

VII. be gradually brought back to their homes as soon as transport can be provided and their means of subsistence insured.

3. The burghers so surrendering or so returning will not be deprived of their personal liberty or property.

Then four clauses guaranteeing an amnesty except in special cases; the recognition of the Dutch language; possession of registered rifles; and the grant of self-government at a future date.

Then 8. A strange clause, introduced from the Grand Wet of the Republics "No franchise shall be granted to Africans.

Then three clauses promising monetary assistance to the burghers.

Finally a clause that all rebels will be disfranchised, their leaders tried, but no death penalty would be inflicted. (Kestell

J.D. and van Velden D.E.: Peace Negotiations pp.133-135)

And so, thought Cronje, the Boers had lost their independence ^{the 209 v 15 Z} (6)

again. The struggles and sufferings of the Voortrekkers had availed nothing; the high hopes built on the Sand River Convention on 1852 and the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854 had been hollow and empty as a shell; the blood and tears of the War of Independence of 1880-1881 had been spilled in vain, and the sorrows and sufferings of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902 had been worse than useless, for before it, there was a semblance, a shadow, if not a reality of Independence, recognised by the London Convention of 1864, so far as these Conventions could be said to recognise anything usefully, but

~~anything usefully~~, but now, even that shadow was gone. They, the Boers, were again subjects of the haughty and hateful 'verdom'd' English. The idea was galling. To think of the 50,000 Dutch-Afrikaners, his own compatriots, his own kith and kin, who had been captured like him, and sent to strange lands - Bermuda, Ceylon, India, St. Helena, and there to pine and suffer in lonely obstruction: to reflect on the 95,000 Dutch-Afrikaner women and children, who had been collected and couped up in deadly Concentration Camps: this was the depth of humiliation and degradation. But now, to remember the 4,000 brave Boer patriots, who had lost their lives, and the 16,000 that had been wounded and disabled, in the course of their defending their homes and fighting for the right to live their lives their own way: Had their blood been spilled in vain? And the 20,000 women and children who had

died of disease in the Concentration Camps - Was it really all in vain - this agony and anguish, these tears, this bitterness and this death?

"En hoe vreeslik is de gedachte dat al dat verschriklik lyden, de ellende, bloedvergieting, en het verbazende verlies van levens, alles veroorzaakt werd door de begeerte van een paar staatsmannen om hun zelfzuchting verlangen naar macht en roem te bevredigen door middel van een verovering-oorlog, op onmenselijke wysegevoerd, een dapper volk in ongekende ellende dompelend."

Ref 7 (Herinneringen-Brandwag 1/11/1913 p.334) (And how terrible is the thought that all that fearful suffering, the misery, the shedding of blood, and the shocking loss of life are all the result of the lust of a few statesmen, who, to satisfy their ambition for power and fame have waged an annexationist war, and carried on in an inhuman manner, thus dooming a brave nation to untold misery).

Such were Cronje's thoughts - dark thoughts, morbid thoughts, bitter thoughts. And then he said something prophetic "Dech die toestand kan niet voortduren, want God is rechtvaardig. En afschoon onze vryheidsboom, meedongeloos werd omgehouden, voor dat hij syn volle wasdom had bereikt, zal het so zaad door ons volk in Zuid Afrika gezaaid, toch ontsputten en gedijen en goede vruchten voortbrengen, ondanks de byl die de moeder-boom velde (Ibid p.330) (Nevertheless, this state of things cannot continue long, for God is just. And although our tree of Independence has been hewn down unmercifully before it had reached its full maturity, yet the seed sown by our people thru thoughtout South Africa will sprout and prosper and bring forth good fruit, despite the axe which has felled the parent plant."

Ref -
1. Repatriation:
To the anxious and perplexed prisoners of war, the courteous Governor Sterndale explained the position and conditions of their repatriation. They had each to take an oath of fealty, and they had each to sign a document to testify to that oath. Piet Cronje felt the humiliation of it. Before his mind's eye came again that other field on the clear morning of the 27th of February 1900 on the

Modder River, when he had humbly to listen to dictation, and to be moved whither he list not. Governor Sterndale's announcement was synchronous with similar announcements to the Boer prisoners of war in ^olther parts of the British Empire - South Africa, Bermudas, Ceylon, India etc.

It was made known to the British Government that some Boer prisoners of war were averse to taking the oath of allegiance. The Earl of Onslon, Parliamentary Secretary for the Colonies then made a statement that the British Government was quite ready to meet the prisoners by accepting a formal declaration by them, where an objection was felt to taking the formal oath of allegiance to the King.

A buff form 5½ inches square and bilingually inscribed was prepared accordingly, and every prisoner of war was required to complete and sign it. Some of them at first refused either to take the oath or to make a formal declaration of allegiance, but when it was made clear to them that their repatriation was conditional on their duly declaring their acceptance of their position as subjects of the King of England, they all completed the forms, some by taking the oath, the majority by making a declaration. (Ormond G.W T: The Boers in England pp 131,132)

Ik-----

van-----

hecht myne toesteming aan de termen van de overeenkomst geteekend te Pretoria op 31ste Mei tusschen myne gewesene regering en de vertegenwoordigers van Zijner Majestiet's regering. Ik erken mij selven te zijn een onderdaan van Koning Edward De Sevende en ik beloof hem, zijne erfgenamen en opvolgers volgens wet, wittige getrouwheid toe te dragen.

Vrklaard voor mij te St.Helena desen -----

dag van-----1902

Speciale Commissaris.

Vul naam van plaats of dorp, wyk en distrikt.

I-----
 of-----

adhere to the terms of the agreement signed at Pretoria on the 31st May 1902, between my late Government and the representatives of His Majesty's Government. I acknowledge myself to be a subject of King Edward the Seventh, and I promise to own true allegiance to Him, His Heirs and Successors according to law.

Dated before me at St.Helena this.....
 day of-----1902.

 Special Commissioner.

x Fill in name of farm, or town and district.

At last, the 6,000 inmates of Deadwood and Broadbottom Camps were free to return home. There was excitement and commotion in the camps as men collected and packed their personal belongings - blankets, pots, and pans, and then went pell-mell to Jamestown and there stood in tumult before the municipal buildings to hear the address of the governor, and waited in readiness for their turn to go on board the one transport or another. They could not all leave together. They had to leave in relays as the boats became available, and according to a previously determined priority based on obedience and co-operativeness. The first batch left St.Helena in July by the transport Kirkland. Among them were General De Wet's two sons. In the middle of August, (1902) General Cronje and his immediate party and thousands of prisoners of war went on board the transport Tagus. After all, Cronje's captivity had not been as long as Napoleon's; after all, thank God, his tomb was not going to be in St.Helena. The Tagus weighed anchor, and in due course (on the 27th of the month) arrived in Cape Town. There people crowded at the docks and at the station - some drawn by regard, but most by curiosity to see the famous captive. Cronje at once proceeded to the Transvaal. At the various railway stations along the route

northwards, several people came to greet him. The evidences of war along the journey in broken buildings, charred remains, skeletons of horses and cattle, burnt grass, unploughed lands, broken broken vehicles along roads, and general desolation, could not but further depress a nature already prone to melancholy. He was met at the Klerksdorp station by his relatives; among them was his brother General Andries Cronje, who had distinguished himself during the war in Natal, on the Modder River, and in the Free State. Unaccountably, this brave burgher and passionate patriot had, during the closing stages of the war turned coat and surrendered (Times History of the War in South Africa Vol.V p.) He had deserted the Boer cause and gone over to the enemy, assisting the English as one of the leaders of the so-called National Scouts. How this act of betrayal ~~xxxxxx~~ tarnished the honourable name of Cronje can be better imagined than explained. The ~~eggr~~ opprobrium did not fall upon Andries Cronje alone, but upon the whole of the ~~Cronje~~ gens, and his act must have been adduced as additional proof of the treachery and treason that were already imputed in whispers in whispers to Piet Cronje when he surrendered at Paardeberg.

