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The origins of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879.

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from that day to this.[218]

This lapse into clarity by Frere was an aberration. After 30 September, as before, his professions were all pacific while every warlike intention was attributed to Cetshwayo. He represented the reinforcements he asked for as being needed to repel or discourage a Zulu attack. In his letters and despatches to Hicks Beach he described the ultimatum in such terms as a demand for 'further securities for peace' or 'a statement of the guarantees which we consider necessary in order to ensure pea[illegible]'.[219] It was not until well into December, when Hicks Beach saw a letter from Frere to Shepstone dated 7 November, a copy of which Frere had sent to Herbert, asking for Shepstone's 'opinions regarding the kind of ultimatum that ought to be sent to Cetywayo' that Hicks Beach clearly grasped that Frere intended to send an ultimatum that might result in war.[220] This was in fact only one of many repetitions of a request which Frere had first made to Shepstone a month earlier.[221] But Frere was never so straightforward in his letters to Hicks Beach.

As late as 10 November he was still only hinting at his intentions, and diluting his hints with statements of an opposite tendency. Statements concerning the necessity of 'employing an adequate force' to take 'immediate action' were mixed up with statements that 'the time for taking action no longer rests with us' and that 'it rests, not with you, nor with us here, but with a conceited savage to say whether he will have peace or war'.[222] To divine Frere's true intentions from the confused and multifarious deluge of paper he sent Hicks Beach was an almost impossible task. It was not until 2 January 1879 that the first draft of the ultimatum specifying the terms to be imposed on Cetshwayo reached London, and the final draft, in the form it was actually delivered to the Zulu.

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[218] Colin Webb, in his useful 'Lines of Power: the High Commissioner, the Telegraph and the War of 1879', *Natalia*, 8 (Dec. 1978) makes no mention of this reference to an ultimatum, and states (p.34) that Frere's 'first intimation of his intention to make "demands" on the Zulu was in a private letter to Hicks Beach, written on October 14, 1878'.

[219] Frere to Hicks Beach, 14 Oct. 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, pp.158-9; B.P.P., C.2222, p.17, no. 11, Frere to Hicks Beach, 11 Nov. 1878.

[220] Hicks Beach to Frere, 11 Dec. 1878, in Hicks Beach, *Life of Hicks Beach*, Vol. I, pp.115-6; S.P. 34, Frere to Shepstone, 7 Nov. 1878.

[221] S.P. 33, Frere to Shepstone, 7 Oct. 1878; S.P. 34, Frere to Shepstone, 26, 29 Oct. & 2 Nov. 1878.

[222] Frere to Hicks Beach, 10 Nov. 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.110.

arrived only on 25 January, a fortnight after the war had begun and three days after the battle of Isandlwana.[223]

Brilliant parody is usually more effective than careful analysis, and much of the impression of Hicks Beach's feebleness is derived from the summary of his despatches with which Sir William Harcourt entertained the House of Commons:

> My dear Sir Bartle Frere: I cannot think you are right. Indeed, I think you are very wrong; but then, after all, I feel you know a great deal better than I do. I hope you won't do what you are going to do; but if you do I hope it will turn out well.[224]

But this is really a summary - a fairly accurate summary in fact - of Hicks Beach's despatch to Frere of 23 January 1879,[225] rather than of his despatches in general. By this time Hicks Beach knew what Frere intended and had given up hope of controlling him. He was hedging his bets: while not approving of Frere's having acted without prior approval, he was prepared to condone it, if it proved successful. Hicks Beach may well be criticised for allowing success or failure to influence his judgement on a matter of principle: Frere's apologists are almost certainly correct in saying Frere would not have been censured had it not been for Isandlwana.[226] But it is much less fair to criticise Hicks Beach for failing to prevent Frere from invading Zululand, since Frere did not tell him (until it was too late to stop him) that he had any such intention, except so obscurely in his despatch of 30 September that not only Hicks Beach but everyone else failed to notice it.

Still less can one argue (though Frere himself of course did) that Frere did not know that the British government wished him to avoid war with the Zulu. In the first private letter he received from Hicks Beach, in April 1878, the latter stated that the troops to be transferred from the Cape to Natal 'should not make us relax our best efforts to obtain a peaceful solution'.[227] The telegram of 5 October stating that Hicks Beach believed there to be 'a good chance of avoiding war with the

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[223] B.P.P., C.2222, p.23n, no. 19, Frere to Hicks Beach, 16 Nov. 1878; *ibid.*, p.201, no. 53, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Dec. 1878, encl. border award and ultimatum.

[224] H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLV, col. 85, Harcourt, 31 March 1879.

[225] B.P.P., C.2222, pp.197-8, no. 51, Hicks Beach to Frere, 23 Jan. 1879.

[226] This is shown by Hicks Beach to Disraeli, 13 Jan. 1879, in Monypenny & Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, Vol. VI, p.423.

[227] Hicks Beach to Frere, 7 March 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.69.

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Zulus' reached Frere by 3 November at the latest.[228] The despatch of 17 October which expressed the 'confident hope' that it would be possible 'to avert the very serious evil of a war with Cetywayo' reached Frere on 10 November.[229] It was not until 16 November that a message was sent to Cetshwayo requesting him to send representatives to the Lower Thukela Drift to receive the border award and what Frere described as 'further communications'.[230] A telegraphed summary of Hicks Beach's letter of 7 November in which he urged him to redouble his exertions to avoid war was sent from Cape Town. The text of the summary does not survive, but it can scarcely have failed to include the statement which Hicks Beach underlined in the original: *'we cannot now have a Zulu war in addition to other greater and too possible troubles'*.[231] This telegram reached him on 30 November. It was on 4 December that John Shepstone left Pietermaritzburg to deliver the award and the ultimatum, and the die might be said to have been cast.[232]

Frere and the Danger of Revolt in the Transvaal

Frere knew that the home government did not wish him to send an ultimatum to the Zulu King, but he sent it nevertheless. He was convinced that 'everything in South Africa hangs on this question - Transvaal contentment and Transvaal finance, and all chance of Confederation depend on its being settled, to say nothing of the peace of this border'.[233] He calculated, quite correctly, that the government would acquiesce in a successful *fait accompli*.[234] He gambled and he lost - and proved to be an extraordinarily bad loser, spending the rest of his life insisting upon the absolute rectitude

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[228] See above, p.283. Hicks Beach stated he sent it 'to catch at Madeira the mail that left England on 3rd of October' (Hicks Beach, *Life of Hicks Beach*, Vol. I, p.99); a letter from Hicks Beach to Frere dated 2 October reached the latter on 3 November (Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.102); if the telegram was telegraphed from Cape Town to Pietermaritzburg, as it probably was, it would have reached Frere about a week earlier.

[229] See above, p.283; Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.106.

[230] S.N.A. I/7/13, p.149, message to Cetshwayo, 16 Nov. 1878; B.P.P., C.2222, p.107, no. 28, Frere to Hicks Beach, 25 Nov. 1878.

[231] See above, p.284; Martineau, *Life of Frere*, Vol II, p.318; Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, pp.131 & 132.

[232] S.P. 35, Frere to Shepstone, 4 Dec. 1878.

[233] Frere to Herbert, 10 Nov. 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.112.

[234] Martineau, *Life of Frere*, Vol. II, p.255; see also above, p.287.

of all his actions.

'Transvaal contentment' - the danger of a Boer revolt - was the major reason why Frere was so inexplicit about his plans until it was too late for Hicks Beach to veto them and why he brought about a war with the Zulu against the wishes of the government. Mounting discontent in the Transvaal had been temporarily allayed by the decision in April 1878 to send a further deputation to Britain to request the restoration of independence. But Hicks Beach warned Frere in July that Kruger and Joubert were quite intractable, that reforms, promises of telegraphs and railways and so forth were unlikely to satisfy them, and that when they returned 'with their little request refused, I fear there will be an outbreak'.[235] According to Frere's private secretary, writing in October, the same belief was common in Pietermaritzburg.[236] Hicks Beach seems to have favoured the restoration of self-government within the framework of a British protectorate, with British control over foreign relations and native policy, along the line of the later Pretoria Convention,[237] a scheme which might have worked had it been conceded from strength and not in the aftermath of British military defeat. But Frere was opposed to any arrangement outside the framework of confederation,[238] about the chances of which Hicks Beach was by now frankly sceptical. Frere was not interested in piecemeal settlements of local problems but in the implementation of his grand design. He did not accept that the Boers were irreconcilable. He did, however, believe that they would not be reconciled unless the Zulu problem were solved.[239] He wrote to Carnarvon:

> In the Transvaal, I need hardly tell you it is quite useless my saying a word to the Boers, unless we can settle the Zulu & other native questions. I have most encouraging accounts of their willingness to accept the past as irrevocable, if I can give them assurance as to the future. But how can I satisfy them as to the future, if, after annexing them because they provoked a Zulu difficulty, we leave that difficulty unsettled?[240]

Kruger and Joubert passed through Natal on their way back to the Transvaal, arriving in Pietermaritzburg on 28 November. They were due to report back on their mission on 10 January

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[235] Hicks Beach to Frere, 11 July 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.75.

[236] U.W.L., Littleton Papers, no. 75, Littleton to his mother, 6 Oct. 1878 (sheet 4).

[237] Hicks Beach to Frere, 18 & 25 July 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, pp.76-7 & 79.

[238] Frere to Hicks Beach, 10 Aug. 1878, in *ibid*, p.83.

[239] Frere to Hicks Beach, 15 Sept. & 10 Nov. 1878, in *ibid*, pp.89 & 111.

[240] B.L. Add. Mss. 60797, Frere to Carnarvon, 16 Nov. 1878.

1879. As things became more urgent, so Frere's language became more explicit. 'The Boers' he wrote to Hicks Beach on 8 December, 'will watch what we do here; &, if we prove the better men, will accept it as some sort of argument for the annexation of Transvaal, which otherwise they will resist as far as they dare'.[241] To Shepstone he pointed out that 10 January was

> the same date on which the time given to Cetywayo will expire, &, unless he has completely given in, Ld. Chelmsford will take the matter in hand, & his preparations are so complete that I have every hope of his speedy success.
>
> I hope the discontented Boers will understand this & see what the Zulus can do, before they decide on their own future proceedings.[242]

It was not simply the removal of the danger of Zulu aggression that he hoped would mollify the Boers but the nullification of the 'most inconvenient - most disastrous'[243] border award. In response to the despatch telling him the reinforcements being sent were not to be used for a 'campaign of invasion and conquest',[244] an instruction he disregarded, Frere said war with the Zulu might possibly have been deferred, but 'an insurrection or rebellion in the Transvaal would have been almost inevitable', adding only as an afterthought (between the lines of the letter) 'and would certainly have been followed by a Zulu invasion of Natal'. He went on:

> It would take months to convey to the Boers the devices by which I hoped the Commissioners' disregard of private rights might possibly be mitigated and corrected. Meantime it is probable the Boer discontent would have exploded in some form or other.[245]

In April 1879, having been privately informed he would be publicly censured, Frere wrote (from the Transvaal) that the evidence of Boer discontent had convinced him that the delay of a referral would involve 'dangers far greater than those of a Zulu war'. Hicks Beach might prefer Colenso's opinion to his on the danger of a Zulu invasion of Natal, he wrote:

> But there could be no doubt as to the state of Boer feeling, of which at the time you had

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[241] G.R.O., PCC/1/31, Frere to Hicks Beach, 8 Dec. 1878.

