CHAPTER XIV
CLOSE OF LORD ROBERTS'S COMMAND

I

With the capture of the railway to Komati Poort and the surrender or dispersal of the last compact and centrally organised Boer force, Lord Roberts thought that, for all practical purposes, the war was at an end. As early as the beginning of September, and shortly after the battle of Bergendal, he put this view very strongly before the Boers in a proclamation announcing President Kruger's flight, and in two letters which he addressed to General Botha and afterwards published for the information of the commandos. In these he called upon them to give up a useless struggle, which by this time had degenerated into mere guerilla warfare, the only result of which would be continued suffering and useless distress for their own countrymen and women. Generals, no doubt, often try to persuade their opponents that it is useless for them to continue the struggle without sufficient grounds for their contention, but in this case Lord Roberts certainly thought that it was only a question of a few months at most before the country would be brought to complete submission. So strongly was he persuaded of this, that he gave the home Government to understand that the war was practically over, and announced that he could spare some of his troops from the campaign.

On October 6th Buller's column, which had returned to Lydenburg on the 2nd, was broken up, as there seemed no further reason to retain the Natal Army as a separate command. On that day General Lyttelton was given charge of the north-eastern district of the Transvaal, and General
Sir Redvers Buller returned to England after the completion of a year's arduous and responsible work. His parting with the men who had stood by him in good and evil days with such steadfast courage was touching. They crowded down to the road along which he and his staff passed slowly away, cheering him to the echo. For the first time in the campaign the General's impassive face showed signs of emotion at this spontaneous tribute to the power which, whatever his faults may have been, he undoubtedly had of inspiring and keeping the enthusiastic devotion of the rank and file in his command. In the same month General Hutton gave up his mounted infantry brigade and returned home. He had previously proved his powers of organisation in peace time; during his six months in South Africa he further established his claim to high command by his quickness of decision and his energy in the field. Moreover, in spite of a slightly didactic method with the men, he had shown an enthusiastic appreciation, not always found in English generals, of the opportunity which this campaign gave for drawing the various colonies closer to the mother-country and to one another, by stimulating the sense of comradeship and of generous emulation among the different units of his own representative brigade.

During the months of October and November the Household Cavalry, the whole of the C.I.V. regiment with its battery, the Royal Canadian regiment and the Royal Canadian Dragoons, and other bodies of oversea colonials and South African volunteers were allowed to go home. Besides these, the Guards and two regular batteries were actually under orders for England during October, but were eventually detained.

His own task Lord Roberts now looked upon as ended. This, too, was the view of the Government, who, in the last week of September, informed him that he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief in England, in succession to Lord Wolseley, whose term of office had expired. He therefore made all preparations to relinquish the command in South Africa at the end of October. Owing to the serious illness of his elder daughter, he was unable to leave the Transvaal till the end of November; but before that date...
Lord Kitchener had already, to some extent, succeeded to his duties. After a brief visit to Natal he sailed to Cape Town, where he had an enthusiastic reception, and on December 11 embarked for England in H.M.S. Canada. On landing he was at once summoned to Osborne by the Queen, who created him an Earl and a Knight of the Garter.

Relying on this satisfactory aspect of affairs in South Africa, Lord Salisbury's Government thought it a suitable time to dissolve Parliament and call upon the electors for a fresh lease of power. They took full credit to themselves, not unnaturally, perhaps, for the apparent success of one of the greatest military undertakings upon which Great Britain had ever embarked, and felt entitled to demand authority to settle the permanent administration of the new colonies. Parliament was accordingly dissolved on September 25. The electors, no doubt much impressed by the declarations given to them as to the successful issue of the struggle, and reluctant to entrust the management of South African affairs to a party which had always opposed the policy of which the war was the outcome, again returned the Government to power. The Unionist majority was less, indeed, than that of the previous election of 1895, but, amounting as it did to 134, seemed a satisfactory response to the Government's appeal.* Possibly the nation, after their vast and most unforeseen effort in continuing the struggle on so great a scale, would not have extended their confidence so generously to the Government which had conducted it, had they realized that the war was by no means ended.