Piet Cronje immediately saw this, and with grief in his heart and tears in his eyes, he realised that appearances were ranged unassailably against him. His own brother had supplied his calumniators with well nigh incontestable proof of his alleged treachery. The name he had so assiduously and laboriously tried to build was now dragged in the mud. The name Cronje was now synonymous with crime, treason and patriicide. Going away from home had been cruel and bitter, but home coming was even more cruel and more bitter. Banishment had been something of martyrdom. Repatriation had brought disillusionment, and torn off the blissful veil of ignorance. But Cronje prayed silently for light and leading from above, and he forgave his brother completely, wholeheartedly. He argued with himself that Andries had not wronged him personally, but rather he had sinned against his country and

his people and his God. They must judge, and not he. With mingled feelings of joy and sorrow, Piet Cronje and his wife went to their farm Palmietfontein on the Schoon Spruit from which they had been absent three years.

Cronje was at this time in his sixty-sixth year, that is to say at the time of life when the fire of ambition has long since burnt out but he carried with him, from St. Helena some deep impressions which irresistibly cried for expression. One of his first acts after coming home was to alter his house at Palmietfontein into a double storey, and in appearance as near like Kent Cottage as his limited means could permit. Kent Cottage (it will be remembered) was the name of the house in which Cronje lived at St. Helena.

At his farm Palmietfontein, Cronje lived quietly, very much retired because he had an instinctive feeling that his country men were deliberately avoiding him, almost as one smitten with a deadly contagious disease.

2 From Cronje Mrs. Cronje's mind had given way at St. Helena, possibly as a final result of the accumulated tensions and stresses which she had so courageously brought upon herself by joining her husband in the laagers throughout his military command in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.

The first World War 1914-1918 brought out prominently the condition of nervous dislocation and mental dislocation known as 'shell shock' in soldiers exposed to intense bombardment, a condition which must have occurred in earlier wars, but very much less frequently, or indeed rarely, because of the relatively much smaller incidence of bombing and distress occasioned by heavy bombardment. The Paardeberg phase of the Anglo-Boer War approached the recent World Wars by the intense bombardment of Cronje's trenches by a hundred pieces of British artillery, bursting, causing deafening explosions of ammunition cases and conflagration of wagons, killing and engendering great terror among

men, women and children, oxen and horses. Add to this the unhygienic conditions under which Cronje's commandos and their women folk lived for ten days, the foul air and green choking fumes of lyddite they inhaled, the putrid water they drank, the exposure to inclement weather and dampness, the shortage of provisions, the absence of vegetables and fresh articles of food, the constant fear and suspense of what the next few hours might hold in store. Inflict all these unhappy and unhealthy conditions upon a woman of ~~x~~ sixty years of age, by nature and temperament delicately built, and you ~~ga~~ have what the doctors would call the aetiology or root causes of Mrs. Cronje's physical and mental break down; you have indeed a perfect example of Shell shock.

3 Under a cloud Then there was a whispering campaign afoot against Cronje, which he vaguely sensed, a ghostly passing to and fro, an evasive conduct towards him which puzzled, irritated and saddened him. If he went out walking or riding, people seemed to clear out of his way as soon as they recognised him. If he went into Klerksdorp, burghers rushed past ~~as~~ a spectre or some approaching danger. What could the reason be? The explanation came when Cronje confronted an old friend, in fact a former Field Cornet of his by the name Kees Jooste, who had been assiduously dodging and avoiding him like the rest of the Afrikaner world. From him Cronje learned that he was regarded as a traitor; that his conduct and surrender at Paardeberg were deliberate manoeuvres pre-arranged with the enemy to assist him.

Cronje was speechless, the news was a shock to him. On further reflection he thought Jooste was remancing. The thing was absurd. It was preposterous. But the proof of Kees Jooste's statements was to come soon afterwards. In January 1903 Joseph Chamberlain, the eminent British Colonial Secretary came to South Africa, and in the course of his tour visited Pretoria. Thither prominent white citizens of South Africa and the Boer generals were invited to the reception held in his honour on January 5th by Sir Arthur Lawley, Lieutenant-Governor of the

Transvaal, and also at a public banquet on the following day. The Boer generals at the head of a large deputation of about one hundred later met Chamberlain to discuss the problems of peace and reconstruction. There were present, among others, General Botha, General De la Rey, General De Wet General Meyers, General Smuts, also the Commandants Grobler, Meyer, Trieshardt, Hindon, Emmett and others. There came also General Piet Cronje (Herinneringen - Brandwag 1/11/1913: Times History of the War in South Africa Vol.VI.pp.79,80) To his astonishment and acute mental pain, his former colleagues treated him, one and all, as if he was an utter and unwelcome stranger. His own comrades and countrymen, they gave him the cold shoulder, and hardly any of them spoke to him who had borne and suffered most for his country. What could the reason be? Ah yes; Kees Joeste's story - He was accounted a traitor. Very different was Joseph Chamberlain's manner towards Cronje. Chamberlain the 'arch enemy' of the South African Republic, and the 'doer' (death) of the Boers. Effusively catching hold of Cronje's hand and arm with both his hands, he greeted him heartily and exclaimed, "I am glad to meet a man, honoured the world over as a hero" (Ibid) What a striking contrast Chamberlain's words and greeting were to the conduct of Cronje's own countrymen, labouring under a grievous and mischievous misapprehension, and imputing to him the foulest motives and the greatest crime that a man can commit. "Dat ik myn land of de zaak waarvoor ik gevochten had ooit onrecht had aangedaan, zelfs door een onbehoerliker gedachte, is een leugen, so laag als er ooit een verteld is (Herinneringen-Brandwag 1/11/1913 p.351) (That I ever wronged my country or the aim for which I had fought, even by as much as an improper thought, is as base a lie as was ever told) A few days afterwards, Cronje heard that it had been circulated. *That he had written*

Ref

Ref

Ref

circulated

that that he had written from St. Helena advising the burghers to surrender wholesale to the enemy, otherwise he would come and lead a force of 'National Scouts' against them; that Andries Cronje's defection was in accordance with this advice; and that the peaceful and brotherly re-union of the two brothers was because they understood each other in this matter, both being the willing tools and creatures of the enemy, and hateful traffickers with the life and liberty of their own countrymen. That such infantile stories could gain general credence is just one proof of the backwardness of the Boer peasants of South Africa at that time. As to his approving of his brother - Andries forsaking the Afrikaner cause and joining the enemy as a leader of the National Scouts Cronje had to admit once more to himself, that appearances gave colour to the allegation, because however grieved he had been at Andries' act, he had whole-heartedly forgiven him for his infamy.

