CHAPTER II.

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR.

IT is impossible to understand the cause of this quarrel without going a long way back—back, in fact, to the beginning of the century. After the Great Prisoner had been immured in St. Helena's lonely isle, Great Britain was allowed by the Powers to retain possession of Cape Colony, with other Dutch territory, upon paying to Holland £6,000,000. Cape Town, and the district round it, had been colonised originally by the Dutch East India Company, and many farmers had emigrated thither. Thither also went large numbers of French Protestants, two centuries ago, when their own fair land was made an impossible abode for men who dared to believe according to their conscience. But after the Cape became a British possession, a few English and Scots went there too, and became farmers and traders.

The farms were largely worked by the labour of slaves, the original black inhabitants of the country. In 1833 slavery was abolished wherever the British flag floated, and Parliament voted an enormous sum of money by way of compensation to slave-owners. It was alleged, and it may be true, that the Boers of Cape Colony did not receive their fair share of compensation. At all events, in a few years' time they found themselves with ruin staring them in the face. And so in 1833, and right on to 1837, a large number, many hundreds, packed up their household chattels in waggons, drove their flocks and herds before them, shouldered their muskets, and trekked forth into the wilderness.

They settled to the north of the Orange River, and some even crossed the Vaal.
River, a stream which runs westward and southward, and eventually pours its intermittent waters into the Orange River. They subdued the country, fought and defeated the Zulus, Basutos, Bechuana, and other native tribes; and there they lived for nearly twenty years, farming and hunting. As for government, they thought little of it. Each isolated householder kept order in his own domain. The British Government laid claim to their allegiance, but it was given grudgingly, or not at all, until at last, by the agreement of 1852, known as the Sand River Convention, "the Dutch African Republic," or Transvaal, was recognised as independent. British emigrants had been pouring in on the North-East, and had largely colonised the country now known as Natal, of which possession was formally taken by Great Britain in 1843.

The Sand River Convention carved out as independent Boer territory an enormous tract of country north of the Vaal and south of the Limpopo or Crocodile River, extending east to Delagoa Bay, and west from the Marico River to Fourteen Streams, a country of 110,000 square miles, or 20,000 square miles greater than Great Britain. In 1854 the British Government further conferred independence on those Boers who had trekked north of the Orange, but south of the Vaal, under the style of the Orange Free State. The Free Staters, from that day to the year 1899, lived at peace, and apparently in amity, with the subjects of the Queen, who formed their southern, eastern, and western neighbours; and, their country being a fertile one and well enough watered, they speedily became a solid, sober nation of pastoral and agricultural farmers. Their national history, happily, was uneventful.

But with the Dutch African Republic—afterwards called "The South African Republic"—matters were very different. These men seemed to comprise the whole of the more fanatical part of the trekkers—stern Calvinists: more like the Westland Whigs whom Claverhouse hated than like any other men of whom we know. They were the Chosen People. The blacks were the race of Ham—the Hivites and the Hittites, who must either be exterminated or made to labour for the superior race. They passed the **Grond Wet**, or Fundamental Law, declaring that they would "admit of no equality of persons of colour with the white inhabitants either in Church or State." This spirit brought about troubles with the natives; and there were massacres; and vengeances; and more massacres. They even quarrelled with and invaded the Orange Free State in 1857, and tried to impose a union upon the Free Staters. In 1868 Delagoa Bay was annexed—on paper—by Pretorius, the President; but on Britain and Portugal putting in rival claims, the matter was referred to arbitration, and Marshal MacMahon awarded the Bay and the territory a few miles inland to Portugal, which was a blessing in disguise to the Transvaal, as she has discovered in this war.

In 1875 the burghers entered upon a war with Sikokuni, a native chief, and had by no means the best of it. Then Great Britain tried to prevail upon the two Boer States to agree to a federation of themselves, Natal, and Cape Colony; and this might have been accomplished but for the action of the Cape Ministry of the day. The reason assigned for this was the danger from the natives, who were everywhere restless. The Zulus were, in fact, having very much the best of a war that was raging between the Boers and themselves. Then, in 1877 Britain inter-
THE BOERS RESENT TAXATION.

