to General Colville. Under a flag of truce, General Cronje then sent the following letter to Lord Roberts.-

Headquarter~~s~~ Laager, Modder River

27th February, 1900.

I have the honour to inform you, herewith, that the Council of War which was held yesterday evening decided on the unconditional surrender of all the invested forces. Under the circumstances we are forced to this. We throw ourselves, therefore, upon the mercy of Her Majesty the Queen. As a token of surrender, a white flag will be hoisted this morning at 6 o'clock. The Council of War begs that you will at once order the cessation of all hostilities so that further loss of human life may be avoided.

I have the honour etc. ^Y(Waters W.H.H: German Official Account of the War in South Africa pp.219,210)

How painf^ul it must have been for Cronje to write that letter, and with what bitter sense of humiliation must he have sent it. That it must come to this, he Cronje, the old, experienced general to have to surrender to "things like that": Well might a British historian of the Boer War write "Dark Cronje: Betrayer of Potchefstroom, Iron-handed ruler of natives, Reviler of the British, Stern victor of Magersfontein, at last there has come a day of reckoning for you:" ^Y(Conan-Doyle A: The Great Boer War p.253)

Roberts at once gave the cease-fire order, and sent General Pretyman with a small escort to feth^ch Cronje. At 7 o'clock Pretyman returned, followed by a man riding a lean white pony. It was none other than Cronje - the fthormidable and indomitable Piet Cronje, now the cynosure of all eyes. Cronje, of whom,

because fate accorded him some similitude to Napoleon, if in nothing else, at least in predestining him for banishment to the rock of Saint Helena; of whom, to compare the small with the great, it may be permitted to quote those winged words alluding to the great French-Cordican:

There sunk the greatest nor the worst of men,
Whose spirit, antithetically mixt
One moment of the mightiest, and again
On little objects with like firmness fixt,
Extreme in all thigs.

Conqueror and captive of a nation are thou,
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name
Was neer more bruided in men's minds than now
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame
Who wooed thee once, thy vassal, and became
The flatterer of thy fierceness, till thou wert
A god unto thyself.

Yet well thy soul hath brooked the turning tide
With that untaught innate phⁱlⁱsophy,
Which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy.

When the whole host of hatred stood hard by
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast sm^ailed
With sedate and all enduring eye;-

When Fortune fled her spoiled and favourite child,
He stood unbow'd beneath the ills upon him piled. (Byron)

As Cronje approached, Roberts, who had been walk^king up and down in front of his wagonette and tent went towards him, and saluted. As Cronje dismounted, and held his horse's bridle in the left hand, Robert grasped Cronje's right and asked: "How are you? Cronje replied "Onder de onstandighe^{ede}, wel (Under the circumstances, well) (Herinneringen - Brandwag 15/10/1913) Then "You have made a gallant defence, Sir - I am glad to meet so brave

a foe" Cronje was silent.

As the two leaders stood there, face to face, although nearly of the same age (Roberts was 68 years and Cronje 65 years of age) they represented as great a contrast as it was possible to convey. Roberts - spare of body, clean, nimble, smart and erect in his well-fitting uniform, shining leggings and bespurred boots, and wearing his Kandahar sword at his side. Cronje - of middle height, bulky built, dark beard slightly turning grey, dark long hair protruding under a brown slouch hat, quick fiery restless eyes. He wore creased frieze trousers, rolled up at the bottom, a large jacket, clumsily buttoned up at the throat, and over it an old greenish overcoat. His feet were shod in dull brown easy fitting shoes. His shoulders stooped slightly, and he carried a horse whip (sjambok) in his right hand; his face dark-tanned at once sardonic, immobile and imperturbable; his manner stiff and independent, betraying his natural obstinacy, and yet at the same time dignified and deliberate as of a man who knew what he wanted and what he had a right to expect, and was ready to meet his fate, be ^{it} what it may. When the conditions of the capitulation were discussed, through Keyser - his secretary, Cronje's only requests were that his wife - Hessie - his grandson Pietman, his secretary - Keyser and his adjutant Frans Labuschagne, and his African servant - Hiskia might accompany him where-ever he was sent.