[242] S.P. 35, Frere to Shepstone, 19 Dec. 1878.

[243] S.P. 33, Frere to Shepstone, 17 Oct. 1878.

[244] See above, p.284.

[245] Frere to Hicks Beach, 5 Jan. 1879, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.139. The original is in G.R.O., PCC/2/1.

> little evidence before you. I felt, however, quite certain that, even if I could postpone for a few weeks or even months the inevitable Zulu War, it would be impossible to avoid a Boer rebellion. You will, I think, agree with me when you read my recent despatches about the Transvaal and reflect how much the danger we have so narrowly escaped here would have been aggravated had the malcontent Boers been able to point to Piet Uys and his gallant band, driven from their homes to make them over to the Zulus.[246]

The Sending of the Ultimatum

Frere needed the overthrow of the Zulu kingdom to persuade a reluctant Transvaal and an almost equally reluctant Cape into confederation. He forced on a war with the Zulu for imperial reasons, but he had to represent it as being forced on him for local, defensive reasons. This made it embarrassing for him that, as he was obliged to admit, there was 'a considerable party in Natal and the Cape Colony who have taken, and advocated in the public press, views regarding Zulu affairs strongly opposed to the use of coercion'.[247] A further embarrassment was that while Frere was describing the aggressive blood-lust of the Zulu in ever more lurid terms in an attempt to alarm the home government into sending out reinforcements, the Zulu themselves were doing nothing to justify this description. There were no frontier incidents after Mbelini's raids on the Swazi in early October.[248] On the same day that Frere telegraphed Hicks Beach to say that reinforcements were 'urgently needed to prevent war of races' and that the Zulu were 'insolent' and 'burning to clear out white men',[249] a message was received from the Zulu King stating that he wished to 'sit down and rest and be peaceful'.[250] His subsequent messages were equally pacific,[251] as was a message received on 13 November from the *izikhulu*.[252] The King's brother Hamu, even while secretly

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[246] Frere to Hicks Beach, 25 April 1879, in Martineau, *Life of Frere*, Vol. II, p.323. See also in the same vein, B.P.P., C.2454, p.140, no. 54, Frere to Hicks Beach, 30 June 1879.

[247] B.P.P., C.2222, p.225, no. 58, Frere to Hicks Beach, 27 Dec. 1878.

[248] See above, pp.275-6.

[249] B.P.P. C.2222, p.8, telegraphic, Frere to Hicks Beach, 5 Nov. 1878, encl. in no 6, Frere to Hicks Beach, 5 Nov. 1878.

[250] S.N.A. 1/7/13, p.148, message from Cetshwayo, 5 Nov. 1878.

[251] *Ibid.*, p.157, Dunn to Bulwer, 10 Nov. 1878; S.N.A. 1/4/2, message from Cetshwayo, 28 Nov. 1878, encl. in no. 91, B.A., Lower Tugela, to A.S.N.A., 28 Nov. 1878.

[252] S.N.A. 1/4/2, message from Zulu chiefs, 13 Nov. 1878, encl. in no. 79, B.A., Lower Tugela, to A.S.N.A., 13 Nov. 1878.

informing the British of his intention to defect to them in the event of war, stated that Cetshwayo had no aggressive intentions.[253] The Zulu people at large also showed no sign of a wish for war. The Border Agent on the Lower Tukhela wrote:

> I am repeatedly assured both by our own natives just out from the Zulu country and by Zulus who visit their friends in Natal that the desire of the Nation is lasting peace with the English and that any other policy on the part of the Zulu King would not receive g al support.[254]

But Frere needed the Zulu to be aggressive. 'Are we then forcibly to coerce the Zulus in order to secure the allegiance of the Transvaal?' he asked in one of his despatches advocating in effect just that. His explicit answer to his question however was: 'Certainly not, if any one can show us reasonable grounds fo.' expecting that the Zulus will be cont. to remain in peace within their own borders.' But there could be, he insisted, no such expectation of one who sought 'to revert to Chaka's system of centralised military organisation, for the avowed purpose of conquest and aggression of the bloodiest and most barbarous kind'.[255]

Since Frere so needed the Zulu to be aggressive, he was unable to keep out of his numerous and voluminous letters and despatches all traces of his irritation at Cetshwayo's pacific demeanour. He attributed the Zulu King's failure to take advantage of many 'favourable opportunities' in the previous eighteen months to 'half-heartedness'[256] or 'want of resolution'.

> Just at present Cetywayo seems a very ordinary kind of butcher; with some ability of a low cunning kind, but little personal courage, and no tinge of genius like Chaka. Had he Kreli's ability or popularity you would long since have had trouble in Natal.[257]

All Frere's problems would be solved if only Cetshwayo would strike the first blow.

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[253] T.A., S.N. 1, message from Hamu, 6 Nov. 1878, encl. in. no. 281, Rudolph to H.C. Shepstone, 7 Nov. 1878.

[254] S.N.A. I/4/2, no. 56, B.A., Lower Tugela to A.S.N.A., 7 Oct. 1878.

[255] B.P.P., C.2222, pp.6-7, no. 6, Frere to Hicks Beach, 5 Nov. 1878.

[256] B.P.P., C.2252, p.51, no. 18, Frere to Hicks Beach, 24 Jan. 1879. This was written after the battle of Isandlwana but before Frere had heard of it.

[257] Frere to Herbert, 10 Nov. 1878, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, pp.110-112.

> If some of Cetywayo's young regiments would try their strength against one of H.M.'s, I should have no fear of the result & the way would be clear. But if, as is very possible, he tries to gain time, & to wait for a more favourable opportunity, when we are not so well prepared - what should be our course to bring him to a clear issue?[258]

Frere's great fear was that Cetshwayo would accept the ultimatum. He was, he told Shepstone, 'at a loss to know what security I can get, or demand from Cetywayo, should he profess an intention to do as we require, & offer to repeat his broken Coronation promises'. There was, he said, 'a great disposition among many persons in Natal to be satisfied with such promises of amendment'; but this, he considered, would be 'a fatal error'. To obviate as far as possible the danger of its being accepted, Frere wished the ultimatum to be as comprehensive as he could make it. But he experienced difficulty in finding sufficient things to complain of. He began to suspect that the Natal government was concealing Zulu outrages from him. He had been unable, he told Shepstone, to whom he appealed for help, to get from anyone in authority in Natal 'any clear or complete account [of] what we have to complain of'. He had given Bulwer a note of what had occurred to him on the subject, which most of the Natal officials had seen, but he had had no response. He knew of course of the Sihayo, Mbelini, and Smith and Deighton incidents, 'but for anything I know to the contrary there may be scores of similar misdeeds, during the last 12 months'.[259]

Shepstone's official advice on the ultimatum arrived only after it had been drawn up. This was the result not only of his habitual dilatoriness but of his uncertainty as to whether Frere wanted an ultimatum which would be accepted or one which would lead to war. This was a delicate enquiry which produced a circumlocutory answer, but its meaning was clear enough, and Shepstone was relieved to learn that Frere intended the overthrow of Cetshwayo.[260] Shepstone in turn expressed the reassuring opinion that a demand for the surrender of the people involved in the border incursions and the payment of a heavy fine would not be complied with, and that the Zulu kingdom would disintegrate at the first move made against it.[261] He was unable to produce any further Zulu actions to complain of, so the Smith and Deighton incident, which Frere had earlier been inclined to agree

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[258] S.P. 34, Frere to Shepstone, 20 Nov. 1878.

[259] *Ibid.*, Frere to Shepstone, 15 Nov. 1878.

[260] S.P. 69, pp.173 & 183-4, Shepstone to Frere, 16 & 30 Nov. 1878; S.P. 34, Frere to Shepstone, 20 Nov. 1878.

[261] S.P. 69, pp.176 & 184-5, Shepstone to Frere, 23 & 30 Nov. 1878.

with Bulwer in regarding as of little significance, had to be promoted to the status of an 'outrageous insult'.[262]

Shepstone's official memorandum on Britain's relations with the Zulu,[263] when it eventually arrived, was chiefly remarkable for its historical inaccuracy and its inconsistency with his earlier statements. His assertion, for example, that Britain had a 'sovereign right' over Zululand, derived curiously enough from the voortrekkers' defeat of Dingane and installation of Mpande, was scarcely consistent with his statement in 1875 that no treaty or formal protectorate existed between Britain and the Zulu kingdom.[264] Even Frere commented on how greatly Shepstone's statements on the border dispute differed from the views he had expressed as Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal.[265] Frere could afford to do this since he had decided to accept the Border Commission's decision in form. But Shepstone's observations on the necessity for intervention by force in Zululand were useful to him, and corresponded to his own views on the subject. Shepstone made it clear that a complete reformation of Zululand's government and social system could not be effected without the use of force, and that such a reformation was essential for the peace, progress and civilization of South Africa.

> At this moment the Zulu power is a perpetual menace to the peace of South Africa; and the influence which it has already exercised and is now exercising is hostile and aggressive; and what other result can be looked for from a savage people, whose men are all trained from their youth to look upon working for wages and the ordinary labour necessary to advance the progress of a peaceful country to be degrading; and to consider the taking of human life as the most fitting occupation of a man![266]

By the end of November the ultimatum had been drawn up. It required the surrender of Sihayo's

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[262] Cf. B.P.P., C.2220, p.305, no. 111, Frere to Hicks Beach, 6 Oct. 1878, with B.P.P., C.2222, p.189, minute by Frere, 12 Dec. 1878, encl. in no.46, Frere to Hicks Beach, 12 Dec. 1878.

[263] B.P.P., C.2222, pp.130-4, memo on political position occupied by the British Government towards the Zulu King, by Shepstone, 18 Nov. 1878, encl. in no. 38, Frere to Hicks Beach, 2 Dec. 1878; see also B.P.P., C.2222, pp.177-9, Shepstone to Frere, 30 Nov. 1878, encl. in no. 43, Frere to Hicks Beach, 9 Dec. 1878.

[264] See above, ch. 3, p.84.

[265] B.P.P., C.2222, p.62, memo by Frere, n.d., encl. 11 in no. 19, Frere to Hicks Beach, 16 Nov. 1878.

