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by: Peter Marsh

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JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN AND SOUTH AFRICA

The most remarkable feature of Joseph Chamberlain's government of the Empire was his attempt to command assent at home and abroad. At home he was extraordinarily successful. His complicity in the Jameson Raid and his responsibility for the long, expensive and no more than marginally successful war with the South African republics made that achievement only the more remarkable. But abroad, particularly in South Africa, success eluded him. That lack of success raised questions about the worth of his whole imperial enterprise, questions to which most people now, historians and laymen alike, would give the same negative answer. Conscious of the risk of failure though equally confident of the possibility of success, Chamberlain concentrated his final energies on an attempt to harness domestic and colonial economic self-interest to the chariot of the Empire. This time success eluded him at home, though he might have been able to turn the tide there if fate had allowed him the same vigorous old age that Gladstone and later Churchill enjoyed. But this part of Chamberlain's story lies outside my concern in this essay. What I want to suggest here is the liberal as well as authoritarian character of his leadership of the Empire particularly in South Africa during his tenure as Colonial Secretary.

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The seminal year in Chamberlain's mid-life occurred between the autumn of 1887 and the spring of 1888. In August 1887, he found himself almost alone in the political wilderness, cut off from the bulk of the Liberal party by his opposition to Irish Home Rule, cut off from his main Conservative ally, Lord Randolph Churchill, by Churchill's impossible temperament, and close to despair at the essentially negative policies not only of the Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury but also of the Liberal Unionist leader, Lord Hartington. When Salisbury asked him to head a British delegation to try and resolve a vexed controversy between Canada and the United States over the north Atla ntic fisheries, Chamberlain seized the opportunity for at least temporary escape.

In the winter of 1887/8, he found his footing personally as well as politically. His encounters in the new world convinced him of the superiority of the old. Canada and, by wa y of contrast, the United States impressed him with the talent of the British for strong, imperial leadership of far-flung peoples. The chilly personal isolation that he had often felt in England outside Birmingha m was replaced by warm hospitality in Washington, which embraced him as the lion of its social season. His diplomatic mission was crowned with substantial success.

He grafted the entire experience to himself by falling in love and winning the love of a young Bostonian Brahmin, Mary Peabody Endicott, daughter of President Cleveland's Secretary of the Army. She anchored him for the rest of his life in a happy marriage, an Anglo-Saxon imperial marriage.

Chamberlain returned to England with a newfound but as yet vaguely defined sense of purpose. To some extent under his prodding, the domestic policy of the Conservative government had taken a substantially constructive turn with the introduction of an epoch making Local Government bill. Without neglecting the domestic agenda, Chamberlain gave an increased amount of his attention to colonial and imperial issues and particularly to South Africa.

South Africa had already concerned him for almost a decade. Before he joined Gladstone's cabinet in 1880,, he had taken notable part in the chorus of Liberal critics of the Zulu war.. He argued along the familiar lines laid down by John Bright and Gladstone: "... we have," he declared, "undertaken illimitable obligations and responsibilities, and ... are warring everywhere against justice and freedom, against the inevitable and righteous course of events." (The Times, 17 April 1879) He gave his argument an imperial twist: the policy of Disraeli's government was weak as well as wicked, it had "neither advanced British interests nor maintained British honour." After the general election, because of Chamberlain's interest, Gladstone asked him to answer questions on South African subjects for the new government in the House of Commons.

Chamberlain reacted impatiently to the hesitation of the cabinet to give the Transvaal back to the Boers.. He welcomed the decision to do so after the British defeat at Majuba hill, not, however, he later, insisted, because of Britain's military weakness. He accepted assurances from the army that Britain could avenge the defeat. He welcomed the restoration of the Transvaal to the Boers as a matter of ethical responsibility.

Kruger's chafing at the restraints of the Pretoria Convention of 1881, which established the independence of the South African Republic though under British suzerainty, awakened doubts in Chamberlain. His doubts found initially ethical outlets. He became friendly with F.W. Chesson of the Aborgines Protection Society. More momentously, his friend, R.W. Dale, the leading Congregationalist minister in Birmingham, introduced him to the missionary-cum-imperial agent from South Africa, John Mackenzie, who latched onto Chamberlain eagerly. The government tried to remove the grounds for Kruger's irritation at the Pretoria Convention by watering it down in the London Convention of 1884. The ink on this agreement was scarcely dry when Kruger began to chafe against it too.

His behaviour completed the discredit, in Chamberlain's eyes, of the policy of kindly accomodation that had dictated both conventions. But the furour generated over his own "unauthorized programme" for domestic reform and then over Ireland drove South Africa to the back of his mind from 1885 to 1888.