Heavy of heart, crushed in spirit, and mad with indignation, Piet Cronje left Pretoria and returned to his wife's sick bed. She was affected with exhaustion psychosis and its concomitants of visual and auditory hallucinations. She was worse than ever now. She would look through the window, and imagining she saw British soldiers coming on to attack, she would cry, quickly close the curtains and the doors; or imagining that she heard the booming of big guns and bursting of the shells, she would distractedly *for shelter. Her condition was pitiable in the extreme and it would* rush to a dark corner of the room, agonising sighs from the heart of the broken down man who was misunderstood and rejected by his countrymen. Patiently, faithfully and affectionately Piet Cronje stood beside the sick bed of his dear wife - Hester day after day and night after night, until, finally, her gentle spirit forsook her wasted body on the 16th of November, 1903, and she was buried the following day in the family burial yard, half-way between Klerksdorp and Ventersdorp by ^SDr. Jan Boshoff of the Nederduits Hervormede Gemeente of Hartbeestfontein and Klerksdorp.

Cronje was now left alone in an unkind, ungrateful, sullen and suspicious world. Looking back upon the preceding fifteen years of his life, remembering his recognised deeds of valour and his admitted contributions to the life, and freedom of his Afrikaner people, he could appropriately have repeated Wolsey's words:

Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness:
 This is the state of man: today he puts forth
 The tender leaves of hope; tomorrow blossoms,
 And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
 The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
 And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
 His greatness is a ripening, - nips his root,
 And then he falls, as I do.

(Shakespeare's Henry VIII)

This is perhaps the proper time and place to review and assess those facts and circumstances which have combined to import a terrible verdict on Cronje's character - the verdict of treason which his compatriots and countrymen have almost unanimously pronounced upon him since his surrender at Paardeberg on the 27th of February 1900, and in reference to which, circumstances and incidents before and after have been adduced as throwing more light upon, and furnishing more and further proof ^{of} the justice of verdict of contemporaries and colleagues, which a generation has accepted with implicit approval and unanimity, and then bequeathed to another, which has also accepted it without demur, thus deliberately relegating to the limbo of forgotten and contemptible things the name of one of the architects of the independence of the South African Republic, and the freedom of the Dutch Afrikaner race.

It is worthy of remark that Afrikaner writers, of whom there are to-day a ~~large~~ legion, write around Cronje, and around the verdict pronounced upon him by his contemporaries. It is even more remarkable that to mention the name of Piet Cronje to the average Afrikaner is to invite a veritable storm of adverse criticism, while the temerity to question the justice of the sentence under which he lies is to be recklessly accused of blindness, of crass ignorance or else of dishonesty and selfish motives.

Two generations after the surrender of Paardeberg, fifty years after the tragic event, one still finds the facts and motives of the surrender being debated with animation and even heat by the sons and grand-sons of the participators in the event and witnesses of the drama.

Taking the surrender of Cronje at Paardeberg on Majuba Day, the 27th of February 1900 as the crucial event and looking beyond it to search for Cronje's suspicious failure, we find that

1. At the Battle of Modder River on Tuesday the 28th of November 1899 the Boers under Cronje, De la Rey and Prinsloo held their

ground against the armies of Methuen, Colville and Pole-Carew and pinned them to the south of the Modder River for the greater part of the day. In the late afternoon, however, the British left wing under Pole-Carew turned the Boer right flank under Prinsloo and crossed the river at the little village of Rosmead. Prinsloo's retreat communicated itself to the whole of the Boer force including De la Rey's and Cronje's commandos. But night set in, and the British had to re-cross the river to return to their camp on the south bank. To De la Rey's surprise and annoyance, Cronje ordered the burghers to quit the Modder River positions and fall back on Jacobsdal and Schelznek (F.N. "Maar sien julle dan nie dat ons die slagveld behou het nie"? (But can't you see then that we have the mastery of the field of battle?")/ ~~the~~ De la Rey shouted angrily to Cronje in the Krygraaf^d), an error of judgment which allowed the British forces the free access to Modder River as a watering place, whereas, if the Boers had not evacuated their positions there, the British would have been obliged to go back to Orange River for water.

(Conradie F: Met Cronje aan die Wesfront p.43). Cronje, however expected the renewal of British attack in the night and indeed both Colville and Pole-Carew intended to renew the attack and had brought up reinforcements for that purpose (Times History of the War in South Africa Vol.11 pp.357,358) Cronje had observed these preparations and as his men were tired and he had no reinforcements. and retired to Jacobsdal for safety. As circumstances afterwards showed, De la Rey's insight was more correct. The Free Staters ^{he} had retreated in such disorder that they abandoned their heavy guns but during the night while Boer and British rested, Albrecht and De la Rey quietly recovered them.

3. At the Battle of Magersfontein on the 11th of December 1899, while the British employed all their weapons, their field pieces ^{and} naval guns howitzers, mountain batteries and maxims thundered and emitted their bullets, shells, shrapnel and lyddite upon the entire length of Cronje lines. (Davitt K: The Boer Fight for Freedom pp.219-220)

Foot note

Ref

Ref

Ref

(Conradie FL Met Cronje aan die Wesfront p.79) the Boers only used their mausers. "One of the most remarkable features of the fearful struggle was the silence of the Boer guns for fully eight hours. Not a shot was fired by them from morning until late in the afternoon when the battle was won. ^Y Davitt M: The Boer Fight for Freedom p.) This was no act of forgetfulness. Several Boers were concealed in trenches close to the artillery emplacements, and Cronje had no intention of revealing their positions by using his Krupp and Maxim Nordenfeldt and thus directing the British artillery fire upon them, until the Mauser had won the battle, and the British were in full retreat.

3. Another strange thing in this battle was that when the British, after having the worst of the fight, retreated to their Modder River Camp on Monday night the 11th December, they left three batteries on the plain of battle. Cronje had 5,000 men who had taken no part in the battle, and yet he made no attempt to capture the cannon, and the British retok possession of them on Tuesday morning by limbering them on to the mules that drew the ambulances ^Y Conradie F: Met Cronje aan die Wesfront pp. 73-80 ^Y Conan Doyle A: The Great Boer War p.128)

Mr Francis D. Conradie is uncompromisingly forthright with Cronje in his book "Met Cronje aan die Wesfront, herein made frequent reference to, and published with the assistance and blessings of Professor E.C. Piensaar of Stellenbosch; as well as in his articles in Die ^u Hagenot, he arraigns Cronje in language comparable to that in which Edmund Burke with virulent/impeached Warren Hastings for peculation, corruption, and high crimes and misdemeanours, for in which Cicero savagely declaimed against Catiline for extortion, murders, profligacy and conspiracy. Conradie describes to Cronje "onbuigbaarste koppigheid" most inflexible or ^{asertic} incorrigible obstinacy, "eiewaan" or self conceit and "selfoerskatting" self-overestimation; and describes him as a man inaccessible and conceited by reason of his high positions in the State, totally ^u unaware of his short-comings, over-rating himself and highly contemptuous of the military courage

and skill of his opponents, an unpardonable and almost pathetic misfortune (pp. 182, 183) an arrogant ignorance ('n verwaande onkundige) on military matters (Ibid p. 103)

① F. Smuts Conrads queries somewhat censoriously - "Waarom het Cronje nie die verpletterende nederlaag opgevolg nie? Waarom nie die batterye in besit geneem nie?" (Why didn't Cronje follow up his smashing blow, and why did he not take possession of the deserted batteries?) Cronje won at Magersfontein because his men were concealed in the trenches. If they had got out to follow up their victory, they would face Methuen's reserves in the open, and results might conceivably be different.