[266] *Ibid.*, p.133, memo on political position occupied by the British Government towards the Zulu King, by Shepstone, 18 Nov. 1878, encl. in no. 38, Frere to Hicks Beach, 2 Dec. 1878.

brother and sons, together with a fine of 500 cattle, within twenty days of the delivery of the ultimatum. A fine of 100 cattle was demanded in recompense for the Smith and Deighton affair, also to be paid in twenty days. The people responsible for Mbelini's raids were to be given up for trial in the Transvaal courts; no time limit was laid down in this case. The changes required within Zululand were then specified. The existing military system was to be abolished. Men were to be free to marry when they pleased. The obligation upon every able-bodied man to defend his country was to remain, but men were not to be called out or assembled in regiments without the consent of the British. The laws agreed to by Cetshwayo at his coronation were henceforth to be strictly observed: people accused of crimes were to be given a fair and open trial, there was to be a right of appeal to the King, and no executions were to be carried out without the King's consent. There was to be a British Resident in or on the borders of Zululand to see that the coronation laws and the military regulations were observed. All missionaries formerly in Zululand and their converts were to be permitted to return, and no obstacle was to be put in the way of Zulu wishing to listen to the missionaries. Any dispute concerning Europeans was to be heard by the King in the presence of the British Resident, and no Europeans were to be expelled from the country without the approval of the Resident. An affirmative answer to these proposals was required within thirty days.[267]

The ultimatum was signed by Sir Henry Bulwer. This seems strange when one considers how out of sympathy he was with Frere's policy towards the Zulu. Colenso's comments, in a letter of May 1880, on the circumstances of Bulwer's signing the ultimatum are of interest:

> I have heard *on very good authority* that Sir B.F.'s despatch requesting Sir H.B. to sign the ultimatum remained for some days unanswered - that, at last, as the two Governors were hardly on speaking terms, our Col[onial] Sec[retary] (Col. Mitchell) *urged* Sir H.B. to sign it for the sake of peace (!) - & that Sir H.B., when he sat down to sign it, hesitated for a while, then signed & dashed it from him, saying 'That's, I fear, the worst thing I ever did in my life.'[268]

This account seems to be confirmed by Sir Garnet Wolseley's account of a conversation with Bulwer in June 1879:

> Bulwer was evidently very sore at having been induced by Frere to sign the ultimatum, and from what he said on the subject led me to believe that much pressure was brought to bear

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[267] *Ibid.*, pp.203-9, message no. II, encl. in no. 53, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Dec. 1878.

[268] K.C., Colenso Papers, File 27, K.C.M. 50050, Colenso to Chesson, 23 May 1880.

upon him to make him do so.[269]

Colenso's statement seems to be supported by Wolseley's, but it is emphatically contradicted by a letter written by Bulwer himself to his brother a few days after he signed the ultimatum. He wrote that the demands made upon Cetshwayo were 'absolutely necessary and just, and therefore in requiring them we are doing no more than we have a right to do and no more than we ought to do'. He doubted that the demands would be accepted, and expected hostilities to ensue.

> However, there is no help for it. It is impossible to allow the king to keep up a standing army of thirty or forty thousand warriors - a perpetual menace - and without necessity, for there are no enemies to fear. By taking over the Transvaal we have become practically the only neighbours of the Zulus, and they have no need to fear us.

About Frere he wrote 'I get on very well with him. We have not always agreed upon all points, but I am able to agree with what he has now ar[illegible] he has asked no more than necessary'.[270]

Bulwer resisted Frere's relentless pressure, but retreated [illegible] and eventually capitulated on every important point, not only in substance but [illegible] principal concern was that justice should be done in the matter of the disputed territory, in which he had intervened and so acquired a sort of personal interest, and this he secured, though only in form. He opposed the massing of troops in Natal but was overruled. As he feared, their presence created a crisis. The Zulu fear of a British attack caused them to mobilize their army, which led to the British troops being sent to the border, which in turn increased Zulu fear and suspicion. The extra British troops could not remain indefinitely in Natal, and in the circumstances created by their presence they could not very well be withdrawn without some corresponding reduction in Zulu military power. Bulwer doubted Britain's alleged historical right to intervene in Zululand, but in the circumstances that had

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[269] Preston, *Wolseley's Journal, 1879-80*, p.48.

[270] S. Clarke (ed.), *Invasion of Zululand 1879: Anglo-Zulu War Experiences of Arthur Harness; John Jervis, 4th Viscount St. Vincent; and Sir Henry Bulwer* (Johannesburg, 1979) pp.213-4.

[271] B.P.P., C.2367, pp.113-8, memo by Bulwer, 25 Oct. 1878, on no. 105, Frere to Hicks Beach, 30 Sept. 1878, encl. in no. 39A, Frere to Hicks Beach, 8 Nov. 1878; B.P.P., C.2222, pp.169-176, memo by Bulwer, 18 Nov. 1878, & note by Frere, 6 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 42, Frere to Hicks Beach, 7 Dec. 1878; B.P.P., C.2222, pp.186-90, minute by Bulwer, 29 Nov. 1878, & comments by Frere, 12 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 46, Frere to Hicks Beach, 12 Dec. 1878.

developed he considered intervention unavoidable on grounds of self-preservation.[272]

The point was made in the crudest terms by Norman Macleod, the British Swazi Border Commissioner:

> My opinion is that unless we thrash the Zulus or dictate such ignominious terms to them as to make it plain they cannot fight us (and this will never happen) we shall lose what little prestige we ever had. All eyes, native eyes, are on the Zulus & ourselves now. They all believe, even our own Natal Kafirs, but certainly the Swazies and any independent tribe that the Zulus are the most powerful, and I believe the only chance of settling S. Africa once for all, is to lick the Zulus now right or wrong, justly or unjustly. I did not realize till I got among the Swazies what a poor opinion it was possible for a nigger to have of us, but when we show ourselves stronger than the Zulus our position would be acknowledged throughout S.A.[273]

The crisis created by the British military build-up in Natal could not be resolved by unilateral disarmament on the part of the British. Such a humiliating climb-down would too greatly damage the prestige on which they relied to hold down the subject populations. But bilateral disarmament meant the disbanding of the Zulu army, which meant the disbanding of the Zulu monarchy, which was something to which Cetshwayo could never assent. War was thus at this stage inevitable.

Bulwer clung for some time to the hope that the necessary changes in Zululand might be made without the sending of an ultimatum, but he failed to convince Frere of this. He argued that the Smith and Deighton and Sihayo incidents were not sufficient grounds for resorting to extremities: a nominal fine would be sufficient for the former, he considered, and an enhanced fine in place of the surrender of the culprits for the latter. But Frere would not agree to these suggestions. The most Bulwer secured was an extension of the time limit from the 15 days originally proposed by Frere to 30 and 20 days for the two categories of demand. Bulwer believed Cetshwayo himself to be a cruel tyrant. He was anxious that the Zulu people should understand that the British complaints were not against them but against their King, and that the changes envisaged would be to their benefit. To save this out of the wreck of his original hopes he was eventually reduced to the pitiful and absurd expedient of rewriting the ultimatum in more conciliatory language.[274] Frere's original draft had at least hinted that if the demands were not complied with there would be a resort to war. As

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[272] B.P.P., C.2584, pp.203-6, no. 94, Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 10 March 1880.

[273] N.A.M. 6807-386-23, no. 9, Macleod to Crealock, 15 Nov. 1878.

[274] U.W.L., Littleton papers, no. 24, Littleton to his mother, 5 Jan. 1879.

rewritten by Bulwer, it said nothing about what would happen in the event of a failure to comply. It concluded that the King and his advisers should give their answer within thirty days

> in order that Her Majesty's High Commissioner may then know if the King and the Great Council agree to the words which are here given, and will give effect to these conditions, which are necessary both for the peace and safety of the Queen's subjects and allies, and also for the safety and the welfare of the Zulu people, to which the Queen's Government wishes well.[275]

There was thus a big discrepancy between the real and apparent meaning of the ultimatum, or the 'message' as it was officially known. The initial reaction among Natal's colonists, by then fully expecting a war, was that it was a 'milk and water' document. It was not until the 5 000 word document had been more carefully studied and considered that its real implications became clear.[276] *The Natal Colonist*, a Colensoite paper, at first warmly supported the 'message', but then developed doubts.[277] It is very probable that its real implications never became clear to the Zulu, and that Bulwer's inappropriately emollient language served only to produce that lack of urgency which characterised the Zulu reception of the ultimatum.

The British army showed how much real concern it had for 'the welfare of the Zulu people' by plundering and destroying their property as soon as it crossed the border.[278] This, together with the opprobrium that came to be attached to the war in general, seems to have aroused Bulwer's regret and anger that he should have allowed himself to become the instrument of Frere's aggression. Frere's later accusation that the military operations had been delayed by Bulwer's want of co-operation - described by Bulwer as a 'monstrous and iniquitous untruth' - turned him more decisively against Frere.[279] Bulwer was indeed, as Wolseley said, 'induced' under 'much pressure' to sign the ultimatum, but the pressure and the inducement were psychological. It was not a case of external pressure and unwilling compliance, though Bulwer may later have come to believe that it had been.

Frere won an even more unexpected, albeit even more temporary, convert to his ultimatum policy.

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[275] B.P.P., C.2222, p.209, message no. II, encl. in 53, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Dec. 1878.

[276] *The Natal Witness*, 17 Dec. 1878, editorial; *The Natal Mercury*, 17 Dec. 1878, editorial; *The Natal Witness*, 21 Dec. 1878, 'Mail Summary'; *ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1879, 'Short Notes'.

[277] *The Natal Colonist*, 14, 19 & 21 Dec. 1878, editorials.

[278] Preston, *Wolseley's Journal, 1879-80*, p.48.

[279] Clarke, *Invasion of Zululand*, p.224.

This was none other than Bishop Colenso. Colenso expressed to Frere his

> cordial assent to the main points of the message, viz., those requiring the disbanding of the military force and an entire change in the marriage system, as being, though measures of coercion, yet such as a great Christian power had the right and the duty of enforcing upon a neighbouring savage nation like the Zulus, brought into close relations with itself, whose King had been installed at their own request by the representative of the Natal Government, and to whom a signal proof of generosity and good faith had been given in the award, as was set forth emphatically in the forefront of the message itself.[280]

It was when Colenso discovered that the border award was in reality quite fraudulent - that the Zulu were to get only a nominal sovereignty while the Boers kept the land - that he was forced to face the fact that he had been duped by Frere into dwelling briefly in a 'fool's paradise'.[281] But Colenso's initial ignorance of the real nature of the award does not explain everything. It was still, as John Bramston in the Colonial Office observed, 'unexpected to find that the Bishop approves of those points of the ultimatum which really made war inevitable'. Fairfield commented that his approval was 'extremely important to Sir Bartle Frere or anyone wishing to take up his defence', a judgement borne out in the parliamentary debates.[282] That he should have so approved, even temporarily, is inexplicable if one sees him as a 'twentieth century liberal who somehow wandered into the wrong century'.[283] Colenso was a man of his time, his nationality, his class and his profession. As Jeff Guy's study of Colenso shows, as a critic of imperialism he had decided, if inevitable, limitations.[284] He could never entirely rid himself of the belief that British expansion was essentially a force for good, and that the injustices he encountered and fought were aberrations, the accidental products of the weakness or wickedness of individuals, and not intrinsic to the

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[280] B.P.P., C.2252, p.52, Colenso to Frere, 27 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 19, Frere to Hicks Beach, 26 Jan. 1879.

[281] *Ibid.*; J. Guy, *The Heretic: a Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814-1883* (Johannesburg & Pietermaritzburg, 1983) p.267.

