

FRANCE AND THE BOER WAR

II. THE DEATH OF VILLEBOIS-MAREUIL TO THE END OF THE WAR*

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The enemy for the majority of Frenchmen at the turn of the century was the English, and so much so, that agitation in favour of the Boers was often transformed into anglophobia. In Paris, thus, the year 1899 ended with hostile shouting aimed at the Queen in front of the British Embassy and shouts of praise for the Boers, when, on 1st January, Monson, the Ambassador of Great Britain, came to present his best wishes to the French President.⁶² In February 1900, the Léandre affair broke when the satirical review *Le Rire* published several caricatures of Queen Victoria drawn by an artist called Léandre, who subsequently received the Légion d'Honneur. When this occurred the British Ambassador found it necessary to leave Paris for a time for the Italian Riviera. In addition, there was a demonstration at Lyons in front of the Consulate.⁶³ On the occasion of a mid-Lent parade, the Prefect of Paris was obliged to forbid the display of a Joan of Arc figure being escorted by a group of Boers and a John Bull being harassed by the Pigmies.⁶⁴ In March, furthermore, the insults that sailors were said to have shouted in the front of the British Consulate, aroused the ire of the ambassador.⁶⁵

The most serious incidents in France were those which occurred at Bordeaux on 8th March, 1900. After a lecture given by Henri Lorin, professor of Geography at the university, demonstrators caused a disturbance and broke some windows at the British Consulate. The British Ambassador, Monson, was most indignant, writing:

"The police did not seem to have taken any measures to prevent the demonstration. Also I think it was unwise to give Professor Loren permission to speak about the Boers at that time."⁶⁶

Delcassé, however, expressed his regrets and the Minister of Justice requested the Court at Bordeaux to be severe with the demonstrators who had been arrested. Thus, ten people, mostly students, were sentenced to four days' imprisonment and a fine of 15 francs each. Three of them received six day prison sentences and a twenty-five franc fine.⁶⁷ These sentences, which were relatively heavy for such trivial offences, showed the French Government's desire not to be pushed on to the road to anglophobia. Nevertheless, for the public, any occasion was good for vilifying "Albion".

The Universal Exhibition which opened in Paris on 14th April, 1900 was another such occasion. In spite of the War Transvaal wished to be present. The construction of its stand had even been accelerated. On the other hand, the construction of the British section had been

*A list of abbreviations of sources was given with part I of the article which appeared in *Historia*, 33(1), May 1988.

62. PRO, FO 27, 3493, January 1900, letter of Monson to FO.

63. AAE, GB, NS 12, p. 198, 16 March 1900, following a lecture by Georges Berry, there were 12 people arrested.

64. PRO, FO 27, 3494, 23 March 1900.

65. AAE, GB, NS 12, night of 20 to 31 March 1900, p. 244 ss.

66. PRO, FO 27, 3494, 10 March, 1900. Letter of Monson to FO.

67. PRO, FO 27, 3493, Delcassé to Monson, 9 March 1900; reply from Monson, 10 March 1900, AAE, GB, NS 12, p. 182 and AN, BB 18, 2415, 145 to 1900.

slowed down and there was speculation about whether Great Britain would agree to participate in an Exhibition where the South Africans had been accepted on an equal basis with her.⁶⁸

The South African stand was divided into three parts: an official section, a Boer farmhouse, and a part concerned with the mines. The Boer Republic had wanted to create a favourable impression, showing that its nation was modern and not “un peuple de sauvages, une horde de barbares”, which was the way the Lord Mayor of London had described it according to one French review.⁶⁹ That was why the official section of the stand contained a library which included Afrikaans books and, on the walls, statistics indicating the importance attached to education by the Transvaal Government.⁷⁰ The Boer farmhouse, which a contemporary called “le clou moral de l’Exposition” (The moral highlight of the exhibition)⁷¹ was a stone building “of an extraordinary bareness and severity ... The four rooms ... having hard-packed earthen floors. Furniture ... consisted of a bed with a straw mattress, a few chairs, a harmonium ... and on a rustic table, a huge Bible.”⁷² In one of the rooms a portrait of Villebois-Mareuil was to be found, decorated with a piece of black crêpe. Finally, in the section about the mines, an enormous sort of obelisk was to be seen, which showed the quantity of gold extracted since its discovery. The contrast was striking, therefore, between the riches of the country and the modest tastes of its inhabitants.