When a war correspondent describes Cronje as a bush-whacking chieftain, he makes it difficult for an ordinary reader to accept his evidence (Ralph Julian: At Pretoria p.116) that "Cronje's belongings were in a sack, ^{and that his} His wife's wardrobe was in a pillowcase, and the chief article in Frau Cronje's pillowcase proved to be a silk dress commandeered from Lady Sarah Wilson". ^{Ibid} Another censorious correspondent describes Frau Cronje as "a thin, descript old woman and in her rough straw hat and dirty old black dress, without cloak or shawl of any sort, presenting a hopelessly miserable, dragged and woebegone appearance." (Ibid p.118)

Page
145
146

Ref.

Ref.

After about half ^f an hour's discussion between the victorious Roberts and the vanquished Cronje, breakfast was served under the tree and then cigars, ^{were} passed round, all which Cronje partook of without embarrassment. In the meantime a company was sent to bring on the prisoners of war. Pale, haggard and ragged they emerged from their pits, from which, for ten days, they had defied and withstood the British guns and military ^{might} gallantry. There were 4,105 men. The majority - two thirds of them in fact - being men of the western Transvaal - Potchefstroom, Bloemhof, Klerksdorp and Wolmaran^sstad, The Free State was represented by the remaining one third. They were arranged in their commandos, as they delivered up their rifles. Four guns and a Nordenfeldt Maxim was all the artillery which they had. They were, according to Conan Doyle "the most singular lot of people to be seen at that moment upon earth-ragged, patched, grotesque, some with goloshes, some with umbrellas, coffee-pots, and Bibles, their favourite baggage. So they passed out of their ten days' of glorious history

Ref. 4 (The Great Boer War p.258)

Besides Cronje, there fell into the British hands also Major Richard Albrecht, the notable Austro-German artillerist and tactician, who had played no mean part, both at Magersfontein and Paardeberg; ^{he had} made a name for himself, and compelled the unwilling admiration of his adversaries. In the course of conversation, he expressed his opinion freely without bitterness that up to the arrival of Lord Roberts, British strategy and tactics were very erratic - not only stupid but little short of insane. 4 (Scaife A.H. War to Date p.278). Forty-four other officers were captured with Cronje.

Ref. 4
At ^{noon} mid-day on the day of the surrender, the prisoners of war were marched off to Klip Drift, and thence to Modder River Station, in charge of the Earl of Errol and the Gloucestershire Regiment and a detachment of the City Imperial Volunteers. Most of the women and children went to Jacobsdal, but a few chose to accompany their husbands to Cape Town.

In contrast with the uniformed and serried lines of their captors, the Boer prisoners of war looked like anything else but a band of brave, determined, hard war-bitten warriors in their dusty and ragged clothes of all cuts and colours, grey trousers of varying lengths, broad-brimmed shapeless hats, and unstockinged feet in veld-schoens; their ~~belongings~~ belongings wrapped up in sacks and gaudy mufflers, their striped and coloured blankets tied up with reims or ropes, some men carrying cooking utensils, and others protecting themselves from the rays of the sun with coloured parasols or umbrellas. ^f (Times History of the War in South Africa Vol. III p.484; Hillegas H.C: With the Boer Forces p.79).

Ref. But beneath that uncouth and un-attractive exterior beat proud hearts, brave hearts that were willing to bleed for the ideal of independence, and were ~~stt~~ satisfied to have done their best for their fatherland, and were ready to face the unknown perils of captivity.

In the afternoon, Cronje and his wife and staff were taken by a cape cart drawn by six artillery horses to Modder River Station. They were in charge of General Pretzman and a mounted escort of fifty City Imperial Volunteers. They passed the other prisoners on the road, arrived at Modder River Station on the morning of the 29th February, and after a rest and a repast, joined a special train to Cape Town at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

on his arrival
Arrived at Cape Town, a cordon was formed around Cronje at the station and along his route, and every precaution taken to discourage and prevent any demonstration against the Boer general whose name was upon every tongue. There were crowds of people at the station, all straining to have a glance at the famous Boer general, but none of them were allowed on the platforms, which had been barricaded. Cronje was received by a guard of fifty of the Cape Garrison Artillery under Captain P.C.van Bam and Lieutenants Grover and Garden,. By these he and his staff were handed over to a section of Blue Jackets under Lt.Newton. Three cape carts were waiting to receive Cronje and his staff, and escorted by the Cape

Garrison Artillery and Blue Jackets, these took the prisoners first to their hotel, and then, later to the Cape Town Harbour, where they were handed over to the captain of H.M.S. Doris, in which temporary quarters had been arranged for them. After a day or two the Doris steamed to ⁱSimonstown and there lay at anchor for about a month. There Cronje was joined by nearly all his comrades of Paardeberg preparatory to their trans-shipment to St. Helena.

