

## Chapter XI

Re-assembling of Volksraad - contrast Johannesburg and Pretoria during war - absentees from Volksraad on account of war - business done - bewaarplaatsen - proposed sale - Milner's proclamation - De Volksraad, interview with him - Mr. Smuts on sending ultimatum - on locus standi of Free State - on numbers in Boer army - on destruction of mines - on termination of the war - on Boer prospects - women burghers want to fight - political position - a woman at the Fighting Front - Helena Wagner and her strange story.

At the beginning of May, some little animation became evident at Johannesburg, but far more at Pretoria, in anticipation of the re-assembling of the Volksraad, and recognizing that this was likely to be a meeting of quite unusual historical interest, I determined to be present at <sup>the opening of</sup> what ~~was~~ proved to be the last <sup>session</sup> meeting of that assembly.

Pretoria had been, generally speaking, far more lively during the war than Johannesburg. The deadly dullness of the latter place due, <sup>primarily</sup> to the fewness of the people remaining there, was accentuated a hundred fold by the melancholy appearance imposed <sup>on the town</sup> by the barricaded shops and stores. Whole streets there were with wood and iron barricades covering the shop fronts; whilst, as already described, there was, <sup>also</sup> almost entire cessation of vehicular traffic - including the trams, which ceased running soon after the commencement of hostilities. At Pretoria, on the contrary, ~~there~~ were no barricades to be seen, the trams were still running and the constant passing to and fro of bargainers, gents and hores to the front gave quite an air of animation to the town. In fact, Johannesburg and Pretoria

seemed almost to have changed places <sup>as a result</sup> ~~the circumstances~~ of the war.  
 The exceptional circumstances obtaining in the country  
 were the re-assembling of the Volksraad additional interest  
 well as importance, the empty seats, draped with the  
 bierkleur, of the members who had been killed or had  
 died during the war adding considerably to the pathos of  
 the scene. The death of Mr J. H. Barnard, late member  
 for <sup>Rustenburg</sup> ~~Imperium~~, was in particular, very keenly felt  
 by his fellow-members, in view of the peculiar circum-  
 stances under which he was killed. <sup>as previously related</sup> The Executive had  
 suffered more losses in proportion to members than ~~any~~  
 the private members, the vacant places, <sup>amongst the former</sup> being those of  
 Lieutenant-General Joubert, whose death has been  
 already described, General Hoch, mortally wounded at  
 Launslaagte; and General Cronje, then a prisoner  
 at St. Helena. The references of President Struager, in his  
 evening address, to these absentees and those from the members'  
 benches through similar causes were touching in the extreme.  
 The aged President himself, however, bore his years and  
 troubles very well, and spoke with a vigor which  
 would have done credit to a man twenty years younger.

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The session of the Volksraad lasted only two days, the members being eager to ~~return~~ <sup>refer</sup> to their commands. Apart from matters directly connected with the war, the principal matter discussed was a proposal by the Government to sell the underground mining rights (bouaarplaat ten) of the Witwatersrand Gold-fields; which was, however, rejected by the Raad. For this the present mine-owners may be duly thankful. Had the proposal been carried through it would have <sup>pro</sup> depreciated the value of the mines, in some cases probably fifty per cent. Sir Alfred Milner's proclamation to the effect that the British Government would refuse to recognise the validity of <sup>any</sup> such ~~an~~ alienation to the contrary notwithstanding.

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The Raad fails to see what possible locus standi Sir Alfred Milner or the British Government could have in this matter. It must be remembered that this was not an attempt on the part of the Government by a catch vote under exceptional circumstances, to effect a radical alteration in the laws of the country, but merely a request to the Raad to be allowed to enforce a provision in the law which had always existed. Even had the former

even the case, it surely behoved us to at least annex the  
 country, to say nothing of conquering it - it used to  
 conquer and annex, but we have changed all that  
 before <sup>beginning</sup> ~~making~~ to govern it, or interfere in the  
 interpretation and administration of its laws. It  
 would certainly have been a very interesting point in interna-  
 tional relations, had the sale been effected between the subjects  
 of one of the European Powers or America, whether the  
 power in question would have recognised the right of  
 Sir Alfred Chilner or the British Government by means

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such a proclamation <sup>merely its</sup> ~~merely~~ subjects  
 effecting a perfectly legitimate <sup>by bargain</sup> ~~deal~~ with the Transvaal  
 Government. Considering that when the proclamation in  
 question was issued, so far from the country being effectively  
 occupied or annexed, even the capital had not been oc-  
 cupied by the British forces - an event which occurred  
 some considerable time before Pretoria itself was taken  
 this is, to say the least, highly improbable.

Being at Pretoria, I took advantage of the opportunity  
 to interview Mr J. C. Smuts, the State Attorney  
 upon the war and cognate subjects. As Mr Smuts

has not been quite so prominently before the world, and is, therefore not so well known perhaps as the two Presidents of the Republics and one or two other of the Boer officials, for instance, Mr. Krantz or Dr. Leyds; it may not be out of place to give a few particulars regarding him.