This stand was the scene of various demonstrations both of sympathy, and otherwise. In May 1900, a young American telegraphic clerk brought a manifesto to it, signed in sympathy with the Transvaal by 30 000 Philadelphia school-children.⁷³ On the other hand, the bust of President Kruger which was exposed there, attracted the fury of an Englishwoman, angered to see visitors flocking to sign the register in favour of the *Comité pour l’Indépendance des Boërs*.⁷⁴ Yves Guyot commented that though he felt the *Comité* could use their headquarters as they pleased, they should refrain from using the Exhibition to practice Dr Leyds’s policies.⁷⁵ The Exhibition was thus a good tribune for pro-Boer propaganda. It was not, however, enough.

During the War, Transvaal and the Orange Free State sent emissaries to Europe and the United States of America, to ask the governments for aid and to arouse the sympathy of the public by press conferences and speeches. The first of these delegations, composed of three Boers, arrived in Europe in the spring of 1900. It was received by the better-known members of the *Comité pour l’Indépendance* and by the Paris Municipal Council. Loubet, the French President, consented to see this delegation too, but only “à titre tout à fait privé” (in private).⁷⁸

68. AAE, GB, NS 12, letter of Cambon to Delcassé, 10 November 1899, p. 73. AAE, GB, NS 12, Delcassé to Cambon, 16 November 1899. He replied that the rumours were false and that work on the English stand was even ahead of schedule.
69. *Revue française de l'étranger et des colonies*, 1900, p. 399.
70. Rousselet, L., *L'Exposition universelle de 1900*, Paris 1901, Hachette.
71. Lacaze-Duthiers, Gérard de, *c'était en 1900* (...) t.1, Paris 1956, p. 308.
72. *Revue française de l'étranger et des colonies*, 1900, p. 400.
73. *Le Soleil du dimanche*, 6 May 1900.
74. There are two versions of this incident: according to PP.B₁₁₃₃ and *Le Siècle*, 14 November 1900, p. 3 an Englishman spat on the bust of Kruger. Mandell (R.D.) *Paris 1900* (...), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1967, p. 105, however, said that an Englishman spat on the bust of Kruger while his wife held off the crowd with her umbrella.
75. *Le Siècle*, 2 September, 1900, p. 1.
76. Letter from Pauliat to Leyds which gave a report of the terms of the letter that Loubet had sent to him, Leyds Archives, 24 July, 1900 no. 229.
77. Fisher (A.), Wessels (C.H.), Wolmarans (A.D.W.), *Mémoire présenté (...) le 31 juillet 1900*, Paris, s.d., Mouillot, p. 19.
78. AAE, GB, NS 13, p. 133 and AN, BB 18,2206, File 2328 A 01.

The delegation also presented a memorandum to the Congress of the Inter-parliamentary Union for Arbitration and Peace, which was held in Paris at the end of July.⁷⁷ This text, which called for mediation, came to nothing. The three delegates left France in August to pursue their futile efforts with the other European chancelleries. In 1901 and 1902, C.G.S. Sandberg, an aide-de-camp of General Botha, made his appearance in France and undertook a speech-making tour. On 6th December, 1901, having listened to one of his speeches, three hundred demonstrators at Bordeaux, preceded by about fifteen students armed with sticks, marched on the British Consulate crying: "Conspuez l'assassin Chamberlain, conspuez les Anglais!" (Down with the murderer Chamberlain! Down with the British.) Twenty people were arrested.⁷⁵ Sandberg spoke in several other towns, namely: Montauban, Toulouse, Nîmes, Marseilles, Orléans, Chartres and Colmar. When passing through Domremy, he took advantage of the occasion to lay a wreath at Joan of Arc's house. In Paris he made at least two speeches: one in December, 1901, at the Châtelet Theatre, at which Mounet-Sully recited the *Ballade de Noël* by Rostand, and another, on 10th March, 1902 at the Theatre des Nations.⁷⁹

The most important visit, naturally, was that of President Kruger himself. This visit which was used to relaunch pro-Boer propaganda, took time to be confirmed. On 13th September, 1900, *Le Petit Journal* mentioned the possible departure of President Kruger for Europe. It was only on 11th October that the newspaper mentioned that the possibility of President Kruger's arrival at Marseilles was envisaged. Holland had provided a warship for Kruger, but it needed to be reprovisioned between Lourenço Marques, where the President would board it, and Marseilles. At the request of the Dutch, France agreed to allow the ship to reprovision itself with coal, at Djibouti.⁸⁰

