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LORD ROBERTS'S CAMPAIGN

AND ITS

CONSEQUENCES.

(Illustrated with two Maps and a Profile of the South African Railways.)

BY

JEAN DE BLOCH,

Russian Councillor of State,

Author of "The War of the Future."

PRICE SIXPENCE.

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CONSTITUTIONS

JEAN DE BODEN

THE ROYAL ARMY

LORD ROBERTS'S CAMPAIGN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

INTRODUCTION.

THE military operations in the Transvaal theatre of war at the present time, in all probability, will take an entirely different character from those of the preceding period. Instead of standing immovable, the armies will be moved rapidly from place to place, and only occasionally will there ensue more or less prolonged stoppages of operations. But in the final result, as far as may be foreseen, a decisive victory to be followed by a radical settlement is not likely to be gained, and it will be necessary, in the end, to conclude a peace which will, to a certain extent, be a compromise. If my propositions are true, in such event the sooner such a compromise is concluded, the more advantageous will it be for both of the warring parties.

At the present time the majority of Englishmen are still unconvinced that the impending operations, in consequence of the absence of roads for transport of food, and of the climate, will meet with tremendous difficulties involving great risk. But the realization of this may appear sooner or later, when the mass of the population both in England and in the Transvaal gains some idea as to the importance of the military operations which are proceeding. Owing to the practical nature of the work in which they are engaged, the greater part of the population of England have no opportunity of making themselves acquainted with the local conditions of the theatre of war, and the new factors which are operating. It is owing to this that I undertook the writing of the present pamphlet, in the hope that the materials which it contains may serve as a base for the consideration of the problems involved. It would, of course, be too daring on my part to pretend to give military instruction to those who do not need it. My object is a different one, to give to the great masses

of the population some idea, however slight, of the essential considerations which must be taken into account in order to determine whether peace is not preferable to war, even if, in the end, a complete victory may be gained. In other words, my object is to ask, is the game worth the candle? In doing this, of course I shall not touch upon the political side of the problem, since it is already well known to all.

At the time this pamphlet was begun the Orange Free State, it may be said, almost without resistance, was occupied by the British armies, and further military operations seemed likely to take place only in the Transvaal. Since then the Boers have begun guerilla operations with remarkable success, and have threatened the communications of Lord Roberts so seriously that extensive military operations may be required before the invasion of the Transvaal can be begun. The limits of these operations it is impossible to foresee. It may be that the Boers, having lost all hope of help from outside, or from a rising in the Cape, will defend themselves without energy, and give up their arms. But it may be, on the other hand, that they will resist desperately, and carry on a guerilla warfare, in which case the British generals must meet with great difficulties in the supplying of their troops, and may be forced to stand a long time on one spot, or even retreat into the Orange Free State. The greater results of victory, for reasons already considered by me, cannot be expected by the Boers. Such being the case, fresh attempts may be made to decide the quarrel by peaceful means. But, of course, to attain such a result—a result, according to my firm conviction, advantageous on both sides—it would be necessary that public opinion should have given itself a clear account of all the possible combinations which may appear at the theatre of war. At the present moment, when operations at the seat of war have taken a favourable turn for England, it would seem at the first glance that there is little need to issue fresh warnings with the object of inclining public opinion in England in favour of peace. The question will naturally be asked: "Would it be wise or even right to leave unsettled a question which is likely to cause bloodshed again, and which can now be settled satisfactorily once for all by subjugating the Boers, and at the same time turning the Transvaal into an English province?" Is it not, therefore, absurd for me to suppose that any arguments I can adduce would produce conviction? To this I would reply, that if the future movements of the British armies met with as little opposition

as in their recent advance into the Orange Free State, the pamphlet which I publish here would be as a voice crying in the wilderness. But, as a matter of fact, to predict the future character of the campaign is impossible. At the present moment England has at least four times as many troops as the Boers; and "*le bon Dieu est toujours avec les gros bataillons,*" says a French proverb. The hopes of the Boers on a rising and on the intervention of foreign Powers may vanish, and with them may vanish all reliance on victory by their own efforts. The best that the Boers could expect is to inflict on the British constant defeats, and to force them to retreat owing to insufficiency of provisions. Yet the result of the war would still be annihilation for the Boers—if not from the invaders' arms, from exhaustion of forces. To follow up the invaders, and, when these shall have taken the defensive, to drive them from the Free State, not to speak of Cape Colony, would be too daring a hope; the economic and financial forces of England being much more powerful than her military strength, and, indeed, being largely the result of her maintaining such weak military forces. Having weighed all these circumstances, only two suppositions remain, either that the Boer defence will be carried on without energy, ending in submission, or—a supposition involving an equal degree of probability—that the Boers will defend themselves energetically to the point of exhaustion. If the latter be the case, instead of decisive battles, we must look for guerilla warfare. The war will be prolonged, the invaders will be held for long periods before defensive lines, and every day will see the increase of desperation and ferocity. The enemy will first of all attempt to retard the English march, and by stopping convoys, as they have just done with striking success on the retreat from Thaba'nchu, may make it extremely difficult, and even impossible, to furnish the British with supplies and ammunition, while at the same time making all possible efforts to subject the invaders to all the disadvantages and sickness arising from the African climate.

In such circumstances, the same melancholy feelings which impelled me to issue my first pamphlet, entitled "*The Transvaal War and its Problems,*" urge me again to ask whether it is not better to devise some other issue from the present position than that of driving the Boers to desperation. Were I addressing any other country than England, the hope of attaining peace by this means would certainly be nullified by the belief that it would be dishonourable to make any con-

cessions to such an insignificant adversary as the Boers. Dealing with the English people, it is another matter, and I must regard it so, so keenly conscious am I of the vast possibilities of the ethical side of the Anglo-Saxon character, which has been the source of those wonder-working forces which alone could have built up the greatest Empire, the most perfect political fabric, known to space and time. And it is in the ethical sentiment, which is so profound and so widespread among English-speaking peoples, that we find hope for trusting that the voice of reason will be raised above prejudices and childish vanity. That this is not a vain hope there is evidence enough. All are familiar with the circumstances of the quarrel with the United States about the *Alabama*. In that dispute England was assuredly in the wrong, as nations are from time to time. But she frankly owned it, which is more than any other State has ever yet done, and, what is a still more difficult feat, she consented to atone for the harm she had inflicted. By this act England informally inaugurated a system for the peaceful settlement of international disputes, a system which contains within it the promise of the only millennium attainable by the human race. None of the many and marvellous mechanical inventions which mark the progress of the nineteenth century will prove such a boon to civilization as this self-humiliation of a whole people in the higher interests of the world.

Another and much more arduous feat of political morality accomplished by Great Britain was the conclusion of peace with the Boers after the signal victory gained by the latter at Majuba Hill. Nothing like it is known to history, nor can the heroism underlying the act be easily exaggerated. The English forces had been cut to pieces. The Boers were triumphant and hopeful, and Great Britain was ready to wash out the "blot on her scutcheon" in the blood of the Boers. Powerful forces were on the spot, and further reinforcements were on their way to the Cape. A strong War party at home clamoured loudly for vengeance. Every opportunity was presented for treading out the embers of hostility which might once more burst into flame. In a word, every consideration of honour and self-interest seemed to call for the carrying on of the war. In that time there were no such things as smokeless powder, modern rifles and guns, or scientifically raised entrenchments, which give such advantages to the defence, nor in Europe was there that sickly envy of England arising from her colonial conquests. Nevertheless, the English people, choosing the better part, made peace with

the enemy and transformed the struggle into an honourable competition in the domain of civilization.

Magnanimity of this kind in foreign politics is seldom gauged aright, and is never appreciated if displayed in war; it is absolutely certain to be misunderstood. The magnanimity which refuses to change defeat into victory must of necessity be mistaken for weakness, and weakness, even when only imaginary, is always a political danger and sometimes a material loss. Yet England could afford to neglect all such considerations of worldly wisdom, and she did so after Majuba Hill. As a consequence, this event to-day constitutes the high-water mark of political morality.

But all British civilization tends in the same direction. There may, nay, there must be, back eddies. The present war movement is one of them, but none the less, the main current is set steadily towards peace. The admirable attitude of Lord Pauncefoot at the Hague Conference is a convincing proof of this. No other nations were more thoroughly in earnest in this matter of turning swords into ploughshares than those which speak the English tongue, none were willing to go farther than England and the United States in the direction of arbitration. The English-speaking peoples, looking all the consequences fully in the face, declared their readiness to do the right thing, come what might, and if the work of the Conference proved ultimately less complete than it might have been, the fault was certainly not one of theirs.

Why must it be supposed that the brilliant example set to all other peoples has outplayed its part in the past of England and cannot return? Material interests speak more in favour of concluding an honourable peace than in any previous case. No war ever yet threatened England with so many complications from the part of the Continental Powers as the present. The unanimity of the peoples in hatred of England is too strong and plain to be ignored. The impossibility of attaining the decisive subjugation of the Boers without immense losses and fresh sacrifices in men and money may become apparent at any time. Consequences never make themselves felt at once, but only gradually, and when it is necessary again to renew armies and military stores, and to meet the expenses of the war by levying fresh taxation, internal discontent may result, and parties with subversive tendencies may rise up in England at the first convenient opportunity.

The social movements of the nineteenth century accomplished as much for the well-being of the masses as science

effected for the mere mechanism of human comfort. It brought forth societies for the care of the blind, for the treatment of incurables, the succour of the poor and the sick, the relief of indigent old age, the education of the young and innocent, the improvement of the depraved, the housing and healing of the insane, the curing of the habitual drunkard, the defence of the poor and helpless; it brought cheaper lodgings, night refuges, and cheaper dinners to the people—in a word, there is no domain of life in which public and private enterprise has not set itself to work with excellent effects. The result is the gradual levelling upwards of the masses. But what has heretofore been accomplished in this respect is but as a raindrop to the ocean when compared with what still remains to be done by the civilizing influences now at work.