It came forward again as soon as he returned from Washington. Mackenzie, ever importunate, approached him at this ripe moment, asking him to preside at a meeting of the London Chamber of Commerce that Mackenzie was to address. Chamberlain took his time before accepting the invitation in order to mull over the subject of South Africa and the issues that it raised. He tried his ideas out against well informed but critical opinion around the privacy of a dinner table. Three men joined him. One, Lord Derby, had been Colonial Secretary when Britain accomodated Kruger through the London Convention, and was, as Chamberlain explained to Mary Endicott, an advocate of scuttling out of embarra ssing imperial obligations.. The other two men, the English historian James Anthony Froude and the South African jurist Sir J.H. de Villiers, wanted to leave the initiative and responsibility in South Africa to the elected colonial government at the Cape. Strengthened in his thinking by their friendly argument with him, Chamberlain accepted Mackenzie's invitation.

Chamberlain used his position as chairman of Mackenzie's meeting to present his own ideas, (The Times, 15 May 1888), developed as they had been by events in South Africa as well as by his own experience. He was fully alive to the significance of the recent discovery of gold on the Rand. That gold, he knew, was "as certain as destiny" to attract "European enterprise and European colonization." As a screw manufacturer in the 1860s and '70s, he also knew the importance to British industry of enterprise overseas. His firm, Nettlefold and Chamberlain, had owed its ascendancy in good part to its conquest of foreign markets, a conquest that had been his particular responsibility. The richest fields in that conquest had laid in Europe:: but the depression that had fallen on British metal manufacturing industry since he had left the business, and the opportunities that he had recently sensed in Canada as well as South Africa, excited his economic imagination and concentrated his focus on the Empire. "Is there a man in his senses," he asked the meeting, "who believes that the crowded population of these islands would exist for a single day if we were to cut adrift from the great dependencies which now look to us for protection and assistance?"

He wedded Britain's economic interest to his earlier insistence on Britain's responsibility for the protection of native peoples in a way that subordinated the second to the first. Disregard for the well-being

of natives had discredited imperial expansion in the past, he said; a more humane policy would avoid that discredit. Then he took a leap. As he reckoned it, the addition of imperial responsibilities and imperial economic interests amounted to more than a simple sum. It amounted, he declared amid ringing cheers, to the question, "who is to be the dominant power in South Africa?" Having carried his audience with him that far, he pushed them onto controversial ground. With de Villiers sitting in front of him, he took issue with those who advocated placing responsibility in local colonial rather than in central imperial hands: "... if we are once for all to recognize our obligations in regard to this great continent," he insisted, "we must do so in pursuance of an Imperial policy and not of a colonial policy if in any respect that differs from ours."

For the next fifteen years, Chamberlain sought to reconcile the often competing demands of Cape Town and London. He met sometimes with spectacular failure, sometimes with hard earned, fleeting success. He experimented with a variety of devices. In doing so, he kept three prorotypes in mind. Two, Birmingham and Canada, kindled his imagination; but the third, Gladstone's scheme for Ireland that come to be known as Home Rule, alarmed him. The difference was not a matter of local powers of initiative but of imperial powers of superintendence. Birmingham had more power over the social, cultural and economic life of its citizens than some nation states exercised. But it secured those powers from Parliament. Chamberlain as mayor had worked closely with the Home Secretary, Sir Richard Cross, in framing and using parliamentary legislation to meet Birmingham's needs, even though the two men belonged to opposing political parties. There was a somewhat similar distribution of power in Canada. While the provincial governments, particularly of Quebec and Ontario, exercised a good deal of power for the benefit of their different "races" (as Chamberlain used the word), the federal government could disallow their legislation, and also possessed a wide range of responsibilities of its own. The fatal flaw in Gladstone's Irish proposals, on the other hand, as Chamberlain saw it, was the limited title that they left to the imperial Parliament to act for the kingdom as a whole.

Cape colony had its own elected legislature, with an executive responsible to it, under loose, often diffident supervision by the imperial high commissioner. There was too much Home Rule colouring for Chamberlain's taste in this arrangement. He certainly did not want to see any aggra ndisement of the Cape through annexations to it of further territory to the north. "We have gone ahead at a great rate in giving Home Rule to the Cape," he observed to the Conservative Colonial Secretary, Lord

Knutsford, in October 1888, "but there is no earthly reason for disposing prematurely of the future of the whole of South Africa." Cecil Rhodes' Chartered Company offered an alternative arrangement of imperial and colonial interests for economic development to the north. Chamberlain was uneasy about this arrangement too. Although the charter was an expression of imperial authority, Rhodes acquired his own colonial power as prime minister at the Cape, and his personal wealth rivalled the financial resources that the imperial government could put behind his enterprise. Chamberlain reconciled himself to the experiment by inducing Lord Grey as his friend and fellow advocate of imperial supremacy to accept a directorship in the company. The precaution was woefully inadequate.

