15. The Boer War, 1899-1902 – The Family Militants

Further Revision to be done:

1. **Insert STILL TO BE WRITTEN sections on Percy, and Betty and Caroline's roles in the Boer War** – c. p. 6; and at the end (p. 10), **Betty's trip to London with Boer War generals in 1902.**

The Opening Shot – The Jameson Raid

The day started quietly enough. It was New Year's Eve, 31 December 1895 and a typically hot, dry summer's day. James Molteno was living temporarily with his elder brother, Charlie – both of them now Members of Parliament – Charlie still a bachelor and James already without his family, his wife, Clare, and their two children having moved to England. Glancing through the *Cape Times* over breakfast, he noticed a startling report that Dr Jameson, a close friend and employee of the Cape Prime Minister, Cecil Rhodes, had crossed the border into the South African Republic with several hundred-armed men. The two brothers agreed it was probably just another newspaper rumour. But an hour later as James was crossing Church Square on his way to Parliament, he bumped into the Imperial Secretary, Sir Graham Bower.[1] He was very agitated and, on James asking if there was anything in the rumour, said indeed there was.[2]

It soon became clear that what came to be called the Jameson Raid was a plot to spark an armed uprising on the Rand and overthrow President Kruger's government – in the interests of the British-owned gold mines, including Rhodes' own company, and the recently arrived non-Dutch population, the socalled *Uitlanders*. As the news spread through Cape Town, James saw first-hand how it ignited tensions between Dutch and English whites, and put centre stage the inflammatory issue of whether Britain would continue tolerating the world's richest gold mines remaining in foreign territory. There was already a pointer to the likely answer – when diamonds had been discovered at Kimberley in the late 1860s, the British Government had annexed the territory at the expense of another Boer Republic, the Orange Free State. Strolling down Adderley Street later that day, James 'met one of my old sporting friends, a leading stockbroker. We discussed the news. I remarked, "I hope to God Jameson does not reach Johannesburg." He glared at me: "If you say that again, I will knock you down." My friend was a little sickly fellow who in ordinary life could not hurt a fly. In my amazement, I replied: "Don't be a fool. If Jameson gets into Joburg, your and my friends will be shot down and sacrificed."[3] What James meant was that the idea that this conspiracy to ignite an armed rebellion against the South African Republic would be tamely acquiesced in by the Boer population was nonsense, and a bloody engagement with and defeat of the *Uitlanders* would be the certain result.

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[1] The top official heading the staff of Britain's High Commissioner to South Africa.

[2] James gives a detailed account of all that happened before and during the Boer War in his reminiscences, James Tennant Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom,* op. cit., Ch XI et seq.

[3] Ibid., pp. 62-3.

In fact, the plot collapsed in an almost farcical mixture of incompetence and pusillanimity. Within a few days a Boer commando rounded up Jameson and his force in a humiliating surrender and no uprising took place in Johannesburg. The political consequences, however, were of the utmost seriousness and long lasting. Within days Rhodes had to resign as Prime Minister. The British Government was compelled to set up an official inquiry. And it became clear that at the heart of this conspiracy against a neighbouring state was the Prime Minister of the Cape himself, acting in secret, and with powerful allies in the British Government. As a result, the floodgates of Boer (Afrikaner) suspicion of British intentions in South Africa were opened once more, and most Dutch- and English-speaking whites divided into two irreconcilable camps.

Although things were smoothed over for a couple of years, an increasingly febrile atmosphere developed in the Cape. The Afrikaner Bond moved into opposition. 'Loyal leagues' sprang up among English-speakers all over the Colony. Almost the entire white population of the Colony divided along communal lines into irreconcilable camps and the term 'race hatred' was used to characterise their mutual animosity. Things got even worse in May 1897 when the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, replaced Sir Hercules Robinson, who was both Governor of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner to South Africa, and had known nothing of the Raid,[4] with a classically imperial pro-consul, Sir Alfred Milner. It became rapidly clear that Chamberlain and Milner were determined to end the existence of South Africa's two independent states. Powerful elements in the Conservative Party, which was now in alliance with the Liberal Unionists led by Chamberlain, accepted the idea. This was, after all, the high noon of British Imperialism. Britain had taken over huge swathes of territory during the partition of Africa following the Berlin Conference of 1884. It had also made two previous attempts to end the existence of the Boer republics – in the early 1850s and again when Lord Carnarvon tried to strong-arm John Molteno as Prime Minister of the Cape into consenting to Britain forcibly absorbing them into the Empire.