Refs 4 (Herinneringen ~~4~~ Brandwag 1 Nov. 1913) 4 (Scaife H.A. War to Date pp. 279, 280)

Throughtout the British Empire, the surrender of Cronje, who was rightly considered one of the ablest and greatest of the Boer generals was greeted with great joy, but not with the spontaneous outburst and the delirious exultation which characterised the mood of the people in subsequent victories. It was a triumph for British arms and a justification of the faith that was reposed on their little field ^{as Lord Roberts now called.}marshall. It was a prelude to greater successes, and a happy augery and fore-runner of victories that were soon to follow. What matter the disparity in armaments and the disproportion in men, Paardeberg was considered a fitting revenge for Majuba. Had thousands not lustily shouted "Remember Majuba" when Lord Roberts' train pulled away from Waterloo Station in December 1899, and had tens of thousands not assembled at the harbour and shouted again "Avenge Majuba" when his boat steamed out of Southampton two days before Christmas - when he left England to come and assume the chief command in South Africa? Their wish was now fulfilled; their prayer was answered; Majuba was avenged in a significant^{ly} dramatic manner. Shouts of "Majuba avenged" had been heard in every engagement in which the British arms seemed to prevail. They were heard at Elandsplaagte (October 1899) as the British charged and ~~pus-~~ pursued the Boers, rode them down and transfixed them with lances and bayonets and mortally wounded the veteran Gen. Jan H. Kock. But it was ^{only} ~~out,~~ now on this ^{19th} anniversary of that dramatic and complete Boer victory that the British soldiers could truly and with satisfaction to themselves say "Majuba avenged".

But even the normal Britisher had to admit that Cronje was a

man, that is to say he was no ordinary man, and in the secret places of his heart there was a sneaking admiration for this ^Sdour and ^Obstinate Boer, this grim and determined fighter, this fearless and ~~ob~~ passionate patriot. Says again the honey-worded Conan Doyle "It is a poor spirit which will not applaud the supreme resolution with which the gallant farmers held out, and award to Cronje the title of one of the most grimly resolute leaders of whom we have any record in modern history" (The Great Boer War p.253)

Ref.

~~Not only~~-British Not only Britain, but ~~the~~ world at large, had looked with breathless expectancy upon the determined struggle and heroic resistance of Cronje in an unequal fight, and as day after day passed, and he still defended himself with the ^Sdéperation born of despair, and defied with indomitable pertinacity the united action, concerted strategy and co-ordinated tactics of the best of British generals - Roberts, Kelly-Kenny, Kitchener, French, Henry Colvil, ^{and} Smith-Dorrein with colossal armies and the world's best military equipment; as 4,000 undisciplined and famished farmers successfully resisted 40,000 trained soldiers; indifference and apathy changed insensibly into interest and sympathy, and cold neutrality into warm partiality for Cronje, and soon, the world was lost in boundless admiration at the dauntless courage of the ⁱgrim Boer at bay, and accorded Cronje unstinted praise and spontaneous ovation.

Among scholars and classicists^{S/S}, the unequal fight recalled to the imagination the classic siege of ~~Per~~ Thermopylae, when the Greek King Leonidas with 300 Spartans ~~heroically~~ held the bridge against Xerxes and his myriads of ^rPersian soldiers, and the familiar passage was aptly quoted:

Then outspake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the Gate
To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late;
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,

For the ashes of his fathers

And the temples of his Gods?

The surrender of Cronje was a staggering blow from which the Boers never recovered. ^{Because of} Through it, they were siezed with panic; they were demoralised; they were already defeated as a nation."