On account of the general lack of knowledge about President Kruger's plan, rumours of the wildest sort spread: according to some, Kruger was visiting Beaulieu, others supposed that he would be going to stay at Ajaccio. An hotelkeeper of Aix-en-Provence offered to place his establishment at his disposal.⁸¹ The President arrived at Marseilles on 22nd November, 1900, the same day as the funeral of the Bishop of the Diocese.⁸² He was met by the principal well-known pro-Boer figures and a large crowd. Although the municipal and academic authorities had decided to stay away, the Prefect of the Department of the Couches-du-Rhône and the town's Mayor, came to present their respects to him at his hotel, and the Prince of Monaco sent a telegram.⁸³ Kruger's popular welcome was well-organised thanks to Hayard,⁸⁴ who furnished a quantity of badges, songs, flags and even slogans to shout; a certain song was very much in vogue and was entitled "Ous Qu'est Prétoria?" (Where is Pretoria?), which was sung to the music of the English Polka.⁸⁵

79. *Le Petit Journal*, 11 March, 1902, p. 3.

80. Several letters between Delcassé, the Navy Minister and Dutch chargé d'Affaires, Paris on the subject, AAE, TO, NS 26, pp. 24-57.

81. AAE, TO, NS 26, p. 44, letter from Préfet des Alpes Maritimes to *l'Intérieur*, 22 October 1900; *La Patrie*, 24 October 1900, p. 2; *Le Petit Journal*, 20 November, p. 1 and *Ibid.*, 7 November 1900, p. 1.

82. *Le Siècle*, 22 November 1900, p. 1.

83. *Le Temps*, 24 November 1900, p. 1 and AAE, TO, NS 26, 22 November 1900, p. 78.

84. The editor Léon Hayard was called the greatest gossipmonger of the 19th Century and the Emperor of the newsboys.

85. *Le Petit Journal*, 20 November 1900, p. 1. The following are the words of this song by Guidon (Maurice) and Pellegrin (Pierre), (Nice, 1900, imp. Gay et Fortoul, p. 4):

"Mais à Prétoria
 "Pauvre Victoria
 "Y a qu'des solid's gars
 "Aoh! yes, plum pudding!
 "Et tous les soldats

There was a certain amount of hustling and jostling. The crowd turned on some Englishmen who had thrown some small change from the windows of whorehouses, as a sign of their derision for the organisation *Sou des Boërs*.⁸⁶ As usual, the newspapers continued to disagree about the event. *La Petite République* reported that President Kruger had rejected with an energetic gesture, a bouquet of flowers Jules Guerin had wished to give him, calling the latter “le prisonnier des Juifs” (the prisoner of the Jews).⁸⁷ *Le Siècle* waxed ironical over the text of the newspaper *La Patrie* which had described the number of people who had assisted at Kruger’s arrival thus: “people were grouped in front of buildings. Every window was occupied by 100 persons. Everybody is getting crushed thank goodness, we are in Marseilles and windows are very large.”⁸⁸

During the railway journey from Marseilles to Paris, Kruger was much acclaimed. At Tarascon, the Municipal Council was presented to him as well as a deputation of officers.⁸⁹ At Dijon, where he spent the night, an extra special welcome had been prepared for President Kruger: the town had been hung with South African flags and a grand banquet took place. He reached Paris on 24th November, where a crowd described as “immense” and very enthusiastic, had collected from early morning around the Gare de Lyon. The general public was not allowed access to the station, only a few particular groups were permitted to enter.⁹⁰ During his visit to Paris, the President stayed at the Hotel Scribe.⁹¹ The newspaper *La Patrie*, captured the atmosphere in the streets by describing how vendors circulated between the nearby Opera and the Rue Scribe, selling without difficulty, the little Boer flags or portraits of Kruger that they had for sale. The vendors claimed to have done well on the day according to the reporter, but not so well as they had done on previous, similar occasions, like that of the arrival of Marchand. However, they considered that they could not complain. Asked what they had sold most, they explained that the flags and portraits had sold best but that the public had bought hardly any songs at all.⁹²

The crowds behaved peaceably, apart from a few incidents such as that at Marseilles: Avenue Victoria was renamed Rue Kruger by some demonstrators. The Prefecture of the Police forbade the sale of a trinket representing Chamberlain with a pig’s features. The left-wing newspapers were severe about the nationalists whom they accused of assaulting passers-by and breaking the springs of carriages and one declared that Paris had again seen, the previous day, bands of anti-semitic brawlers and thugs.⁹³