Most members of the Molteno family including James, and a diminishing number of his fellow English- and Dutch-speaking Cape politicians, greatly feared the consequences of a possible war between Britain and the republics. Not only would there be the death and destruction any such war would wreak, but the rupture between Boer and Briton would in all likelihood lead to unforeseeable consequences. Such a prospect was entirely contrary to the political tradition John Molteno had espoused – amity between English and Dutch, and the creation of a united South Africa only on a basis of consent. It may be doubted, however, whether any of them quite realized how such a war would result in the century-long entrenchment over the whole of South Africa of a virulent Afrikaner nationalism.

At the same time, John Molteno's sons and daughters were all deeply anglophile. Take James as an example. He was one quarter Dutch by descent, but was completely English in his education, cultural inclinations and indeed political leanings. He believed the British Empire was a great institution and he made clear in his letters that his political sympathies in Britain lay with Conservatives rather than the Liberals.

[4] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

Political shenanigans on the path to war

So began for James a period of six or so years that 'were to become the most strenuous in my life'. It started early in 1898 with elections for the upper house, the Legislative Council. Rhodes's Progressive Party (as the Loyalists now styled themselves) were defeated by a combination of the Afrikaner Bond, still led by 'Onze Jan' Hofmeyr, and various English-speaking candidates who soon called themselves the South African Party. When Parliament met in May Sir Gordon Sprigg, who had taken over as Prime Minister from Rhodes two years before, was defeated and Parliament dissolved. There followed an election that turned out to be the most bitterly fought, violent and corrupt in Cape history.[5] Rhodes was determined to win. Not only did he have his enormous wealth and control of almost the whole Cape press, but he wanted also to grab what African and Boer votes he could. He set up a new paper for African readers to challenge John Tengo Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu* which opposed him, and a Dutch paper, *Het Dagblad*, to challenge the Bond.

James and Merriman knew they would not be re-elected in Namaqualand because 'the bulk of the electors [there] were servants of the copper companies, mostly Cornish miners, and High Finance made our standing for that constituency out of the question'. James was given a safe seat in another part of the country. But a dramatic turn of events changed all this when Richard Solomon, a son of the famous Saul Solomon who had been the friend and comrade in arms of James's father, withdrew from the contest in the seat where he was standing, Somerset East, convinced that he would lose at the hands of Rhodes. Hofmeyr, with every seat crucial and needing a strong candidate, asked James – the two men were now close friends – to switch seats and stand in this remote constituency instead.

James was still in his early 30s and leapt into the fray. In the fortnight of campaigning that remained, he travelled some 600 miles by cart and horseback trying to visit every distant settlement around Graaff Reinet. On the last day the train he as in broke down and he was stranded in the veld. It was just as well because the destination where he was scheduled to speak – Cookhouse – had been taken over by Cecil Rhodes himself earlier in the day. A huge crowd had gathered there which the charismatic mining magnate whipped into a frenzy of excitement. He 'painted me the very Devil... and the poor deluded railway employees and loyal British subjects were prepared to serve me, the disloyal traitor, ... with tar and feathers.' So James had a narrow escape and got instead to Somerset East, where the count was to take place, at midnight.

Next morning he dressed up in his 'best Bond Street frockcoat, patent leather boots and top hat' and rode down to the town hall. On meeting one of his opponents there, he thoroughly disconcerted the man by insisting on betting – James always loved the excitement of a wager – a substantial sum that he would win. Alas! When the counting took place, James was the loser, coming in just 10 votes behind. However, he had been on the look-out for possible fraud and, as the returns came in from each area, jotted down the number of votes. He now noticed that he actually had got 30 votes more than the number the returning officer was about to declare! Most reluctantly the officer ordered a recount. Not only was James right, but one packet of votes for his opponents contained only 70 of the 100 votes recorded on the wrapper. James had won after all, plus his £50! Revelling in all the

[5] This account relies on James Molteno's two volumes of reminiscences.

excitement and 'followed by a great company of his supporters in carriages, carts and on horseback', he drove triumphantly through the streets 'in a landau drawn by four handsome horses, and beside me sat the belle of the district!'