* * *

The confusion of authority in the arrangements of the Chartered Company created quicksands into which Chamberlain stepped at the outset of his career as Colonial Secretary. The Jameson Raid was an event that needs to be looked at from many angles. As an episode in Chamberlain's career, it was a doubly paradoxical failure. He was usually acutely sensitive to popular opinion, yet he failed to foresee the impact that the Raid might have on public opinion in the Cape, a topic to which I will turn later. He was also an advocate of firm leadership by the imperial authorities, yet he failed either to supervise or to steer clear of a critical situation on the borders of the Empire.

Every cache of letters that surfaces to throw light on the Jameson Raid reduces the doubt about Chamberlain's complicity in it. As Lord Grey put it (on 12 June 1896) to Rhodes' solicitor, Bouchier Hawksley, Chamberlain "was led to believe that the inevitable Revolution /at Johannesburg/ was about to take place, & he very properly took precautions to ensure its success when it came about." Grey put it this way to exonerate Chamberlain, but the defence does not hold up under examination. Chamberlain cannot be condemned for his ignorance of the extent to which Rhodes was organizing the "Revolution" on the Rand; but Chamberlain certainly did not take either proper or adequate precautions about the force that would ride in to support the revolutionaries. Jameson's force ought to have been under the ultimate command, not of Rhodes, but of the high commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson. To make that arrangement work, however, Robinson ought to have been Lord Loch--as Chamberlain had desired when Robinson was appointed. Robinson was a very sick man, and weak. Assuming that Chamberlain and Rhodes were conspiring over his head, he simply plugged his ears, leaving Rhodes and Jameson without surveillance and Chamberlain without an independent channel of information. The indictment against Chamberlain over the Jameson Raid is that

he failed to control the disjointed machinery willed to him by the preceding Liberal government.

The subsequent committee of enquiry into the Raid was quite a different story. There was no lack of control on Chamberlain's part in this case. The indictment against him here is simple: he lied to the House of Commons and to the country by denying his complicity in the Raid. Although that has become the more shocking of the two indictments, it did not seem so at the time to most of those who knew or guessed the truth. Until the enquiry was over, even Chamberlain's bitterest political opponents in Britain bridled their tongues. Those who spoke out, like the idiosyncratic moralist W.T. Stead, were extraordinarily rare. Chamberlain's conduct was approved or tolerated by his colleagues, who knew a great deal, by his staff at the Colonial Office who knew everything, and by the great majority in the Commons and, more passively, in the country, who knew enough to be suspicious. This reaction is a commentary less on the morality of the age than on the national solidarity. Salisbury had lied to the House of Lords in 1878 when an accurate outline of one of the agreements that paved the way for the Congress of Berlin was leaked to the press. Lord Selborne, his son-in-law and fellow high churchman, was as implicated in the Raid as Chamberlain, and lied about it even more blandly. The Commons and the country were prepared, like Nelson at Trafalgar, to turn a blind eye to Chamberlain's complicity in the Raid because the imperial reputation and international interests of the nation were at stake.

Still, he would not have survived politically without breathtaking, brutal audacity during the months of enquiry. For a year and a half he fought, through fluctuations of alarm, to protect himself and the country from the consequences of the Raid. The threat of exposure was too acute to allow anything like settled policy toward South Africa to emerge from his twists during this time. But some of the devices that he used and decisions that he reached proved lasting.

He discovered new worth in bipartisan consensus. He would not have been safe without a wide measure of bipartisan agreement in the parliamentary committee of enquiry on the Raid to focus attention on concerns other than his suspected complicity. Though he used these concerns to divert attention from himself, he genuinely shared them to one degree or another. Sir William Harcourt, leader of the Liberal party in the Commons and also in effect of the enquiry, was preoccupied by the strain in Anglo-American relations over Venezuela. The interest of Chamberlain as well as Harcourt in the United States was deepened by their American wives, an affinity that Harcourt enjoyed; and Chamberlain ultimately took the lead for the government in resolving the dispute.