But all those beneficent influences are paralyzed by want of the funds necessary to carry on the good work. And the funds are lacking because of the untold sums of money absorbed every year by militarism, which, like some mythical monster, lives and thrives on the lifeblood of the masses.

Therefore we ask, is it wise to set the problem for the Boers—and we must not forget that behind them stand all Afrikanders of Dutch blood—as a choice between annihilation and the continuation of the struggle to the last extremity, in the hope of exhausting the invaders, or of the intervention of external complications? But even after attaining the end by the sword the question would not be decided. Owing to the rapid increase of the Dutch population it will be necessary to maintain immense forces to prevent a rising on the first convenient opportunity when political complications shall ensue in England. Nor must we forget the problem of the natives, from whose union the most terrible complications might ensue. That is to say, the subjugation of the Boers involves a movement on the path of increasing militarism, and the constant sacrifice of immense sums on military purposes. Is it, then, better to spend hundreds of millions in continuing the war, and afterwards millions yearly on keeping the Boers in subjection, than to spend them on relieving human suffering at home? Let those to whom the answer to this question is doubtful examine, as I have done, by night the poor quarters of London, Glasgow, and Manchester, and watch the public-houses, the police courts, the cheap dining houses, the night refuges. No one who has once with his own eyes seen even the best of the night refuges kept for the comparatively wealthy—for the happy ones who can pay one penny for their

night's rest—can retain his prejudices in favour of continuing the war. He would see, as I have nightly seen in the homes of the Salvation Army, masses of half-starved people, especially women, who, for want of a bed, spend the night sitting, dressed, on the hard stones, in the morning again to begin their heavy labour. And so from day to day. And if he would glance in the faces of these homeless sufferers he would see there such an imprint of suffering that he would realize that these now quiet outcasts sooner or later, even in England, will turn their thoughts into action. For among this mass there is no lack of intellects which well understand that it would be possible to extend aid to all if it were not for the pursuing of aims which have nothing in common with the welfare of ninety-nine out of a hundred individuals.

Questions like these cannot be long hidden from the common people, nor until they have been rightly solved can socialistic agitation of a disquieting character be entirely suppressed. If they are less to be feared in England than elsewhere, it is precisely because, heretofore, England adopted a line of action opposed to militarism and free from most of its characteristic evils. To continue the war will be to retrace her steps and follow in the wake of the military Powers of the Continent. And the attempt to maintain a great land army and the most powerful fleet in the world will bring forth curious effects not dreamt of in the philosophy of Jingoism.

Still another danger threatens England. To govern the conquered countries on general lines is impossible for England, and to enact exceptional laws will be unavoidable. But to enter upon this path is very dangerous, and it is unquestioned that first of all at the Cape, and afterwards in all colonies which enjoy self-government and constitutional representation, all trust in the principles of freedom preached by England, and which have resulted in her brilliant successes in colonization, will be destroyed. Can it be rational or profitable to increase the number of discontented Irish in the Empire? And in the end what England desires, that is, her dominance in South Africa, the restoration of peace, and the establishment of good relations, cannot be attained. The Boers are of no use for industry and trade, and their culture stands on a much lower level than that of the English and other Europeans, who will not cease to flood the Transvaal, the present minority by this means becoming less and less powerful every year. But as this change will in any case take place by peaceful means, it will be far easier for the Boers to be reconciled thus than by the whip of exclusive laws.

It is for this reason that, having dedicated ten years of my life to the study of military questions, I feel I must not be silent, but, with the frankness which the duty of an honourable man prescribes, express my convictions. Notwithstanding the reproaches which have been heaped on me in Continental States, owing to the fact that it is recognized that the continuation of the war will involve an advantageous weakening of England, I consider it my duty to uphold the French proverb, "*fais ce que doit advenir ce que Dieu voudra,*" and if the operations at the theatre of war again come to a full stop, and the gloomy outlook of last January be renewed, evoking fears of all, then the expression of my views may increase the number of those who begin to weigh the pros and cons of the various feasible means of ending the war humanely and in a manner worthy of the English people. Even if fortune should continue to smile on British arms, the Boers be subjugated, and all power be left in the hands of England, even then a reminder of the future dangers, which must spring from a too drastic settlement—the possible risings, and, in any event, irreconcilable elements—may be not without use.

The consideration which I have given to this delicate question inspires in me a feeling of deep respect for the English people, and equal sympathy to both warring sides, for the prolonged and desperate guerilla warfare which may ensue in a hilly country like the Transvaal must have terrible consequences, and be accompanied by deeds at which the heart of every one uninfected with Jingoism must shudder. But in addition to all this, I say it with sincere regret, the more serious danger exists of political complications. The hatred of England is so widespread among peoples, and especially among military men, and so general is the conviction that all the military resources of England are exhausted, leaving her impotent in South Africa, at home, and in the Colonies, while there is no reserve of men or officers or munitions, that governments may be forced to make some aggressive move to avoid the reproach of inactivity. Millions are squandered every year on armaments, and the discontent of the taxpayers is aroused. The military caste recognizes the dislike which it excites, and soldiers will be only too glad of a chance to show that they are indispensable. The longer the war lasts, the more rooted will become the conviction that the moment has approached to take advantage of England's difficulties; and if the European governments do nothing, the accusations already made will be confirmed, that the popular

interests are sacrificed to family bonds, that rulers lack energy, while the opposition to expenditure on armaments and to military conditions no longer utilizable will further increase.

Thus, on the one hand ethical motives, on the other considerations of self-interest, based on calculations of future immense losses in men and money, and, finally, the possibility of great political complications, force me to say that England has everything to gain and nothing to lose by silencing the war trumpets. I do not doubt that all the instincts of the friends of England and lovers of their kind are with me in the hope that as material interests, political prestige, and moral obligations all point to one and the same line of action, she will not delay to rise above the egoistical calculations of the shareholders in South African enterprises.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL CONDITION OF THE STRUGGLE.

As a picture may be pertinently criticized by some who are not professional artists, so a plan of campaign may be fitly and ably analysed by others than full-fledged generals. This is especially true at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the success of an invasion depends to a very large extent upon the efficiency of measures of a non-military nature. The sufficiency of food and munitions, the degree of rapidity and safety with which the vast impedimenta of an invading army may be moved backwards and forwards at a moment's notice, the ease and difficulty of defending railways, roads, and bridges along an enormous stretch of country inhabited by a hostile population—all these and many other analogous matters have become essential factors in the war problems of to-day. Upon the solution of these depends the upshot of the struggle quite as much as upon the tactics of the officers and the strategy of the generals. The days when a Hannibal could march through Europe at the head of an army without supplies, without bases, without communications with home, are gone by for ever. Nowadays the economic and technical aspects of war have attained an importance which they never possessed before, and a plan of campaign which having been weighed in these balances is found wanting cannot reasonably be expected to prove successful even from a purely military point of view.

Now the scheme of invading and occupying the territory of the Boer Republics seems to me to be open to most serious objections precisely of this character. I set them forth summarily, but I trust clearly, in my pamphlet, "The Transvaal War and its Problems." The invasion of the Orange Free State has, however, since then been accomplished, and my contentions will consequently be put to the severest possible test : refutation or confirmation in deeds rather than in words. Yet I cannot see any reason for swerving even by a single hair's breadth from the propositions which I then laid

down as established. I have been asked to say what course, in my opinion, the campaign just inaugurated is likely to take. I reply with the promptitude of an expert, but with the diffidence of one who is called upon to solve a problem without a thorough knowledge of all its essential data, and with the embarrassing consciousness that I am breaking wholly new ground. The progress made during the past quarter of a century by science, and now for the first time applied to war, has utterly changed the conditions of warfare; the tactics adopted by the Boers are entirely new, in the sense that they have never yet been employed in any really serious military struggle; and, lastly, political considerations have played, and will yet further usurp, a *rôle* in the conduct of the campaign, which is one of the strangest and most puzzling factors I know of.

But in the midst of much that is doubtful, there is a whole series of axiomatic facts, which, being virtually self-evident, should therefore be ever borne in mind by the reader. Thus, in the first place, it is clear that each of the belligerents will strive to strike a blow at what may be termed the "heart of the enemy"—that is to say, the main basis of his operations, the seizure of which would effectually paralyse his action. In the case of the Boers, the mines would constitute this "nervous centre of military activity"; and in the case of the British, to a lesser degree, the occupation by the Transvaalers of the coast line of the Cape. In the second place, it may be taken for granted that each belligerent will give the preference to that plan of campaign which seems best calculated to cripple the adversary and to make it impossible for him not merely to continue, but even to renew hostilities. Acting on this maxim, the Boers will carefully husband their forces and recoil even from rencontres in which they might inflict heavy losses upon the British at the cost of one half the number of killed and wounded on their own side. I assume—and in this, I think, most people will agree with me—that all things considered, the Boers will not deem it advantageous to sacrifice one man for five British whom they may kill or disable. This supposition is based upon a very simple calculation. England can afford to lose 150,000 men killed and wounded without seriously jeopardizing her position as a first-class power. Suppose that the Boers had paid for this result at the rate of one to five, they would have lessened their numbers by 30,000 fighting men. In that case, the surviving Boer population would have become relatively so small that it could and would be easily absorbed by the

as it has been carried on in Spain, in Russia, in the Caucasus, and in Bosnia, while deciding frankly to abandon the greater part of the Orange Free State. I am prepared further to give it as my opinion that the occupation by the British of Bloemfontein—although, undoubtedly, it is a step in the direction of Pretoria—will not of itself import a new factor into the problem, nor essentially change those which are already there; nor would it have done so, even if the Boer general had attempted to stop the English on the road to Bloemfontein, and, in doing so, suffered constant defeat. But (of course, on the supposition that the determination of the Boers to continue resistance will be held to) in order to prolong the war by guerilla operations, even if the Boers were still to lose 10,000 men, there would still remain sufficient forces to prolong the war.