They formed a secret combination. And at last, just before Christmas of 1880, a large party of farmers met to celebrate the defeat of Dingaan by Pretorius,* rose in open revolt to resist the seizure of a farmer’s waggon, which had been distrained.

A BOER FATHER AND SON READY FOR THE FRONT.

After the Zulu War, in 1879, in which many Boers fought with us against the natives, some taxation was imposed on the Transvaal to help to meet the expenses. Now the Boers, under their own government, had hardly known the meaning of taxation, and they prepared to resist. They accumulated in every farmhouse stores of ammunition. They bought the best rifles; they formed a secret combination. And at last, just before Christmas of 1880, a large party of farmers met to celebrate the defeat of Dingaan by Pretorius,* rose in open revolt to resist the seizure of a farmer’s waggon, which had been distrained.

* Dingaan was a Zulu chief, who almost exterminated the Transvaalers. After defeating them several times and overrunning the country, he was met near the Buffalo River in 1840 by the last force possible for the Boers to collect, and defeated with such slaughter that his power was broken. The Boer general, Pretorius, was ever afterwards regarded as the saviour of his country; and the capital of the young republic was named after him—Pretoria. The anniversary of Dingaan’s Day is the great Transvaal festival of the year.
upon for taxes. Over a thousand burghers there assembled took an oath not to lay down their arms until independence had been achieved. As each man’s turn came, he picked up a stone, and, when he had finished taking the oath, he cast it from him, until gradually a cairn was made. This was at Paardekraal.

The burghers acted with great promptitude, and, to cut a long story short, eventually met and defeated a small force of British soldiers, under Sir George Colley, at Majuba Hill, near the place where Natal, the Free State, and the Transvaal meet. The shooting of the Boers was so deadly that almost every man who showed himself
WHAT IS SUZERAINITY?

was shot. Sir Evelyn Wood was ordered to quell the rising, and Lord Roberts was also despatched from India. But nothing further was done. The British Government had previously made up its mind to grant independence to the enemy, and a Convention was signed for that purpose on March 21st, 1881.

As the preamble of this Convention gave rise to much dispute, it will be well to summarise it. It declared that the British Government accorded “complete self-government, subject to the suzerainty of Her Majesty, her Heirs and Successors.”

In 1884 a further agitation was begun in the Transvaal for a revision of the 1881 Convention, and in 1884 the British Government consented to a revision. The Convention of London (1884), as it was called, declared that “the following articles of a new Convention should be substituted for those of” the 1881 Convention. It is somewhat important to notice this, because, since the Convention of London did not mention suzerainty, it was contended that suzerainty had been tacitly abolished or purposely dropped.

The words last quoted hardly seem to bear that construction on the face of them; but it is impossible for any person to speak with real impartiality on the subject, and it probably will be so for many years to come, because the matter has been made one of party politics. And where party politics begin, farewell to impartial judgment. The Macaulay of 1950 will, perhaps, be able to solve the problem. It is certain, however, that “suzerainty” was an unfortunate word to use. “Suzerain” is a feudal term, adopted by us from the French; and it describes this state of things: Suppose, for example, the King of France granted a province to a nobleman, as he did to the first Duke of Normandy. The nobleman, being a vassal of the king, was bound to render him the services contracted for when the grant was made—generally, services in war. The great vassal let out the land in smaller parcels to counts and knights, who became bound to serve him, and these to farmers and husbandmen, who became bound to serve them. Now, the King of France was the suzerain or over-lord of that province. But his powers regarding it were of the slightest—as witness the relations of the Dukes of Normandy and Burgundy with their suzerains, the French kings. Technically, the great vassal owned the suzerain assistance in time of war and certain irregular occasional payments in money or in kind; and he was bound not to make war upon his over-lord.