② Actually there were 30 other British guns about 1,000 yards behind the deserted field pieces, and they would surely have exacted toll on any of Cronje's men who ventured near the deserted guns.

③ Undoubtedly ^{Cronje} he was obstinate, over-confident of himself, unconscious of his shortcomings as a military leader and perhaps even conceited but he was certainly not an ignorant nor is he unpardonable - no man who has done his best according to his lights is unpardonable. And if Cronje had not surrendered at Paardeberg, he would sooner or later have had to surrender elsewhere, and in any case, the end result of the Boer war would not have been different.

But of course, the head and front of Cronje's offending is his capitulation at Paardeberg, which is ascribed to his having refused to leave his wife and grandchild, and the wives and children of his burghers, as well as those burghers who had no horses. (There were only about one hundred servicable horses between 4,000 men)

General De Wet eluded the British a hundred times. He slipped through their fingers and their nets like the Scarlet Pimpernel, but that did not alter one whit the ultimate result. Eventually, he too, resolute, brave, tenacious, dare-devil that he was - even he had to surrender; all the Boer generals had to surrender to avoid total annihilation.

m The views for and against the stand taken by Cronje at Paardeberg have been reproduced with wearisome re-iteration. By forced

marches from Magersfontein Cronje tried to reach Bloemfontein, but failed within sight of his goal. He was surrounded by overwhelming forces, who tried to destroy or capture him, but he fought bravely and kept them at bay for ten days, inflicting severe losses upon them. His confederates were meantime around the besieging enemy and urging him (Cronje) to fight his way out instead of themselves fighting their way in. In all history, relief to beleaguered garrisons their way out through a ring of the investing enemy, but by their comes, not by their fighting/friends outside breaking that ring, forcing the enemy to give way, and themselves marching to the centre and heart of the garrison. That De Wet and Ferreira and others did not do so is because they could not, and if they could not, with their comparatively unlimited facilities and freedom of movement, and choice of time and point of attack, how much more difficult must it not have been for Cronje, couped up in the dismal dongas of the Modder River.

General De Wet
 It is interesting and educative to recall another famous (or notorious) surrender of a Boer general during the war. It is that of Marthinus Prinsloo, Commandant-in-Chief of the Orange Free State forces. The British had captured Bethlehem, and the Boers were fighting with their backs to the wall, when, on the 30th of July 1900 Marthinus Prinsloo with about 3,500 burghers and several officers was trapped. As his retreat was cut off, he surrendered unconditionally at Naauwpoort to General Huleyn (O.F.S.), De Wet, who was so bitter at Cronje for his capitulation is equally furious at Prinsloo for his surrender, and says the circumstances of his surrender were so suspicious that it is hard to acquit the man who was responsible for it of a definite act of treachery. (De Wet G.R.: Three Years War. p.165). He says it was nothing short of an act of murder, committed on the Government, the country and the nation to surrender with 3,500 men in such a way.

Ref
 In passing, it is of interest to note that De Wet himself has been blamed for Prinsloo's capitulation. He and President Steyn had broke out of the enemy ^{cordon} round Brandwater Basin cordon with a column, a convoy and some guns, leaving Marthinus Prinsloo to

help himself as best he could. "If ever it was the duty of men in such a position to stay behind and see personally that the whole programme of retreat was carried out, it was in this case. Here were special causes which rendered the master's eye indispensable The disaster which subsequently befell the army left inside the Basin has been attributed to Prinsloo's incapacity or even treachery, but the chief cause undoubtedly was this sudden evasion by De Wet and Steyn, which cannot be qualified otherwise than a culpable neglect almost amounting to a desertion of their post. The whole incident illustrates De Wet's selfishness as a commander, which militated more than anything else against his becoming a really great general. (Times History of the War in South Africa Vol. IV pp. 317-318)

Cronje's reflections upon this act of De Wet, breaking out from the enemy's cordon, and leaving his men behind to their own doom would have been most interesting to observe. He would undoubtedly call this a flagrant dereliction of duty. He would recall how steadfastly ^{he had} refused to break out at Paardeberg, leaving behind the people entrusted to his care. ^{Prinsloo's} This was the largest surrender of the Boers. Next to Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg, but while the latter was distinguished by deeds of heroism and in central figure lead an illustrious record - Prinsloo history was drab and ^{prosaic} ~~prosaic~~. He could not claim one successful engagement and his career as a commandant left much to be desired. (Davitt: The Boer fight for Freedom p. 449)

The sequel to Prinsloo's surrender was that a large number of burghers from Harrismith and Vrede commandos surrendered to Sir Hector Macdonald. "One could gnash one's teeth to think that a nation could so readily rush to its own ruin. ^{says De Wet} (Ibid) There we have General De Wet's verdict on Prinsloo's surrender in practically the identical words he used in the case of Cronje's capitulation. And to fully appreciate De Wet's use of the words 'treason', 'treachery' 'suspicion', 'murder of a government and nation', we have to remember that he was a 'bitter ender', an irreconcilable

~~and by these words one means nothing~~

and by these words one means nothing more or worse than that De Wet was a proud, in-and-out nationalist, that his nature was such that he would himself rather die than surrender, and he made that quite plain at the peace palavers at Verseniging in May 1902 when nearly everybody was in favour of surrendering he said "I maintain that this terrible struggle be continued. We must fight on, no matter how long, until our independence is absolutely secure"

Ref. ^y(De Wet C.R: Three Years war p.486) If we surrender as vanquished we shall have but little mercy from England, we shall then in any case have dug the grave of our independence. Well then, what is the difference between going into our graves in reality and digging the grave for our national existence? ^yKeestell and van Velden: The Peace Negotiations p.92) Such a man was De Wet - brave, fearless uncompromising determined - hard as granite and no less obstinate than Cronje himself, and that is why he parted spiritually company with his dearest friends Botha and Smuts, and even Hertzog, and that is why he died an unaltered republican.

Ref. De Wet's verdict on Cronje as on Prinsloo set the tenor of contempt and disdain, suspicion and accusation against that general, and hardened and embittered all hearts against him, and a hard and bitter heart is a ready and impermeable receptacle of malicious stories and cruel imputations, and so Cronje became a traitor to his country. The word 'surrender' was not in De Wet's vocabulary, for him it did not exist, or else it was synonymous with treason, treachery and madness. No circumstances could warrant it.

Ref. Near Lindley, earlier in the month of July, 1900, De Wet at the head of 500 burghers found himself face to face with a large British force of 8,000 soldiers. His brother General Piet De Wet suggestively asked him if he saw any chance of still being able to continue the struggle. Savagely turning upon Piet, he shouted "Are you mad?" ^y(De Wet C.R: Three Years War p.176) That is how De Wet reacted to the idea of surrender. It made him immediately furious. It immediately suggested treachery and treason and madness to him.