But before proceeding to discuss the matter at length, I should like to plead once more, in extenuation of any errors of detail, the circumstance that my knowledge of the Transvaal and its people is based upon reading only; and further, that the conditions of the struggle are to a large extent new, so that past experience is no longer a guide to future events. In all matters touching upon the new conditions of transport, of communication, of supplies, &c., which must have been well weighed before a plan of campaign was drawn up, I feel that I am treading upon familiar ground.* I have had equally favourable opportunities for studying the question of the influence which tactics and the administrative arrangements must necessarily have upon the work of keeping the army supplied with food and munitions.†

It is in the light of those new facts, the bearings of which seem to be as yet but dimly apprehended in England, that I hold the repeated checks sustained by British arms to be the result of *force majeure*, just as an outbreak of the pest or a series of disastrous earthquake shocks would be. On the same facts I base my contention that no plan of campaign adopted by the Boers can contemplate their taking the offensive; consequently they are not open to the reproach of neglecting to utilize their victories.

In my next article I shall consider the results of an invasion of the Transvaal territory by the British troops.

* Some 283 pages of the author's work on "The War of the Future" are taken up with a summary statement of these new conditions.

† The section of the author's work on "The War of the Future" devoted to this subject occupies 279 pages.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEAT OF WAR AND THE TRANSVAAL ROUTES.

WITHOUT detailed and accurate maps of the enemy's country a business-like plan of campaign is an impossibility. So much depends upon the physical features of the district, not only for the transport of supplies, but also for the parts to be assigned to artillery, cavalry, &c., in the work of invasion, that a few mistakes may make all the difference between success and failure, victory and defeat. This, of course, applies to both sides, but more especially to the belligerent, who must assume the offensive, and has therefore to be guided in his action by the number and nature of the obstacles with which he may be confronted on his march. The defenders are less completely dependent upon maps, because of their thorough acquaintance with the configuration of their own parishes and counties. Now, strange to say, there are no detailed and trustworthy maps of the Boer territory, and this circumstance, like so many others, is an unexpected advantage to the two South African Republics. Under these conditions the very best scheme drawn up by the British Commander-in-Chief must of necessity be contingent, conditional, liable to sudden modification. And this is a serious drawback.

I shall not be accused of rashness if I assume that the general drift of the plan now being carried out is an advance from Bloemfontein on Pretoria, and should it be absolutely necessary, the seizure of other important points of the Transvaal. That being so, and, taking it for granted that the data supplied by existing maps* are, at least, approximately correct, the question of ways and communications is more simple than reassuring. There are practically no good main roads in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal; and by good roads, I mean such as the British troops with the

* Four maps of the French *dépôt des cartes militaires*. The Transvaal War Atlas, Nelson & Sons. Stanford's New Large Scale Map of the "Seat of War," and others.

enormous amount of baggage which always accompanies them can avail themselves of. The only remaining routes, therefore, are the railway lines.

In 1898, Cape Colony possessed 3,781 kilometres of railways; Natal, 800 kilometres; the Orange Free State, 821 kilometres; and the Transvaal, 1,247 kilometres; but special importance is possessed only by the lines leading from Colesberg to Pretoria *viâ* Bloemfontein, and from Natal to Johannesburg *viâ* Newcastle. As regards the main roads of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, these are for the greater part merely laid upon the natural soil, often without bridges, and narrow. For transport are employed heavy carts, drawn by oxen in pairs. On the better sections of these roads, under favourable conditions, the speed of movement attains some four kilometres an hour, but on the average not more than two kilometres can be relied upon. One of the commonest occurrences in this respect will be the necessity of moving the transport carts in one line with the troops. Once the road is encumbered with carts, owing to the insufficiency of other roads, transport must be led across fields, hills, and overgrowth.

Boerland differs from cultured countries among other things in this, that such roads as it does contain seldom run parallel to the railway, and are generally at right angles to it. Thus, according to one map, along a line 440 English miles long, from the Cape frontier to Pretoria, there are but three separate district roads of 83, 25, and 45 miles long respectively; that is to say, 153 miles in all, and the total length of the secondary roads is no more than 20 miles.* For the remainder of the distance the main routes cut the rails at right angles, just as if they had been specially constructed for the purpose of facilitating an attack on the invaders' only possible line of advance. This is another source of defensive strength to the Boers, the importance of which can very easily be underrated.

Again, in Europe, in fertile, densely inhabited places, even those fragments of routes which run parallel to the rails might be turned into links of a long chain of positions offering supplies of food and shelter to the invading army. But in arid Africa, with its sparse population, such a thing could not be thought of. The density of the population of the Orange Free State

* The existing maps differ considerably in this matter of the roads; but although exactitude is unattainable, the bases of my arguments are untouched.

is 1.6 inhabitants per quadratic kilometre, and in the Transvaal 3.5 inhabitants per quadratic kilometre. That is to say, the density of the population is less than that of the Government of Tomsk, in Siberia (two inhabitants per quadratic kilometre), and that of the Transvaal about the same as Vologda, one of the most sparsely populated Governments of Russia. The yield of agricultural products, notwithstanding the fruitfulness of the soil, is insignificant, owing to the insufficiency of labour. The best proof of this is afforded by the circumstance that the country belongs to those importing agricultural products. Indeed, with the exception of cattle, there is nothing to be had there, and the foraging expeditions, which in guerilla warfare would be exposed to very great dangers, would be little better than a wild-goose chase.* Thus it would be utterly impossible to apply to South Africa the latest and most widely approved military maxim: that war must be waged by the invading army at the cost and with the supplies of the enemy's country. When it is a question of a very numerous army, there is, of course, no choice left but to requisition the dwellers of the districts through which the invaders pass. And when this issue out of the difficulty is closed up, as it is in the case of the invasion of the Transvaal, the problem assumes a very ugly aspect indeed. For, on the one hand, almost everything required by the army will have to be sent on from the distant base; and, on the other hand, there will be only one line of railway available for the transport. Very much will therefore depend upon the carrying capacity of that single line, and on the efficiency with which it is defended from one end to the other. Any interruption of communications would be serious, and if sufficiently protracted, disastrous to the invaders. And the difficulty of guarding against such stoppages from one cause or another borders on the impossible. The enemy may succeed in destroying a portion of the line with dynamite; or, in the ordinary course of things, a collision may take place; the rails or the rolling stock may be injured by explosives; in a word, interruption may be caused in a variety of ways.

* According to Intendant General Baratier, "a place of average productiveness can feed for twenty-four hours a number of troops exceeding its own population six times, besides a number of horses equal to one fourth of the total of the soldiers. In practice it is possible in a village of 1,000 inhabitants to feed 6,000 men and 1,500 horses for a day and a night." The Russian General Hasenkampf holds that a territory or place possessing a population equal to the total of the troops invading it is capable of supplying the latter with foods and provender during at least four and not more than six days.

Let us suppose, however, that the carrying capacity of the line in question is found to be adequate to the numerous demands to be made upon it. I make this assumption for the sake of argument, but I am free to admit that it does not by any means form part of my convictions. But that question being thus settled satisfactory, the next point to be considered is this: how much time will it take to repair the damage which the enemy is certain to have done to the railway before he withdrew and allowed the invading army to enter his territory. This is a serious matter, and it is not the only one of its kind. It will have to be decided, further, how the transport of the materials necessary for this work can best be effected, whether there will be room enough at the nearest stations to unload the freight and to manœuvre the soldiers, and sufficient open space for military camp life, which is indispensable if the troops are to be kept in readiness to protect the workmen who are engaged in executing the repairs from a sudden onslaught of the enemy.

Now all those are matters upon which, I may claim without presumption, to speak as an expert.* I have constructed in my time several thousands of miles of railways, and I have been the chairman of the companies which owned them for the space of forty years, so that I am thoroughly familiar with all the details of the working and repairing of the rails, rolling stock, &c. And in the light of that experience I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that, judging of the Transvaal railway by published descriptions, the damage which the Boers will do to it before withdrawing into the interior could not be repaired in less than from four to six weeks, and even this moderate estimate presupposes that the invading army carries with it all the needful materials and a sufficient number of skilled artisans as well. But if, as seems extremely probable, neither materials nor workmen are ready, the time needed would be from six to ten weeks. Outsiders have but a very hazy notion what an arduous undertaking it is to repair a railway in a country like the Transvaal, where workmen, materials, and even water are lacking; and the difficulty is enormously increased when, as in the present case, there is no other line but the damaged one. It is not by any means improbable that even the supply of water may prove a matter of very great difficulty from time to time, and the most

* The author built the St. Petersburg-Warsaw Line (1,500 versts), the South-Western Line (2,500 versts), and the Ivangorod-Dombrovska and Lomshinsk Line (480 versts).

obtuse understanding can readily realize what that will mean. Doubtless, British soldiers are heroes, and British generals are adaptive and enterprising, and they will both manfully tackle any and every difficulty with which they may be confronted. But it would be unjust as well as absurd to blame them for not working miracles, and some of the tasks which these railway repairs will impose upon them may be truly Herculean. It will, for instance, be necessary at one and the same time to forward troops for the defence, materials for the repairs of the line, and supplies for soldiers and workmen. And with the mobile and omnipresent Boers hanging about and harassing the invaders and seeking to hinder all work, the difficulty may occasionally border on impossibility. It may be found advisable to send detachments of troops to every portion of the line damaged and to have the repairs executed by workmen organized in military fashion. But in that case what an entangled skein of affairs the administration would be forced to unravel.