This state of things, which is really suzerainty, could not possibly be supposed to describe the relations intended to be established between Britain and the South African Republic. And, therefore, the term was one of those loose, misleading words, sure at some time to lead to dispute; because its plain, grammatical, legal meaning not being the true interpretation, each side tried to put on it a gloss to suit its own purposes.

This also seems certain: that the Boer view of “suzerainty” was not the British view. The Convention of 1884 contained two other provisions which led to dispute. One was Article 7, which guaranteed to British subjects and loyalists resident in the Transvaal on August 8th, 1881, full civil rights and protection for their persons and property. Article, 14 guaranteed to all persons (other than natives) full liberty to enter, reside, or travel, possess landed property of all kinds, carry on trade and commerce in the republic, without being subject to any taxes, general or local, other than those imposed uponburghers.
Not very long after the Convention of London the Transvaalers showed some disposition to extend their boundaries; and, largely to prevent trouble with the natives, who have always hated the Transvaal Dutch, but partly, also, to protect them from oppression, the British Government hoisted the Union Jack in Bechuanaland and proclaimed a protectorate there. This was in March, 1885, and it had the effect of confining the new republic to the Limpopo as its western as well as its northern boundary, and of preventing any possible expansion of territory.

The subsequent seizure and colonisation of the country of the Matabele by the Chartered Company of South Africa also shut them in to the north, and left the two Boer republics absolutely surrounded by British territory, except for a strip of the eastern frontier of the Transvaal, marching with Portuguese East Africa (Delagoa Bay).

Here they might have remained peaceful enough, attending to their flocks and herds, their sowing and reaping, had it not been for one fact, which altered the whole aspect of South Africa, and created again a South African question.

In 1886 gold was discovered in the Middleburg district of the Transvaal. More was found in the Witwatersrand. And immediately the little township of Johannesburg, about twenty-five miles away from Pretoria, began to receive the inrush of the hordes who came to hunt for the precious metal. Soon Johannesburg became the largest and most prosperous town in South Africa, and the population was a population of all nations, but chiefly British subjects.

It was the discovery of the gold that made war possible; for it produced the Outlander question, and it led to the Jameson Raid. Finally, it made the Transvaal rich, and thus enabled the burghers to accumulate warlike stores, to construct fortifications, to hire officers from Europe, to employ mercenaries, to convert Pretoria into one of the most formidable arsenals in the world, and to make the South African Republic the best-armed State in Africa. In 1885 the revenue was £177,876. In 1898 it was £3,983,560, and of this £321,651 was from mining prospectors’ licences, £668,951 from railway receipts—principally connected with the Rand—and £1,066,994 from Customs, due to the large increase of population on the Rand.

In course of time the Outlanders, as the new population was called, outnumbered the Boer farmers, who regarded the immigrants from the first with mistrust and dislike. For although, as a mining city, Johannesburg was never a centre of lawlessness, vice and debauchery such as were found in the early Californian and Australian goldfields—since the Rand mining was conducted by machinery, and was necessarily an organised industry—yet the pious Calvinistic farmers regarded with horror a town where night was turned into day, where the Sabbath was not strictly observed, and where theatres and music-halls existed. Imagine, if you can, what would have been thought of such a place by the Scottish Whig farmers of Wigton and Dumfries in 1600, or even in 1800, and you may have some idea of the Boer feeling.

Ere long the Rand population began to agitate. They found themselves governed, policed, judged by a set of men whom they regarded as ignorant bigots; lazy, unprogressive. They found themselves paying nearly all the taxes, and having no voice
in the spending of them. The Volksraad, or republican parliament, was elected by Boers only. Taxation was adjusted, so they said, in order that they, the men who were "making the country" by their capital and their brains, might be practically the only taxpayers. Their children were obliged to be taught in a hybrid Dutch patois, or else not go to school at all. Dynamite, an essential in Rand mining, was only obtainable from a concessionnaire, who had bought the monopoly of it from the Government. They were taxed far more heavily than the needs of government required. They had not even the municipal franchise. They complained that there was no justice—in the inferior courts, at all events—between Boer and stranger. They even complained of the corruption of the Government. This was the Outlander question. The time has not yet come when a historian can decide on the rights of this quarrel. Here it is merely intended to state both sides as fairly as may be.