There was undoubtedly great justification for the opinion that little remained to be accomplished. Besides Lord Roberts and his military advisers, men who knew South Africa well were equally confident that the war was over. The Dutch at the Cape were convinced of the real completeness of the British victories; and on the English side, acute observers thought at the beginning of September that a week or ten days at most would see the end of the war. Mr. Rhodes himself, in a speech which he delivered to the South African League at the beginning of October, assumed, as a matter of

* In 1895 the Unionist Government's majority was 152.
course, that the military situation might be dismissed and that the most pressing question of practical politics was to discover the best means of welding the two opposing races into one harmonious whole under the British flag.

Nevertheless, even during the last two months of Lord Roberts’s tenure of the South African command, there were many indications that the war was not so near its close as these sanguine estimates had led most people to believe. The detailed history of these months belongs to the next volume, but a brief epitome will explain the situation. De Wet was reorganising the Free State commandos as early as September, and in October again took up the offensive with vigour. Before November was out, in spite of a damaging check at Bothaville, he had laid formal siege to two strong garrison towns, had taken one by open assault, and was threatening Cape Colony with invasion in force, while from his followers came a whole series of sporadic attacks on fortified posts and convoys. In the Transvaal also the symptoms were ominous. French, during October, made a long and profitless march from Barberton through Carolina and Heidelberg to Pretoria. In its course he had, it is true, more trouble in preserving his own transport from exhaustion than in dealing with the enemy who hovered about him; but it was plain that his immunity from serious attack was due more to his opponents’ unwillingness to interfere with so large a force under so redoubtable a general, than to any inclination on their part to submission. Methuen, Hart, Clements, and other generals in the west, and Lyttelton in the east were all busily engaged; and one of Lord Roberts’s last acts was to send Paget against Viljoen, who had raised a formidable gathering in the north. The railways everywhere were subjected to constant attack and damage; indeed the very troops returning home found it unsafe to travel at night along the main line, and occasionally were called out to deal with marauders in the neighbourhood of their own trains.

Without doubt, Lord Roberts, quick and alert as he was, failed to grasp the significance of these symptoms; to the very end he thought, after the dispersal of the main Boer army under Botha, that all the rest was a mere matter of
police, and that all difficulties could be solved by the various columns, to which he assigned the charge of districts in the conquered colonies.* Even at Cape Town on his way home

* As early as August 25 the following circular was issued by the Chief of the Staff. The instructions illustrate the prevalent idea on the headquarters staff that the suppression of a few rebels was the only task left to be accomplished.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GENERAL OFFICERS COMMANDING COLUMNS IN ORANGE RIVER COLONY AND THE TRANSVAAL.

1. In order to ensure public security in the country, it is considered advisable that mobile columns should act in certain districts with the object of putting down any open rebellion, of removing all horses and forage, and of collecting cattle and live stock belonging to all those who after laying down their arms and taking the oath of neutrality have again gone on commando, or whose sons may have gone on commando.

2. Although rough limits have been assigned to each column, where necessity arises the nearest force available should act irrespective of the boundaries laid down.

3. Each commander will immediately take steps against any known rebel in his district, and will be careful, by organising a system of agents for intelligence throughout his district, to keep himself fully informed of any disaffection.

4. Whilst giving protection to loyal inhabitants in his district, the general officer commanding will see that the country is so denuded of forage and supplies that no means of subsistence is left for any commando attempting to make any incursions.

LIMITS OF THE VARIOUS DISTRICTS.

1. **Northern Column**—Maj.-Genl. A. H. Paget commanding.
   This column is based on the Pietersburg Railway, and has charge of the country between the Crocodile and Olifant’s River, from Waterval northwards.

   This column is based on Commando Nek, and has charge of the Hebron, Rustenburg, and Hekpoort districts, and of the country between Pretoria, Krugersdorp, and Johannesburg.