[282] C.O. 48/489, minutes by Bramston & Fairfield, 10 March 1879, on Cape 3217, Frere to Hicks Beach, 26 Jan. 1879; H.L. Deb., Vol. CCXLIV, col. 1632-3, Cranbrook, 25 March 1879; H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLIV, col. 1931, Hicks Beach, 27 March 1879; *ibid.*, col. 1997, Hanbury, 28 March 1879; H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLV, col. 48, Sandon, 31 March 1879.

[283] Norman Etherington's critical phrase, quoted in Guy, *Heretic*, p.x.

[284] See esp. *ibid.*, pp.353-5; but the whole of this illuminating book should be read by anyone interested in the history of British imperialism in South Africa in the nineteenth century.

process.[285] All the signs pointed to the war with the Zulu which he dreaded; but he suppressed his doubts and clung desperately as long as he possibly could to the belief or hope that Frere, as an English Christian gentleman, would prove to be on the side of right and truth and justice, and that Cetshwayo would prove sufficiently enlightened to embrace the elements of civilization he was being required to accept.[286]

The award and the ultimatum were delivered on 11 December 1878 on the right bank of the Thukela under what is now known as the Ultimatum Tree. The Zulu delegation was headed by Vumandaba kaNteti, a personal attendant of the late King Mpande, and the British delegation by John Shepstone, the Acting Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal. The award was read first. It defined the line decided upon by the High Commissioner as the Ncome (Blood) river to its main source in the Magidela mountains and thence in a direct line to a round hill between the two main sources of the Phongolo river. Much of the text of the award was taken up with the question of whites and Zulu living on the 'wrong' side of the line. It gave the impression of even-handedness, but this was highly misleading. What the award did not state was that all the land between the line it defined as the border and the line claimed by the Transvaal had been divided into farms, and that all these claims, whether marked out on the ground or only on paper, would be accepted as valid; whereas any Zulu on the Transvaal side of the newly-defined line could only be living on white-owned land, since Transvaal law did not allow Africans to own land, and they therefore would not have any right to the land they lived on or any claim to compensation if they moved. The Zulu delegates raised no objection to the award on this sort of ground, which shows they had no idea of its real nature. They did object to the statement that Cetshwayo was not to attempt to exercise any sovereignty north of the Phongolo, but John Shepstone pointed out that the document also stated that any trans-Phongolan claim Cetshwayo considered himself to have should be submitted to the British government. The Zulu appeared to be satisfied with that.

There was a break for lunch, and in the afternoon the ultimatum was read. The award had been passively received, but the ultimatum produced manifest consternation. The Zulu delegates denied that the coronation laws had been broken, and stated that they could not understand why the disbandment of the army was required since it was an ancient and necessary institution. John Sheptone stated that in the presently existing circumstances the Zulu army could only attack British

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[285] See Hicks Beach's pertinent remarks on Colenso's inconsistent shrinking from the only means by which the ends he supported could be attained: H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLIV, col. 1931, Hicks Beach, 27 March 1879.

[286] Guy, *Heretic*, pp.262-7.

subjects, and that the Zulu knew that the British government presented no threat to them. One of the Zulu delegates pointed to the British troops present and asked what they were. Shepstone replied that they were for defence and that it was the actions of Cetshwayo that had brought them there. The Zulu objected that thirty days was far too short, and that on such important issues no time limit should be set. They also asked that a British representative should be present when the ultimatum was delivered to the King so that it might be certified as correct. Shepstone interpreted this as signifying a reluctance to bear sole responsibility for the conveying of such bad tidings, but it may also have stemmed from a lack of confidence in their ability to remember accurately so long and complex a communication. Shepstone replied that he had no authority to agree to such a request or to vary any of the terms of the ultimatum.[287]

The written documents were left with John Dunn, who sent messengers to the King (who reached him before the official delegates) but did not go to the King himself. It is possible that Cetshwayo and his advisers never received any very clear or accurate account of the ultimatum. The impression seems to have prevailed in Zululand that the surrender of Sihayo's sons was the chief demand of the British and that if this were complied with the other demands would not be insisted upon. The *izikhulu* were generally strongly in favour of their being surrendered, but Cetshwayo himself was reluctant to do so, and the younger regiments were strongly opposed. It may be doubted whether it was politically possible for Cetshwayo to have complied even with this demand. It was certainly impossible for him to comply with the demand for the disbandment of the army and the abrogation of the marriage laws. This would have amounted to the abolition of the *amabutho* system, which would have meant the abolition of the monarchy and the disintegration of the state. The demand for cattle was the easiest to comply with, and there is much evidence that cattle were rounded up for this purpose. But even here insufficient importance appears to have been attached to the time limit. Cetshwayo seems not to have been convinced that the British, with whom the Zulu had been on friendly terms for so many years, really intended the conquest of Zululand. The ultimatum, as we have seen, announced no such intention, nor did it provide any explanation of the significance of the time period mentioned. Cetshwayo gave instructions that if the British troops entered Zululand they were not to be resisted, unless they took hostile action first, or constructed entrenchments and fort-

[287] The award and the ultimatum are in B.P.P., C.2222, pp.201-9, messages I & II, encl. in no. 53, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Dec. 1878. My description of the delivery of the award and ultimatum is based on: *ibid.*, pp.209-11, Brownlee to Frere, 12 Dec. 1878, & Littleton to Frere, 11 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 53, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Dec. 1878; *ibid.*, pp.216-7, Brownlee to Littleton, 16 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 56, Frere to Hicks Beach, 20 Dec. 1878; U.W.L., Littleton Papers, no. 83, Littleton to his mother, 14 Dec. 1878; S.N.A., 1/7/12, p.36, report by J.W. Shepstone, 19 Dec. 1878.

ifications. He appears to have hoped to discuss the whole matter with them when they reached Ulundi.[288]

The first public response of the Zulu King to the ultimatum came in the form of a letter from John Dunn. Dunn reported that the messengers he had sent to the King had returned with a message requesting him to write that he agreed to give up Sihayo's sons and pay the fines of cattle, and that he would submit the other demands to his advisers. Cetshwayo begged that, should the twenty days expire before the arrival of the cattle and the wanted men, Frere would take no action, as the recent heavy rains had made communications difficult. Bulwer urged Frere to wait the full thirty days before taking any action, but Frere refused; the most he would concede was that the troops should halt at convenient posts across the Zulu border and there await the expiry of the term of thirty days.[289] Frere was fairly confident that the terms of the ultimatum were such that it would be 'quite impossible for Cetywayo to submit',[290] but he did not want to take any chances. Shortly afterwards an encouraging letter arrived from Dunn. Dated 24 December, it stated that although cattle were still being collected, Cetshwayo evidently did not attach sufficient importance to the time limit, 'and it will be impossible now for them to be up in time'. Dunn was therefore making arrangements to cross over into Natal.[291] On 26 December a message was received by the Border Agent at the Lower Thukhela. It stated that Cetshwayo agreed to pay the number of cattle demanded but asked for more time: 'Why does the Government name days, and count them out to him? He cannot get all the cattle together within the days mentioned, as the land is great and he has to seek them.'[292] Neither the cattle nor Sihayo's sons had been handed over by 31 December when the twenty day limit expired. On Frere's instructions, the invasion began before the expiry of the full thirty days.[293] On 11 January 1879, the Border Agent at the Lower Thukhela received a message

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[288] On the reactions of the Zulu to the ultimatum, see the reports of Border Agents in C.S.O. 1925; and Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, pp.16-7 & 91-4.

[289] B.P.P., C.2222, p.227, Dunn to A.S.N.A., 18 Dec. 1878, pp.227-31, memos by Bulwer, 26 Dec. 1878, & by Frere, 24 & 28 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 59, Frere to Hicks Beach, 27 Dec., 1878.

[290] Frere to Hicks Beach, 23 Dec. 1878, in Martineau, *Life of Frere*, Vol. II, p.263.

[291] B.P.P., C.2242, p.10, Dunn to A.S.N.A., 24 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 4, Frere to Hicks Beach, 1 Jan. 1879.

[292] S.N.A. I/7/13, p.165, message from Cetshwayo, 26 Dec. 1878.

[293] B.P.P., C.2234, p.39, no. 26, Chelmsford to War Office, 22 Dec. 1878. On 6 January 1879 Wood's no. 4 column crossed the Ncome (Blood) river, by then the acknowledged Zulu border - B.P.P., C.2242, p.24, no. 9, Frere to Hicks Beach, 13 Jan. 1879. It appears Frere attempted to countermand his instruction, too late to prevent Wood's advance - N.A.M. 6807-386-27, p.8,

from Cetshwayo that he had 'not yet refused to listen to the voice of government' and that 'the Zulu Nation' was gathered with him to consider the British demands. He asked for more time to send their reply.[294] But the thirty day limit had expired the previous day and the invasion was already in progress.

In accordance with Cetshwayo's instructions no resistance was offered by the Zulu. The British troops began looting cattle as soon as they entered Zululand, but the only opposition they encountered at first was verbal.[295] On 16 January Lord Chelmsford, who accompanied Glyn's no. 3 column, wrote 'I cannot help thinking that the Zulu has not much stomach for fighting. He ought to have attacked one of our columns before this if he really means business.'[296] A few days later he wrote to Pearson, the commander of no. 1 column, that there was 'no sign of any armed force'. He told Pearson that Bulwer was 'in a great state of mind' about a large force of Zulu said to be in the Nkandla forest, and asked him to send troops to explore the forest, 'from which', he wrote, 'the Zulus will most probably scamper as those have done from before this column'. His letter was dated 'Insandlana Hill, 21 January 1879'.[297]

Chelmsford to Frere, 1 Jan. 1879. Pearson's no. 1 column was prevented by rain from crossing before 12 January - Public Record Office, War Office records, W.O. 32/7707, Chelmsford to War Office, 14 Jan. 1879.

[294] C.S.O. 1925, telegraphic, B.A., Lower Tugela, to A.S.N.A., 11 Jan. 1879.

[295] N.A.M. 6810-38, no. 4, Chelmsford to Pearson, 12 Jan. 1879; Public Record Office, War Office records, W.O. 32/7707, Chelmsford to War Office, 14 Jan. 1879; G. French, *Lord Chelmsford and the Zulu War* (London, 1939) p.71; Vijn, *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, p.96.

[296] N.A.M. 6810-38, no. 7, Chelmsford to Pearson, 16 Jan. 1879.

[297] *Ibid.*, no. 9, Chelmsford to Pearson, 21 Jan. 1879.

Chapter Nine

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

Epilogue: the War and its Effects

The British camp at Isandlwana was not fortified. The waggons were needed for bringing up supplies and were not used to make a laager; the ground was stony and entrenchments were not dug; 'furthermore it seems that the camp, intended merely as a temporary base, was never considered to be in danger of attack'.[1] The Zulu attack on 22 January 1879 overwhelmed and destroyed the camp, and 1 250 men on the British side - 52 officers, 727 white troops and 471 black - lost their lives. Zulu deaths were probably not fewer than 1 000, but they remained in possession of the field and so won a spectacular if costly victory.[2]

It was not until early in the morning of the 24th that the first survivors of the disaster reached Pietermaritzburg and the news became generally known.[3] It had a shattering impact on the colony. Colenso reported that the 'excitement & consternation' was intense 'as it is well known that C[etshwayo] has expressed his determination to send in a force & sweep the Colony'.[4] 'A panic is spreading broadcast over the Colony which it is difficult to allay', reported Chelmsford.[5] It was believed that the government was concealing even worse news from the public. 'The people here are in a terrible fright of being attacked', wrote Frere's private secretary; 'the panic is a horrible thing to see'.[6] The Newcastle district, with the exception of Fort Pine and the town itself, was reported

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[1] J.P.C. Laband & P.S Thompson, *A Field Guide to the War in Zululand 1879* (Pietermaritzburg, 1979) p.41.