This was not the end of the campaign however. When he got back to Cape Town, Hofmeyr asked him to rush up to the even more remote seat of Bechuanaland and Vryburg.[6] There he found Rhodes again, accompanied by several other De Beers directors, spearheading the Progressive campaign. 'Fraud, corruption, bribery and impersonation were openly rampant on the Progressive side.' On the evening of the poll, Rhodes invited James to dinner in his personal railway car parked on a siding at Vryburg Station. After the meal, he asked his friends to leave and settled into a long attempt to persuade James to change sides. He refused. Rhodes then warned him, so James recalled: 'we are determined to put in our Ministry and form our own government'. And he went on to say that the news had just come through that General Kitchener had smashed the Mahdi in Sudan and that he, Rhodes, 'had a promise from the British Government that, when things have been settled in the Sudan, its whole weight will be thrown against the Transvaal and clearing up affairs in South Africa.' And this is exactly what transpired; within a year Britain was at war with the Boer Republics.

The two Progressives were declared the winners of the Vryburg seat but James immediately lodged a petition alleging electoral malpractice. On the eve of the Supreme Court hearing in Cape Town, both men threw in the towel and resigned their seats, and in the subsequent by-election two Bond supporters were elected in their stead.

Rhodes was still not prepared to give up trying to regain control of the Cape Government. He now launched an election petition of his own, this time against James, only to be grievously disappointed once more. When the ballot papers for Somerset East were reopened, whole batches of Progressive supporters were found to have voted twice and James ended up with a considerable majority! An avalanche of further legal challenges, financed by Rhodes, to Bond and SAP Members of Parliament followed, all of them to no avail. In desperation he and his supporters finally turned to outright attempts to bribe Bond members to cross the floor of the House. 'A member at that time was worth his weight in gold,' James recollected with considerable exaggeration. But Rhodes had lost and W. P. Schreiner became Prime Minister, with Merriman and Sauer as two of his ministers.

There was one last act in this political drama. Charlie Molteno had not been elected in the September general election. Then as the year turned, sixteen new seats were created. He stood again, this time in the seat of Jansenville, and to James's great joy was elected. Once again, there were two Moltenos in the Cape Parliament.

Furore – James Molteno publicises Milner's determination to defeat Afrikanerdom

The drift to war between Britain and the Boer Republics now gathered pace despite the new Cape Government, led by the famous South African feminist and anti-racist writer Olive Schreiner, being wholly opposed. Despite also Sir William Butler, the general commanding British troops in South

[6] Polling day was staggered across the different constituencies.

Africa, telling the War Office that it was a nonsense to think it would only take one army corps and three months to defeat the Boer forces. The pro-war party among English-speaking whites at the Cape became desperately worried that this warning might halt the British Government in its tracks. Sir William was insulted daily in the Cape papers and people took to sending him white feathers and cakes decorated with white flags. London responded by removing him from his post!

Meanwhile the Governor of the Cape, Sir Alfred Milner, surrounded himself by men from the pro-war faction inspired by Rhodes. He declared that foreign relations lay outside the remit of the Cape Parliament and that, in his other role as High Commissioner to South Africa, he was not bound by any views or advice from the Cape Prime Minister. Tensions mounted. Chamberlain issued an ultimatum to the South African Republic – back down or face war. In desperation the Ministers in Schreiner's administration, backed by the 54 MPs who supported it, signed a Loyal Petition to Queen Victoria warning against the impending war and calling for a commission of inquiry. On the morning of 27 September 1899, three of them, with James as their spokesman, were despatched to Government House and to ask the Governor to cable their Petition to London. Milner read it, turned to James and said he couldn't. 'Why not?' James asked in surprise. The Governor responded with the feeble excuse that the telegraph line was congested and the Petition too long, but that he would cable a summary and inform James of the British Government's response.