   Based on the Potchefstroom Railway, and operates north of the Vaal to Losberg, the Gatsrand, Krugersdorp, Ventersdorp, and Klerksdorp.

   Based on Mafeking and Zeerust, and operates to Lichtenburg, Tafelkop, Rustenburg, and to the left bank of Crocodile River below its junction with Elands River.

The above distribution does not affect the command of troops on the
at the beginning of December, and almost on the eve of one of the greatest defeats which befell the British arms during the war, he reiterated the opinion that the war was "practi-
cally over."

In truth Lord Roberts now, as all through the war, was so fully able to deal with any combinations in the field which the Boers might bring against him, that he never fully realised the nature of the Boer resistance. He could not understand their desire to prolong the struggle, which seemed to him, and which no doubt really was hopeless. In the first place, he hardly appreciated the fact that their strength was not to be measured solely by their armies in the field. The Boers were never dismayed for long by a dispersal of their organised forces, for they always looked on guerilla warfare as the real method of dealing with the invader, a method which enabled every able-bodied man to take part in the struggle whenever he felt inclined. Secondly, Lord Roberts was misled by the prompti-
tude with which surrenders followed each of his successes.

Orange River Colony Districts.

   (i.) Northern Column.—Based on Vrede, and operating to Reitz, Frankfort, Standerton, and the Natal Railway.
   (ii.) Southern Column.—Based on Harrismith, and operating to Fouriesburg, Bethlehem, Reitz, and eastwards through Newmarket.

   (i.) Northern Column.—Maj.-Genl. A. H. MacDonald, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.—Based on Heilbron, and operating to Frankfort, Reitz, Lindley, Kroonstad, and the east of main line railway.
   (ii.) Southern Column.—Maj.-Genl. Bruce Hamilton.—Based on Kroonstad, and operating to Lindley, Senekal, Winburg, Ventersburg, and east of railway.

   Based on Kroonstad, and operating thence along the main line to the Vaal, and throughout the country between the railway and the river as far as Bothaville.

The above distribution does not affect the command of troops on the lines of railway and responsibility for its safety as already defined elsewhere.
Many of these surrenders were due to a genuine belief that it would be wrong to fight any longer against fate, but most were subject to the implied condition, which was often not fulfilled, that those surrendering would be protected from the temptation of rejoining their friends still on commando. Above all, he did not make sufficient allowance for the patriotic stubbornness of the great majority of the Boers, nor realise that they were doing, and intended to do, exactly what the British people, or any people with a spark of self-respect, would do under similar circumstances. It was useless explaining to such men, just as it would have been useless explaining to Englishmen under like conditions, that they would have fuller liberty, and a better form of government under the British flag than under their own. The fact remained that they cared deeply for their independence, and wished to govern themselves in their own way, in a country which they had conquered with their own arms. Lord Roberts's inability to understand this spirit cannot be better exemplified than by the succession of proclamations which he issued from his first entry into the Free State till the end of his term in command of the South African forces.

On entering the Free State in February, 1900, he issued his first proclamation to the burghers of that Republic, declaring in terms customary in like cases that the quarrel of the British nation was rather with the Boer Government than with the people, whom they were "anxious to preserve from the evils brought upon them by the wrongful action of their Government." It warned them to desist from hostility, and promised that those found staying in their homes "would not be made to suffer in their persons or property on account of their having taken up arms in obedience to the order of their Government." It promised that everything requisitioned would be paid for on the spot at market rates, and announced that orders had been issued prohibiting soldiers from entering private houses, molesting the civil population, or injuring property. That was the unexceptionable spirit in which the invasion of the Republican territories was begun, and, despite the bitter feelings which had been caused by the Boer ravages in
Natal, these humane and laudable intentions were for long carried into practice with such excessive regard for the interests of the enemy and the rights of private property that British soldiers were subjected to many privations which might have been avoided had their officers allowed them to diverge from a strict interpretation of their orders.