The Boers replied:—We will not give you the franchise in any way on an equality with ourselves, because you outnumber us, and to do this would be national suicide. In President Kruger's words, "How can strangers govern my State?" As to taxation, you come here to get rich; you take your riches literally out of our soil. It is only fair that you should pay more heavily than others. Lastly, we know that you Englishers wish to make this a British State. We will not submit to lose our independence.

After a time, the British Outlanders appealed to their parent Government to interfere; and some remonstrance was addressed to President Kruger. While pourparlers were being exchanged, an association called the Reform Committee appealed to Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the controlling head of the Chartered Company, a man of vast wealth and influence only surpassed by his ambition, to aid them. And eventually it was agreed that a rising should take place in Johannesburg; and that, if need be, a force of the Chartered Company's men should march from Rhodesia through Bechuanaland and assist the Johannesburgers by policing the town and protecting the women and children.

Dr. Jameson was then administrator of Rhodesia; and he, in December, 1895, got together about 600 men, all mounted, with some Maxim guns, and marched from Mafeking over the Transvaal border. But the movement failed for want of concert.

The Johannesburgers, who had been obliged to arm secretly, were not yet ready to rise when, on Monday, the 30th of December, 1895, they heard that "Dr. Jim" and his men were at Krugersdorp, a point about twenty miles west of the golden city. The Boer Executive had been better informed—in time, in fact, to gather together a force of burghers who blocked the way to the Rand. The republican force met the raiders after these had been marching for ninety hours almost continuously.

Men and horses were tired out when, on the 1st of January a rifle-fire from the adjacent hills and kopjes brought them to a halt. Cover was sought; but the burghers had selected their position. And although the Englishers fought bravely enough for a time, they finally surrendered.

The commandant of the Boer commando at first decided to shoot the prisoners, but eventually thought better of it, and the ringleaders were ultimately handed over to the British Government, were tried in London, convicted of an offence against the Foreign Enlistments Act, and sentenced to varied terms of imprisonment.
The Johannesburgers at once surrendered such arms as they had, on the advice of the British Commissioner at the Cape. And from that time to the outbreak of war, negotiations went on from time to time between the Governments for a removal of the Outlanders' grievances. But the Boers' suspicions were aroused. "You want," they said, "not equal rights, but our country"; and from that time they regarded Mr. Rhodes as a kind of Mephistopheles. And when in the House of Commons Mr. Chamberlain publicly exonerated Mr. Rhodes from blame, "as a man of honour," the Colonial Secretary was regarded as hand-in-glove with their worst enemy. And so, when negotiations reached any stage beyond mere politenesses President Kruger distrusted Mr. Chamberlain and the British Government. He adopted a procrastinating policy. And very soon the British Government distrusted him, too.

Meanwhile the Transvaal Government was arming. Every sixpence it could raise was spent upon munitions of war of the latest and best type. Mauser rifles, Maxim guns, Hotchkiss guns, field artillery and guns of position from the Creusot works in France, shells and cartridges in millions. And as the Boers were no cannoneers, having, for the most part, a pious horror of great machines, German gunners were imported. And French, Russian, and German officers came in and surveyed the country, and prepared to place their knowledge of the art of war at the service of the Boers.

The Free Staters also armed, and concluded a treaty with their cousins mutually to defend the independence of the two republics. Negotiations for the friendly settlement of a dispute are not likely to be successful when neither party trusts the other. And in this case neither party did. Sir Alfred Milner had been sent out to the Cape as High Commissioner after the Raid, to see if he could not restore harmony between the white races there; and ultimately, in 1899, when the Colonial Office persisted in its demands for redress of Outlander grievances, but without inducing the Transvaal to do anything, Sir Alfred Milner suggested a conference between himself and President Kruger. This was held on the neutral ground of Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. But again each party thought the other had something "at the back of his mind," as the Americans say, and the conference ended in precisely nothing. This was in May and June of 1899.