A week later, no reply having come, the caucus sent James over to the Governor's residence again in order to find out the situation. Milner strode into the room and immediately told James that a reply from the British Government had been received and was unfavourable. He then asked him to sit down and a long conversation ensued about the imminent war, with James trying to argue him out of it even at this late hour. He pointed out 'the horrors of war in this country', Milner responding with a trite 'it will be alright after it is over'. James then said it was 'the terrible after-effects' he feared – 'English and Dutch will never come together again.' Eventually Milner lost patience. He stood up. 'Well, Mr Molteno, it is no use; I am determined to break the dominion of Afrikanerdom'.

James immediately realized the significance of this outburst – the real intention of Milner and the British Government was to marginalise permanently the political influence of Dutch-speaking South Africans across the whole region. On leaving Government House, he at once wrote down a detailed Memo of what had been said.

He and his brother, Percy, in London were in weekly correspondence as the crisis mounted. Both men were desperately trying to halt the impending war. Explaining he was too busy to write, James simply put a copy of the Petition and his Memo in the mail to Percy. Percy had good links with the section of the Liberal Party led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, but it was Lord Salisbury's Conservative Party which was in power. By the time James' missive arrived two weeks later, war had already broken out. Percy understood how politically explosive Milner's unguarded expression of his intentions would be. The war was not to secure more rights for recently arrived immigrants in the SAR, the Uitlanders. The British Government's real purpose was to make sure of South Africa as a permanently loyal part of the Empire by removing Afrikaners from political power.

Percy showed James's Memo to some friends confidentially. They urged him to publish it. But he hesitated and sought the advice of Sir Edward Clarke, one of the greatest barristers of the time and a leading Conservative. Sir Edward told Percy it was indeed fit and proper that the Memo be

published. So Percy sent it to the *Daily Chronicle* and it was only when the South African press got hold of the English papers that the news of the British Government's intentions broke in Cape Town.

An almighty row broke out. James was accused by the papers controlled by Rhodes of 'having broken every code of honour', his conversation with the High Commissioner being presented as a private and confidential one. But it was the light it threw on Milner's attitude and political intentions that really put the fat in the fire. He was forced to respond in a lengthy explanation to the Colonial Secretary, Joe Chamberlain, which was made public. He protested that he had told James it was a 'misrepresentation ... that what we were contending for was in the interests of Capitalists or that Great Britain wished to subjugate the South African Republic because of its mineral wealth'. He did not deny using the words 'the dominion of Afrikanerdom', but put a gloss: what he had meant wa that the real difference between Britain and the SAR was that 'the latter aimed at maintaining throughout South Africa the predominance of a single race [the Dutch], while we were contending for equality.'[7]

The incident had very significant repercussions. For those in Britain, like Percy and members of the South African Conciliation Committee, it provided real ammunition in their efforts to persuade the public of the illegitimacy of Britain going to war against the Republics. In South Africa, it helped fuel an accelerating sense of grievance among Afrikaners that they were a persecuted community at the hands of Britain and its local allies, the English-speaking Whites. In this way, another stone was laid on the path towards ever more extreme Afrikaner nationalism which ultimately culminated in full-blown apartheid and the declaration of a Republic outside the Commonwealth in 1961.

As for James, he was now a marked man both in the eyes of most English-speaking Whites at the Cape and the British authorities. It heralded a tough time for him during the nearly three years the War lasted. It also resulted when it was over and his friend and mentor, John X. Merriman, at last became Prime Minister of the Cape in 1908, that he felt it was too controversial to offer him a position in his Cabinet.

[INSERT SECTIONS ON PERCY'S ROLE AND BETTY AND CAROLINE'S ROLES DURING THE WAR.]