On March 15, another proclamation offered to burghers, who laid down their arms and took an oath to abstain from further participation in the war, a free pass to return to their homes, and a promise that they would not be made prisoners of war, or deprived of their property. In the northern districts of Cape Colony the inhabitants were at the same time warned that any further act of rebellion would be treated with the utmost rigour. Again, on crossing the Vaal, Lord Roberts proclaimed that "personal safety and freedom from molestation" were guaranteed to the non-combatant population of the South African Republic, and recapitulated for the benefit of the Transvaal the advantages already offered to Free Staters on taking the oath to abstain from further hostilities.

But there were already signs that this lenient policy was not without difficulties; and contemporaneously with the last proclamation the depredations of guerilla bands upon the railways caused the issue of the first proclamation containing anything in the nature of a threat. The Transvaalers were warned that though every possible protection would be given to them, and that everything taken would be paid for, yet that residents in any locality would be held responsible in their persons and property for any damage to railways or telegraphs or any violence to British troops, which occurred near their homes.

On June 1, a proclamation declared that, inasmuch as the Orange River Colony was now British territory, all inhabitants thereof found in arms within fourteen days would "be liable to be dealt with as rebels and to suffer in person and property accordingly." At the same time it was ordered that all arms should be given up. This endeavour to attribute to the fighting burghers a different status from that which they had possessed before, by virtue
of a proclamation of annexation which the Boers considered null and void, was not a judicious measure. The death penalty was never enforced upon burghers from the fact of their being taken in arms, nor was it ever intended to be enforced, while few rifles were given up, and the failure of the proclamation to effect its declared purpose tended rather towards the spread of a belief that the British were unable to enforce their own edicts.

On June 16, as a consequence of the continued destruction of railways, a proclamation of greater severity was issued to the effect that since such acts could not be done "without the knowledge or connivance of the neighbouring inhabitants, and principal civil residents," they would be held responsible for aiding and abetting the offenders, would be made prisoners of war, and that their houses would be burnt if the practice continued. This was amplified by a second edict of the same character on June 19, which, among other things, enacted that residents in the various districts might be carried on trains, as hostages for their compatriots' good behaviour. This provision, however, was repealed a few weeks later. Both these proclamations were founded on precedents set by the Germans in 1871. Their uselessness in the present instance arose from the fact that the persons who were ordained to suffer were not the mobile commandos who did the damage, but peaceful Boers who had surrendered.

During July and August it was found that burghers who had surrendered were resuming hostilities, and Lord Roberts began to realise that the policy of trust in them was a mistake. On August 14, therefore, a new proclamation informed the Transvaalers that personal safety and freedom from molestation were no longer guaranteed except to burghers who had already taken the oath, and that, with the same exception, passes would no longer be issued to enable burghers surrendering to return to their homes; that all burghers who had not taken the oath would be regarded as prisoners of war and "transported or otherwise dealt with as I may determine." Lord Roberts went on to say that buildings harbouring the enemy would be liable to be razed to the ground, and that burghers failing to
acquaint the British with the presence of the enemy upon their farms would be regarded as aiding and abetting the enemy. A similar edict of September 1 applied the same rules to the Orange River Colony. By Government notices of September 22 and 28 it was stated that burghers voluntarily surrendering would not be sent out of South Africa; that stock and supplies of men on commando or of those who had broken their oath were to be taken and no receipt given; and that the houses of leaders of bands of snipers would be burnt. As a consequence of this proclamation a considerable number of farmhouses were burnt. But, owing to the outcry which this policy aroused in England, on November 18, "as there appeared to be some misunderstanding with reference to the burning of farms and breaking of dams," Lord Roberts issued the following order, which in effect, though not admittedly so, constituted a change of policy: "No farm is to be burnt except for an act of treachery, or when troops have been fired on from the premises, or as punishment for breaking of railway or telegraph line, or when they have been used as bases of operation for raids, and then only with the direct consent of the general officer commanding, which is to be given in writing; the mere fact of a burgher being absent on commando is on no account to be used as a reason for burning the house. All cattle, wagons, and foodstuffs are to be removed from all farms; if that is found to be impossible, they are to be destroyed, whether the owner be present or not." Such was, in brief, the substance of the guidance that had been given to commanders in the field as to their treatment of the Boers.