There is but one systematic and efficient means of dealing with the matter, and the Germans have, of course, adopted it. It is to have a plan of action drawn up beforehand by a commission of experts, consisting of engineers and railway administrators; and although the difficulties which exist in Africa would not occur in Europe, nevertheless special bodies of troops are organized for the protection and exploitation of the railways. The example of Germany has been followed by all the other Continental Powers.

In Austria, too, this idea has been long since accepted, and the work of repairing the railway in the enemy's country has from time to time been rehearsed at military manœuvres. The following amusing incident which accompanied one of these rehearsals will help to convey an idea of the difficulty of the task. It was narrated to me by one of the most eminent Austrian railway administrators. Kaiser Franz Josef, who takes a most lively interest in military progress of every kind, was present at manœuvres, one of the main features of which consisted of experiments in this very matter of repairing railways. The Emperor was very hopeful of their success, and said as much to the Administrator who told me the story. The latter, however, was sceptical, and took no pains to dissimulate his unbelief. As a matter of fact, however, everything went on admirably, and without a hitch. Troops were transported to the various points where the rails were supposed to have been torn up; the heavy materials needed for reconstructing the line were also forthcoming at

their respective destinations, and everything was done as if by clockwork. It was a glorious triumph. When it was all over, the honest face of the Austrian Emperor was wreathed in smiles, and turning to the Administrator, he said: "Well, you see I was right. My lads have gallantly surmounted all obstacles, and done the work to perfection." But the countenance of the high official was still the picture of incredulity. The Emperor then asked him to step into the railway carriage, and there he cross-examined him on the subject. Then for the first time his Majesty's eyes were opened to the prosaic facts. It turned out that the splendid results which delighted the monarch had been obtained by suspending all goods traffic, by driving in workmen from the neighbouring villages, and by *preparing and transporting beforehand* the materials. In a word, the rehearsal was but a pantomimic illusion brought about as if by the waving of a magician's wand, and bore no relation whatever to what would happen in war time, when the feat would not even be attempted. When the Emperor had heard it all, his countenance fell, and in a very sad tone of voice he exclaimed: "This is most deplorable. But I hope in God the Monarchy will not be involved in a war so long as I live."

But let us suppose that the railway line in Boer territory has been successfully put in working order. What services is it then likely to render under present conditions? At the best of times a railway is easily injured and its carrying powers lessened, but in an enemy's country the difficulty of keeping it serviceable is enormous. Towards the close of the Franco-Prussian War the forces set apart for the defence of the German rear amounted to 145,712 men, with 5,945 horses and 80 guns. And yet the railways were threatened only by unorganized *francs-tireurs*, whose rifles were thirty times less deadly than the Mausers of the Boers. "One dynamite cartridge is enough," says General Klembowski in his work on guerilla warfare, "to destroy the line and to stop regular traffic on it for a long time. The direct protection of the railway and of all its constructions is a task most difficult of accomplishment. The permanent occupation of the entire line is out of the question, because it would demand a disproportionately large number of troops; on the other hand, weak posts will not safeguard the line, and will be easily picked off by the enemy." And this view is borne out by history. The raids of Stoneman, Morgan, Grierson, in 1862-1864, the destruction of bridges by French partisans at Fontenoye, Buffon, and La Roche in 1870-1871, and the

damage done by the Germans to the railway near Orleans, are all cases in point.

Heretofore the destruction of railways formed merely a passing episode of international war, whereas in the struggle between Great Britain and the Boer Republics it will constitute the rule. And naturally so. The British plan of campaign must, as we saw, be based upon the railroad, and is mainly dependent upon that; the Boers' system of defence will therefore, as a matter of course, provide for frequent attacks upon the line and its rolling stock. And the ease with which such attacks can be carried out and the chances of their occasional success seem not to have been completely realized in England. Yet the physical features of the country through which the rails wend their way ought to make the difficulties and dangers of the situation obvious to the dullest. From the very frontiers of the Cape the line passes through very high lands, the stations being situated at an elevation of at least 4,000 feet (Norvals Pont). Some thirty miles from the frontier we reach Springfontein Junction, which towers aloft 4,937 feet above the sea level. After this the road descends again till it is about 4,400 feet above the sea surface, and it continues at that elevation for about 260 miles, till it gets to Kroonstad (4,489 feet). Beyond this point the railway traverses mountains now rising, now descending, till at Zuurfontein it attains a height of 5,457 feet, which is, roughly speaking, the level of St. Gothard tunnel. And along the entire course of the railroad there are hills on either side, less frequent before we come to Kroonstad, but continuous beyond that station. Unfortunately, we possess neither topographical drawings nor other data concerning the height of these mountains, but some idea may be formed of them from what we know of the rivers and their tributaries. Now such being the conditions, I ask, not whether it is possible, but whether it will not cost very considerable sacrifices of men and money, to defend such a line in such a country against the active Boers, whose every effort will be directed to the destruction of the railway? There can be no doubt that the powerful British Empire can solve this problem, and can likewise carry out everything else against the Boer Republics, if only the needful sacrifices be judiciously and opportunely made. What I may, perhaps, be allowed respectfully to call in question is whether those sacrifices would be agreed to, if the British people were fully aware of their extent, and of the disproportionately insignificant results which they can purchase. That, however, is a matter which lies outside my own special sphere.

CHAPTER III.

ATTACK AND DEFENCE OF RAILWAYS IN THE
BOER COUNTRY.

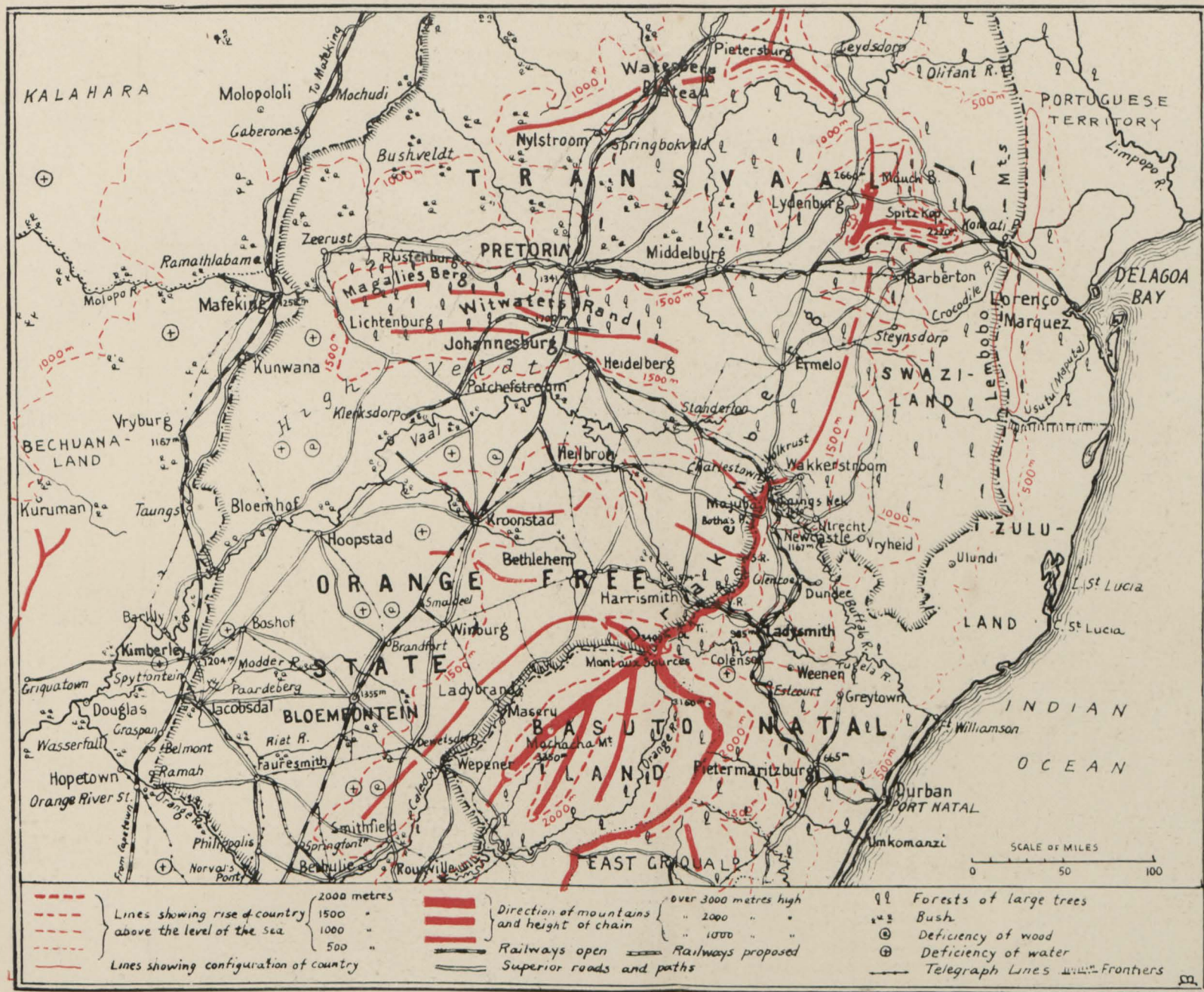
GUERILLA warfare on a large scale, with ideal and well-equipped soldiers like the Boers as one of the belligerents, is an unknown quantity. Russia's experiences in the Caucasus and Austria's defeats and victories in Bosnia are indeed analogies, but analogies which serve at most to heighten the dark colours with which the philanthropist may feel warranted in painting its horrors; but they do not enable military men to draw anything like an adequate picture of the reality from a technical point of view. Never before were there so many conditions favourable to the defence in guerilla warfare as are to be found on the side of the Boers, and strategists and tacticians look forward to the hostilities which will ensue on the invasion of the Republican territory with something of the thrilling interest with which physicians follow the development of a new disease. Under such conditions it would be absurd to seek to play the prophet, the past affording no clue to the future. But a study of the conditions of the struggle, and certain of their inevitable effects, may prove instructive, and cannot lack a certain degree of interest.