Ref "If the famous Cronje was captured", "How could any ordinary burgher be expected to continue his resistance"? asks De Wet, ³ Three Years War p.63) ⁴ Who cannot conceal his bitter disappointment and total disgust at Cronje; and well might he feel bitter, for of all the Boer generals, he ^(De Wet) was the one who did most, in fact he thought he did everything humanly possible to open the way for Cronje by gun, by heliograph, and by personal message, to escape; but proud and obstinate Cronje treated each attempt with contemptuous indifference. De Wet continues:

Ref "No words can describe my feelings when I saw that Cronje had surrendered, and noticed the result which this had on the burghers. Depression and discouragement were written on every face. The effects of this blow it is not too much to say, made themselves apparent to the very end of the war" ⁵ (Op cit p.64)

After the initial surprise and shock of Cronje's surrender the act was universally condemned among the rank and file of his countrymen in such manner that all sympathy was alienated from him. His refusal or failure to fight his way out, ⁶ of Wolvekraal and Paardeberg in spite of the repeated advice and openings made for him by his colleagues De Wet, Philip Botha, Froneman, Ferreira and ⁷ André Cronje surprised and irritated them and other fellows officers at Poplar Grove, and his determination to hold out and to fight the investing British army from within the investment, however heroic, was looked upon as faulty judgment, ⁸ fatal stubbornness, and overweening pride, whereby he failed to avail himself of advice and opportunity that would have saved, not only himself and his burghers in the laagers, but the republics. "He ought to have sacrificed his own ideas for the good of the nation and he should not have been courageous at the expense of his country's

independence" ⁴ (De Wet C.R: Three Years War p157)

The repeated effect of this irritation and sense of frustration suggested the terrible thought "treason" in ^{the} one mind of some unknown individual. ^{According to this view,} Cronje was bought with some English money to put up an appearance of resistance, to refuse all advice and help to fight his way out of the dongas of Paardeberg; to held back the 4,000 burghers with him to their ultimate doom of surrender and capture, and thus materially and morally to undermine and weaken the Boer forces and the cause of the Republics; to put victory in the hands of their enemy.

It is one of those strange palpable caprices of the human mind that it will grasp, nurse and cherish palpable absurdities, suggested by prejudice; and the more fanciful the absurdity, the greater the number of people who will cherish and assiduously propagate it. The arguments of tradition, history, antecedents, surroundings, personal character and behaviour are then futile. They are deliberately set aside lest they should interfere with just that fanciful prejudice, founded on nothing else than calumny. Though indeed it is the smallest member, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and it can set on fire the whole course of nature." It needed just one person, perhaps jestingly to say "Cronje het ons verraaien verkop" (Cronje has betrayed and sold us), and the idea, injected into minds already irritated and highly inflammable, set the whole nation and its progeny on fire against an unfortunate man, who has now become "a sport of the gods and a jest of fame."

CHAP. XVII **CRONJE AND DE WET** Between Cronje and De Wet, there was apparently some subdued

antagonism, which gradually developed into animosity. At first, perhaps, it might have had its origin in some officialdom^{ism}, some ^{superciliousness} superiority and intolerance on the part of Cronje, under which De Wet, himself a man of stubborn grain and independent mind like Cronje - chafed and fretted, especially when, with ^{the} best intentions in the world, he had sought to suggest something, and he was impatiently waved off and curtly silenced as if he was a mere child, a day dreamer, or a mad man. Such instances were numerous in their personal contact

at Magersfontein, and later in their relations at Paardeberg. It is probable that the petulant answers that Cronje nearly always returned to De Wet's frequent messages and suggestions were the result of his dislike for De Wet and anything savouring of De Wet. He just found it impossible to be civil to De Wet; De Wet simply irritated him. Now De Wet being himself rather touchy and proud would very quickly sense this dislike and reciprocate it in the fullest manner, compatible with his duty as a subordinate officer. He would therefore not answer Cronje back, but he would prepare his case carefully and appeal to the forum of public opinion. This, De Wet has done in his "Stryd tussen Boer en Brit" and "Three Years War" A synopsis of the relevant passages involves unavoidable repetition which however is essential for the demonstration of ^{this view} the thesis and the ^{re-}statement of Cronje's apologies apologia pro vita sua

At Magersfontein Cronje was in chief command of about 8,000 burghers with De la Rey and De Wet under him respectively in charge of the Transvaal and the Free State commandos, the two men asked Cronje for 1,500 to make a raid upon the south of Methuen's lines of communication but he would not hear of it (Stryd tussen Boer en Brit p.20) When De la Rey left for Colesberg in January, De Wet took charge of both the Transvaalers and the Free Staters and was immediately subordinate to Cronje. In this position he was often crossed and ⁿsubbed by his superior officers.