[2] J. Laband, *Kingdom in Crisis: the Zulu Response to the British Invasion of 1879* (Pietermaritzburg, 1992) pp.87, 90-1.

[3] J. Martineau, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1895) Vol. II, pp.272-3.

[4] K.C., Colenso Papers, File 27, K.C.M. 50091, Colenso to Chesson, 26 Jan. 1879.

[5] Public Record Office, War Office records, W.O. 32/7706, copy of telegram from Frere, received 11 Feb. 1879.

[6] U.W.L., Littleton Papers, no. 88, Littleton to his mother, 26 Jan. 1879.

to have been deserted.[7] A laager incorporating the substantial public buildings was constructed in central Pietermaritzburg. A similar laager was constructed in Durban, together with a stockade across the Point, the narrow spit of land between the bay and the sea.[8]

The impact of the disaster on Britain was greater than one might have expected.

> The news that reached England on February 11, of the terrible disaster at Isandhlwana, was a shock for which the nation was totally unprepared. It was as complete and almost as horrifying a surprise as the Indian Mutiny, and nothing had occurred since then to stir public feeling about imperial affairs so profoundly. It was not indeed felt that there was any danger of a province being lost to the Crown, but there were the same fears for the safety of English colonists, an unarmed population exposed to the fury of overwhelming numbers of savage enemies.[9]

Disraeli was said to be so impressed with the belief that there would be further disasters in South Africa that he dreaded going home for fear of the telegrams he might find there.[10] Disraeli was at this time at the height of his power and success, having gained an extraordinary hold over aristocracy and people alike. But it was a fragile success: it still remained to be seen whether Russia would fulfil the obligations entered into at Disraeli's diplomatic triumph in Berlin; and the economic depression at home had become very severe. Isandlwana was an exhibition of British military incompetence, it diverted troops from Europe, and served notice that the war would be protracted and expensive. Carnarvon, now out of office, was told that 'the defeat in S. Africa has extraordinarily shaken the prestige and credit of the Govt.'.[11] Disraeli told the Queen that 'this terrible news from S. Africa...will change everything: reduce our continental influence & embarrass our finances'.[12] The Lord Chancellor described Isandlwana as 'the heaviest blow we have sustained since we came into office'. It prevented Britain from intervening in Egypt and raised the possibility that France would do so unilaterally. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, explained that France would not

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[7] Natal Blue Book, 1879, p.JJ 11.

[8] P. Thompson, 'The Zulus are Coming! The Defence of Pietermaritzburg, 1879', & 'The Defence of Durban, 1879', in J. Laband & P. Thompson, *Kingdom and Colony at War: Sixteen Studies on the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879* (Pietermaritzburg & Cape Town, 1990) pp.273-336.

[9] *Annual Register for the Year 1879*, p.13.

[10] B.L. Add. Mss. 60913, Carnarvon's diary for Jan.-June 1879, entry for 12 April.

[11] *Ibid.*, entry for 18 Feb.

[12] Cabinet Reports, Cab. 41, 12/6, Disraeli to Victoria, 11 Feb. 1879.

intervene if Britain were in a position to do so too: 'But all our force is locked up - Oh! that Bartle Frere! I should like to construct for him a gibbet twice the height of Haman's.'[13]

The effect of Isandlwana on the course of South African history was much greater. It halted the phase of British territorial expansion that had began with the annexation of Basutoland in 1868. Isandlwana focused the attention of the previously indifferent British public and Parliament upon the war in Zululand. Not only the conduct of the war but its causes came under scrutiny. Journalists and members of Parliament were able to compare the views of Frere and Bulwer in the Blue Books, and some were assisted by the researches of Bishop Colenso. At first there was a tendency to accept the jaundiced picture of Cetshwayo painted by Frere, but the latter's violent language contrasted with the former's behaviour in refraining from invading Natal when it lay at his mercy, produced a reaction. Cetshwayo came to be described in Parliament as 'a gallant Monarch defending his country and his people against one of the most wanton and wicked invasions that ever could be made upon an independent people', and this and other similarly unpatriotic statements do not seem to have produced the outrage one might have expected.[14] 'The fact is' said Hicks Beach, 'that, unpopular as South African wars have always been in England, there never was one more unpopular than the Zulu war.'[15] The war was seen as not only bloody and expensive but as unjust and unnecessary as well, and the demand arose that it should be ended. The wisdom of the old policy of the Conventions was increasingly praised. In the circumstances an annexation of Zululand was politically impossible. Frere was instructed in March not to make any Zulu settlement without the prior approval of the government,[16] and a few days later Disraeli virtually assured Parliament that there would be no annexation.[17] In November Hicks Beach wrote to Frere in connection with the Transkeian territories 'you can hardly imagine the reluctance to agree to anything that could by any possibility be twisted into a charge of extension of territory in South Africa'.[18]

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[13] M. Swartz, *The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone* (Oxford, 1985) pp.106 & 130.

[14] H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLIX, col. 973, Anderson, 14 Aug. 1879. See also *ibid.*, cols. 150-3, Lawson, 4 Aug. 1879. Sir Wilfrid Lawson stated that everyone agreed the war was wicked and unjust.

[15] Hicks Beach to Frere, 28 Aug. 1879, in W.B. Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere: a Footnote to the History of the British Empire* (London, 1923) p.297.

[16] B.P.P., C.2260, p.110, no. 16, Hicks Beach to Frere, 20 March 1879.

[17] H.L. Deb., Vol. CCXLIV, cols. 1689-1690, 25 March 1879.

[18] G.R.O., PCC/23, Copy, Hicks Beach to Frere, 30 Nov. 1879.

Zululand could not be annexed. But the Cabinet did not know what to do instead. There was a widespread feeling that Britain's military honour and reputation had to be retrieved, and that the Zulu army, which even Colenso was prepared to acknowledge was a potential threat to Natal,[19] could not be allowed to remain in being. But how to achieve this without annexation seemed an insoluble problem. The solution eventually arrived at was to send out the imperial superman, Sir Garnet Wolseley, and leave it all to him.[20] His instructions were verbal and of the most general nature; they were summed up by Hicks Beach as: 'Bring peace about as soon as you can: but let it be made on such terms as you believe will last.'[21]

After Isandlwana the British invasion of Zululand was suspended for over four months. The centre column was destroyed, the right hand column under Pearson was besieged in Eshowe, and the left hand column under Wood was in an entrenched position at Khambula, from which it was able to do no more than make forays against the Zulu. One of these, on the Hlobane mountain, proved disastrous, with 200 killed on the British side, including nearly 100 regulars. A little earlier a convoy bringing supplies to the camp had been surprised, and 80 had been killed, including 60 regulars. These were minor disasters compared to Isandlwana, but were not the sort of thing that was expected in 'small wars' or what Bismarck called 'England's sporting wars'. The Zulu also suffered serious losses. There was reported to have been 'more crying than rejoicing' after Isandlwana.[22] The attack on the camp at Rorke's Drift later the same day added 600 Zulu deaths to the nearly 1 000 Zulu lives lost at Isandlwana, and also on the same fateful day more than 300 Zulu died resisting Colonel Pearson's advance. Encouraged by their success at Hlobane, the Zulu made the mistake of attacking the entrenched camp at Khambula, from which they were beaten off with severe losses, possibly nearly as many as 2 000 losing their lives.[23]

The Zulu were thus ready to endure great losses, but they made no attempt to invade Natal, with the exception of the attack on the Rorke's Drift camp, just across the Mzinyathi. Natal's freedom

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[19] K.C., Colenso Papers, File 27, K.C.M. 50001, Colenso to Chesson, 23 Nov. 1879.

[20] Cabinet Reports, Cab. 41, 12/15, 16 & 18, Disraeli to Victoria, 11, 19 & 23 May 1879.

[21] G.R.O., PCC/8/1, Hicks Beach to Wolseley, n.d. but 27 May 1879. See also Hove Central Library, Wolseley Papers, S.A. 1, p.32, Wolseley to Hicks Beach, 5 Sept. 1879; and H.C. Deb., Vol. CCXLIX, cols. 158-163, Hartington & Hicks Beach, 4 Aug. 1879.

[22] C.O. 959/1, extracts from letter from officer of naval brigade, 27 March 1879, quoting Zulu informants.

[23] All estimates of deaths from Laband, *Kingdom in Crisis*, pp.90-1, 108, 120, 137, 152 & 164-5.

from invasion was attributed by some to the reverse the Zulu suffered at Rorke's Drift, but this is scarcely credible. It would have been an easy matter for the Zulu forces to have avoided the British army posts and to have made devastating raids upon Natal.[24] The most plausible explanation and the best supported by the evidence, is that Cetshwayo had given orders that the war was to be fought on a strictly defensive basis. The attack on the Rorke's Drift camp was contrary to his orders.[25] Cetshwayo throughout the war sent numerous messengers with pleas for peace, all of whom were either turned away for a variety of reasons or excuses, or else imprisoned on suspicion of being spies.[26] Chelmsford did not want negotiations but an opportunity to restore his military reputation.

Yet he delayed the second attempt at an invasion for months. At the beginning of April he relieved Colonel Pearson and brought his force back from Eshowe to Natal. Almost two months were then spent in elaborate preparations for the renewed invasion, during which time the war, in the sense of actual fighting, came to a virtually complete standstill. The major conflict that took place in this period was between Chelmsford and the Natal government, which he blamed for his transport difficulties. Eventually on 1 June 1879 Chelmsford and his army began their second invasion of Zululand. A month later they were in the vicinity of Ulundi, the royal capital. Cetshwayo still made attempts at negotiation and peaceful settlement, but both Chelmsford and the younger Zulu warriors wanted to fight. The ensuing battle of Ulundi took place on 4 July and was a complete victory for the British.

This was the final battle of the war. Whether it was the cause of the war's coming to an end is much more doubtful. It is true that the Zulu cherished the belief that they could defeat the British if only the latter would come out from their fortifications and fight them in the open, and that the battle of Ulundi, which was fought in an open plain, disabused them of this notion. But to conclude

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[24] J.W. Colenso, *Bishop Colenso's Commentary on Frere's Policy* (Bishopstowe, n.d.) p.466n, quoting military minute signed W. Bellairs, 8 Feb. 1879.

[25] K.C., Colenso Papers, K.C.M. 50081, Colenso to Chesson, 28 Jan. [1879] citing four African waggon drivers who escaped from Isandlwana; B.P.P., C.2454, p.88, statement of Sibalo, 1 June 1879, encl. in no. 32, Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 7 June 1879; *ibid.*, p.100, statement of Sihlahla, 3 June 1879, encl. in no. 34, Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 16 June 1879; C. Viju (ed. J.W. Colenso) *Cetshwayo's Dutchman: Being the Private Journal of a White Trader in Zululand during the British Invasion* (London, 1880) p.31; Natal Archives, J.W. Shepstone Papers, Vol. 10, p.30, 'Reminiscences of the Past', citing evidence of Zulu who took part in the attack on Rorke's Drift camp, which he stated he 'fully believed'.