Then as already mentioned there were those Beers who surrendered 'ignominiously' and were afterwards formed into a company of police or scouts by the British authorities. The British called them 'National Scouts' while among their compatriots they were called 'Hands-Uppers'. Rightly, De Wet had no language strong enough to denounce these men, his favourite word 'treachery' was too tame to describe their ignominious lapse, so he rather called them 'these trusty counsellors of the English' (Three Years War p.233).

Ref

It is interesting to note that both Piet Cronje's brother - ^{Christiaan} Andries and Christian De Wet's brother - Piet, were leaders of the National Scouts or Hand-uppers. General Andries Cronje surrendered to Captain ^o Lambert of the Kimberley Mounted Corps at Klerksdorp on the 14th of June 1900, while Piet De Wet surrendered in March 1901. Both were men of outstanding ability, and had been brave in the field and capable commanders of their people, and their defection was a serious blow to the Afrikaner cause. They both led a deputation to interview Chamberlain on the 14th of January 1903 in Johannesburg on behalf of the ex-National Scouts. With respect to these brothers of ^{to} eye rivals, the poet could not very well call the kettle black.

The conclusion is inescapable that the dark cloud under which the name of Piet ^{Cronje} lies has chiefly been of Christian De Wet's making. De Wet's eulogizing of Cronje with faint praise, and De Wet's half-pronounced judgments on Cronje have been disastrous to the good name of Cronje. De Wet's own popularity, his strategic marshalling of words and language, his veiled criticism, his admitted honesty, courage and patriotism - all have given force and credence to his seemingly dispassionate judgment, and have been exploited against Cronje. But there was ^a keen rivalry, ^a deep-seated antagonism and ^a rankling animosity between these two men, recognition of which should modify the interpretation put on their words about each other.

3. Parallels
To appraise the significance of that rivalry, that antagonism, that animosity between Cronje and De Wet, we have to recall the rivalry and antagonism that existed between Paul Kruger and Piet Joubert, or, going further back in history, between Andries Pretorius

and Hendrik Potgieter. Call Cronje Potgieter or Joubert, and name De Wet Andries Pretorius or Paul Kruger and you have a clear picture of the feeling that divided them. Or still better, draw a vertical line. On the one side, ^{wrote} Hendrik Potgieter, and on the other Andries Pretorius.

A.
Hendrik Potgieter
Piet Joubert
Piet Cronje

B.
Andries Pretorius
Paul Kruger
Christiaan De Wet

If you like, write two other names

J.B.M.Hertzog

Jan C. Smuts, and-you-a

and you have a remarkable example of a recurrence of historical patterns, parallels and episodes. Remember the rivalry, the antagonism of each pair of these men; their ambitions, their jealousies their selfishnesses, their petty acts of mutual exclusiveness their quarrels, their bitter recriminations, and you have a proof of the lengths to which personal ambition can go in divising ^d men otherwise honest and sincere, and fundamentally united in a common cause.

The comparison is tempting. Men of Group B. were as proud and a hot-tempered as men of Group A; but they were all more tactful; they could count ten before speaking; they could hide their feelings and control their passion and choose their words more, and they came off best, at the top. Men of Group A were apt to be reckless, to give way to their anger, to storm and throw discretion to the winds. In the end and on the whole they came off second best.

The comparison has been made to show that there was nothing unnatural or criminal in the rivalry, jealousy and mutual recriminations between General De Wet and General Cronje.

Potgieter was once called a coward, Piet Joubert was once called a traitor, and so was Piet Cronje, and so was Jan Smuts. In fact the epithet 'traitor' is common among Afrikaners. It is common among all people of efflorescing nationalism, and is ^d at first but a mild reproach. But let one false move in people so reviled give colour and strength to the calumny, and their name is for ever mud. Let them but be eclipsed by their rivals, and they are for ever rejected. How tragic can be the consequences of a word like

'treason', first uttered carelessly, but gradually gathering malice as it rolls from tongue to tongue.

CHAP American Sojourn

XXI THE AMERICAN SOJOURN

Since his return from St. Helena and throughout his wife's illness, Cronje was living under ~~grave~~ hardships. He was already an old man. His days of earning a livelihood were passed. He had no income and no pension. His farms were damaged and mortgaged, and to make them productive required capital, health and youth, none of which requisites he possessed. The first year of peace synchronised with one of the worst droughts which had ever gripped South Africa, in the memory of living men. A pitiless sky met the gaze of ^{the} anxious farmer praying for rain to quicken his hard-gotten meagre seed. There ~~were~~ ^{was a} sharp sear-scorching winter, followed by terrific cyclones, destructive hail storms, invasions of locusts, cut worms and caterpillars, and a general economic depression spread over the country. Times were out of joint.

Soon after his wife's death, Cronje was called upon to make a difficult decision. A certain Mr. A. Lewis of Johannesburg organised a company which he named 'The South African War Exhibition Company' with the subtitle of 'Het Transvaalse Militere Spetakel Sindikaat'. Its purpose was to proceed to the United States of America in at St. Louis, Missouri, there to give an exhibition, in which the main events and episodes of the Anglo-Boer War were to be enacted.

Banking on the sympathy of the Americans for the Boers during the war, the promoters felt confident that such an exhibition would be very popular in the States, and therefore a great financial success. Early in the year 1904, they issued a prospectus in glowing terms, and invited the public to buy shares in the company, and these got a fairly ready market.

Feeling that the presence and prestige of General Piet Cronje, the hero of Paardeberg, would add lustre and dignity to the show, besides being a great attraction, they invited him on special terms to join them. In the same way invitation was extended to the other famous Boer General and ex-captive at St. Helena - Ben Viljoen.

Here was a difficulty for Cronje, a most conservative member

of a conservative race, whose inclination was, like most people, to cover past failures under a blanket of forgetfulness.

Now, this exhibition was to be a parade of his failure and defeat of his people before the world. And being already under the terrible shadow of suspicion as a traitor to his country, would not his joining this Exhibition Company impart verisimilitude and add strength to the arguments, rantings and vapourings of his detractors? Was he - Cronje - a hero of a hundred wars, one of the most famous of the Boer generals, a man known to be proud, and grave in disposition, was he to degrade himself by being an actor, a mere performer in circus? But again, why hesitate? He was not going to detract on his people; he was not going to ridicule them. No, rather the reverse. He was going to take part in their vindication, and demonstrate how unjustly they had been robbed and cheated by England. But above all, he must be practical and realistic. He was impecunious, ^h He was hard up, and here was a god-sent opportunity, if not of retrieving his fortunes, at least of making a little money to pay his way during the few remaining years of his life. The ^{wolf} world was at his door, and surely it was better, it was more honorable to earn a little money honestly than to go and beg, borrow or steal it, or to be sold up as a bankrupt!

Cronje's mind was made up and on Sunday the 6th of March 1904 he was among the 140 passengers who left Johannesburg by train to go and join the Douane Castle (Captain S. Henderson) at Laurens Marquis, sailing from that port for New York.

The Douane was at sea when the British ambassador at Washington D.C. raised objections to the South African Exhibition Company's programme on grounds that the British army would be shown in a bad light and held up to ridicule. This objection at once affected adversely the financial prospects of the Exhibition by discouraging many would-be share holders.

Upon the assurance to the British authorities, however, that no such slur was intended, and that no stigma would be cast upon the British army or nation, and that the Exhibition would be strictly historical, the British objections were withdrawn.