In the first place, then, it can hardly be doubted that the Boers will split up into hundreds of small parties, flying columns, predatory bands, dealing death and destruction whithersoever they appear. And for work of this character the Boer is unequalled in Africa or the world. He is a splendid walker, an excellent rider who never tires in his saddle, as frugal in his habits as a Scottish Highlander, endowed with powers of endurance far and away beyond any that can be predicated of the best British troops; he is well acquainted with the country, and is sufficiently intelligent to know, without being expressly told, exactly what to do in unforeseen circumstances, and sufficiently enterprising to do it. For these reasons, and also because the aim and object of the

defence will be mainly to kill and destroy, there will be no need to maintain continuous communications among all those petty detachments. Neither will they want a numerous commissariat, vast magazines filled with supplies, a complex machinery for distributing them, nor even comfortable lodgings. They will eat what they can get from the inhabitants in return for receipts, fight on empty stomachs when necessary, and sleep with the firmament for a roof. As for ammunition, they will have stores well stocked at various places, the very existence of which will probably never be discovered by the British.

In hostile operations of this nature the defence enjoys an enormous initial advantage over the attack, even when the latter sets out from a base much less distant than the British. Napoleon's experiences in Russia and Spain are instructive, and, although the present conditions are essentially different from those of his days, prove that even a military genius at the head of the best disciplined soldiers in the world could make no headway against a combination of adverse circumstances which seemed to show that nature herself was on the side of the defence. As in the days of Deborah, "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It is hardly too much to say that the guerilla tactics employed against Napoleon by the Spaniards, and the results they attained, contributed materially to the final downfall of the greatest general since Julius Cæsar. His invasion of Russia was attended with circumstances too exceptional, perhaps, to allow that campaign to be profitably compared with that of Lord Roberts against the Transvaal Republics; but the fact should not be blinked that the analogy between the two expeditions is greatest precisely where the character of each seems least typical. To give an instance of what I mean: Russians are still wont to say that Napoleon in Russia succumbed to Generals Golod (hunger) and Kholod (cold). In South Africa, during the operations now about to commence, hunger and heat may fitly be reckoned among the most serious dangers to which the English troops will be exposed.

In matters of this kind details are of the essence of all argument, and I should like to call the reader's attention to the following points. The defence of the railway by the army of invasion can, and probably will, be effected by means of posts established at various distances along the line. The duty of these small garrisons would be to defend not only the stations at which they reside, but also the line itself backwards and forwards along a stretch equal to half the



TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP OF TRANSCAAL AND ORANGE FREE STATE.

SCALE 1: 5,000,000. 1 centimetre = 50 kilometres.

distance to the next post in both directions. Now one of the chief dangers of this work is that the men, when moving backwards and forwards to guard the line, will be shot down like grouse by an invisible enemy. Let us suppose that the English soldiers do not fear this; but what will happen with the various necessaries required for the repairing and keeping in order of the line and for signalling? Even in former times and in other countries this was always to a great extent the danger that had to be guarded against. Thus the struggle between Russia and the peoples of the Caucasus was a series of brilliant feats of sharpshooting. But heretofore the enemy's whereabouts were always revealed by the smoke of his powder, and he could be unearthed or driven away in a few minutes. At present, however, there is nothing to betray him, and he may go on shooting as carefully and calmly as any man can when the targets are human bodies. An English correspondent, in a letter published in London a few days ago, writes from the seat of war: "I have no doubt that there are men in our army who have never seen a Boer in battle. I know of officers who have only seen one or two in one battle and five or six in another."* It ought to be needless to point out the loss of life which this state of things may occasion on the side of the invaders. But people seldom take the trouble to realize fully what is meant by the words.

Curious myself to ascertain what the loss of life might be under analogous conditions, I caused a series of experiments to be made in Switzerland. A number of little balloons filled with smoke were placed in positions such as we might reasonably suppose to be those of the soldiers guarding a railway line, and fired at from a distance of 300 metres. The results can be seen very visibly in a series of cinematographic photographs in my possession; one balloon after another vanishes in a cloudlet of smoke almost after each shot. It has been objected that, owing to psychological causes, the best marksmen will miss their aim more frequently when the target is a human body than in the shooting gallery or on the moor. That proposition I am not prepared to deny. But I think unbiassed readers will agree with me that there are probably no soldiers in the world less affected by emotions of the battlefield and more cool and collected than the Boers.

Under such conditions one could hardly blame the soldiers if, to protect themselves against this death-dealing fire, they were to construct little shelters for themselves with stones or

* Cf. *Daily Mail*, Feb. 13th.

earth. But in that case, who would effectually protect the railway line?

The truth is that the defence of the railway is beset with difficulties which even a commander of genius may be unable to overcome. The ease with which, under cover of night, a few Boers could creep up to the line, blow it up with dynamite, and cause the next train coming along to be wrecked is alarming. Even overwhelming numbers of guards might be insufficient to ward off a disaster.

To defend a railway there will remain no other means than to build on each side a line of redoubts with garrisons of from 50 to 150 men, outside these redoubts being advanced sentry posts from which by means of signals the approach of the enemy could be made known. Yet even this means of defence is not very hopeful. The attacking troops may be sufficient to surround the redoubt, and while fighting is going on, even in the case of small bodies, a single miner may cause an explosion on the line. In addition to this it must not be forgotten that the construction of the redoubts in hilly localities, and their supply with food and water, is accompanied by extraordinary difficulties, and their garrison and protection with sentry posts would require large forces of experienced soldiers. A writer in the *Saturday Review* describes in the following manner the nature of the ground where such operations must be carried on. "The veldt of South Africa is apparently as level and boundless as the ocean, it is an ocean studded with islands and archipelagos in the shape of low lying rocky hills. These islands are further frequently connected with isthmuses in the most inextricable fashion." To illustrate the nature of the country I cannot do better than print a topographical map taken from the remarkable work of Captain Wojcik, of the Austrian General Staff, which has been published in Vienna, and translated into several languages. Now to build a post on every hill is impossible, and once a position is occupied by the Boers, to drive them out will be extremely difficult. Attempts to protect the road under such conditions (once the Boers decide to direct their chief blows at the rear of the army, and why they should not do this is inconceivable) will inevitably have a demoralizing effect upon the men. The climate of South Africa is found very trying even by normally healthy Englishmen. Combined with hard work and occasional privations, it induces that extraordinary lassitude and nervousness which have enabled the Boers to take such a surprising number of prisoners. But the additional strain which this momentary

expectation of a sudden onslaught or of death from an invisible hand would impose upon the highly taxed nervous system must, to put it moderately, detract considerably from the value of the services which the troops would be able to render. I entertain a very high opinion of the *morale* and the *physique* of the British soldier, and on this question there are no two opinions in Europe. But I hold that he is greatly handicapped in Africa by climate, country, and a variety of other special conditions; and that is a circumstance which is seldom borne in mind even by English military critics. Moreover, the British soldier is much more dependent upon his officers, their commands and their example, than the Boer. And while on this special duty he will be less carefully looked after and encouraged than on any other. The officers who should ride from post to post and see that the men were doing the work efficiently, would be shot down by Boer sharpshooters hidden behind a stone or covered by an inequality of the ground.

But even if all the attempts of the Boers to damage the line were baffled, the question would arise whether their efforts to wreck the trains could be thwarted with equal success. It would suffice for a number of them to station themselves on any of the heights commanding the line, and from there to open fire upon the passing train, in order to inflict a degree of damage which might cause a serious interruption in the traffic. And this could be accomplished even if none but armoured trains were despatched along the line, unless, indeed, the British effectually occupied large tracts of country on either side of the railway and parallel to it. The cost of this measure in men and money would be enormous, and even then the object aimed at might not be attained. For the Boers would find it possible, if not precisely easy, to slip in unobserved between two such British positions.

It would seem, then, as if the British Commander-in-Chief will have no choice but to take a leaf from the Boers' book, and send out a number of small parties to unearth and attack the enemy, to scour a large tract of country, to prevent ambushes and other surprises, and generally "to feel their way" forward. But who will undertake to say that even then the defence of the railway line is guaranteed? The circumstance that a very few minutes suffice to allow of its being damaged so considerably that several weeks must elapse before it can be repaired, ought to cause one to be very cautious about making too hopeful forecasts.

Everything points clearly to the general conclusion that

whereas, on the one hand, the railway will be the chief line of advance into the enemy's country, on the other hand the invaders will find it a most arduous and costly undertaking to protect it sufficiently to make it render even a tithe of the services which in ordinary times might be reasonably expected of it.

But the defence of the railway will be but one of a long series of episodes in a war consisting of petty skirmishes, sharpshooting from under cover, and destruction by dynamite, the whole intensified for the English by a struggle with climatic conditions, and the occasional gnawing of hunger and the pain of disease. And throughout this guerilla war the Boers will enjoy a number of considerable advantages over the British. The one source of British superiority—their artillery—will virtually disappear altogether, if it be not changed into advantage on the side of the Republicans, while all the personal qualities and accidental advantages which have heretofore stood the Boers in good stead will have a much wider field for development than ever before. The British soldier, on the contrary, will be at his very worst. Overpowering heat, torrential rains, insufficient food, exposure to stress of weather, the terrible nervous tension of minds ever on the look out for deadly surprises, and the isolation of troops accustomed to receive from their officers guidance in the smallest details—all these, and other less constant conditions, will contribute to render the English forces far less efficient than ever before.