Mr. Smuts is undoubtedly one of the best samples of the younger generation of Boer officials. He is an Afrikaner by birth, and was educated in the Cape Colony and subsequently at Cambridge, where he took very high <sup>honours</sup> degrees, and having decided to adopt the legal profession he was called to the English Bar as a Member of the Middle Temple.

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Like of irreproachable reputation and conspicuous abilities, <sup>young, energetic and</sup> his progressive ideas testified to by the reforms he effected <sup>in the legal department of the State</sup> during his short tenure of office up to the commencement of the war, there is no doubt that had events shaped a different course in the Transvaal, Mr. Smuts would have made his mark in ~~the~~ the history of his country and would eventually have risen to far higher office in the State than even that of State Attorney; - in itself a by no means unimportant position to attain to; especially by a young man. Mr. Smuts is <sup>now only about</sup> ~~less than~~ thirty years of age. Having courteously accepted <sup>to my</sup> request for an interview

I first asked Mr Sumts what considerations had induced the Transvaal Government to send the ultimatum to Great Britain. His reply was very significant as indicating the feeling of despair to which the Boers had been reduced by the extraordinary diplomatic methods adopted towards them by Mr Chamberlain & Sir Alfred Milner. "In the first place" he replied, "we had quite given up hope of averting war. Not only could we not obtain a definite statement as to what was required by the British Government with some prospect of finality to the demands on our part, but our demands were increasing as we made concessions, but when we went beyond Sir Alfred Milner's Bloemfontein demands our offer was not only rejected, but the offer of the British Government ~~was~~ of a Commission of Enquiry into the new Franchise Law was also withdrawn. Then we waited nearly a ~~month~~ <sup>month</sup> for the final demands of the British Government, which Mr Greene promised we should have within two or three days, and this notwithstanding that an Army Corps was being mobilised and the reserves called out in England - this latter, a course

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which is never adopted until war is actually decided  
 upon. I myself saw Mr Greene repeatedly to inquire  
 when the promised final dispatch from Mr Chamber-  
 lain would arrive, only to be told that it would surely  
 arrive by the morrow; and on the morrow to receive  
 the same reply. But what finally decided us to take  
 the step we did, was the reply of Sir Alfred Milner to  
 Mr Steyn's last dispatch, that of Oct 6. In it  
 Mr Steyn protested against the continued concentration  
 of British troops upon the Free State and Transvaal  
 borders, and in his reply Sir Alfred Milner said  
 almost so many words, that there was no cause  
 for apprehension regarding the troops so far as the  
 Free State was concerned, as they were intended for  
 operations in the Transvaal. Mr Steyn at once  
 came to Pretoria with this dispatch of Sir Alfred  
 Milner's, and as it was then very <sup>evident</sup> apparent that  
 Mr Chamberlain was delaying the forwarding  
 of his final demands until he could pour sufficient  
 troops into South Africa to make it a case  
 of "Hobson's choice" with no about accepting them



however unjust they might be, we resolved to  
 bring matters to a head at once while we still  
 had some little chance of being able to hold our  
 own, and sent the ultimatum accordingly, so  
 that there were four ~~things~~ <sup>things</sup> which, <sup>taken together</sup> compelled us to take  
 the step we did: our inability to obtain, after nearly  
~~months~~ <sup>months</sup> of waiting, Mr Chamberlain's final  
 demands; the mobilisation of an Army corps; the  
 calling up of the Reserves, admittedly for service  
 in South Africa - and this alone constituted prac-  
 tically a declaration of war against us - our  
 Sir Alfred Milner's reply to Mr Steyn's despatch.  
 It has been urged, Mr Smuts, and perhaps with  
 some amount of plausibility, that in any case the  
 Free State had no quarrel with England, and  
 was wrong to take up your quarrel. What is your  
 reply to that?" I next asked him.

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Simply that apart from the blood relationships which  
 exist between the majority of the burghers of the two  
 Republics, and which would alone have rendered it  
 impossible for the Free State to maintain neutrality

when the Transvaal was attacked. The sister Republic  
 was bound to us by treaty relations which it would  
 have been most dishonorable to have repudiated in  
 our hour of need. What would Englishmen say  
 if their own country were to back out of its  
 treaty obligations under similar circumstances?  
 Yet that is apparently what they expect the Free State  
 to do. Besides, do you suppose that if the Transvaal  
 had been attacked and conquered by England, the Free  
 State would <sup>have</sup> been allowed to ~~retain~~ <sup>retain</sup> its independence?  
 The documents ~~found at London~~ <sup>found at London</sup> prove that the Free State  
 was menaced as well as ourselves, and confirm our belief  
 that the only chance for the two Republics was to stick to  
 each other <sup>and</sup> to stand or fall together."

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My next question was  
~~to ask~~ "Is it any secret, Mr Smuts, how many  
 men you have or have had, in the field? That is a point  
~~upon~~ which I would much like to have an authoritative  
 pronouncement upon, in view of the abarbitrary differences  
~~made~~ <sup>made</sup> guesses and estimates from various quarters."  
 "Oh, no," he replied, "no secret at all. We have had, approx-  
 imately, from first to last, about 55,000 men in the



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