In so far as South Africa was concerned, Harcourt directed his anger at Rhodes. So, more passionately, did Labouchere, the firebrand on the committee of enquiry. The diversion of Labouchere's attention away from Chamberlain was surprising, for Labouchere had once hoped that Chamberlain would become Britain's first Radical prime minister, and ever since Chamberlain's defection from the Liberal party over Home Rule, Labouchere had attacked him with all the venom of a rejected lover. Chamberlain shared Harcourt's and Labouchere's distrust of Rhodes, though within much more confined limits. Rhodes' attempt to blackmail him over the Raid hardened this distrust, and also won Chamberlain some sympathy from the two Liberals. The fiasco of the Raid enabled Chamberlain to reduce the Chartered Company to the subservience he had originally desired. While Rhodes preserved its economic mandate, Chamberlain stripped down its political powers.

He collaborated with Harcourt so successfully over the parliamentary enquiry that he tried to repeat his success with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman during the run-up to the Boer War in the summer of 1899. But the collaboration with Harcourt had destroyed Harcourt's credibility as party leader. Campbell-Bannerman had taken over the position that Harcourt lost, and he appreciated the reason for his rise. He too had been a member of the committee of enquiry, and though he had maintained a lower profile on it, he could not exploit this particular vulnerability in Chamberlain. But he maintained a stance of critical detachment toward Chamberlain, and resisted his attempts to secure official Liberal approval for a precautionary military build-up in South Africa.

The fires of the enquiry tempered Chamberlain's steel. The Raid had exposed his rough edges. They continued to show in his forays into foreign affairs. But in his own sphere at the Colonial Office he emerged with an increasingly sure imperial touch. His performance as Secretary of State from the autumn of 1897 until the spring of 1903 commanded recurrent, often massive respect from contemporaries..

Chamberlain is remembered as a hard man, manipulative and ruthless. Contemporaries saw him as emotional and impulsive, a man of fierce loves and fierce hates, very loyal to his friends--though only up to a point, for if they parted from him, he reacted with intense bitterness that only time might mellow. "As temperamental as a schoolgirl and implacable as Juno" is how Salisbury described him, selecting feminine comparisons.. That temperament had not been brought under control in Gladstone's ministries, with fateful consequences. The tearing apart of the Liberal party in 1886 had less to do with Ireland than with violation of the bonds of loyalty between leaders and followers in England;; and Chamberlain was the lightning rod through which the fiercest of those emotions surged.

The nineteen months of suppressed fear that he endured after the Jameson Raid taught him some long lasting restraints. For the next six years he held himself in remarkable control. Sparks flew whenever he was verbally attacked, as so frequently happened, and he was very sensitive to aspersions upon his honour. But that sensitivity had something to do with his industrial origins and brief formal schooling in comparison to the landed wealth and Oxford or Cambridge education in which most of Britain's governing elite still gloried. The sparks that shot from him in debate came from the striking of steel against still harder steel.

Behind his fierce energy lay a will to create. The business of consolidating an empire required that kind of will. Hard work was not enough. It took a rare will to avoid bogging down in the administrative detail of an empire that covered half the earth,, leaving initiative in the hands of the pro-consuls on the spot. Empire building called for creativity as Chamberlain had learned in early manhood on a small scale when he helped to monopolize the British screw-making industry. His early small and later large enterprises showed much in common: bold imagination, careful attention to costs--Hicks Beach at the Exchequer and Chamberlain at the Colonial Office talked much the same language--sensitivity to the work force, and relentless absorption of competitors. Empire building called for creativity in a way that was not true of the conduct of international affairs. There, certainly for a satisfied power that could not hope for much further foreign expansion, the premium was on the arts of preservation, on shrewd analysis and patient diplomacy, skills of which Lord Salisbury was master. He and Chamberlain worked out a mature, mutually dependent, and extraordinarily successful partnership. They became in effect the twin consuls governing Britain. The deference with which they treated each other gracefully expressed their mutual restraint. When Salisbury eventually retired, the quality that Chamberlain and his wife singled out in their letters of appreciation to him was his loyalty to Chamberlain, loyalty at a particularly difficult time--during the aftermath to the Jameson Raid.

While that experience showed Chamberlain the bedrock reliability of his fellow consul, the Raid itself taught him the need for a frank, cordial, collegial relationship with his pro-consuls in the major spheres of the Empire, above all in South Africa. Rhodes gave him an unforgettable lesson in the dangers of an indirect or parallel relationship between Secretary of State and the possessor of the primary imperial mandate on the spot. Robinson served Chamberlain acceptably for an interlude after the Raid. In spite of some sharp differences on policy, the two men clung to each other to protect their

individual reputations. It served Chamberlain's purposes even to publish evidence of Robinson's occasional refusal to do as Chamberlain bid him: that helped to suggest the limitations to Chamberlain's responsibility for what went on in South Africa before as well as after the Raid. Still, Robinson served merely as a temporary expedient. He and Chamberlain did not naturally see eye to eye, and in any case he was dying.