Another grave cause of weakness on the British side is their great loss of officers since the war began. This fact is sufficiently interesting in itself to call for a word of explanation. From the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the loss of officers, as compared with the number of men killed and put *hors de combat*, has been steadily on the increase. The most plausible, and it may be the most correct, explanation of this curious phenomenon would seem to be the growing aversion of soldiers throughout the world to face the horrors of actual warfare, and the duty which consequently devolves upon the officers to risk their own lives merely in order to encourage the men by the force of a good example. The proportion of British officers who have thus suffered is larger than that of French and Germans during the Franco-Prussian war, and the difference may, perhaps, be accounted for by the well-known fact that British troops are, and have always been, more dependent upon their officers than the soldiers of any other Great Power in Europe,

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE BOERS WILL DEFEND THEIR OWN TERRITORY.

"NOTHING is certain but the unforeseen," is a saying which holds especially good of the methods and results of war. No matter how numerous the data on which a general or a military council bases its forecast, the field still left open for the play of accidents is almost boundless. A glance at the course of events which marked the Chino-Japanese, the Spanish-American, and the Anglo-Boer wars amply confirms this statement. It is for this reason that, while pointing out and analysing the conclusions to which all known data seem at present to point, I lay the greatest stress not on any mere speculative inferences, but upon certain cardinal facts which cannot be reasoned away. And foremost among these is the proposition that even if Great Britain triumphs—as she ultimately must if she pays the price of victory and if her rivals look on inactive—the results will be but as dust in the balance as compared with the sacrifices which purchased them.

But there are many other interesting inferences equally certain which concern the ways and means which the Boers will employ against the invader. And one of them is that the defence of Boer territory will be carried on by means of scientific guerilla warfare, a system never yet tested by actual experiment. Heretofore the only kinds of guerilla defence tried in practice were the unorganized, as exemplified by the resistance made by the Spaniards to the French and by the Bosniaks to the Austrians, and the semi-organized, which was relied upon by the Russians against the French in 1812. Much more formidable, however, than either of these is the cold, calculating, scientific method which leaves nothing to

chance except what neither science, art, nor audacity can control or modify, which will profit by every feature of the country, every characteristic of the climate, every blunder or weakness of the enemy. And that is the method to which the Boers are sure to give the preference. Nor have I any doubt that during the long days and weeks and months that Ladysmith was surrounded, the Republican leaders used their leisure to mature a completed plan of defence, the details of which will soon be embodied in events telegraphed from the seat of war. And it may likewise be taken for granted that, as in Cuba during General Weyler's campaign, so in the Transvaal, the peaceful inhabitants will have a certain rôle imposed upon them, and will willingly co-operate with the burgher soldiers by strengthening natural obstacles to the British advance, misleading the foreigner by false statements, and in many other ways which circumstances will suggest.

The main efforts of the defence will, of course, be directed to cutting off the enemy's supplies. For while it is quite possible for both sides to watch each other for weeks on end without giving battle or engaging in a skirmish, it is impossible for either side to dispense with eating and drinking. For this reason, and because the chapter of accidents is likely to second the Boers' endeavours in this direction, I am disposed to think that hunger will play a decisive and a horrible part in some of the episodes which will soon be unrolled before our eyes.

While the Boers will move heaven and earth to stop or retard the British advance at every likely place along the entire line, they will none the less carefully bear the military maxim in mind that he who seeks to defend everything ends by defending nothing. Hence they will exert themselves to the utmost in making a stand in the inner lines, where they can choose time, place, and means at leisure. The railway being the axis around which all the operations of the invading army will revolve, the choice of suitable places for defence, of places which cannot be readily turned, offers no difficulty. Bloemfontein has now become the basis of the British operations against the Transvaal, and this involves the occupation and defence of the railway. Whether the Boers would defend Bloemfontein as the British defended Ladysmith it was difficult to predict in advance, owing to the surprising part which political considerations seem to play on both sides. But, speaking from a military point of view, the grounds against this hypothesis were convincing. A defence of Bloemfontein would have considerably hastened the decisive

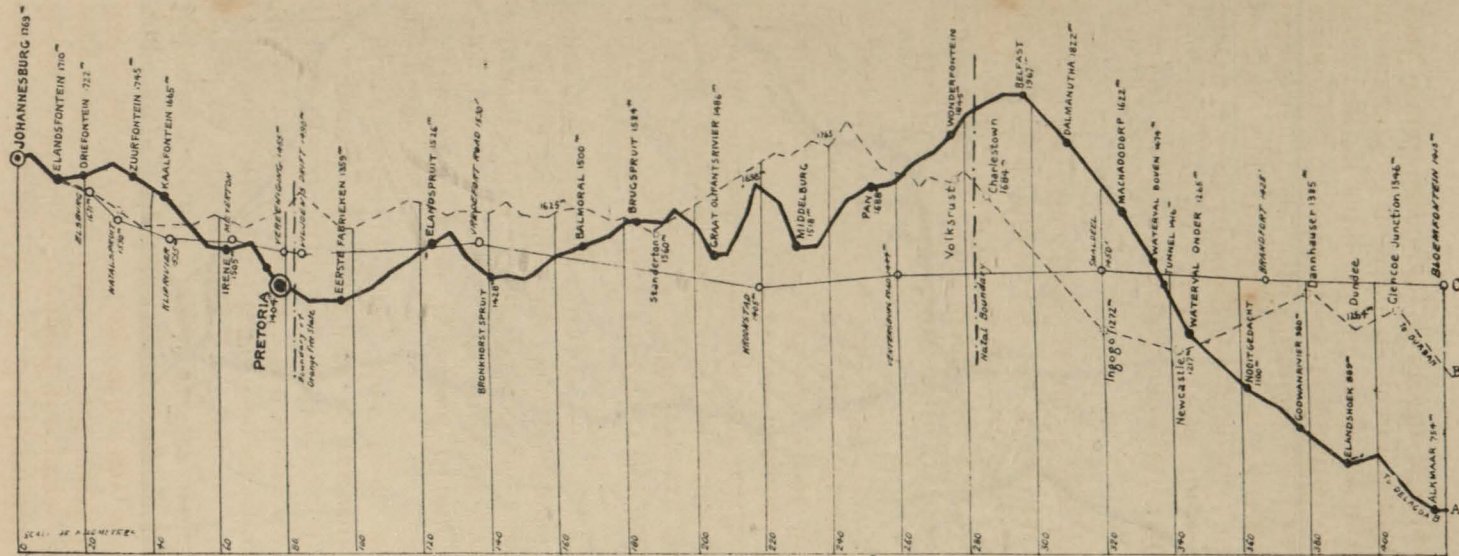
victory of England over the Republics. For at least 10,000 Boers must have occupied the place—which, by the way, is very unsuited for defence—and could at most have held out for a few months. That is to say, it would have rendered some 30,000 British troops inactive for that space of time. But was there no better service which 10,000 Boers could render to their country than that? The inactivity of 20,000 or 30,000 men would have been an inconsiderable item for the British as compared with the inactivity and final surrender of 10,000 Boers. And as the Boers could count the cost quite as accurately as outsiders, it was safe to conclude, from a military point of view, that there would be no siege of Bloemfontein.

The heart of the Transvaal Republic can be reached by three railway routes. In order to give some idea of these railways I give, on pp. 35 and 36, a sketch of their profiles, and also a map showing their positions. On this map will be found the following railways :—

(I.) Delagoa Bay-Pretoria, the shortest line, about 562 kilometres. The local difficulties are very considerable. The railway passes through a very unhealthy country, infested with malaria, so that Europeans can hardly live in the localities adjacent to the line. Troops stationed there for a long time in guarding a line would soon perish from fever and sickness. But, in addition to this, the utilization of this line would require the consent of Portugal.

(II.) Port Natal-Ladysmith-Pretoria. Of English lines this is the shortest, being about 812 kilometres long. Along the first half of the line there are few Boers. The country is healthy, and might provide a certain amount of resources. But, on the other hand, much of the line runs through high hills.

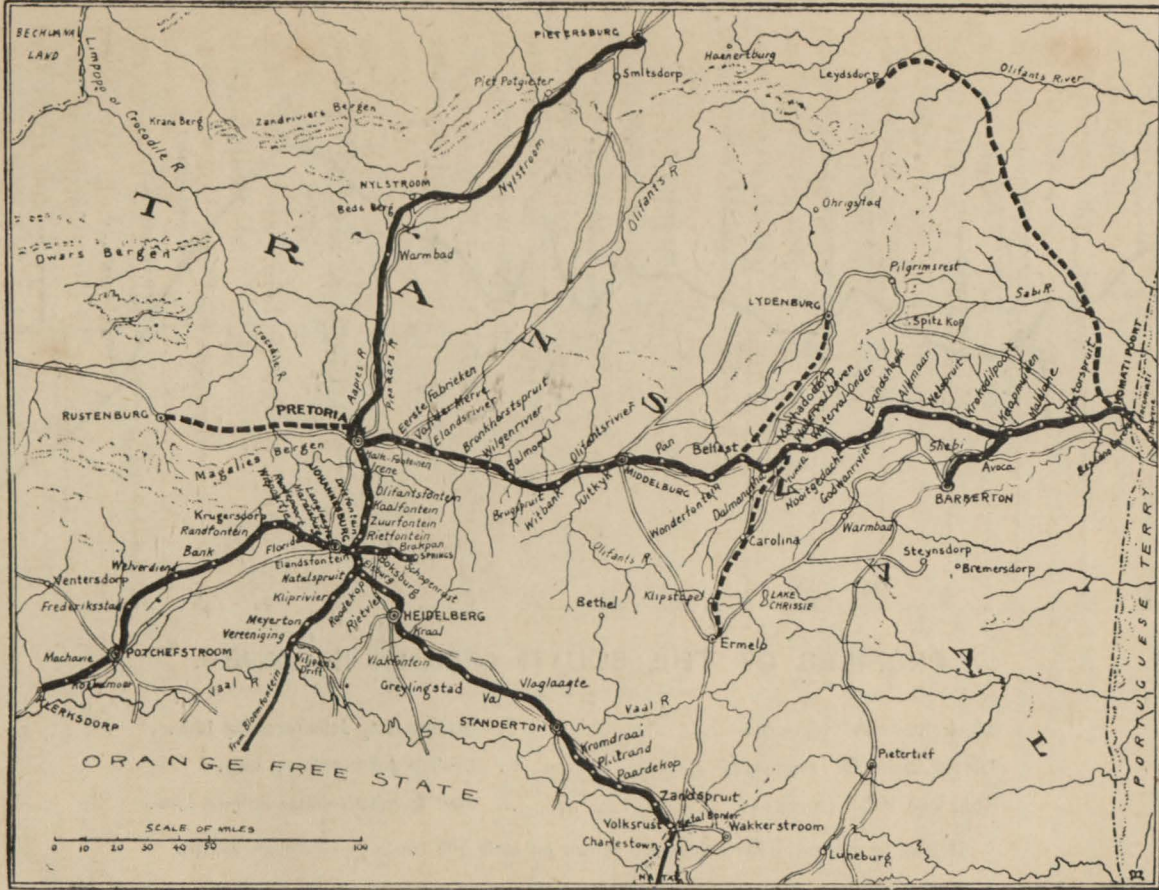
(III.) Lines from East London, Port Elizabeth, and Capetown over the Orange River. These lines are much longer, the shortest, East London, being about 1,114 kilometres, and the longest, Capetown-Pretoria, 1,674 kilometres. But, on the other hand, the local obstacles are less, and the possibility of employing several lines facilitates operations. The local resources for supplying an army are inconsiderable. The lines are single and unfitted for heavy traffic. Such are the lines that would be employed for the advance ; but if it happened