After the Battle of Magersfontein, De Wet felt certain that Methuen would not again attack along the railway line. He expressed this opinion ^{to} Cronje but was practically told to mind his business (De Wet C.R: Three Years War p.38)

Then De Wet, feeling that the presence of women and children in the laagers was not conducive to military efficiency went right over the legitimate channels, and disregarding Cronje, opened correspondence with the Government on the matter. (Ibid) and asked them to forbid it. Frau Cronje was at this time in the laager, this step was not calculated to improve the relations between the two men.

It is probable that Cronje not only resented De Wet's action, but was highly incensed at what he regarded as presumptuous temerity in a subordinate officer.

Again, when French advanced from Ramdam and crossed the Riet River at Waterval and De Kiel Drifts, it was ^{generally} thought ^{that} the British were making for Koffyfontein and Bloemfontein. When De Wet realised that they were in fact heading for Kimberley, he sent Commandant Scheepers to Cronje, advising him "to get out of their road as quickly as he could" Cronje snapped angrily at Scheepers with sharp words that were really meant for De Wet ^y (Ibid p.36)

Ref Cronje in his Memoirs, replies to De Wet's strictures contained ^{the latter's} in Three Years War and Die Stryd tussen Boer en Brit. He ~~shows~~ states that De Wet conceals the real reason that led to his (Cronje's) surrender. He shows that when he heard of the British ~~advnce~~ advance, he sent De Wet with 600 men (De Wet says 450) with two guns to Waterval and De Kiel Drifts to stop the enemy crossing. When they attacked De Wet he sent him reinforcements but De Wet ~~foolish~~ foolishly divided his small force "Doch De Wet zyn eigen hoofd volgende besloot zyn kleine macht te verdelen en de helft daarvan verder oostwaards ^t te verplaat^sen naar Koffiefontein. Dit was een verkeerde stap; in plaats van zyn verkenners uit te sturen en om de bewegingen van die vijand waar te neem, ging hij zelf met een kommando" (But De Wet, ~~fo~~ following his own head ^d decided to divide his small force, and to send the ^a half of it to Koffiefontein. That was a blunder; instead of sending out his scouts to shadow the enemy, he went with the commando himself. ²)

He accuses De Wet of a serious error in not withdrawing to the west to join him, as he could easily have done through the gap between French's cavalry and the Infantry. " Instead, De Wet ^t watches the enemy and sends ~~cavalry-and-the-~~ him (Cronje) warnings to get out of the way. Instead of following orders, he is satisfied with attacking convoys and capturing tins of jam and sardines (konfyt en sardientjes) etc, which we did not want, and which the enemy could easily replace" ^y (Brandwag 15/10/1913 p.297)

Ref

Says Cronje

✓ ^{all} If De Wet and Andries Cronje and their commandos had only kept in touch with me, French would not so easily have crossed the Modder River and marched to relieve Kimberley. General De Wet criticises me and declares that if I had followed his advice I might never have been surrounded at Paardeberg nor have had to surrender. On the contrary, if he had only listened to my orders from the very first, ^{and} I might never have been surrounded at Paardeberg nor have had to surrender. If De Wet did not fritter away precious time in capturing tins of jam and sardines, instead of joining me, or if he had occupied Koedoesberg before French during my retreat towards Bloemfontein, then I might never have been captured. (Ibid p.301)

Cronje continues:

~~It has been shown what efforts De Wet made for the relief of~~

Ref. ¹I went across the enemy lines on the night of the 15th February hoping to get the assistance of De Wet, Ferreira and the commandos that were around Kimberley, but in vain. On the night of the 16th, I sent a commando in advance to occupy Koedoesberg Drift. Of this commando I have never heard again, No word ever came from them (Herinneringen - Brandwag 15/10/1913 p.298). "My hopes for help from other commandos were disappointed. They all heard the roar and boom of guns in my first contest with French at Koedoesberg on the 17th, and I was sure they would come to my assistance, but again I was disappointed. Then on the 20th February De Wet, Philip Botha and Andries Cronje sent me a heliograph that they had occupied a hill on the south-east of my laager and would relieve me if only I could hold out. I sent Commandant Fronemen with all my burghers who still had mounts - about 30 altogether - to cut their way through, and tell De Wet and others to co-operate with me that night. I waited hopefully, but in vain for an answer. Now I am told to leave the wagons, wives, children, oxen and possessions to fall into the enemy's hands. This I could not consider. To leave these private possessions of the burghers would only have caused great dissatisfaction among them; moreover, most burghers had no horses to break through with" (Ibid).