The reason for these changes of policy is obvious. At the beginning, Lord Roberts, with much justification, believed that the Boers were genuinely anxious to surrender. On finding that he was mistaken, he attempted to intimidate oath-breakers and even consistent fighters by a show of authority which had no effective sanction of force. The mistake of scattering a litter of conflicting proclamations over the country was that they were practically without effect. The almost paternal tenderness of the earlier edicts
and the Draconian severity of the latter were equally treated with derision and contempt. Some Boers read one proclamation, and some another; the majority of the fighting burghers never read any at all. The only enduring memory was that while one British commander would promise protection, which he was unable to afford, to burghers who remained on their farms, another would carry them off as prisoners of war, thus causing them to make perfectly baseless but apparently reasonable accusations against their enemy's good faith.

It would no doubt have been more truly lenient, and have caused less suffering in the end, if from the outset all men capable of bearing arms who wished to surrender had been confined with their families to towns under the constant supervision of British troops. They would thus have had no temptation to return to the commandos. In that case it might have been good policy to burn down farmsteads and destroy crops as an act of military necessity, in order to prevent the men left in the field from profiting by them. But the policy fitfully adopted after the beginning of June of burning down farmhouses and destroying crops as a measure of intimidation had nothing to recommend it, and no other measure aroused such deep and lasting feelings of resentment. The Dutch race is not one that can easily be beguiled by promises, or moved by threats; farm-burning as a policy of intimidation totally failed, as any one acquainted with the Dutch race and Dutch history could have foreseen. British officers who had served on the Indian frontier had been accustomed to the destruction of the towns and villages of the tribesmen as a normal act of war, inseparable from the conduct of hostilities. In the ordinary course a frontier campaign begins with a raid upon British territory, is followed by the forward march of an avenging column, and ends by the defeat of the tribesmen in the field, the destruction of their towers and dwellings, and the submission of the foe after the imposition of a fine. The application of a system which, even in India, has long provoked criticism and disapproval, to the conditions of a campaign against a white race defending their homes with a
bravery and resource which have rightly won the admiration of the world, was the least happy of Lord Roberts's inspirations, and must be plainly set down as a serious error of judgment, due to the fact that he persisted in regarding the Boers, when once their chief towns had been occupied, not as regular combatants, but as rebels who rather required punishment than defeat.

II

But although Lord Roberts misapprehended the strength and nature of the Boer resistance, and left work for his successor not destined to be accomplished without eighteen more months of arduous fighting, he had nevertheless, when he left the country, brought the war to a stage at which it would be impossible for the English to avoid completing their victory, given their determination to carry on the struggle with no abatement of energy.

The history of the remaining months of the war served to prove Lord Roberts's wisdom in securing, from the first, the great trunk lines of communication. For an army fighting thousands of miles away from its first base, against a scattered and highly mobile adversary, the possession of these lines was indispensable. As long as the English held the line from Cape Town to Pretoria, from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay, and from Pretoria to Durban, so long would they always be able to supply themselves and to maintain their grip on the country, and at the same time to cut off the Boers from all regular means of securing fresh supplies or reinforcements; thus practically limiting the struggle till the day when all the supplies to be obtained from the farms had been exhausted. This fact is the real justification for the rapid advances to Pretoria and to Komati Poort, however much it may be questioned whether Lord Roberts might not have dealt harder blows to the Boers in the process of securing the railways. The failure to reduce the Boer forces during the last few months of his command no doubt helped to prolong the war, but a failure to occupy the railways might have proved fatal. Another important point achieved was that Lord Roberts
by his great marches, in which he traversed both republics almost from end to end, fully justified himself in the important step of annexing the republics to the British Crown. He has been criticised for taking this step before the complete subjugation of the country was an accomplished fact, but with little justice. The annexation of the republics at the earliest possible moment was a necessity, if only in order to prove to the Boers and to the world in general, that England meant to finish her task. However much opinions differed as to the causes and initial justice of the war, it was agreed upon by both parties in England, by the leaders of the Liberal opposition quite as much as by the Government, that annexation was the only possible solution when the war had once begun. Most of the colonies also, from the first, had strongly supported this solution. It was only just therefore to give the Boers warning at the earliest possible opportunity of England’s fixed resolve, so that they should not continue the struggle under the false impression that they might retain their independence.