[26] J. Laband, 'Humbugging the General? King Cetshwayo's peace overtures during the Anglo-Zulu War', in Laband & Thompson, *Kingdom and Colony*, pp.45-67.

that it was this battle that caused the Zulu to decide that 'they had had enough of war, and wanted peace and the withdrawal of the British so that they could go home and resume the normal course of their lives'[27] is surely to beg a very large question and ignore a very large error. The Zulu had never wanted war with the British and had never wanted the normal course of their lives disrupted. They fought to keep their land and cattle and to remain free of taxes and forced labour. When the British invaded their country the Zulu naturally assumed they intended to reduce them to the status of the *amakhafula* of Natal,[28] as indeed they did. Robert Robertson had earlier advised that in the event of an invasion, defections to the British 'would be largely increased if whoever is in command were able to proclaim that no one would be taxed or obliged to work. These two things are the great horror of the Zulus'.[29] Chelmsford proclaimed no such thing. But when Wolseley arrived immediately after the battle of Ulundi he announced that the Zulu would not be brought under British rule and that they would be allowed to keep their land and cattle; and it was then that all resistance came to an end. Wolseley required the Zulu to surrender their arms and the royal cattle in their possession; but the young men who were heard to say that 'they never would have fought for Cetshwayo if they had known that this was all the British would have exacted from them',[30] entirely misunderstood the situation. Had they not fought, the British would have exacted a great deal more.

The Zulu chiefs and people were not prepared to carry on a desperate struggle simply for the sake of the monarch or the monarchy. Cetshwayo was progressively isolated as the *izikhulu* made their submissions to Wolseley. He became a fugitive in his own kingdom and was eventually captured on 28 August and deported to Cape Town.[31] In the place of the monarchy, Wolseley appointed thirteen chiefs as independent rulers. He required them to agree that they would 'not permit the existence of the Zulu military system', that they would 'make it a rule that all men shall be allowed to marry when they choose', and that they would 'allow and encourage all men...to work in Natal

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[27] Laband, *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.236.

[28] J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: the Civil War in Zululand, 1879-1884* (London 1979) p.1; G.H. 1397, Robertson to Bulwer, 16 Nov. 1877; see the statements by Sibalo and Sihlahla cited in note 25 above; and see above, ch. 6, pp.175-6 & 191, and ch. 7, pp.199-200. '*Amakhafula*' was a derogatory term, probably derived from 'kaffir', used by the Zulu to refer to the Africans of Natal

[29] C.O. 879/13, African no. 150, p.29, Robertson to Bulwer, 1 Dec. 1877, encl. in no. 23, Bulwer to Carnarvon, 14 Jan. 1878.

[30] Laband, *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.237.

[31] Guy, *Destruction*, ch. 4; J.P.C. Laband, 'The Cohesion of the Zulu Polity under the Impact of the Anglo-Zulu War: a Reassessment', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, VIII (1985).

or the Transvaal, or elsewhere, for themselves or for hire'.[32] As a means of providing Zululand with good government Wolseley's settlement was a disastrous failure, but it solved the immediate problem of breaking up the Zulu army without annexing Zululand.

Wolseley came out to South Africa not only as Commander-in-Chief, but as Governor of Natal and the Transvaal and as High Commissioner for South East Africa. Frere, though he retained the title of High Commissioner, was virtually relegated to being Governor of the Cape. As the man responsible for what was widely regarded as an unjust and unnecessary war, Frere came in for devastating attack not only from Liberals but from a great many Conservatives as well. 'The Duke of Wellington calls Sir Bartle Frere "a sniveller"', reported Theophilus Shepstone, who had gone to England in May, and, as in the Langalibalele affair, miraculously escaped responsibility for the Zulu war; 'he says that he talks religion to make his politics go right, and you have no idea what a strong feeling there is in this direction regarding Sir Bartle among some at least of the aristocracy of England'.[33] The government censured Frere for not referring the terms of the ultimatum to them before sending it, but did not recall him. A motion in the House of Commons demanding his recall was defeated with a significantly reduced majority. Most of the Cabinet were in fact in favour of his recall, but the Queen, who was a personal friend of Sir Bartle and Lady Frere and conducted a private correspondence with them, was strongly opposed to such a step.[34] Disraeli, whose private opinion was that Frere ought to be impeached,[35] had to use all his magical arts to bring the Cabinet to accept the Faery's wishes.[36] An argument for retaining him was that he had acquired influence with the Cape colonists and so was the man most likely to achieve confederation. The British government still wanted a South African confederation, but not for the expansive reasons of Carnarvon's day. It now wanted it for much the same reason as the Liberals had earlier done, as a means of escaping expense and responsibility.[37]

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[32] G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa*, Vol. X (London, 1919) pp.347-8.

[33] K.C., Shepstone Papers, File 6, K.C.M. 31408/3, Shepstone to [Henrique Shepstone] n.d.

[34] Cabinet Reports, Cab. 41, 12/10 & 19, Disraeli to Victoria, 8 April & 27 May 1879.

[35] Zetland, Marquis of (ed.) *The Letters of Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield* (London, 1929) Vol. II, p.225.

[36] V. Hicks Beach, *Life of Sir Michael Hicks Beach (Earl St. Aldwyn)* (Two Vols. London, 1932) Vol. I, 130.

[37] C.F. Goodfellow, *Great Britain and South African Confederation 1870-1881* (Cape Town, 1966) pp.173-186.

It would have been better for Frere had he resigned when he was censured. Instead he hung on, hoping to justify himself by achieving confederation: this was to be for him what the battle of Ulundi was for Chelmsford. But the result of this decision was that he died a slow and agonizing political death in public. Wolseley's appointment denied him any control over Natal, Zululand and the Transvaal, which he argued unavailingly was necessary if confederation was to be achieved. He was denied even information, since Wolseley was jealous of any possibility of interference.[38] Wolseley's appointment was temporary, but when he departed, instead of the High Commission being reunited, General Colley was appointed in his place, and Frere's relegation to the Cape continued. The Liberal government which came into power in 1880 reduced his salary on account of his diminished duties. Shortly afterwards the Cape Premier failed to persuade his Parliament even to hold a confederation conference. The British government accordingly decided there was no possibility of confederation, and Frere was finally recalled.[39]

Frere felt the humiliation of his treatment very deeply. Had it all come at once he would almost certainly have resigned. Coming in stages, it led him to cling to the dwindling hope that he might yet snatch success from the jaws of failure. He refused throughout to admit that he had done anything wrong. He denied that he had exceeded or acted counter to his instructions.[40] He insisted that the war had been 'forced on us by Cetywayo - begun by him and not by us'.[41] In long and intemperate despatches he defended himself not only against the censure of the British government but against all attacks from whatever quarter. Hicks Beach begged him not to supply his enemies with further ammunition, but to no avail. He believed that his despatches would one day be the means by which he would be exonerated. 'I shall not leave a name to be permanently dishonoured' he told Hicks Beach.[42] He was still defending himself on his death-bed. His last words were: 'Oh, if they would only read "The Further Correspondence"; *they must understand.*'[43]

Frere's calculation that the overthrow of the Zulu kingdom would conciliate the Transvaal Boers

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[38] Hove Central Library, Wolseley Papers, W.A. 200, no. 2, Frere to Wolseley, 20 July 1879.

[39] On Frere's position after Isandlwana, see J.A. Benyon, 'Isandhlwana and the Passing of a Proconsul', *Natalia*, 8 (Dec. 1878).

[40] B.P.P., C.2740, p.40, no. 26, Frere to Kimberley, 30 Aug. 1880.

[41] Frere to Hicks Beach, 22 Sept. 1879, in Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.300.

[42] *Ibid.* p.300.

[43] Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere*, p.336.

proved to be utterly mistaken. The Boers showed very little disposition to support the British against the Zulu; indeed their sympathies seemed to be with their fellow-victims of British imperialism. It was with much difficulty and only after much persuasion that Evelyn Wood secured the services of the small number of frontier farmers who fought under Piet Uys.[44] After Isandlwana (where his son George was killed) Shepstone attempted to raise a force of mounted men in the Transvaal. 'But judge of my surprise' he told another of his sons, 'when I found not only a disinclination to face the Zulus but an open sympathy with their success, and exultation at our defeat!'[45] There are reports of the Zulu attempting to enlist Boer support, as well as of Boers offering their services to the Zulu. It seems virtually certain that there were communications between the Zulu King and the Boer leaders, and that there was an agreement that the Boers would remain neutral. On a number of occasions cattle captured from the Zulu and sold at auction were seized by parties of Boers and returned to the Zulu.[46] By May 1879 many Transvaal frontier farmers had reoccupied their farms, and it was said that this was done by agreement with the Zulu.[47] Wolseley's setting aside of the Border Commission's finding and his award of most of the disputed territory to the Transvaal[48] had no effect on Boer loyalty, and Britain's Zulu War was followed eighteen months later by a Boer War.

Another miscalculation concerning the effects of the war was that made by the missionaries. They had hoped that the overthrow of Cetshwayo would be the dawn of a brighter future for mission work. Instead they found themselves worse off. 'Grants of land by former Kings to Missionaries cannot be recognized by the British Government' stated a notice in the Natal Government Gazette.[49] When missionaries attempted to resume the occupation of their stations they found that they were theirs no longer. They were now the property of the thirteen chiefs, who were not obliged to allow the missionaries back. Some, notably John Dunn, whose territory contained more than half the stations in Zululand, decided to exclude them. Righteous indignation on the part of the missionaries and their supporters was as unavailing as their appeals to the legitimacy of the grants by the King

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[44] E. Wood, *From Midshipman to Field Marshal* (London, 1906) Vol. II, pp.14, 22 & 23.

[45] S.P. 71, Shepstone to Offy Shepstone, 6 Feb. 1879.

[46] S.P. 69, pp.222-3, Shepstone to Frere, 30 Jan. 1879; S.P. 37, Osborn to Shepstone, 31 Jan. 1879; S.P. 38, Osborn to Shepstone, 17 Feb. 1879; T.A., Letter-book 3, Administrator to High Commissioner, Confid. Shepstone to Frere, 2 Feb. 1879; *ibid.*, Private, Shepstone to Wood, 5 Feb. 1879.

[47] C.O. 959/1, Macleod to Littleton, 26 May 1879.

[48] B.P.P., C.2482, p.258, no. 87, Wolseley to Hicks Beach, 3 Sept. 1879.