Sir Alfred Milner, whom Chamberlain selected as high commissioner after a prlonged search, did not turn out to be quite what Chamberlain expected. As soon as the Anglo-Boer War was over, after five years of working together through seemingly much more difficult times, the relationship between the two men broke down, and it never really recovered. Milner almost certainly would have resigned in 1903 if Chamberlain, for different reasons, had not done so first. Nevertheless, the relationship served Chamberlain remarkably well. Nothing is more notable during the times of strain when Chamberlain was over-riding Milner than Chamberlain's urging of him to stay in office.

The two men brought to their respective assignments, and they valued in each other, the same quality of bold as well as assiduous enterprise that was indispensable to the task of building up the Empire. Both were men of strong conviction, an affinity that would have led to a clash long before it did if they had not shared most of the same convictions and also had not recognized the paramountcy of each other in their respective spheres. Even when he raised questions about the course that Milner proposed to pursue, Chamberlain deferred to his assessment of the situation on the spot and appreciated his need for tactical freedom of manoeuvre. Milner similarly appreciated the over-riding need of Chamberlain back in England to carry the cabinet, Parliament and the country with him. The relationship between the two men needed all of this temperamental affinity, agreement, and mutual recognition of spheres of primacy, in order to endure through five extraordinarily searching years.

They fell apart only with the advent of peace. At one level, their falling out was over their functional conduct. Trying to define their proper relationship, Chamberlain compared it to that of fellow members of the cabinet, "namely, that there should be absolute frankness in our private relations & full discussion of all matters of common interest, and that the decisions finally arrived at should be loyally supported & considered as the decisions of the whole of the Government or of the parties concerned in the discussion." (Chamberlain to Milner, 24 July 1902) Milner had violated these canons by publicizing his demand for suspension of the Cape constitution in spite of Chamberlain's repeated refusal to agree. But Chamberlain's

analogy to the cabinet was meant to flatter and was not quite candid. He did not regard Milner as a fellow colleague but ultimately as a subordinate, though an immensely important and trusted one.

The heart of their disagreement was not functional but political;: and it revealed the tempering of Chamberlain's imperialism that had taken place since the Jameson Raid.. In spite of all his thrusting, manipulation and venom as a politician, he had a fine sense about the aspirations, the commitments and the boundaries to the tolerance of the large groups of people who collectively forced the public. He was by nature and conviction an authoritarian democrat, authoritarian being the adjective, democrat the noun. That balance was evident from the outset of his political career, not least in the National Liberal Federation that he created. Critics derided it as a cheering section to applaud Chamberlain's decisions.. But in fact he spoke in its name so authoritatively because he listened to its first and second echelons so attentively. He was as good a listener as a speaker. He always gave a vigorous lead, but then he listened with surprising objectivity to the response. He knew, furthermore, that public response was never monolithic, that it varied from place to place in Birmingham, in the West Midlands, in England, and in the United Kingdom. The art of leading and listening to the British public was a complex one.

Much more so the art of leading and listening to the Empire.. Chamberlain had a little early experience of this as spokesman for the Liberal government on South African affairs in the House of Commons during the early 1880s, when visitors from the Cape began to seek him out. But his formative experience as an imperial spokesman came during the Washington fisheries negotiations in 1887/88. In Canada during the Christmas recess, he learned a little about dealing with a colonial cabinet. In Toronto, where he spoke out against commercial union with the United States and sketched out his burgeoning imperial vision, he brought his audience cheering to their feet. Some actually wept for joy. Others jumped onto the tables, waved their napkins, and shouted themselves hoarse. This response galvanized his belief in Britain's talent, even mission, for imperial government, a talent that Canada demonstrated within its own borders through its confederate constitution and the cooperation of French and English.

This belief received powerful reinforcement in the United States. Chamberlain's observations, sharpened by the gloomy commentary of Henry Adams and his circle into which Mary Endicott drew him, led him to a number of conclusions. He again saw what he took to be the Anglo-Saxon talent for drawing different peoples into a common polity. But he was more struck by the spinelessness of American political leadership, by the timorous way in which president and congress felt out the contours of public opinion in fear and trembling. Chamberlain's reaction

strengthened his natural predilection toward a much more assertive style of democratic leadership. It was, by the way, the same style that he used to win Mary's hand. It could be called imperial courtship. It required the leader to begin by taking a strong stand, and then carefully to observe the response, willing to modify, though rarely to abandon, his stance in order to ensure that his lead was followed.