The War – James Molteno's experiences

War between Britain and the South African Republic (SAR) broke out on 11 October 1899. Immediately the Cape was plunged into an unprecedented position. As part of the British Empire, it was automatically, even if entirely contrary to the wishes of its elected government, at war. At war not only with two neighbouring states, but with people who, quite literally, were the 'kith and kin' of a substantial part of the Cape's own population. Afrikaner Bond and other Members of Parliament like James raced around the rural areas desperately urging Cape Boers not to rebel. Some, especially in the northern districts near the Orange Free State and SAR, did go off to fight with the Republican

[7] James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom,* op. cit., p. 192.

forces, but there was no general rising in the Colony. James was always convinced that, had there been, the British Army would have lost control of South Africa entirely.

The Cape Parliament faced an almost impossible position. Every inhabitant of the Colony was by definition a British citizen; if they joined or helped the Boer forces in any way, they would be guilty of treason. Chamberlain and Milner wanted, among other punishments, to disenfranchise any Cape Rebels, as they were called, for life. This, of course, would decisively tip the political balance in favour of pro-imperialist, 'Loyalist' voters and Milner's goal of ending 'the dominion of Afrikanerdom' would have been achieved in the Cape. Prime Minister Bill Schreiner and his Cabinet asked Merriman to draft its Amnesty Minute of 28 April rejecting this draconian policy. Milner, as Governor, rejected it. The ministry divided and fell. The new administration, with Sir Gordon Sprigg as Prime Minister again, did Milner's bidding and squeaked through a Treason and Indemnity Act before proroguing Parliament indefinitely on 13 October 1900. It was not to meet again until three months after the War eventually came to an end in May 1902.

This meant there was neither parliamentary scrutiny of the Cape Government's actions, nor even a lawful passing of the annual Estimates. In practice, the British military took over the running of affairs. Martial law was declared in district after district as the country settled into the long haul of a prolonged guerrilla struggle. Curfews and movement restrictions came into force. Censorship was imposed. And a special Treason Court was set up in the northern districts of Kimberley, Mafeking and Colesberg, and later extended eastwards to Aliwal North, Wodehouse and Barkly East.

There was now no parliamentary role which James could play. But he felt far too passionately about what was at stake to retreat into inactivity and just earn a living at the Bar. Instead he threw himself into acting as defence counsel for those accused of treason or other offences.[8] "For over 19 months I was away from Cape Town and living in the northern districts of the Colony. I returned occasionally when the Treason Court took vacation or the enemy forces drove the Court and the advocates away."

As for his family responsibilities, Clare and the two eldest children – Clarissa who was ten and Vincent eight – had returned to England in July 1900. However, little Monica (only five) 'refused to leave', James recalled. Every afternoon he would take 'the faithful and beautiful little child to the beach at Muizenberg to give the little one and myself some fresh air'.[9] She was still at the Cape when, in late March 1902, Cecil Rhodes lay dying in his cottage by the sea, and she happened to be sitting with her father on the beach nearby when the news came through. Who Monica actually lived with and who looked after her all the time James was up-country defending people in the treason trials is not known.

The legal defence work James did was largely unpaid, and he depended financially on a generous 'subsidy' Percy sent him. What he was doing could also be dangerous; indeed when up-country he took to sleeping with a pistol next to his pillow. Another indication of the extreme hostility he encountered became clear at an exhibition put on in London during the War. On display was a

[8] 'Molteno, Sir James Tennant', *Dictionary of South African Biography,* p. 481. CHECK TITLE

[9] James Molteno, *The Dominion of Afrikanerdom,* op. cit., p. 224.

shooting gallery with the heads of three men labelled as traitors which members of the public could use as target practice – alongside President Paul Kruger and John X. Merriman was James![10]

By late 1901, he had grown increasingly desperate. The War was dragging on and on as the British Army struggled to get on top of what had become its first real experience of guerrilla warfare. As James wrote years later, 'My experiences were not confined to dry law only. I witnessed the progress of the war from within, the growth of – and life in – the concentration camps, and all the meanness and horrors of the administration of martial law.' In October that year he rode out with a British officer into the countryside: 'For miles about, dotted over the veld, there were castles of dried, half-burnt carcasses of cattle. Tens of thousands of cattle had been concentrated and then left to die.... The half-putrid carcasses had then been collected, piled up in mounds, and set on fire.'[11] And in order to deprive the Boer forces of food and shelter, British troops also systematically set fire to farm houses, laid waste the crops as well as getting rid of all livestock.