PROFILES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS.

- Thick line "A" represents Delagoa Bay-Johannesburg Line.
- Dotted line "B" represents Durban-Johannesburg Line.
- Thin line "C" represents Port Elizabeth-Johannesburg Line.

Height in metres. Elevations are shown on scale 100 times greater than length.



MAP OF THE TRANSVAAL RAILWAYS.

that other main roads were decided upon, none of my arguments, none of my inferences would be shaken, and at most we should have to change a few proper names, leaving everything else untouched.

Just as considerations of a military character rendered it improbable that Bloemfontein would be seriously defended, in like manner analogous arguments inclined me to discard the idea that any of the lines of elaborate resistance would be chosen in the neighbourhood of the frontier. The reason is self-evident. The occupation of the Orange Free State by the British troops could not have been hindered. The only thing that could have been done was to cause them as much trouble and loss as possible without too great sacrifices on the part of the Boers. And this can best be compassed in the interior of the country, where the difficulty of getting supplies will have enormously increased, and where the large number of English troops employed in protecting the rear will lessen the disproportion between attack and defence. No one fancies that Lord Roberts's advance into the heart of the Transvaal will be characterized by the terrible losses experienced by Napoleon during a Russian summer. But, none the less, the failure of the French military genius to save more lives than he did affords us an insight into the horrible possibilities of the situation. On June 24th, 1812, the troops of the centre of the French army who crossed the river Niemen numbered 300,000 all told. They then pushed on towards Smolensk, a distance of 500 versts (about 330 miles), and reached that city on the fifty-second day, but they had dwindled down to 182,000 men. On that march therefore they lost about one-third of their numbers, and by the time they reached Moscow they had lost two-thirds.

Comparisons never dovetail completely, and the only conclusion which I could draw from those historical facts is that it was distinctly to the advantage of the Boers not to expend their efforts and energy in organizing a stand near the frontiers, where the British would have recuperated their forces and made good all their losses, but to husband their resistance until the enemy was well in the heart of the hostile country. The Orange Free State will not suffer very much from the presence of the British army. The male adult population was already in the ranks of the Republican defenders, and their possessions, consisting mainly of cattle, can be readily removed out of the reach of the English, who, when once in the Transvaal State, far away from their base, can be harassed in a

thousand ways. Meanwhile the danger for England of foreign complications would continue to increase, and this is really the ultimate hope of the Boers.

For these and many other reasons into which it is impossible now to enter, I consider it most probable that the Boers will withdraw before the British until the latter are at a great distance from the source of their supplies. They will occupy some naturally strong position on the line of advance, a position which it will be virtually impossible for the enemy to turn, and having still further fortified it, will store up supplies of food and ammunition there. When the tug of war comes, the British, in their endeavours to turn the position or force the Boer lines, will have to break up into small parties, which will be all the more easily cut to pieces, so that it may be found impossible on the ground in question to manœuvre the soldiers. Meanwhile, everything possible will be done by the Boers, according to well-laid plans beforehand, to cut off the invaders from their base by destroying the main roads, and especially the railways, in the rear. For this purpose they will have laid down mines in tunnels, under bridges, aqueducts, embankments, water reservoirs, &c., and of these the British troops, despite their vigilant research, will most probably not discover all, without exception. When the decisive moment for action has come the Boers will advance in numbers, and knowing exactly where the mines are laid will fire them before the enemy even suspects their intention. The success of a scheme like this would mean a suspension of British communications for weeks, and it may be for one or more months. And the expedient is all the easier nowadays that the use of land torpedoes* has been introduced into the armies of the world. One of these, with a wire attached, can be laid in places where discovery is almost inconceivable: in the arm of a river, at the bottom of a well, in the earth. A button once pressed and the disaster is complete. And this last act can be performed by a "peaceful native." The difficulty of thwarting plans of this kind differs little from impossibility. The experience of the Russian police during the Nihilist movement is an instructive case in point. Yet the Russian police were aided very materially by the entire population, which was absolutely devoted to the Emperor.

* For a description of land torpedoes see my work "The War of the Future" (Russian edition), Vol. II., pp. 301-305.

Communications thus broken behind, and a strongly entrenched enemy in an almost impregnable position in front, the situation of the invaders must become precarious in a high degree. One can readily conceive them—if the road to their source of supplies were blocked for long—compelled by mere hunger to choose between two of the most odious alternatives that can offer themselves to the gallant soldiers. It is even conceivable, but I sincerely hope it is nothing more, that as the result of a *coup* of this kind, the Boers should find themselves the captors of more prisoners than they could undertake to feed. The mind rightly refuses to dwell upon a picture of the horrors that would ensue in a case of that kind, to which the maxim would be applied that “charity begins at home.”

Turning to a less dismal supposition, we may reasonably ask, would the problem which England has set herself—I speak only of the military problem—be satisfactorily solved and done with by the arrival of the British before Pretoria? I am disposed to doubt it. First of all, the Boer army would still be as vigorous and nearly as numerous as ever. The idea that any large proportion of burghers will be killed or captured during the advance of the British is a delusion. No such thing ever happens in guerilla warfare, and is less likely in the present struggle than ever before. The defenders always manage to keep open one or several lines of retreat, and seldom lose more than one man as against four lost by the attacking side. Heretofore the proportion has been about one Boer to three or four Englishmen. The importance of field entrenching, ignored till now in the British army, and thoroughly understood by the Boers, will stand them in excellent stead in the work of defence.

In the second place, Pretoria is not Bloemfontein. It is not a town hurriedly put in such a state of defence as haste and lack of preparations allow. It is a fortified city of the most approved type, and if the descriptions given of it by British journals are trustworthy, a very large force will be needed to besiege it to any purpose. The difficulty of conveying provisions to these troops over a large tract of arid land will, of course, be greater than ever before, owing to the increased distance of the British forces from their base. This, then, will be the “psychological moment,” when the Boers will put forth all their strength in a well-directed effort to intercept communications in the rear, while harassing the enemy in the front. They may succeed or they may fail.

But the risk to which during those weeks or months the British will be exposed is greater far than the press seems to anticipate in its moments of deepest depression. It would be a distasteful and useless task to draw a picture of the consequences which would follow upon a really successful attempt of the Boers. All such pictures are by their very nature fantastic. What is real, true, and appalling is the difficulty which Great Britain will have to surmount before scoring a final triumph, and the utter insignificance of the results which will have then been attained as compared with the terrible sacrifices which purchased them.

CHAPTER V.

HOW SHOULD ENGLAND CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE ?

IN guerilla warfare, as we saw in former articles, the defence has always enjoyed very considerable advantages over the attack. Nowadays small-bore rifles, destructive explosives, smokeless powder, and a number of other technical improvements have increased this superiority fivefold. And in the special case of the Boers, their country and climate, their physical education, and numerous other conditions—such, for instance, as the distance of the seat of war from the Mother Country—intensify this inequality still further. This explains the extraordinary spectacle which for several months astounded the world: a first class Power finding her match in a handful of farmers, and unable to make headway against them.

The terrible dilemma in which England found herself was this: in order to conquer the Boers and occupy their country, the number of troops despatched must be overwhelming, and out of all proportion to the fewness of the defenders, otherwise they would gradually waste away from wounds, sickness, and hunger. But, on the other hand, the larger the army, the greater the difficulty of supplying it with food in an unproductive land like South Africa; and, no matter how numerous it might be, it must be ultimately split up into small parties in order successfully to cope with the mobile bands of Boers scouring the occupied districts. And under such conditions the losses of men killed by the enemy or carried away by disease will be so frequent as to become extremely formidable. For these conditions no generals can be made responsible, and for omitting to take them into consideration no critic can be excused. The aim of all wars is the attainment of political advantages. Heretofore

the means to the end were bayonets, and they were never so successful as in the hands of an advancing foe. All that has been radically changed, and the British troops in Africa are painfully picking up ideas on the subject.