For the most natural of reasons, Chamberlain did not concern himself much with the texture of public opinion in the Empire till after the Jameson Raid. Once the general election in July of 1895 was behind him, he spent August grasping the main threads of administrative concern in the Colonial Office. After a much needed holiday he returned to these administrative concerns, settling the controversy between Rhodes and the Bechuana chiefs in a way that put Jameson quickly in position to invade the South African Republic in the event of the uprising expected at Johannesburg. It was in November that Rhodes and Chamberlain reached the ill defined agreement that led to the Raid. Chamberlain's only significant involvement with matters of public opinion during these months had to do with the amount of discontent in Johannesburg which he, in common with nearly everyone else, overestimated.

The failure of the Raid instantly expanded his theatre of concern from Downing Street to the public arenas at home and in South Africa. From January of 1896 until June of 1903, when he launched his tariff reform crusade, he kept both of these arenas continually under observation. His immediate objective was to prevent the passions ignited by the Raid from destroying himself and his imperial aspirations. The fires of the next eighteen months burned a lot of impressions upon him. The failure of the Randlords to match deeds to words, the quick surrender of Jameson's men, and the blackmail of Rhodes soured his sympathy for the English and their interests in the South African Republic, and gave him a new appreciation of the Afrikaners. "It makes me sick to hear our braggarts depreciate the Boers," he told Lord Lansdowne (9 March 1896): "After all, they have beaten Englishmen!" As for the Randlords, he cursed them as "a lot of cowardly selfish blatant speculators who would sell their souls to have the power of rigging the Market." (A statement of policy, 5 April 1896) Words like these make his ability on the committee of enquiry to carry Harcourt and Labouchere with him less surprising. Yet ye was willing at the same time to make use of the "braggarts." "I do not mind the noisy exaltation of the Jingo party," he explaied to Edward Fairfield in the Colonial Office (on April 8, 1896), "since it does not commit me & <u>may</u> put pressure on the people in the Transvaal who are afraid of war."

Chamberlain led public opinion at home with stunning effectiveness. Though a partisan by temper,

the public response that he wanted to his leadership at the Colonial Office was national and, if possible, bipartisan. He longed to be acclaimed as a national leader, and liked to think of Lord Salisbury's ministry as a national government. Those impressions would validate his past conduct in splitting with Gladstone over Home Rule and joining forces with Salisbury, and would also serve his current needs as a Liberal Unionist in the leadership of a government most of whose supporters were Conservative. When Campbell-Bannerman denied him bipartisan support during the prelude to the Boer War, Chamberlain wooed moderate opinion on Campbell-Bannerman's side of the House and out of doors only the more assiduously. The imperious manner of his courtship was no reflection on the seriousness with which he took the object of his attentions. He subjected the conduct of negotiations with Kruger and the pace of military preparations in South Africa to this over-riding concern.

Kruger's decision to issue his ultimatum before Chamberlain had to issue his meant that Britain's commitment to the war was not subjected to searching examination from the outset. That test came with Black Week. Coolly objective at the moment of crisis, Chamberlain was not confident of the determination to go through with the business to the end until that week was over. The next test came in the form of the general election in the autumn of 1900. Chamberlain had pressed for the calling of the election then, almost two years ahead of time, and he virtually monopolized the Government's campaign. Yet again, in the very thick of it, he was not totally confident of the outcome. He paid close attention to the demeanour of the crowds, to the passivity or rowdiness of the dissentients at his rallies. Though he announced in an infamous phrase, that "every vote given against the Government is a vote given to the Boers," he also watched how Liberal candidates sought to divert attention from the war to other issues and to avoid the label of "little Englanders." He read that evidence as proof that England's commitment to imperialism was still firm.

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The guerrilla war that took root after the general election opened the final but most promising chapter in Chamberlain's dealings with South Africa. This phase of the war, that persisted sturdily into the spring of 1902, is notorious for the "methods of barbarism" to which the British army resorted in their attempt to stamp it out. Though Chamberlain was not directly responsible for those methods and signally improved conditions in the concentration camps once civilian authority took them over from the military, they of course tarnished his imperial policy.

The guerrilla war is associated with a coarsening of British attitudes toward the Boers. But the reverse was in fact true of Chamberlain. The tenacity of the

guerrillas and, still more, the resilient sympathy for them among Afrikaner civilians gave him a new appreciation of their ethnic fidelity. The war became particularly virulent in the Cape. There the conflict was a rebellion rather than a straightforward fight between enemy states, and the imposition of martial law over broad stretches of the colony gave rise to a hornets' nest of injustices. The situation in the Cape shifted the balance of Chamberlain's concern from the Boer republics to the mother colony, upon which he eventually focussed his talent for imperial leadership. The modification in Chamberlain's response brought him into serious conflict with Lord Milner to whom, however, Chamberlain gave the last word by resigning as Secretary of State for the Colonies soon after he returned from his post-war visit to South Africa.