Besides proclaiming the annexation of the two States, Lord Roberts had taken steps at an early stage to make it plain that the English intended to administer them as far as possible by regular methods of civil government. At the beginning of October, enlistment was begun for a force of South African Constabulary of a semi-military nature, not unlike the North-West Mounted Police in Canada. The command of this force was given to General Baden-Powell, and the other officers were mostly seconded from the regular Army. It was to have duties extending over both the new colonies. In the Orange River Colony it will be remembered that one of Lord Roberts’s first acts on entering Bloemfontein had been to appoint General Pretyman military governor and to give him a general supervision over the gradually extending area of occupied territory.* In spite of the disturbed state of the country, by the end of November a satisfactory record had been made of progress accomplished. Thirteen district commissioners had been appointed, whose spheres of activity

* See chap. i., p. 11.
nominally covered almost the whole Colony; as long as they were not disturbed by Boer marauders they administered justice, re-established schools, and collected a small amount of revenue. In Bloemfontein itself, although martial law still existed, many signs of regular government were apparent. Customs were collected, the post office and banks were open, and the administration of orphans' estates was carried on by the late government's officials. In the Transvaal, civil government had not made the same progress as in the sister colony. A few district commissioners were appointed in such places as Zeerust,* but their duration of office was apt to be cut short by the necessity of abandoning to the Boers the headquarters of their district. In Pretoria General Maxwell exercised a benevolent autocracy, and Sir Alfred Milner's Imperial Secretary, Mr. Fiddes, advised Lord Roberts on civil questions. In Johannesburg it was found impossible, as long as the railways were required almost exclusively for military supplies and the movement of troops, to allow the mines to resume work or the leading business men to return, so that Colonel MacKenzie's chief duties consisted in controlling and feeding the somewhat disorderly population left in the town, and in recovering and preserving the property of refugees. Two commissions were also sent out by the home Government: one under Mr. Arnold Forster, to investigate the facilities for land settlement in both colonies; and another under Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, to examine the conditions under which concessions and monopolies had been granted by President Kruger's government in the Transvaal.

Natal, in spite of stray commandos on the borders, had been entirely freed from rebellion, and in Cape Colony there had been no further sign of rebellion since the suppression of the Prieska and Griqualand West risings, in spite of threatening language and open expression of discontent at meetings of the Bond party. Moreover, the difficulties of administration had been to a certain extent removed by the resignation of the Schreiner ministry. After the suppression of the rebellion a discussion arose with the home Government as to the punishment to be meted out to