The first show was given in a great amphitheatre at St. Louis (Missouri) on the 17th of June 1904, and was a great success. The arena was packed to capacity on that day and subsequent days. Cronje's part in the show was to ride on a white horse three times a day. On each occasion he was introduced to the large audience as "General Piet Cronje, the bravest Boer general, the warrior of many fights, the hero of the dramatic fight of Laardeborg who with 4,000 tired and hungry and ill-equipped farmers held 47,000 of the best British troops under the most famous of the British generals at bay for ten days. Cronje would then be applauded lustily by the large audience, would acknowledge the ovation by taking off his hat and bowing his head. He would then disappear until his next turn after about four hours.

General Ben Viljoen played a similar part. He was much younger and therefore more active than Cronje. Besides taking part in the Exhibitions, he had some private Boer War exhibits of his own which thousands of people came to see at a reasonable admission fee, by which he made a nice sum of money. Helped by some friendly business people, he went also to Mexico and made good money by his 'Boers Corlogs Vertoning (Boer War Exhibition.)

^{2nd Marriage} During the progress of the Exhibition, General Cronje married a widow by the name of Johanna Sterzel. She was of German origin, and it would appear that she was one of the passengers on board the Duane Castle with Cronje and Viljoen and other 350 passengers from South Africa to the United States. On board, already, mischievous Cupid had been busy with his darts, and it was soon noticed by many that sympathy was quickening between Cronje and Mrs. Johanna Sterzel and many prophesied that the old general was soon to meet his second Paardeberg and surrender unconditionally to a more ^{subtle} valiant-conqueror.

It was no surprise, therefore, when soon after arrival in the States, Cronje and Mrs. Sterzel were united in matrimony, on the 28th of June, ⁽¹⁹⁰⁴⁾ the wedding being celebrated at the South African Boer Camp of the World's Fair before some 75,000 people, Cronje and his bride being the target of innumerable cameras

President Kruger's Death

It was a few days after this that Cronje heard and read of the death of President Kruger, which took place at Clarens in Switzerland on the 14th of July 1904. Notice of this fact was given wide and sympathetic publicity in the States, and it proved to Cronje the goodwill which the Boers enjoyed among the American people. The South African Camp at the Exhibition flew the Vierkleur at half-mast. Cronje was still in the States when the President's body was taken to South Africa for burial in December.

The news of the death and funeral of his president and personal friend, to whose influence and favour he owed so much in civil and military advancement could not but fill Cronje's heart with sadness and it was a bitter disappointment to him that he was unable to pay his last respects to the great Dutch-Afrikaner whose name was so closely associated with the independence of his people, and will, ^{be,} for generations, a household word, ^{among them} and whose character has had such power in moulding theirs and giving a direction to their history.

General Botha and Smuts played a leading part in the arrangements for the impressive obsequies, and received the co-operation and sympathy of British authorities. At all stations along the 1,000 mile route between Cape Town and Pretoria, British guards of honour were drawn up and helped to keep order and lend decorum and gravity appropriate for the occasion, as thousands came to view the cortege and to pay their last respects to the departed chieftain.

Under circumstances of impressive pomp and ceremony, and amidst scenes of moving enthusiasm and ^{poignant} pained grief, President Kruger's mortal remains were committed to their last resting place at Pretoria on Dingaan's Day - the 16th December 1904, the great Boer National Day of thanksgiving. All the Boer leaders were there, generals and statesmen, to pay homage to the memory of their chief. Cronje alone was conspicuous by his absence.

The Exhibition finished off at the end of November 1904, and most of the artists and performers returned home to South Africa via Liverpool and London, arriving at Cape Town late in December.,

Cronje and his new wife stayed a while longer in the States. He tried to enter into new business contracts and to give more shows, with what success it is not clear. In January 1905 he visited New York. There he made contacts with some big Newspapers firms to whom he gave interviews and contributions of articles on South Africa and especially the Boer War. By this means he was able to make a little money. From New York, Cronje and his wife took boat and visited the principal cities of Europe before returning to South Africa.

The South African War Exhibition was a great success. Like anything else in the world it had its supporters and its critics, and Cronje came in for a fair share of praise and blame, mostly the latter. Not only in South Africa, but also in America and Europe, there were several writers who expressed the view that General Cronje had demeaned himself and his people by participating in a cheap affair like an Exhibition, a mere circus show. Many people who called themselves the friends of the Boer people thought Cronje had brought disgrace upon himself, that his association with such a show was totally out of keeping with his dignity.

All these aspects Cronje had turned over his mind before deciding to join the Exhibition, and he was fortified with reasoned argument against his critics. Never at the best of times a man who was much influenced by the thoughts and opinions of other men, now, much more than ever did he follow the dictates of his own mind. The time was past when his independent and undismayed temperament could be perturbed by adverse opinions and hostile views of others, and still less of people he neither knew nor cared for nor asked favours of.

Arrived in South Africa, General Cronje and the second Mrs. Cronje went to their farm Palmietfontein on the Schoon Spruit.

Mr. Johanna Sterzel Cronje

It was to attempt to renew the forsaken furrow of agriculture. The glamour of the old life had for ever departed from the place, and Cronje soon knew heart ache and vain regrets. The wife of his youth, the companion of his days of strength and ambition, the partner of his success, fame, failure and captivity, she was gone. But her memory haunted him now as never before, now that he had vainly tried to put another in her place. How utterly scandalised he was when she made fun of his faith, mocked at his devotions and played the gramophone when he tried to read his Bible (P. Roux) Hester Susanna Visser was to Johanna Walter Sterzel as Hyperion to a Satyr. How often he was hurt and revulsed and disgusted at the levity and coarseness of this second wife of his, to whom nothing seemed noble or ^a sacred, and ~~De Wet~~ decided to ~~forewear politics and return to the farm to attend to his private business.~~ What a shocking contrast the second wife was to his first wife - selfish, agnostic, querulous, arrogant and extravagant, where the first was gentle, self-effacing kind and frugal. The lightning had struck the old tree for the third time - first at his surrender at Paardeberg, then at the death of his beloved Hester Susanna (Visser), and now, ^{at} his unfortunate marriage to Johanna Walter Sterzel. Cronje groaned as the blows seemed again to fall and bruise his soul, and he reeled in poignant agony of grief and despair before this crowning misfortune. In his old age, this was a veritable coup de grace. It finished him.

CHAT. XXII POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION
 During the post-war years, 1903, 1904 and 1905 the conditions of life were difficult and trying. Apart from droughts and cyclones and swarms of locusts, agriculture was badly disorganised. Life stock had been practically decimated by war conditions, and the country had to depend upon imports of chilled beef from Australia for its meat supply and to supplement its meagre local products by imported meat tinned food stuffs. Money was scarce, and many people were on the verge of ruin. There was inflation in the price of landed property owing to the periodical mania for speculation and the over-sanguine expectations of impending economic expansion.