The conflict erupted over Milner's demand for suspension of the Cape constitution, which Chamberlain rejected. He did so in the name of parliamentary and public opinion in Britain rather that at the Cape. Milner, using the difficulties raised by extension of martial law over much of the Cape as his justification, wanted suspension of the constitution in order to transfer power from the Cape Dutch to the English. He saw South African Afrikanerdom as a two-headed monster. One head, the independent South African Republic, would be cut off by military defeat and annexation; but the beast would survive so long as its other head, Dutch dominance in the Cape, remained in tact. Chamberlain sensed, however, that the protracted, costly guerrilla war and the methods used to repress it had weakened Britain's willingness to triumph in South Africa at any cost. He tried to put the case positively to Milner. "I continue firmly of the opinion," he wrote (on 7 Feb. 1901), "that there is no fear of any 'wobble' on the part of the British public provided that our policy is firm, clear, & consistent, and that in carrying it out we do not raise new questions of a deeply controversial character." To overthrow constitutionally elected government at the Cape, even briefly, would raise just such a question. The bipartisan consensus, such as it was by this time, on South Africa would be shattered, and hence Milner's achievement would be placed in jeopardy.

Despite Chamberlain's repeated insistence on this point, Milner kept demanding suspension throughout the guerrilla war and allowed his demand to become public at its close. His action backfired. Not only did it force Chamberlain to reject the demand with public emphasis. The prolonged argument between the two men, and its focus on the Cape, helped to alter the balance and character of Chamberlain's thinking about South Africa.

Until the end of the conventional war, he thought of the conflict as a fairly straightforward one between Britain and Kruger's republic. The body of South African opinion on which he focussed was that of Kruger and his Boers.

How determined were they to resist the determination o n Chamberlain's side to bring South Africa sooner or later under Britain's sway? By the spring of 1899 he was sure that they were enemies of Britain. He was not sure until September that they would press this enmity to the point of war. These questions were vitally important but not essentially complicated.

The situation to which Chamberlain paid increasing attention at the Cape after the conventional war had been won was much more vexed; and it stimulated his resourcefulness as a democratic politician. It suggested questions about the viability of a democratic empire. Never doubting the answer to the basic question, he talked about the situation at the Cape in a number of quite different ways. To Milner at one point he developed a comparison between the Cape and Ireland with the kind of ~~xxxxx~~ cynicism that he had learned from Lord Salisbury. "The worst that could happen," he wrote (on 24 July 1902), "would be that ... we should have 'an Ireland in South Africa'. That would be a most undesirable & annoying result, but its importance should not be exaggerated. After all, what is the situation in Ireland? We have constant agitation ... We are hampered in the House of Commons ... however, the annoyance ... does not constitute any real danger. We have always been told that England's difficulty would be Ireland's opportunity. Well, we have been in the greatest difficulty that we have had to face during a century ... and yet Ireland has been perfectly quiet. ... as long as the physical force is under our control British rule will be firmly established and nothing can touch our more important interests." Later, with King Edward VII, he tried a different argument. All along, British policy had been based on two assumptions: first, that the Transvaal was of central importance to control of South Africa, and second, that the majority of its population was or would soon be English. If so, then the Cape, however disaffected, could be kept in hand by the Transvaal. "If the Transvaal is contented & loyal," he wrote from Johannesburg (on 21 Jan. 1903), "it will matter very little what Cape Colony does or thinks, as the prevailing sentiment will be dictated from here."

But Chamberlain was not a natural cynic, nor did he like to think of his Empire internally in terms of "real politik." He wanted to lead the Empire, to give it a lead that would be followed. He was always ready to prompt the following from behind the scenes, as he had done in suggesting to the governors general of Canada and Australia that he would welcome offers of troops to fight in the South African War. But he wanted a cordial local response to his promptings;; and when the prime minister of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, dragged his feet, Chamberlain irritatedly acquiesced.