James began to think that he ought to travel to London and do what he could to publicise what was really going on in South Africa. He was particularly influenced by the fact that there were few opportunities for opponents of the War to make their voices heard within the Cape itself. "All our papers were suppressed, all our editors in jail at Tokai, all our Members of Parliament strangled in the grip of martial law, and half a million troops desecrating our home." What's more, censorship, and the fact that Rhodes controlled those papers that had not been closed down, meant that really only his and Milner's views got an airing in Britain.

James became even more determined when rumours reached him up-country that Milner and Rhodes wanted to abolish the Cape's constitutional status as a self-governing colony. By this time both the South African Republic and Orange Free State had been annexed and Milner appointed as Governor of the new colonies with unfettered executive powers. He viewed the continuation of the self-governing Cape Colony, still by far the largest and economically dominant territory in South Africa, as an inconvenient obstacle to his plans for South Africa as a whole.

Christmas 1901 saw James hurrying back to Cape Town and found the rumours of Milner's intentions confirmed. Indeed Milner had gone so far as to attach a letter of recommendation to a petition to this effect organized by Rhodes's supporters. James's trip to London now took on an even more strategic purpose – the survival of self-government at the Cape that his father, John Molteno, had devoted so many years of his life to winning.

He booked his passage on the next boat and went down to the Permit Office to collect the necessary document. The Chief Permit Officer said fine, come back tomorrow and collect it. But when James returned, he was told the military had allegedly vetoed permission for him to travel. James refused to take this lying down. He went at once to the Castle where the British military had their headquarters and saw the most senior officer there. The man promised to get in touch with Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief, who was based hundreds of miles away in Kroonstad. Weeks

[10] *South African National Biography* – CHECK THIS IS THE SOURCE.

[11] James Molteno, *Further South African Recollections,* London, Methuen, 1926, p. 6.

went by with James pestering the Castle for a response. At long last, Kitchener's cable arrived: 'Have nothing against Molteno can leave for England any time.'

James was furious at how he had been treated. Being a prominent parliamentarian and son of the first Prime Minister, he could get access to important people in a way ordinary persons could not. He went at once to Government House and demanded to see the new Governor of the Cape, Sir Hely-Hutchinson, who had just replaced Sir Alfred Milner. Hely-Hutchinson declared that the decision to grant or refuse the necessary permit lay with Milner. At this James lost his temper: 'Sir, are you the Governor of the Cape Colony, or are you a clerk to Sir Alfred Milner?' And pointed out that he already had the permission of the Commander-in-Chief. Hely-Hutchison caved in and within 24 hours James had his permit.

It was now early May. James finally arrived in London on Saturday 31 May 1902. He at once went down to spend the Sunday with Percy on his farm at Parklands. 'It was a glorious day, the gorse in full bloom beneath a cloudless sky.' That evening he caught the train back to London. As it crawled through the suburbs, he began to hear endless church bells and the occasional explosion of a firecracker. Once arrived at Waterloo, he heard the news. Peace had been concluded at last. The streets were already packed with people streaming towards the City to hear the Lord Mayor formally announce the news on the steps of Mansion House. 'Rattles, noise, feathers, madness and lunacy everywhere.'

The outbreak of peace changed everything. The task now before James was to stymie Milner's plans for the Cape Colony. Never before had a self-governing British Dominion faced such an overthrow of its freedom. The next month saw James at the height of his powers – determined, confident, and using every influential contact he had built up in England ever since his Cambridge days. 'Day and night, I met with every shade of political opinion as I canvassed in support of our Constitution.' His best links, courtesy of Percy, were with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who was now Liberal Party leader and eader of the Opposition. James also met with Lloyd-George, Lord Bryce, and Francis Hirst, Editor of the *Economist.* Even more importantly, he made contact with certain 'old Tories and Conservatives' – their support being essential since their party was still in power.