In the governm⁺ent departments, a large staff of highly paid officials was employed for administration purposes in connection with repatriation, war claims and compensation, dismantling and disposal of military stores. Politically the country was at the cross-roads. The British were in the position of the driver on an unwilling horse, unable to get response from the Dutch-Afrikaners they put in traces and sought to direct. Afrikanerdom was in sullen mood and undergoing the strain of a subdued struggle for absolute equality and sovereign independence. There was distrust and apprehension of the much-talked of British magnanimity; alternating hope and fear in connection with economic reconstruction and the re-organisation of the political fabric were universal. The loss of Independence stipulated in the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging had been a staggering blow and had led to mutual accusation between the leaders and the led; among the leaders there were divided counsels, no clear objective, and some confusion. Some ^{leaders,} markedly those of the Orange Free State President Steyn, De Wet, Hertzog and Abraham Fischer sulked and sought to resuscitate and perpetuate uncorrupted Afrikaner ideals by hook or by crook. They remained bitter and irreconcilable and De Wet decided to forswear politics and return to the farm to attend to his private business. Others, chiefly men of the Transvaal - Louis Botha, Jan Smuts, Kees De la Rey and Schalk Burger, took a more realistic view. The war had demonstrated to them that the Boers could never hope to stand by themselves, that isolation, would be fatal, that primitive republicanism was out-dated, and that the utility of Krugerism had ended with the 19th Century and the day that President Kruger finally left the coasts of South Africa, and that a new era had dawned. Like their late bitterest enemies Chamberlain and Milner, they realised that the true destiny of South Africa lay in the unity and self-government of its inhabitants. These men therefore, at once girded their loins and worked for the dawn of the day of union of Boer and British.

With considerable acumen, these men addressed themselves

to the administrative, constitutional and economic problems confronting the country, and as Chamberlain had declared reconciliation of Boer feelings and sentiment, and the fusion of Boer and British to be his objective, so Botha enunciated harmony, co-operation and progress to be his ^{main} aim political aims.

Article VII of the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging provides that "At the earliest practicable date military administration will cease, and will be replaced by civil administration in the form of Crown Colony Government. There will, therefore, be in the first instance in each of the new Colonies, ~~x~~ a Governor and an Executive Council, composed of the principal officials, with a Legislative Council consisting of a certain number of official members, to whom a nominated ~~xxxx~~ unofficial element will be added. But it is the desire of His Majesty's Government, as soon as circumstances permit, to introduce a representative element, and ultimately to concede to the new Colonies the privilege of self-government etc."

Military administration had ceased^s and was now replaced by civil administration in the form of Crown Colony Government. Lord Milner ⁱⁿ February 1903, invited Generals Botha, De la Rey and Smuts to become members of the Legislative Council in order to assist him, but they politely declined first because they would have neither power nor responsibility for the conduct of affairs, and secondly because ^h they were determined not to be nominated members of any advisory council, but rather to wait until they could be elected representatives of their people, enjoying their confidence when full Self-government would be conceded. In 1905, Lord Lyttleton, the successor of Chamberlain at the Colonial Office, introduced "representative Government" in the Transvaal a slight advance on Crown colony government, but still inferior to Self, or Responsible Government, and the three generals still held aloof for the same reason. In the meantime Botha devoted himself to awakening national and political consciousness among the Transvaal Afrikaners, and many rallied to his party

political organisation known as "Het Volk" organised chiefly to agitate for self-government. In 1906, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the new British Prime Minister granted Self-government to the Transvaal. "Het Volk" triumphed at the polls, and Botha became Prime Minister of the Transvaal with Smuts as his Colonial Secretary and Minister of Education. De-Wet-as-Minister-of-both ^{These taking} ~~Administrating~~ office under the British Crown four short years after they had taken guns against the same authority. Six months after June 1907 the Orange Free State also received its Self-government and Abraham Fischer became its Prime Minister with General De Wet as Minister of Agriculture.

On the 2nd of April 1905, Lord Milner left South Africa after being High Commissioner and disposer and arbiter of the destinies of the country for a period of eight years. Endowed with rare qualities of mind and character, a realist who approached facts with scientific detachment and followed them pitilessly to their logical conclusion, he was hated by the Afrikaners as a stiff and impervious autocrat, bracketted with Chamberlain and Rhodes as arch-imperialists Boer-haters, and the main causes of the Anglo-Boer War, ^{and} Boer misery. Cronje being an ultra-nationalist would fully share these feelings against Milner, and although his (Cronje's) work was done, he would rejoice for South Africa's sake that an ulcer was excised from it in the departure of Lord Milner, and he hoped with his countrymen, that Lord Selborne, the new High Commissioner, would be more friendly to the Boers. For, scurvily treated as he had been by his countrymen, Cronje's heart was still with them, and the well being of his country still came first in his thoughts and figured prominently in his prayers.

Ever and anon, the mystery of his "unpardonable sin" would come up in his mind poison his feelings, darken his thoughts and spoil his peace, and involuntarily, the memory would linger bitterly over the latter and tragic part of his life. He would ask himself a hundred and one questions, to none of which he could

find any answer. -What act of treason had he committed? How? Where? When? Who were his traducers? Could it be some interested persons? Some of his comrades - some of his fellow-generals may be? Did they really believe this crude and patent absurdity? But what is more, how could the Afrikaners generally, who knew him and his deeds so well, how could they be hoaxed into believing this grotesque mosaic of falsehood, clearly suggested by envy, malice and vindictiveness? Was he to go down into his grave with this unjust reproach, this base calumny, this cruel censure, this horrid stigma upon his name? The thought made Cronje groan with mental agony. But again on deeper reflection, some slight assurance and consolation would seem to come from his innermost self that he was guiltless. He was an unfortunate victim of devilishly clever intrigue by some person in authority. "Ik been tans een oude man, en myn einde kon niet veraf syn. Myn geweten segt my geogkeurend dat ik het beste in myn vermoogen gedaan het voor myn land en volk En terwyl ik myn volk trouw diende het, ik de dienst van myn God niet na. Nederbuigend onderwyk ik my aan Zyn wil."

(I am now an old man, and my end cannot be far off. My conscience tells me approvingly that I have served my country and my people to the best of my ability. And whilst I have served my people faithfully, I have not forgotten service to my God. With Willingly I resign myself to His will.)

Herinneringen. Die Brandwag 1/11/1913
 In 1906 there was much talk of closer union of South African Colonies, and soon there were committees, campaigns and consultations all over the country in connection with this new idea, which was the natural child of the grant of Responsible Government to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, adding two new self-governing British states to those already in existence - the Cape and Natal - in South Africa.

In these discussions, his brother generals, and leaders of the Boer War took an active part, and some of them were in the fore-front - General Botha, De la Rey, De Wet, Schalk Burger, President Steyn, Hertzog. He alone Piet Cronje - was out of it all. Nobody sought

Ref
 CHAP
 XXII

UNION of South Africa

his opinion. He was as good as dead. His mind went back to the People's Committees which met in 1879 and 1880 before the 1st War on Independence when he was looked for and consulted, when his opinion was earnestly sought. He remembered Potchefstroom, Wonderfontein, Paardekraal, venues of large and excited meetings of Independence seeking Transvaalers where everybody asked. Where is Piet Cronje? What does Piet Cronje say. Alas those days were gone. His sun was set. He was forgotten. He was now a cypher. The discussions and conferences resulted in the National Convention to which the four autonomous South African States sent representatives in proportion to their population. Cape Colony sent 12. The Transvaal sent 8, N& Natal and the Orange Free State sent 5 each. The sittings of the National Convention took place at Durban in October 1908, at Cape Town in January 1909, and at Bloemfontein in May 1909.