[49] Vol. XXXI, no. 1799, 23 Dec. 1879.

whom they had tried so hard to overthrow. Eventually Dunn relented and allowed some of the missionaries back. Even so, there were fewer stations in operation in the 1880s than there had been before the war.[50]

But the real losers were the Zulu. Their heroic defence of their country and their restraint in sparing Natal won them only a reprieve. The reaction in Britain made it politically impossible to annex their country, and so they retained their land - but only temporarily. They lost the political unity and stability which some of them, perhaps had not previously valued as highly as they later came to when they saw the effects of its absence. Even in its own terms Wolseley's settlement was a botched job. Chiefs found a large proportion of their people in other chiefs' territories. Some of the most powerful and influential chiefs were not granted territories at all. Conflicts inevitably broke out, many of them between those prepared to collaborate with new ways and those loyal to the old. A strong movement developed amongst the latter for the restoration of Cetshwayo. This struck a responsive chord in the new Liberal government in Britain, which felt guilty and embarrassed about the continued exile of the Zulu King. Since Wolseley's settlement had clearly broken down, the British government decided to restore Cetshwayo. But Natal's colonists and officials were strongly opposed to his return. They feared a revival of Zulu military power, and, as Shepstone wrote to Frere, Cetshwayo was 'the representative of the sentiment and of all those that cherish it in South Africa which is opposed to civilization, Christianity and progress and cannot help occupying that position'.[51] Natal's officials also felt a sense of obligation to the anti-monarchist party which had collaborated with the colonial regime. They therefore saw to it that when Cetshwayo was restored in 1883, he was restored to only a portion of his former kingdom. This was a cause of great dissatisfaction to him and his followers, and gave his enemies a power base from which to operate. A civil war ensued, and Cetshwayo became a fugitive once again. He died, in somewhat mysterious circumstances, in 1884. His son and heir, Dinizulu, resorted to the desperate expedient of calling in the Transvaal Boers against his Zulu enemies. The latter were defeated, but the Boers seized most of Zululand as their reward. The British then stepped in to prevent the Boers gaining independent access to the sea, and they reduced the size of the territory the Boers had taken, annexing the rest of the country themselves. In 1897 this remnant was added to Natal, which had received 'responsible' (i.e. settler) government in 1893. In 1905 forty per cent of this remnant was sold to

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[50] C.C. Ballard, '"A Reproach to Civilisation"; John Dunn and the Missionaries 1879-1884', *South African Historical Journal*, 11 (November 1979); and see the correspondence in U.W.L., Selected Records of the Archbishop of Cape Town, Aa5.

[51] S.P. 69, p.68, Shepstone to Frere, 4 June 1880.

white farmers. In this way the Zulu kingdom became the fragmented, eroded, impoverished, labour reservoir that came to be known as 'Kwazulu' north of the Thukela.[52]

Conclusion: the Origins of the War

The most immediate cause of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 is that Sir Bartle Frere was determined that there should be a war and was in a position to bring it about. The opposition of the British and Natal governments, which Frere had to defy or overcome to bring about the war he wanted, and the lukewarmness of the local colonists, shows that the will of this individual was an important cause of the war.

But it cannot be a complete explanation. Even the most headstrong and powerful individuals operate in a context, and it must be asked why Frere was so determined on war. Again, there is a simple explanation: to achieve confederation. Frere was no run of the mill High Commissioner on a routine posting; he was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a 'Statesman' entrusted with a special task, a task which chimed perfectly with his imperial vision, and which he was determined to carry out. Frere soon came to see the Zulu kingdom as the principal obstacle in his way. The Cape Colony was the biggest and richest state in South Africa and would bear the greatest share of the burden of defence; it would therefore not confederate until the Zulu danger was removed. Preventing the Transvaal from rebelling was a more urgent matter. It had been annexed to facilitate confederation, and Frere believed the Boers would become reconciled to the British flag if the undertaking to protect its borders against the Zulu and other Africans were fulfilled. But this required the findings of the Border Commission to be nullified, and this could only be done by overthrowing the independent Zulu kingdom.

Frere himself would have indignantly rejected the motives attributed to him in the previous paragraph. He could not have admitted even to himself that he wished to wage war upon an independent people, inevitably killing many of them, in order to achieve a political ambition. He had to believe that the war was necessary for self-defence, or for the good of the Zulu people, or that it was inevitable in any case; or preferably all three.

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[52] Wolseley's settlement and the civil war that followed is expertly analysed by Jeff Guy in his *Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom.*

The Zulu kingdom was founded by the great warrior Shaka and had a history of conquests and raids upon its neighbours. The very nature of the state, with what was described as its large 'standing army', seemed to Frere to be predicated upon war. Natal's long freedom from invasion, Frere and his supporters believed, was simply the result of the Zulu ruler's need to have Natal's support against the Transvaal, or his policy of 'playing off' the one against the other as it was often described. When the Boers demonstrated their weakness against Sekhukhune the situation changed and Natal's exemption from the danger of invasion ended. Cetshwayo's aggressive intentions appeared to be demonstrated by numerous circumstances. There was his explicit desire to 'wash his spears', and his defiant message to the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal in November 1876 which served notice that he would no longer heed the latter's pacific counsels. His impis became a menace to the Transvaal, reaching such a pinnacle of peril in April 1877 that it became necessary to bring it under British protection. Then came the belligerent behaviour of his representatives towards Shepstone when the latter attempted to settle the border dispute with them in October 1877, the subsequent Zulu seizure of much of the territory in dispute, and the driving away of the frontier farmers. The murderous raids of Mbelini and Sihayo's sons Frere described as 'trying it on', trial runs for the inevitable onslaught to follow.

These events could be interpreted very differently, as I have tried to show. Bishop Colenso interpreted them very differently, and when the events of the Anglo-Zulu war showed beyond doubt that Cetshwayo had no aggressive intentions towards Natal, Colenso's skilfully disseminated interpretation came to prevail in Britain. But before the event it was possible for Frere to justify the invasion of Zululand as a pre-emptive strike against an otherwise inevitable attack. In this sense, the events alluded in the previous paragraph can be included amongst the causes of the Anglo-Zulu war.

A pre-emptive strike against an otherwise inevitable attack was justified as essentially defensive. Frere, Shepstone and others believed that Cetshwayo was the leader of an inter-tribal conspiracy to drive out the white man. In this sense too the invasion of Zululand could be represented as essentially defensive, and such a representation facilitated the invasion.

It is most unlikely that Cetshwayo was the leader of any such inter-tribal conspiracy. It is, however, true that he possessed great prestige among Africans throughout South Africa as the ruler of the most powerful independent African state. The British believed that their prestige was essential to the maintenance of their position as the paramount power in southern Africa. From the time of Shepstone's confrontation with the Zulu on the frontier in October 1877 the destruction of Zulu prestige came to be widely seen as essential to the maintenance of British prestige and power. This

was certainly Shepstone's view, and even Bulwer acknowledged that the British army assembled in Natal could not simply be withdrawn without the submission of Cetshwayo.

Cetshwayo was widely believed to be a cruel tyrant practising atrocities upon his people. We have seen the role of missionaries in propagating this belief and the reasons why they did so. Their propaganda found willing believers since it conformed to white expectations concerning savages in general and Zulu Kings in particular. It also seemed plausible to many, of course, because it justified the intervention which was desired for other reasons. The invasion of Zululand, it was said, was not directed against the Zulu people but against the Zulu King; it was essentially an act of benevolence towards the Zulu people, being intended among other things to free them from tyranny. It was this sort of argument that enabled Bulwer to sign the ultimatum. By the time he realised its hollowness it was too late.

The supposed cruelties of Cetshwayo facilitated the invasion in another way. It was widely assumed that most of the Zulu people would welcome the overthrow of their tyrannical ruler, and that resistance to the invading army of liberation would be slight. Shepstone, supposedly the great authority on the subject, held that the Zulu kingdom would disintegrate when touched. Chelmsford did little to prepare the camp at Isandlwana against attack but made extensive preparations for the reception of the 'considerable exodus of Zulus from their country' which he believed would follow an invasion since 'every reliable account received from that country shows conclusively that Cetewayo is most unpopular' and 'that an internal revolution is not only possible but probable'.[53] Frere believed the short, inexpensive and successful war he confidently expected would cause his acting without instructions to be overlooked. Such a war and the reasons for it would have attracted little interest or attention in Britain. Had Frere known that the war would be a disaster and would destroy his reputation he would surely have acted differently. The limited, swift and successful war that he expected encouraged him to force it on.

The Zulu King, it was held, not only subjected his people to cruelties but kept them in barbarism. He was described by Shepstone as the enemy of civilization, Christianity and progress. Shepstone was entrusted with the restoration of Cetshwayo in 1883, and his report on the occasion was a scarcely veiled attack on the British government for having restored him. He emphasised the improvement in the condition of the Zulu people since the ending of Cetshwayo's rule - the freedom

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[53] N.A.M. 6807-386-13, no. 1, memo by Thesiger (Chelmsford) 30 Oct. 1878; also in G.H. 1299 (no. 4051).

from military service, the freedom to marry, the freedom from fear, the adoption of European clothing, and 'the facilities for their young men earning money by labour in the Colony' which they spoke of 'as a new and great privilege, and such it undoubtedly was'. Shepstone expressed anxiety lest 'we should blight all these new-born aspirations in the minds of, in many respects, a noble people, and thrust them back into the barbarism from which they were just beginning to emerge'.[54] The idea that the overthrow of Cetshwayo was the means of rescuing the Zulu people from barbarism surely helped to justify and thus facilitate the invasion of Zululand.

But justification and facilitation are not the same thing as motivation. It seems unlikely that the desire to benefit the Zulu people was a strong part, or any part at all, of the motive force behind the invasion. All the evidence suggests that Frere was determined to get rid of the Zulu kingdom as an obstacle to confederation. This raises the question of the purposes of the policy of confederation. I have concluded in chapter four that its purposes were to extend the territory under the British flag (in the form of a self-governing dominion) in order to exclude foreign powers, to achieve a greater degree of control over the black population, and to promote economic development. The first and second of these implied bringing Zululand under British rule, and this was made explicit in a number of statements by members of the Colonial Office.[55] The confederation policy required the annexation of Zululand, not simply to remove a political obstacle to its achievement, but because it was an essential part of the policy itself.

What of the promotion of economic development? To return to the question posed in the introduction: was the Zulu kingdom invaded to facilitate the advance of capitalist production in South Africa? In an indirect sense, the answer is yes. The economic development that was envisaged was certainly of a capitalist nature, not peasant and artisan production, and the Zulu kingdom was an obstacle to the achievement of confederation. It might be argued, however, that in a more direct sense too, the Zulu kingdom was invaded to facilitate capitalist production. It seems clear from the discussions of the 'uniform native policy' Carnarvon wanted, that the working class of the new state was to be drawn from its African population, and it seems equally clear that Shepstone and Frere envisaged such a future for the Zulu people.[56] The passage which is usually quoted in this context is by Shepstone:

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[54] B.P.P., C.3616, pp.57-9, Shepstone to Bulwer, 27 Feb. 1883, encl. in no 31, Bulwer to Derby, 5 March 1883.

[55] See above, ch. 6, pp.188-90.

[56] See above, ch. 4, pp.105-8 & 116-21; ch. 7, p.230; & ch. 8, p.252.