As luck would have it, Chamberlain had summoned an Imperial Conference for June. James now hatched a skilful pincer operation to box Chamberlain in and block him from carrying out Milner's intentions. The Cape Prime Minister, Sir Gordon Sprigg, was attending the Conference along with the other Dominion Premiers. The very day he arrived, James was at the Hotel Cecil to see him. Despite the years of mistrust between the two men – going back to Sprigg's support of Rhodes at the time of the Jameson Raid and his role during the Boer War – James was delighted to discover that on this issue he could count on him to oppose Chamberlain.

If the Prime Ministers of the other self-governing dominions could be made to see the danger to their own constitutional position if Britain successfully asserted a right to suspend responsible government – this was now the 20th century after all – they could place Chamberlain in an untenable position. Sprigg went to see the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, as well as Barton, the Prime Minister of the newly created Commonwealth of Australia.

A dramatic confrontation took place when the Imperial Conference convened. Chamberlain did not put forward Milner's recommendation to abolish self-government at the Cape himself. Instead, and presumably thinking it was a skilful move, he got the premiers of two the smallest colonies – Natal and New Zealand – to engage in the extraordinary process of interfering in the internal affairs of another Dominion and proposing a motion to abrogate the Cape Constitution. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was outraged. If the Conference passed the motion, he would at once walk out, pack his bags and return to Canada! Barton and Sprigg backed him up. The upshot was, tail between his legs, Chamberlain had to inform the House of Commons that he (sic!) had decided to reject Lord Milner's advice! And James, now a happy man at last, sailed for South Africa just in time to attend the reconvening of the Cape House of Assembly on 20 August for the first time in nearly two years.

[INSERT STORY OF BETTY ACCOMPANYING BOER WAR GENERALS TO LONDON IN LATE 1902]

The Boer War – Britain's Vietnam?

It is worth reflecting on how significant an event the Boer War was. It had become by far the most expensive and prolonged of any war Britain engaged in between the end of the Napoleonic wars and the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. In its early months, the British Army suffered a succession of humiliating defeats at the hands of the Boer forces who were simply farmers who had organized themselves to protect the countries they believed were rightfully theirs. When the British forces did successfully invade the two republics, occupy the main towns and think they had won, they then found themselves confronting the entirely unfamiliar challenge of guerrilla war across most of South Africa. In the end a third of a million British troops, supplemented by more than 100,000 contributed by Canada, Australia and New Zealand, had to be raised in order to get on top of the situation. The war dragged on for two and a half years while the costs soared, amounting eventually to £200 million (or several times the British Government's total annual budget)![12]

Internationally, the War greatly damaged Britain's reputation. What the world saw was the pre-eminent Great Power of the day, with an empire already much larger in landmass and population than any other and a Navy with undisputed control of the world's oceans, engaging in a flagrant and pre-meditated attack on two small and distant states. Whether or not Chamberlain and the British Cabinet had this intention, people interpreted the British annexation of the South African Republic as a brazen seizure of the richest gold fields the world had ever seen. The moral standing of the country suffered even more grievously when news trickled out, despite the censorship, of the Army's scorched earth tactics and herding of Boer women and children into concentration camps, where some 26,000 died of disease and hunger.

In South Africa itself, there was no escaping the war. British troops were everywhere. Martial law was declared. Stringent curfews and other controls over people's movement imposed. Few districts, even in the Cape, felt confident that the war would never reach them. Tens of thousands of black farm workers in the South African Republic and Orange Free State were also put in concentration

[12] Some £20 billion in today's money.

camps like the Boers, and many of them died in the same way. Division and mutual hostility within the white community escalated as over 25,000 English-speakers volunteered to fight in the war against their fellow South Africans. And Boer bitterness increased further when Boer POWs – some 25,000 in all – were deported to camps in distant parts of the Empire – the island of St Helena in the Atlantic, Bermuda in the Caribbean, and to Ceylon and India.

But it was the political consequences that turned out to be most unexpected and contrary to all the British Government had been intending to achieve. Rather like the USA at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 when its enemy, the Vietcong, finally took over the whole country, Britain also landed up only a few years after the War seeing the Boer Generals it thought it had defeated come to power in South Africa. This was to affect the lives of all South Africans, white and black. And it was to prove the most enduring, and tragic, legacy of this ill-conceived and ill-conducted war. How it came about and how it affected the family we will see in the next chapter.