England, therefore, must needs change her military tactics in consequence. In my pamphlet, "The Transvaal War and its Problems," I sought to prove that on purely technical grounds, and in the interests which the war was undertaken to safeguard, the actual invasion of the Transvaal was not a step in the right direction. I am now speaking solely on the basis of considerations of a military character, and am leaving all political and humanitarian pleas wholly out of the question. And I have no hesitation in saying that the vast preponderance of military opinion in Central Europe and France is on my side. Inasmuch as the attacking side is always handicapped, it was England's cue to force that distasteful rôle upon the Boers. And in order to effect this, it would have been sufficient to take up a series of really strong positions on and near the Boer frontier, and fortifying them still more, to wait. The Boers could not have gone on waiting as long as the British, and they would have been compelled either to assume the offensive, which would have been suicidal, or else to sue for an honourable peace.

But the din of arms drowns the voice of reason, and crowds—be they organized peoples or mere mobs—are wont to judge with the heart rather than the head. The invasion of the Transvaal having been thus decided on, the question at present is, whether it is feasible and under what conditions. The answer is not doubtful. Lord Roberts's gallant troops can most certainly invade and occupy the Transvaal. But the feat partakes of the character of the tasks of Hercules, and will cost more time, more money, more men, and a greater loss of those intangible factors which make up the prestige of England, than the most pessimistic of Britons imagines. And in this heavy bill of expenses I have not included such unforeseen items as the disturbing element of foreign complications.

Whatever the original plan for invading the Transvaal may have been, it will ultimately reduce itself to the dimensions of a guerilla war. England in South Africa will have to imitate Russia in the Caucasus, and the prospect cannot prove attractive to England. From the year 1824 to 1842 Russia fought the tribes and peoples of the Caucasus uninterruptedly, unsystematically, and without success. At the end of that time things were pretty much where they had

been at the beginning of the struggle. The Caucasian peoples were excellent riders and endowed with remarkable powers of endurance, like the Boers, and their country offered many points of resemblance to the Transvaal. Expeditions were organized against them from time to time, hostile villages were burned to the ground, people taken with arms in their hands were executed with short shrift, friendly natives were caressed, recompensed, and utilized as spies and allies; and the Russian troops stationed in the Caucasus became acquainted with the country and with the most effectual modes of warfare there; but, notwithstanding this, the Caucasus was as far from being conquered at the end of this term of eighteen years as at the outset.

Then a systematic plan was resolved upon. The whole Caucasus was treated as one enormous natural chain of fortresses, each one of which had to be taken in order, effectively occupied and strengthened, before using it as a basis from which to advance against the next. This scheme was sanctioned in 1843. Its main trait was to keep on the defensive, while actively constructing good roads, making clearings in the forests, erecting blockhouses or posts along the lines of defence, multiplying the number of fortified camps, and advancing very gradually. The villages situated between the lines had to be destroyed and the inhabitants removed to open spaces, and the same fate overtook all villages immediately in front of the most advanced outposts. This method finally proved successful, and the few hordes of wild, unorganized mountaineers at last succumbed to the empire of eighty million inhabitants. But the struggle lasted for fully twenty years, and the sacrifices it cost in men and money were enormous.

The Austrians made relatively short work of the Mohammedan Bosnian rising. After the ratification of the Berlin Treaty, which authorized Austria to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, the local Beys formed a "Bosniak Bond" under the leadership of Khadji Loya. They were poor, badly armed, inefficiently led, with no scientific plan, and no help from outside, and divided among themselves. Yet, despite these drawbacks, which were so many advantages to the invader, Austria, as I have mentioned before, discovered that the task could not be accomplished with less than 262,350 soldiers, 6,280 officers, 110,000 horses, and 292 guns. But it was less to their formidable force than to the feuds and dissensions, racial and religious, among the Bosnian population itself that the

rapidity and completeness of the victory were due. It is enough to note that in Bosnia there were 492,000 Mohammedans, 571,000 members of the Orthodox Church, 275,000 Roman Catholics, and 6,000 Jews. In other words, the Austrians were opposed by only one-third of the population, and assisted by the Christian two-thirds, who saw in them deliverers, and helped them to the utmost of their power.

England, in her present struggle with the Boers, cannot count upon the advantages which Austria thus drew from the help of the Christian population. The Boers are one people in race, language, education, religion, and politics. They must be treated, therefore, as the Caucasian tribes were dealt with by Russia. But even Russia was better off than England will be, seeing that the climate of the Caucasus was salubrious to a high degree, and the natives were badly armed, whereas the South African climate, though healthy, is trying to Englishmen, and the Boers are as well armed as the invaders, to say nothing of the difficulty of keeping the troops supplied with food and water, which never caused great trouble to Russia in the Caucasus, owing to the fruitfulness of the country. But, despite these obstacles, England is certain to gain her end, always provided that she is willing to pay the high price it will cost, and that her rivals are prepared to play the part of interested but inactive spectators. Whether the latter condition is likely to be fulfilled, professional diplomatists and statesmen are the proper persons to decide. Whether the game is worth the candle is a question for the British people when in one of their calm, sober moods.

But the British nation—the most phlegmatic and practical on the face of the globe—is incapable of calmly counting the cost of the enterprise, of weighing pros and cons, and of drawing and acting upon the inevitable conclusions. I am merely stating a fact, not uttering a reproach. That collective immorality known as patriotism acts upon reason as a great magnet would upon instruments of precision, rendering calculations impossible. People are hypnotized, and the psychological aberrations which characterize the views and the impulses of crowds are distinctly revealed. Thus the idea prevails in Great Britain that compromise of any kind would spell disaster, and that a peace concluded on the ground that war is unprofitable would annihilate the prestige built up in the course of ages and sap the nethermost foundations of the Empire. It is further argued that it is necessary,

once and for all, to conquer the Boers to prevent the outbreak of a war at some future time. But having effected their conquest, by that very act the irritation will be made to continue, and a rebellion at the first convenient opportunity may break out. The peaceful settlement of the dispute, on the other hand, would diminish the probability of this. With prejudices of this nature it would be bootless, were it possible, to argue. One can only appeal from England in an excited mood to England in her calm, collected frame of mind.

But England is not by any means an exception. On the contrary, the number of her people who see things as they are is greater than would be found in any other civilized state under analogous conditions. And what is more, I hold that the course of the Transvaal War down to the present moment is replete with lessons for all the Great Powers, and that the most important of the conclusions to which the facts point is that militarism is on a false route. For if it be true—and the facts leave no doubt on the subject—that improved rifles and more efficient means of defence render a successful attack impossible, even when the latter is carried out with artillery and infantry forces much greater than those of the former, modern war could only consist in siege and entrenchment operations, with an avoidance of all direct attack and pitched battles. It would therefore last much longer than the wars of former times. There would be a stoppage of military operations before entrenched and fortified lines, the opposing forces holding their respective positions until the stagnation of the money market and economic crises forcibly put an end to the war. In these respects England is, of course, much stronger than her opponents, but nevertheless finally to subjugate the Boers immense sacrifices both in men and money must be made. At the present time the passions of the people have full play, but a time of coolness will come, and then all those accusations which at the present time are scorned—that the war was brought about for speculative purposes, and to bring profit to the West End of London—will burst out again, and statesmen cannot fail to foresee that by continuing the war they are giving into the hands of the subversive elements a terrible weapon. But, of course, the advocates of bringing the war *à tout prix* to an end, either from conviction or for interested reasons, in one voice will cry that the picture which I have drawn is exaggerated. That is why it has seemed to me that it would not be useless to prove that those who regard this struggle

with too much confidence do so only because they look at it from a narrow point of view. Even in the past the task of conquering an adversary in a country far removed from one's base involved extraordinary difficulties. In the Transvaal war new forces have appeared against England, namely, smokeless powder, perfected rifles, quick-firing guns, and explosive shells, and also the spade, which, in the words of General Schlichting, is the newest and strongest of weapons, and which in the face of modern arms has acquired a magical strength. According to General Berthaut ("Strategie"), in 1877, the fortifications at Plevna and at the Schipka, for the greater part raised under the enemy's fire, checked and defeated more numerous forces than all those which could be put in the field by England. What is still more important is that in the event of guerilla war, which will be inevitable, the value of the English artillery considerably decreases, and the discipline, daring, and high qualities of the English troops will turn to their disadvantage, while the weaknesses of England's enemies—namely, their want of organization and training—will turn to their advantage. It is possible either to agree or to disagree with the picture which I have drawn, but the aim which I have pursued in writing this article will be attained if Englishmen are found who will take the trouble to weigh the question, for or against the continuation of the war, always bearing in mind its probable prolongation, the character which it must take, and, at the same time, considering the profit which would arise from the conclusion of peace by means of voluntary agreement, or by submitting the quarrel to arbitration, according to the decisions of the Hague Conference, or in any other way, as was done by England in the *Alabama* case, and later disputes with the United States. But, of course, such an issue is possible only if the Boers should propose it. And that they would do this immediately if only they had the slightest hope that their proposal would not be rejected there can be no doubt. The Boers have too much good sense not to see that they never can gain a decisive victory over England. Even supposing that the struggle in the hills of the Transvaal should result in their favour, and England, after immense losses, should be forced to retreat, even then the Boers would not be in a condition to draw any advantage from their success. Leaving out of account the new forces which might be sent out from England, the remnant of the retreating army would be sufficient to prevent the Boers from reaching Cape

Colony. And in the final result the Boers must be confronted with the terrible consequences of exhaustion. It is for this reason that the conclusion of the war is for them a vital matter. While in continuing the war the risk for England is considerable, for the Boers it promises nothing but inevitable ruin. It would indeed give us cause to despair of progress if from such a position no issue could be found. Only children and animals fight without thinking of the result. Can it be that such a highly cultured country as England, not to mention the South African Republics, will attempt to imitate them?

JEAN DE BLOCH.

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