* See chap. vi., p. 225.
rebels, the total number of whom was estimated at 10,000. The Schreiner ministry, arguing from the precedent of the Canadian rebellion of 1837-8, in the first instance advocated clemency to all but the ringleaders. In answer to this proposal Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the circumstances were very different, as the rebels in Cape Colony had constitutional government and no grievance of their own, but had nevertheless joined the forces of an enemy invading the Queen's dominions; whereas, in Canada, the rebels had legitimate grievances which were removed as a consequence of the rebellion; as a pure matter of self-defence it was necessary to mark the gravity of rebellion. After some interchange of correspondence with the home Government, Mr. Schreiner himself, supported by his Attorney-General, Mr. Solomon, and by Mr. Herholdt, proposed as a compromise between clemency and the sterner measures originally suggested by Mr. Chamberlain, that while the leaders should be subject to severe punishments for high treason, the rank and file of the rebels, when condemned by special courts appointed for the purpose, should be let off with no further punishment than disfranchisement for five years. This proposal met the views of the home Government and of Sir Alfred Milner, but the three remaining members of the Cabinet, Mr. Merriman, Mr. Te Water, and Mr. Sauer, frankly objected to any punishment at all for the rebels. In this they were irreconcilable, and, as they had Mr. Hofmeyr and the whole strength of the Afrikaner Bond behind them, the Cabinet split on this rock. Mr. Schreiner was succeeded as Premier by Sir Gordon Sprigg, the veteran Cape politician, who formed a Progressive ministry without the aid of the Bond, which had the majority in the Legislative Assembly. However, helped by one or two of the late ministry, such as Mr. Schreiner and Mr. Solomon, and by a few of its former supporters, Sir Gordon succeeded in passing, on October 12, by a majority of nine votes, an Act of Indemnity and Special Tribunals, substantially the same as Mr. Schreiner's.

The failure of the Schreiner ministry lightened Sir Alfred Milner's heavy task, and was at that time a great advantage
The Hon. W. P. Schreiner, K.C., C.M.G.
Prime Minister of Cape Colony, 1898-1900.

Photo by Elliott & Fry.
to the British cause, for half the Cabinet almost openly sympathised with the republics. But the eclipse, for the time being at any rate, of Mr. Schreiner himself from Cape politics was a great loss. The word "trimmer" has acquired an evil significance in political language, but there is no one to whom Mr. Schreiner can better be compared than to the first "trimmer," Lord Halifax. His rigid conscientiousness and his subtle mind made it impossible for him to be a hot-headed partisan on any side, for he could never blind himself to the good points which every cause must contain. It was said, for instance, of one of his speeches in the Assembly, that it was cheered by both parties, though never at the same time. He had always looked upon the war as a calamity, and thought it might have been avoided. Accordingly, up to the eve of hostilities, he had obstructed, as far as possible, the most necessary measures of defence, lest they should seem provocative to the Boers. But, the die once cast, he was invaluable to Sir Alfred Milner, who always appealed with success to his sense of duty as a servant of the Crown in a colony invaded by the Queen's enemies. Thus always, after persuasion, he not only approved, but even succeeded in carrying his Cabinet's approval, of the proclamation of martial law in the districts overrun with rebellion. Although at first the subject of considerable obloquy from the English party in the Cape, and latterly from the Bond party, in the end he received the respect of all men, from the Governor downwards, for his sincerity and his valiant attempts at peace and conciliation.*

Outside South Africa the effect of Lord Roberts's victories was equally great. In England the Unionist Government's majority was gained chiefly on the strength of them. On the Continent the danger of intervention from powers unfriendly to England was entirely removed, when once they recognised that she not only meant to carry on the work she had undertaken, but had also found a man capable of the task. Admiration for England's determined efforts and for Lord Roberts's capacity and vigour accounted indeed as much for the revulsion of feeling in Europe as the con-
Failure of the Boer delegates in Europe and America.

Consideration that, after the occupation of Pretoria and the capture of the Delagoa Bay railway, whereby all communication from the outside world with the Boers was cut off, it seemed hopeless to make any attempt at active intervention in the Transvaal.