Ref. It has been shown what efforts De Wet made for the relief of

273
Cronje, how he heliographed to him, and sent personal messages by commandants to him to arrange for a united effort and synchronous attack upon the British, and how finally, when the enemy cordon was complete, he still sent Danie Theron, who managed to crawl through the ^{enemy} lines to urge Cronje once more to cut his way out. Cronje thought De Wet was not enterprising enough, and that no really determined effort was made to help him out, and that far too much was expected of him by De Wet and other commandants, who got angry and malicious when he failed and disappointed them.

Cronje continues

"Then the brave Captain Theron comes in the night of the 25th February with a message from De Wet that I should break through the enemy lines on the East, and that he would assist me. I had with ~~me~~ 4,000 men and two guns resisted Lord Roberts with 40,000 men and 100 guns." "Die laaste acht dagen hadden mijn manschappen ongelooflik harde beproefingen moeten ondergaan - omsingeld, hongereg, dorstig en totaal uitgeput, onder een aanhoudend bombardement en voortdurend vechten, en nu werd mij gezegd om mij er maar zelf door heen te slaan;" (During the last eight days my men have had to endure unbelievable afflictions - besieged hungry, thirsty and completely exhausted, under and unremitting bombardment and continuous fighting, and now I am told that I must, after all fight my way out) I had hoped that the other generals would combine and make some definite attempt to open a way for me, and now at the last moment, when my men have reached the limit of human endurance (menslik weerstandvermogen) I receive a message from them that I must cut my way out, ~~and~~ and that they will help me through. ⁷⁴ Herinneringen Brandwag 1th

October 1913 p.301). *Cronje puts up a strong case which cannot be lightly dismissed by any impartial reader.*

Exactly a month after Cronje's surrender when the Boers had not yet recovered from the consternation caused by that event as well as the ^lRelief of Laydsmit and the occupation of Bloemfontein, on the 27th March 1900 ^eCommandant General Piet Joubert died at Pretoria. *Itself a tragic event, the death of their veteran military chief at this time seemed to presage the utter collapse of the Boer resistance and the surrender of the Republics.*

Ref

P 154/

CHAP XVIII

BANISHMENT.

After his capture and removal to Simonstown,
Cronje's movements were kept secret by the British Government,

and no one amongst the ordinary public knew where he was to be taken to. His temporary prison, Her Majesty's Ship Doris, lay at anchor in the harbour of Simonstown, and daily, more prisoners were brought into it. After waiting in the harbour for one month, Cronje and his retinue and a few hundreds of other war prisoners were transferred to the transport ship Milwaukee (Captain Procter), and on the 3rd of April 1900 in the afternoon, the boat escorted by the battleship Niobe heaved anchor, and sailed due North-west - for St. Helena. On board were 1,000 all told, 514 of whom were prisoners of war.

"Nooit zal ik de dag vergeten, toen ik de kusten van myn geborteland zag verdwynen in de verte, en toen ik ten volle beseftte dat ik in ballingskap weggevoerd werd, niet wegens enige misdaad, doch omdat ik voor myn land gestreden had." (Never will I ever forget the day that I saw the coast of my fatherland fade away in the distance, and when I realised fully that I was being taken away to banishment, not because of any crime, but simply because I had fought for my country".) (Herinneringen-Brandwag 1/11/1913) wrote Cronje at a later date. The Milwaukee was two days at sea when, on the 5th of April, the following Proclamation was published in St. Helena by order of the Governor of the Island, Robert Armitage Sterndale C.M.G.:-