A succession of delegations and personalities visited President Kruger: Prince Henri of Orléans presented him with a copy of the text of his speech at Marseilles in favour of the Boers; the brother of Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil, the Duke of Lannes de Montebello, and the President of the Protestant Consistory all called on him. Indeed, the “Tout-Paris” came to wait on the President. A young girl left an account of how her father had taken her to see him and how she had found just another young girl as herself there too, with her mother, for the same pur-

“Qu’t’enverras là-bas
 “S’front brasser en tas
 “Aoh, yes! good evening!”

86. AN, BB18, 2174, File 2374 A 1900.

87. *La Petite République*, 25 November 1900, p. 1.

88. *Le Siècle*, 24 November 1900, p. 3.

89. AAE, TO, NS 26, 23 November 1900, p. 82. There was this comment in the margin originating at the *Direction Politique* of the Quai d’Orsay: “Qu’ont à faire des officiers dans une criconstance pareille?”

90. *Le Temps*, 25 November 1900, p. 1 and PP, B ^a/₁₁₃₃

91. Galtier-Boissière (Jean), *Mémoires d’un Parisien*, t.1, Paris 1960, La Table Ronde, p. 35.

92. *La Patrie*, 26 November 1900, p. 2; Daragon (H.), *op. cit.*, p. 86.

93. *La Petite République*, 26 November, 1900, p. 1.

pose.⁹⁴ One delegation provoked special attention and engaged Kruger in the quarrel between “Dreyfusards” and “anti-Dreyfusards”. *Le Temps* said that the delegation in question was a “groupe de personnalités politiques, scientifiques et littéraires” (a group of political, scientific and literary personalities), but several of these persons were also members of the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme*. The day after this visit, the same paper reported it in these terms:

“Gabriel Monod said that he and his friends sympathized more with the Boers because they suffered unfairness and were fighting for justice. Kruger said he was very happy with the expressions of sympathy because they came from those who were defenders of the right and liberty.”⁹⁵

This version of Kruger’s reply had the effect of setting a cat among the pigeons. Senator Pauliat protested and claimed that the President’s reply had been different. A.G. van Hamel, Kruger’s interpreter, confirmed Pauliat’s version. To calm the passions provoked by its report, *Le Temps*, then claimed that President Kruger - “without interfering in the quarrel between supporters or adversaries of Dreyfus - was deeply touched by the visit of the group”⁹⁶ although those close to Kruger claimed he had been totally ignorant of the whole Dreyfus affair.⁹⁷

In the nationalist camp, much indignation was expressed about this delegation of Dreyfusards that they claimed had wanted to use the Boer President for their cause even while being “de coeur avec l’Angleterre” (in sympathy with England) and had thus opposed the demonstrations in honour of the Boers. According to them, furthermore, these same people were also those who were menacing from inside the country, the religion, patriotism, army and social order of France.⁹⁸ *The Gazette* even declared that “led by Mr Gabriel Monod, the high quarter group of the Jewish-Protestant army went to the Hôtel Scribe.”⁹⁹ The socialists remarked in consequence, that “the lose of Boers does not exist for those strange friend of people, without some animosity for a part of the French people”,¹⁰⁰ while Guyot wrote that Kruger must have suffered considerably on hearing the ovations in his honour which came from anti-semites and nationalists. Gabriel Monod tried to re-establish the facts by claiming that President Kruger had not been duped, and had known exactly to whom he was speaking and what to reply, as his speech had been communicated to the President the day before the visit.¹⁰¹ The incident was settled at the expense of the interpreter, Van Hamel, who speaking Dutch but not understanding the “taal” of the South Africans, very well, had translated the President’s speech by approximations, so that: “Supporters of Kruger received Mr Van Hamel’s speeches and none of Mr Kruger’s.”¹⁰²

One of President Kruger’s actions aroused some further criticism: it was during his visit to the School of Fine Art to admire the models entered in a competition to choose a suitable monument to be erected to the memory of Villebois-Mareuil at Nantes. This project had been organised by *La Liberté*. Guyot protested against the fact that a hall belonging to the state had been placed at the disposal of the organisers, even although the Colonel had been an enemy of the French Republic. A satirical review stated that the models were quite unoriginal, and all

94. Bonaparte (Marie), *A la mémoire des disparus*, t.2, Paris 1958, P.U.F., p. 750.

95. *Le Temps*, 27 November 1900, p. 4.