No better illustration could be given of the change of feeling on the Continent than by the poor welcome given to the Boer delegates, Messrs. Wolmarans, Fischer and Wessels, in their tour to all the chief capitals.* On March 13, the day that Lord Roberts entered Bloemfontein, they had embarked at Lourenço Marques. After passing through Rome they arrived on April 15 at the Hague, where they were received by the Queen and her Foreign Minister, and announced their intention of going to the United States to obtain the restoration of peace. But they received cold comfort in the formal reception given them by the Secretary of State and President McKinley; while the American newspapers told them plainly that there was no hope of intervention. In Berlin and St. Petersburg they were refused any official reception. Even in France, where a generous feeling of sympathy for the Boers, as an oppressed nation, was perhaps stronger and more genuine than in any other country, although they were received by the President, they obtained no substantial assurances. The only piece of consolation which they got was that the International Peace Congress at Paris on October 1st and 2nd passed resolutions against the annexation of the two republics, but even this Congress toned down a resolution proposed by some of the English delegates, calling our conduct of the war a crime. So changed, indeed, had become the attitude of other nations to England, even after the first of Lord Roberts's successes, that on May 10 Lord Salisbury was able to speak of the careful and calm neutrality observed by all foreign governments.

Thus, after a little over ten months of command in an area of territory three or four times as large as Great Britain and Ireland, Lord Roberts, though precipitate in stating that the war was at an end, could fairly have said that he had

* See chap. ii., p. 23.
brought the war to such a state that if England persisted her victory was absolutely assured. Such rapid success in a difficult country, almost barren of supplies, is due above all to the immense superiority which the command of the sea gives to a country like England. As long as she was determined to win, and could pour in men and animals and supplies of all kinds, not only from Great Britain, but from the whole of Europe, from America, from Asia, and Australia, there could be no real doubt as to the ultimate issue. For the readiness of the fleet not only kept the waterways open for England, but closed them almost entirely to the Boers, who were thus left chiefly to their own slender resources. The only danger that ever menaced the Empire was that the military commanders on the spot might be so slow in using the advantage which England's unbeaten fleet gave her, that the English people might become tired of the expense and length of the struggle and give it up prematurely. Lord Roberts had averted the possibility of this calamity. More even than his actual military achievements, his boldness and his magnificent rapidity had conquered the imagination of his countrymen and turned their dogged resistance against defeat into a determination to have complete victory, while on the field of war he had reversed the positions of invaders and invaders, and had begun to teach the Boers the lesson, so hard for them to learn, that the English were equally determined and more powerful than themselves.

Whatever the resources of a nation, and however good its organisation, it can do nothing without men of an original and alert mind, able to adapt the machinery of organisation to meet the varying changes of circumstances, which occur in war more than in any other event in human life. Such a man had England found in Lord Roberts. At an age when most men feel that their life's work is done he plunged into an entirely novel form of campaign and, as if by a magician's wand, entirely changed its aspect. It is not that Lord Roberts was always right in his operations, or that he always fully estimated the problems before him, but he had the great merit of alertness in recognising mistakes and
a most glorious optimism which urged him forward and helped him to impose his will upon his adversaries. No man who had not led a temperate and energetic life, or who was not animated by the keenest patriotism and self-confidence, could have done or even have ventured to attempt what Lord Roberts accomplished. His chief fault was that found in all great commanders, of doing too much for himself. In a man of Lord Roberts's physique and driving power such a fault can easily be condoned. But though he trusted chiefly in himself, he never under-estimated the influence of personality in his officers. Those to whom Lord Roberts gave most responsibility may have made mistakes, but they were all men of spirit and dash, while those of whom he made little use, whatever may have been their other merits, generally lacked the magnetism or the enterprise essential for high command. In dealing with his men he showed truly Irish tact and sympathy, traits which have not always been a characteristic of great British commanders. This tact and sympathy did not show themselves in appeals to the passing emotions of the soldier, but in a far-sighted and constant care for their high character and for the grandeur of their calling. For instance, it would have occurred to few commanders as it did to Lord Roberts, when he himself was still in South Africa and his first troops were returning to England, to write home his nobly-worded letter to the newspapers in which he asked kind friends not to "tempt his gallant comrades" by excessive hospitality, but rather "to aid them to uphold the splendid reputation they have won for the Imperial Army." A man of Lord Roberts's high bearing, of his chivalry, his courtesy, and his alert originality does more for the British Army than any system modelled on a plan, however admirable, which is not moved by the living spirit.