War was now in sight. The negotiations still went on; and once or twice it appeared possible that a settlement would be arrived at by peaceful means. But the old distrust prevented the realisation of this hope. The letters between the parties became more bitter and more recriminatory, each not failing to accuse the other of bad faith. The British Government accused the Transvaal Executive of breaking Article 14 of the 1884 Convention (see p. 19) by unfair incidence of taxation, and by rendering life in the republic practically impossible for a self-respecting Briton—in fact, of doing indirectly what would have been a clear breach of agreement had it been done directly.

In August, 1899, the British troops in Natal amounted to about 6,020. In September they were increased by a whole infantry battalion, and several more battalions of infantry and batteries of artillery were sent from England, India, and Egypt, and Sir George White went out as general in command. The Boers were also arming rapidly, and arms and ammunition were
arriving daily at Delagoa Bay and the Cape, and being forwarded to Pretoria. The Boers talked of British desire for annexation. The British element feared a Dutch conspiracy—with the republics as a nucleus, but aided by Cape Dutch—to oust our rule from South Africa.

No doubt many Boers had, since Majuba and the Convention of Pretoria, been in the habit of thinking and speaking contemptuously about Britain and the British. They treated the British Outlanders with contempt, often actively and offensively manifested. They regarded the British army as a collection of weaklings, led by idiots: the men being unable to ride, shoot, or take cover—men who would surrender after the first few shots. In fact, of military prestige in South Africa the British had none. The common Boers regarded the Convention of Pretoria not as a magnanimous and generous act, but as a treaty extorted at the muzzle of their rifles. And, no doubt, they expected to be able to defy the British power with success, if not with ease, in view of their increased armaments. Whether Presidents Kruger and Steyn, Mr. Reitz, and General Joubert, who had travelled and seen something of Britain's resources, shared the sentiments of their ignorant countrymen, cannot be told.

Matters were brought to a crisis in the month of September. The British Government became insistent. Sir W. Penn Symons, at that time in command of the forces in Natal, moved his troops up country to Ladysmith—now a place of historical military interest—and formed a base camp there. This, no doubt, was by way of precaution against a raid; for, as may be seen from the map (p. 5), this part of Natal runs up between the Free State and the Transvaal, and is open to an attack from both sides at once. Moreover, in this neighbourhood are the coalfields of the colony. In September Colonel Moller was sent nearer to the border, to Dundee, with an advanced column; and so quietly was the march made that the townsfolk's first intimation of the presence of troops was the roll of the drums playing them into camp. On October 11th General Symons took over this column.

There is no doubt that these military movements, and especially the increase in garrison, caused much searching of heart amongst the Boers, and afforded them a ground of complaint. “Here,” they said, “we are negotiating, and at the same time you increase the number of your troops”; and Cronje, one of their generals, rode into Dundee to ask the meaning of it, and they, too, massed commando after commando on the border. Eventually, on the 9th of October, 1899, Sir Alfred Milner received from Secretary Reitz, of the Transvaal Executive, an Ultimatum. This extraordinary document demanded an assurance that no more British troops should be sent into South Africa; and gave Her Majesty's Government forty-eight hours within which to make up their minds. The Colonial Secretary replied that such terms could not even be discussed.

Then came a proclamation by Mr. Steyn, President of the Orange Free State, denouncing Great Britain and officially casting in his lot and the lot of his people with that of the kindred republic. Blood, as we know on the authority of Sir Walter Scott, is thicker than water; but yet the British people were surprised at this defiance from a country with which we had never had a quarrel. But the die was cast. It was the whole Boer race against the British Empire.

In forty-eight hours from the ultimatum, the burghers were on the move.