"In a few days, the troopship Milwaukee, escorted by H.M.S. Niobe will arrive with prisoners of war. No unauthorised persons will be allowed on the wharf at the time of disembarkation. The police will assist as far as they can, the military, acting under the orders of the Officer commanding the troops in keeping order. His Excellency the Governor expresses the hope that the inhabitants will treat the prisoners with that courtesy and consideration which should be extended to all men who have fought bravely in what they considered the cause of their country, and will help in repressing any unseemly demonstration which individuals may exhibit." (Gosse P. St. Helena p. 335)

The passage was uneventful, and apart from the ever present

sense of going into exile, the prisoners underwent experiences in no ^{way} different from those of other people who travel by sea for the first time to unknown foreign lands. On the early morning of the 14th of April, Cronje came on deck of the Milwaukee, and saw at a distance before him a huge barren rock, rising sheer up to the height of from 6,000 feet to 2,700 feet from the sea. This was Saint Helena, situate $15.50^{\circ}\text{S lat.} \times 15.50^{\circ}\text{ W Long}$ in the South Atlantic, and 1,750 miles from Cape Town; a small island, ten miles long by eight miles at its widest, and only 47 square miles in extent, but famous (or notorious) far beyond its size, perhaps and unless that fame or notoriety was only in keeping with its hoary age, for geologists say that St. Helena was one of the first islands thrown up from the sea by volcanic action; that in fact ^{it} is one of ^{the} ancient, worn down volca^cnoes of the dim and distant Oecene era.

Page 156

The Milwaukee gradually neared its destination, and at about 8 a.m. it came to a stand still at Port Jamestown - the harbour and capital of St. Helena, a small town of white painted houses, nestling picturesquely in a valley between two dark steep peaks - the Ladder Hill on the right, and Rupert Hill on the left - suggestive of two burly black policemen, forcibly holding down a paltry white prisoner.

It is not very difficult to reconstruct, in broad outline, the dark and sombre thoughts that passed through Piet Cronje's mind as he stood on deck and contemplated the austere and uninviting scene before him - his prison for an undertermined period; his prison, and, who knows perhaps his sepulch^re, ^sat it had been the ^{prison} grave and sepulch^re of another and greater exile - another and more illustrious enemy of England.

The Milwaukee was met, and Cronje received at the harbour by Governor Sterndale, who with an escort led the prisoners through Napoleon Street to the North-east of the island, where about 4,000 tents had been pitched and enclosed in a camp for them in a plain. This camp - known as Deadwood Camp was two miles

from Longwood Estate, where the famous Napoleon^{had} lived in captivity for six and half years and died. The Camp was enclosed in strong barbed wire fences, there being four lines of rows of fences, each six feet high, and containing twelve lines or strands of wire laced up vertically at intervals of twelve inches.

Here the 510 prisoners of war were placed, while Cronje and Frau Cronje, their secretary Keyser, their adjutant Frans Labuschagne and their African servant Hiskia, as well as Field cornet Jan Bosman were taken about five miles to the other end, the west of the island, and were housed in a neat double-storied house called Kent Cottage. The house stood by itself and was built on bare rock on a hill known as ^{French} French Letter or New Ground, not far from the fearful isolation ^sprison of High Knoll. Around it there was hardly any vegetation: the scenery was as monotonous and dead as any scenery could be. Every where you looked, the deep blue unchanging sea met your gaze. This was the place and these the ^dsurroundings destined to be Cronje's home for two long dreary years. The place was, of course well guarded by day and by night, and the guards had orders personally, though unostentatiously to see Cronje every day.

The Governor Robert Sterndale, a kindly man, an able administrator and a ^{tolerable} scientist showed General Cronje and his staff every consideration compatible with his duty. He provided them with all necessaries and comforts, and allowed them all the privacy possible. The general^d and his wife were allowed to go for long walks without the guard being too much in evidence.

Ref Regularly on Sundays, Cronje visited the prisoners' Camp at Deadwood, and joined them in devotions. ^y(Herinneringen-Brandwag 1/11/1913 p.326). On these occasions, the Governor would place his wagonette drawn by two grey horses at the disposal of Cronje and his staff. The Driver, fully uniformed would bring the vehicle to Kent Cottage, and await instructions from the general ^y(Grosse P. St.Helena p.337).