"What a wonderful thing that Convention was;" writes one of its ardent historians, "There was an atmosphere of great moderation great reason, and amazing patriotism. The cynics and the cavillers were either converted or had hidden in their caves" (Moltenc Sir J.T Further South African Recollections p.155) "Former foes were gathered round the Convention table and service for mankind was supreme... No quarrels, no ill-feeling, and no discord. A great spirit brooded over the land and harmony reigned (Ibid p.180)

The National Convention decided in favour of a resolution proposed by General Louis Botha and seconded by John X. Merriman that "The best interests and permanent prosperity of South Africa can only be secured by the early union under the Crown of Great Britain, of the several selfgoverning Colonies." The Convention produced a report and a draft Act of Union, which was adopted by each of the four Colonial governments. In the Cape Parliament the ~~draft~~ ~~act of Union, which was adopted by each of the four Colonial~~ Governments. In the Cape Parliament, the draft act was passed in June 1909 with only two dissentients - W.P.Schreiner and Sir Gordon Sprigg, who objected to the colour bar provision, discriminating against African and coloured inhabitants on the grounds of race or colour in respect of political rights.

The Union Bill had an easy passage in all its stages through both Houses of the British Parliament in August 1899 in spite of Mr.W.P.Schreiner, Mr.Tengo Jabavu and Dr.A.Abdurrahman urging the British politicians and public to oppose the discriminatory or colour bar clauses in it. On the 20th of December it received the Royal assent, and on the 31st of May 1910, the Union of South Africa was an accomplished fact. / Much to the chagrin of ⁹¹ Mr.John X.Merriman, the Prime Minister of Cape Colony and Hester of South African politicians the Governor-General - Lord Gladstone entrusted General Louis Botha, the Prime Minister of Transvaal and leader of the strongest Afrikaner party, with the formation of the first Union cabinet.

It is interesting to note how the Orange Free State leaders - ex - President Steyn, General Christiaan De Wet, General James B.M. Hertzog and Prime Minister Abraham Fischer - favoured Merriman and bitterly opposed Botha for the Union premiership. These men were an anachronism and a paradox in that they were the irreconcilable foes of the British, and at heart, bitter opponents of the union of the Boer and the British. They still hankered after the old-time republicanism of the Transvaal and the Free State, and their support of the Englishman Merriman against their own Afrikaner compatriot Botha, so far from being proof of the opposite, was really due to their jealousy and hatred of Botha, whom they regarded as too demonstratively conciliatory, feckâz foolishly pro-British, totally forgetful of the past, and ever-hopeful of the future Boer - British relations. Botha and Smuts and their immediate followers were all-out for conciliation, co-operation and unification. They deliberately closed the old book of sordid and bitter memories, and forgot the history of the sufferings and lamentations of the Boers at the hands of the British.

In October 1910, the first Union General Election took place, and the first Union Parliament was opened by the Duke of Connaught on the 4th of November with ornate pageantry and due pomp and ceremony, amidst scenes of wild enthusiasm among the European population of South Africa, when the Union was ushered in with a

fanfare of trumpets, and exultingly hailed as the opening of a new and blessed era, and the beacon of heavenly light that would lead generations unborn down the corridor of history.

CHAR. XXIII *CLOSING YEARS*
 While these momentous events were taking place, General Piet Cronje was lying in loneliness and great long-drawn-out pains in his farm house at Palmietfontein.

The old order of things was passing; the age of division, suspicion and enmity was going out, and was hopefully being replaced by that of union, confidence and amity. ~~Piet Joubert was dead,~~ Jan Kock the veteran of Boomplaats and hero of Elandslaagte had been killed; Piet Joubert, the commandant-General of the South African Republic, was dead; Lukas Meyer the founder of New Republic and chairman of the First Volksraad was gone, and Paul Kruger the President of the South African Republic was no more. They, and many other architects and heroes of the South African Republic had gone to their rest, and a new era, which they could not have understood, had dawned; an epoch into whose spirit they could not have entered, and a society whose language they could not have comprehended was born. Cronje, one of the old guards was destined only to see dimly the flood light of the new age before going to join his comrades. Steyn, De Wet, Hertzog and Fischer of the Orange Free State and De la Rey of the Transvaal, however, were still alive. At best they were luke-warm. Generally they were elusive. They blew hot and cold, now making bold promises and pronouncements on the side of the new union and prospective progress, and now eating the side of the new union and prospective progress, and now eating their words, damning and denouncing the union in their longing for isolation and exclusive nationalism. Now and then they stoked the slumbering embers, and kept the fire of bitter memories burning. As General De Wet said at President Kruger's funeral, "The Afrikaner nation is built upon its history. Woe unto him who will disturb the building of this Afrikaner Nation. I say Woe unto him, and God says so too. Dear Brothers, I hope we understand each other well, for misunderstanding is the cause of our misery" (Rosenthal Eric: General De Wet p.132) "My loyalty to England does not mean

that I am taking off my coat, and handing it to an Englishman. It is all very well to say we have to live side by side. It is true but it does not mean that we have to get under one blanket. (Ibid p.139)

The full import of these half mystic expressions was later revealed in General Hertzog's conduct to General Botha, and in his speech at De Wildt in 1912, which was in effect a repudiation of Botha's policy of conciliation. In October 1914 General De Wet made himself perfectly clear and staggered the pacific and British-minded South Africans by stating publicly ~~that~~ at Vrede "I am going through to Martitz where we will receive arms and ammunition, and from there we are going to Pretoria to pull down the British flag and proclaim a free South African Republic....The ungodly policy of Botha has gone on long enough, and the South African Dutch are going to stand as one man to crush this unholy scandal." (Rosenthal E; General De wet pp.176,177) and true to his promise De Wet joined General Kanie Maritz in his rebellion against the Government of South Africa. In both and other instances, Ex-President Steyn maintained a judicious inaction, and made non-committal statements, an attitude which was naturally criticised by Botha, Smuts, Merriman, and others of the British connection, and characterised as 'querulous', tacit approval, and connivance of the rebels and others desirous of letting go the painter.

For months Cronje was confined to his ^{house} (bed) by the fatiguing and distressing symptoms of bladder trouble peculiar to men of his age. As time went on, his condition grew steadily worse, and medical knowledge of that day was incapable of affording him anything like permanent relief. Complications later set in in the form of Chronic Uraemia which further distressed the family when the General was periodically affected with convulsions which left him weak, confused in thought (paramnesia) and incoherent in speech (paraphasia). On Saturday the 11th of February, 1911, an hour after midnight, the end came. Cronje was in his 75th year. He died misunderstood, misjudged, and wronged. Abuse and contumely had been heaped upon him for eleven years. He died ostracised and unhappy, and was buried

unhonored and unsung.

In a little churchyard along side the main road from Klerksdorp to Ventersdorp and exactly half way (22 miles each way) between the two towns is to be seen a ~~XXXXX~~ tombstone with this superscription:

Hier rusten
Onse geliefde ouders

GENERAL P.A.CRONJE

Geb. 4 Oct. 1836

Overl. 4 Feb. 1921

En

H.A.CRONJE geboren VISSER

Geb. 9 Mei 1840

Overl. 16 Nov. 1903

Zalig zijn de dooden die
in den Heere sterven.

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.