Until the autumn of 1900, preoccupied with the Transvaal, Chamberlain paid only subordinate attention to sentiment at the Cape, with disastrous results. Here

again the story began with the damning fact of the Jameson Raid. In the distracted discussions that led to the Raid, Chamberlain did not think of the Cape. He left it to Rhodes, the trusted leader of the Cape Dutch and English alike. In a way, that delegation of responsibility was proper. But when the ethnic alliance at the Cape fell to pieces after the Raid, Chamberlain neglected to see that they were picked up, even though he recognized that the Dutch made up the majority there. The alienation of their sympathies from Britain toward the South African Republic simply increased the importance that he placed upon asserting Britain's primacy over the republic. He accepted the ambivalence at the Cape and the neutrality of the Schreiner ministry as unfortunate but bearable. He refused to take issue with Milner's blunt language about the Cape Dutch: "the passage /in your despatch of May 4/ has been severely criticised in the opposition newspapers," he told Milner (on 7 July 1899). "Personally I am all for speaking plainly in these matters. There comes a time when it is dangerous to pretend to be blind, and although in quiet years we like to speak of the universal loyalty of H.M. subjects everywhere we must be aware that where there is a mixed population race sympathy may be stronger than devotion to British rule."

It took the argument between the two men over suspension of the Cape constitution to quicken Chamberlain's sensitivities. He poured over the pieces of information he could glean about the varieties of sentiment in the Cape colony. He resisted Milner's attempt to analyse it in polarized terms, divided between loyal English and disloyal Dutch, or between loyal Progressives and a disloyal Bond. He vigorously encouraged the expression of Sir J.H. de Villiers' loyalty to the Empire. He drew attention to the Progressives' lack of solidarity. Yet he sensed that the less obvious or clear-cut, perhaps less settled and hence more promising modulations of opinion in the Cape were eluding him.

It was to hear as much as to lead local opinion that Chamberlain travelled to South Africa at the end of 1902. From beginning to end, the Cape was on his mind. He landed first at Durban, and then travelled to the annexed Boer republics, in order to deal with the less complicated issues in contention there, before becoming enmeshed in the troubles of the Cape. Along the way, though he had to make a daunting number of speeches, he listened intently, not just to the great Boer assemblies at Pretoria and Bloemfontein, but to individuals and small groups at every train stop and to a stream of delegations at every city. He listened with the practised ear of a man who had begun his political career as spokesman for Britain's Nonconformists in their fight over elementary education. Confronted with the sullen insistence of Dutch Reformed predikants on schools that would teach respect for their faith in their tongue, he tutored Milner on how to frame concessions.

Once he entered the zones of contention in the Cape, his governing desire was to break through the ethnic crust on both sides. In the Eastern Cape, particularly at Port Elizabeth, he sought to file down the aggressive, self-interested edges of the protestations of loyalty among the English communities. On the way to Cape Town, he set up private interviews with pivotal Afrikaners, above all with the father of the Bond, Jan Hofmeyr. Chamberlain persuaded them to take public initiatives to reconcile disaffected Afrikaners to imperial rule. Having induced Hofmeyr to take the first step, he induced Progressive leaders to accept it at face value with equal publicity as a signal to their followers. Admittedly there was, as Milner sniffed, a theatrical quality to the performance. Yet Hofmeyr entered into the exercise with careful conscientiousness, on the one hand risking a good deal of Afrikaner disapproval for his public initiatives, on the other hand pressing Chamberlain in sombre primacy for a faster amnesty and more generous treatment of the wartime rebels. As Chamberlain sailed home from Cape Town, his chief concern was to sustain his dialogue with Hofmeyr and, through him, to foster loyalty among the Cape Dutch, not to Britain, but to the broader Empire of which they were part.

What might have come of Chamberlain's new policy if it had been pursued is impossible to say. Perhaps only he could sustain it. Certainly Milner would not. While the disagreement between the two men never became fully explicit, Milner wanted to retire. That prospect filled Chamberlain with dismay, and he impressed everyone, from the King down, with the cardinal importance of Milner's retention of office. His retirement, so Chamberlain feared, would upset the English in South Africa, and in that way would unsettle their confidence in the cooperative order that Chamberlain hoped to achieve.

For most of the preceding eight years, Chamberlain had been preoccupied with South Africa. Over that time, he had learned to curb his natural impetuosity, while the impact of the war, particularly in the Cape, had broadened his popular sensitivities. Within three months of his return from South Africa, something snapped within him. When he launched his crusade for tariff reform or imperial preference at the end of May, his vision, like Gladstone's in 1886, narrowed to a single issue. He soon talked of nothing else, as his children noted a little sadly. At the end of September, he resigned as Secretary of State for the Colonies in order to carry his crusade to the country; and Milner, who would otherwise almost certainly have retired from South Africa, stayed on. However wide the ultimate ramifications of tariff reform for the Empire as a whole, South Africa receded for all practical purposes to the back of Chamberlain's mind.