> Had Cetywayo's thirty thousand warriors been in time changed to labourers working for wages, Zululand would have been a prosperous peaceful country instead of what it now is, a source of perpetual danger to itself and its neighbours.[57]

Modern preoccupations tend to cause certain words in this passage to attract more attention than others: 'labourers', 'wages' and 'prosperous', rather than 'warriors', 'peaceful' and 'danger'. But Shepstone wrote it during the crisis on the Transvaal-Zulu border caused by the breakdown of his negotiations with the Zulu, and there can be no doubt that it was the danger of war that preoccupied him at that time. Security was, as it had always been, his chief concern, and it might be argued that what appears to be a desire for proletarianisation and the advance of capitalist production is really nothing more than his attempt to depict, for rhetorical reasons, and for the benefit of Lord Carnarvon, to whom he was writing, the sort of normal peaceful society (such as that of England) which the artificial military tyranny of the Zulu King made impossible in South East Africa.

One should not, however, attempt to draw too sharp a distinction between security and capitalist production, since the one was dependent on the other. A contemporary supporter of the policy that led to the Anglo-Zulu war made the point clearly. The Zulu kingdom, he wrote, was a 'standing menace to progress and prosperity':

> What good was there in opening up farms, in building houses, or in buying herds, with a not remote prospect of Cetywayo sweeping across the country like a destroying angel, burning, slaying, and pillaging wherever he went? How was capital to be invested, enterprise to be encouraged, with such a cause of terror constantly in the background?[58]

Security, peace, capitalist economic growth, Christianity, and the social changes these things entailed, all constituted what might be called a programme and ideology of civilization and progress. One may distinguish between these things and discuss them separately for the purpose of analysis, but they were not separate in the minds of the British in South Africa and in Britain itself in the 1870s. I think we may legitimately conclude that Zululand was invaded to facilitate the advance of civilization in the sense in which the term was used in the nineteenth century, a sense in which capitalist production constituted an integral part of the concept.

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[57] B.P.P., C.2079, pp.55, no. 39, Shepstone to Carnarvon, 5 Jan. 1878; this is quoted in its context in ch. 7, p.230.

[58] M. Allardyce 'The Zulu War', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 125 (March 1879) p.377.

In his essay on the absence of a telegraph and the genesis of the Anglo-Zulu war, Colin Webb concluded that 'the fate of the Zulu nation and the lives of thousands of human beings were, in 1878-9, twined into the cable coils that were the power-lines of late Victorian empire'.[59] Had there been a telegraph between Britain and South Africa in 1878 Frere might have been restrained (though Hicks Beach doubted even that); but would it have made any difference to the 'fate of the Zulu nation'? This seems much more doubtful. Doubts arise, apart from anything else, because Frere's critics were just as much imbued as he was with the ideology of progress and civilization. One of the charges they urged most strongly against him was that the war which he forced on, with all the loss of life and suffering that it entailed, was unnecessary to achieve the ends both he and they desired. Lord Blachford held that the Zulu kingdom was decomposing and that had it not been for the unifying effects of Frere's ultimatum it would have dissolved and become British in the natural course of events.[60] John Morley wrote:

> Civilisation would have extended in Zululand in the normal way. The people would have come down to Natal for the railways, and would have been silently influenced by what they saw there. Cetywayo and his chiefs might have been induced to send children down to Natal to school, as we know them to have been disposed to do. A few hundred pounds expended in such ways as those would have done more to extend our influence peacefully than millions of war-money and long trains of Gatlings. Patience, caution, moderation - but before all else patience - these are the keywords of a true policy if, in professing to civilise South Africa, you are not to rebarbarize England.

In the course of explaining the origins of the war Morley alluded to the annexation of the Transvaal, which he stated was as unjustifiable as would be a German annexation of Switzerland. 'Where is the difference? The Transvaal government was a government of Europeans, and not a kingdom of barbarians.'[61] A similar distinction was drawn by Colenso. He expressed 'cordial assent' to Frere's demand that the Zulu army and marriage system should be disbanded

> as being, though measures of coercion, yet such as a great Christian power had the right and the duty of enforcing upon a neighbouring savage nation like the Zulus, brought into close relations with itself, whose King had been installed at their own request by the representative of the Natal Government, and to whom a signal proof of generosity and good faith had been

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[59] C. Webb, 'Lines of Power: the High Commissioner, the Telegraph and the War of 1879', *Natalia*, no. 8 (Dec. 1878) p.36.

[60] Blachford, Lord, 'The Causes of the Zulu War', *The Nineteenth Century*, V (March 1879) pp.569-70; H.L. Deb., Vol. CCXLIV, col. 1634, Blachford, 25 March 1879.

[61] J. Morley, 'The Plain Story of the Zulu War', *The Fortnightly Review*, XXV, new ser. (1 March 1879) pp.352 & 330.

given in the [border] award.[62]

Only later did Colenso discover the fraudulence of the border award. Had it been what it seemed, he believed 'the desired reforms might have been gradually brought about in Zululand by judicious & peaceful measures on our part, instead of by this frightful war'.[63] He wrote that he had supposed

> that Sir B. Frere, after making a judicious exhibition on our frontier or, if need be in Zululand itself, of the power of England, would have sought, by wise and peaceful measures of negotiation, to bring about gradually the desired improvements in the Military and Marriage Systems of Zululand, in accordance with the principle laid down by himself on another occasion (2079, p.7) that 'such changes, like all great revolutions, require time and patience to effect peacefully'; and there is every reason for believing that this work, worthy of the English Name, might have been done successfully.[64]

These statements take it for granted that the extension of British control and culture to the Zulu kingdom was desirable, justifiable, and inevitable: in Blachford's and Morley's words, 'natural' and 'normal'. They also assume that the desired changes could be achieved without war, by cultural osmosis, patience, negotiation, or at most a show of force. But these assumptions are surely implausible in the extreme. It is difficult to see them as anything more than the products of wishful thinking. The Zulu did not go down to Natal 'for the railways' or for any other form of wage labour - they were not permitted to do so by their King. Cetshwayo and his chiefs were notoriously opposed to the Christian education (the only form available) of the Zulu people. Cetshwayo could surely never have agreed to the dismantling of the marriage system or the army. These were the two institutions upon which, more than anything else, his power depended. Without the marriage laws, he said, he would be 'a shadow instead a king'.[65] Without the army he would be nothing at all.

Since even Frere's opponents desired changes incompatible with the existence of the Zulu kingdom, and considered that Britain had a right to demand them, it is difficult to see how one can avoid the conclusion that war was inevitable sooner or later. The war that actually took place might have been averted had something occurred to alter its direct political causes - had the telegraph line

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[62] B.P.P., C.2252, p.52, Colenso to Frere, 27 Dec. 1878, encl. in no. 19, Frere to Hicks Beach, 26 Jan. 1879.

[63] K.C., Colenso Papers, File 16, K.C.M. 49320, Colenso to Ferguson, 13 April 1879.

[64] Vijn (ed. Colenso) *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, p.xiii.

[65] C. De B. Webb & J.B. Wright, *A Zulu King Speaks: Statements made by Cetshwayo kaMpande on the History and Customs of his People* (Pietermaritzburg & Durban 1978) p.72.

been completed earlier, or had Frere died. But the alternative seems to be a later war rather than no war at all. The Zulu had a history of success, of military glory, and of domination. They were not like the Mfengu, failures in traditional terms, who willingly embraced new techniques and ways of life. The Zulu were proud of their history and traditions and of their independence, and would not have been incorporated into a white-ruled state and a capitalist economy and civilization without a struggle.

It took a highly intelligent woman, uninhibited by any fear that her opinions might be taken seriously or have any effect, to think the unthinkable and ask whether the Zulu needed to be civilized at all:

> John Bull has been taught, it seems, that he is the Israel of this century, that every other of the many families of man on the globe ought to conform to his ideas, obey his laws, pay tribute to Queen Victoria etc. etc. But is it quite certain that the civilisation of Western Europe is good for Eastern Africa?[66]

Once the Zulu kingdom was safely a thing of the past and the practical effects on the Zulu of transforming them from warriors to wage labourers became apparent, there was a growing tendency among whites to wax nostalgic and romantic about the old Zulu order. This is most striking in the novels of Rider Haggard who, though an ardent British imperialist, contrasted the 'bloodstained grandeur' of the old independent Zulu kingdom with the meanness and vulgarity of civilized life.[67] The son of S.M. Samuelson, the Zululand missionary, wrote in 1929 in similar terms, and in very different terms from those of his father's reports in the 1870s:

> The country had, in those days, its natural and romantic beauty, which has since been destroyed by what is termed as 'Civilization'. The human inhabitants of the land, in those days, were the kindly, cheerful, hospitable and friendly Zulus before they were contaminated, and their self-respect and pride destroyed by the seamy side of European and Asiatic civilisation, and before these had taught them selfishness. They were, indeed, more contented and happier than they are now, in spite of the fact that they were sent to their last account without notice or trial. For death was quick in those days, and not made a

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[66] Mrs. Colenso to Mrs. Lyell, 25 April 1879, in W. Rees (ed.) *Colenso Letters from Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1958) p.343. In the next sentence but one she describes these 'ideas and speculations' as 'scarcely worth pen and paper'. I consider it most unlikely that in this letter Mrs. Colenso 'expressed her husband's doubts', as Martin suggests: S.J.R. Martin, 'British Images of the Zulu, c.1820-1879', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1982, p.300.

[67] Martin, 'British Images', pp.334-6. Norman Etherington reconciles Haggard's imperialism with his nostalgia for precolonial societies by describing him as the laureate of indirect rule (Shepstone being its prophet): N. Etherington, *Rider Haggard* (Boston, 1984) p.106.

> prolonged torture. Nowadays, all that matters are sugar cane, cotton fields, the Almighty Dollar, commercial wrangling and strikes, all saturated with unlimited selfishness and non-consideration of others.[68]

At the time of the Anglo-Zulu war the conventional contrast was the other way round. In Natal, where the Zulu-speaking people had long been in contact with both missionaries and colonists, they were described, for example, in 1881 as having made 'remarkable progress' in their way of life and in their 'growing disposition to labour for others, and to cultivate the soil for market produce'. But it was 'otherwise in Zululand': the 'degradation of the people there is complete', as they 'cling tenaciously to their barbarous customs and laws' and 'do not labour, and as a consequence are often in a state of semi-starvation'. 'Let us hope', this writer concluded, 'that the ploughshare of war that recently passed through the land...will yet prove to have been the harbinger of blessings manifold to that degraded people'.[69]

'The ploughshare of war' is a startling phrase, particularly from a writer on Christian missions, contrasting as it does so starkly with the familiar Biblical antithesis. Few expressed themselves so brutally, or perhaps one should say so thoughtlessly. But in a mental climate, and in the conditions that produced it, in which the sword could be equated with the ploughshare, war was all too possible. Even opponents of the policy that led to the Anglo-Zulu war were inhibited from opposing the forces that led to the policy. The war of 1879 may have been Frere's war, but in the late nineteenth century there were many more impersonal and longer-term forces tending towards war between the British empire and the Zulu kingdom.

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[68] R.C.A. Samuelson, *Long Long Ago* (Durban, 1929) p.9.

[69] R. Young, *Modern Missions: their Trials and Triumphs* (London, 1881) p.220-1.

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