Ref

After the devotions, Cronje would walk round the camp,

examine the burghers' quarters, have a chat with some of them and then go away, taking off his inseparable bowler hat and saying in a raised voice 'More burghers almal' (Good morning everybody) and the reply would be "More generaal" (Good morning General) from most them, not by any means from everybody, for among the prisoners, there were many who never forgave him for his failure at Paardeberg. *These were many who thought and said* It was all due to his stupidity and incorrible obstinacy that they were today separated from their homes, their wives, their children and their friends. Some of them could not disguise their feelings. They had no time for him - this undescerning and caged lion of Potchefstroom.

General Cronje was displeased that no special guard of honour was provided for him in keeping with his position and dignity. There were, however no mounted troops in St.Helena, but the obliging Governor Sterndale, to humour Cronje ordered that some men of the St.Helena volunteers should receive riding lessons, and shortly afterwards, these men, uniformed, mounted and armed were sent to Kent Cottage with orders to accompany Cronje when he went out riding, and poor horse-men as they ^{were}, they yet managed to follow him at a stiff gallop up the steep hills and down dale, while their awkwardness and their being now and then thrown from horse back provided much fun and merriment for the inmates of Deadwood and ^{Broad} Broadbottom Camps, nearly everyone of whom was an accomplished horseman. *Ref* (Ibid p.338).

Cronje's visits to Deadwood Prison Camp were at first fairly frequent and regular. They were bitter sweet ^{memories} mementos, which raised him from his depression, relieved his sense of loneliness, and reminded him of the halcyon days of his power and authority; and ~~Paardeberg~~ Klerksdorp, Paardekraal, Potchefstroom, Doornkop, Mafeking, Magersfontein would pass before his mind's eye as upon a cinematographic screen, and quicken his pulse and breathing. Then also would pass Paardeberg with its sufferings, its struggles, its misfortunes, its hopes and its vain regrets in its train - the accursed Paardeberg, followed by Simonstown, then the dirty Milwaukee, and then this bare rock of St.Helena.

1. Cronje and Napoleon:

These visits of Cronje to his fellow prisoners at Deadwood Camp left him dejected and morbidly reflective, and more conscious of the dead weight of captivity. It had been thus with Napoleon, when the indescribable bitterness and pain of exile began to bear down upon him. He had cried out - "This is the anguish of death. To injustice and violence are now added insult and protracted torment, But we have souls to disappoint our tyrants, our situation may even have its charms. The eyes of ^mMillions of human beings are weeping for us. Our country sighs; our glory mourns our fate. (Young N.: Napoleon in Exile in St. Helena Vol. 1 p. 125)

Cronje's lamentation was not dissimilar. It might not be so wide in its appeal, nor so deep in its philosophy, nor so exalted and magnificent in its expression, but the conceptional germ was identical in the South African Boer farmer as in the illustrious French Emperor. "England is machtig. Zij heeft ons kunnen verbannen uit het dierbaar land van onze inwoning, ons afsnyden van alle betrekkingen met de buitenwereld, onze brieven aan de Sensuur onderwerpen, ons beroven van de woorden van hoop en bemoediging ons toegesonden door medegevoelende mensen uit alle volken en wereld delen; doch met haar macht kon zij ons van een ding niet beroven, en dat was de hoop, de berusting en moed en de kracht waarmede onze Hemelse Vader ons bedeelde elke dag van onze langdurige eentonige ballingschap. (England is all powerful. She has banished us from the beloved land of ^{our} birth, and cut us adrift from all intercourse with the outside world, subjected our correspondence to censorship, deprived us of all messages of hope and ^{d enc} encouragement that might be sent us by our sympathisers in various parts of the world. But with all her might and power, England cannot deprive us of one thing, and that is the hope, the trust, the faith and the strength vouchsafed us from day to day by our heavenly Father during this protracted and weary exile.

(Herinneringen-Brandwag 1/11/1913 p. 325)

If Cronje knew it, or remembered it, it is not likely that he spent much time over the reflection of another ^tstage prisoner, another British prisoner of war at St. Helena - the Zulu chief Dinizulu, who arrived with his several wives, his two uncles and servants and was detained at St. Helena for eleven years from 1887 to 1898, during which time he did not sigh his soul out in van ⁱ ~~regrets~~

Collection Number: A979

Silas T MOLEMA and Solomon T PLAATJE Papers

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

©2012

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: Copyright for all materials on the Historical Papers website is owned by The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and is protected by South African copyright law. Material may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a collection owned by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and deposited at Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.