96. *Le Temps*, 28 November 1900, p. 2.

97. Here is the communiqué which was put out by Kruger’s suite (drawn by Leyds): “La question qui a divisé les Français, dans ces deux dernières années, n’a jamais été agitée dans le Transvaal, et le Président n’a jamais dit un seul mot sur cette affaire à son entourage ni en Afrique ni à Paris”. *Le Temps*, 29 November 1900, p. 4.

98. *Le Correspondant*, 10 December 1900, p. 997.

99. *La Gazette de France*, 28 November 1900, p. 1.

100. Gérault-Richard, *La Petite République*, 30 November 1900, p. 1.

101. *Le Siècle*, 27 November 1900, p. 3 and 29 November 1900, p. 1.

102. *Le Siècle*, 5 December, 1900, p. 3.

looked like the same person gesticulating, surrounded by the same group of heroes, and wanted to know the reason for such mediocrity.¹⁰³

The opposing groups were on the look-out for the least “faux-pas” of the South African delegation, in order to turn it to their own advantage. Thus, even the fact that Kruger had spent a quiet day receiving nobody and going nowhere, on Sunday 25th November, it was reported in *La Croix*: “Some journalists, so amazed by President Kruger’s allotments of Sunday for prayer, were at a loss for words.”¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, when he visited the Paris Exhibition, which was then being dismantled, he was acclaimed by the public present (exhibitors and workmen) and it gave him the opportunity to see his Government’s stand and that of Creusot, one of the manufacturers of cannon for the South Africans. The President also went to the Town Hall for a formal reception: the city had a medal struck in his honour. However, the Municipal Council, with its nationalist majority, was unable to have Kruger assist at a big fête that they had planned, on account of the Foreign Minister, Delcassé’s veto.¹⁰⁵

The Boer delegation had hoped for some tangible aid from the French Government.¹⁰⁶ President Loubet wished to respect “les formes”: he received President Kruger twice at the Elysée and went to see him himself at the Hotel Scribe. As regards the first meeting at the Elysée, 24th November 1900, the Ambassador of Great Britain in Paris, said, correctly: “The compliments exchanged were doubtless without importance.”¹⁰⁷ Of the second, 26th November, one witness mentioned that it had lasted ten minutes,¹⁰⁸ although another said that only a few very insignificant words had been exchanged “faith in God, on one side, greetings and vain words of consolation on the other side”.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Kruger’s councillors hoped for some results from the meetings with Waldeck-Rousseau (the head of the Government) and Delcassé. Of what the *Président du Conseil* (Waldeck-Rousseau) said, nothing is known: he probably relied on Delcassé to clarify things for the Boer statesman. The latter met the Minister of Foreign Affairs twice. Leyds gives a sombre account of the interview of 24th November, the day of Kruger’s arrival in Paris, when his welcome in the provinces had been triumphal:-

“... the anti-climax came that self-same day in Delcassé’s room at the Quai D’Orsay. Kruger was already very tired. With his pained eyes, he glanced round the vast and luxurious study of the French Foreign Minister (...). It did not take him long to realise from the trend of the conversation that Delcassé had no intention of initiating a move, that the French nation’s undoubted enthusiasm was not going to be translated into any concrete form of assistance by that nation’s government.”¹¹⁰

As for the second encounter of 27th November, Delcassé provided a summary for his principal ambassadors, in which he admitted that he had given an evasive reply to Kruger’s request for mediation.¹¹¹

In the same manner, only a purely formal motion was adopted by both Houses of the French Parliament. In the *Chambre des Députés*, on 29th November, 1900, the President, Paul

103. *Le Cri de Paris*, 2 December 1900, p. 3.

104. *La Croix*, 28 November 1900, p. 1.

105. AAE, TO, NS 26, 23 November 1900, p. 79.

106. Elizabeth C. Therrode in *The Official Attitude of France in the years of Crisis, 1899-1902*, M.A. thesis University of Cape Town 1973, 310 p., studied the attitude of the French government in detail.

107. PRO, FO 27, 3498, Monson to FO, 25 November, 1900.

108. Combarieu (Abel), *Sept ans à L’Elysée avec le Président Emile Loubet (...)*, Paris, 1932, Plon, p. 101.

109. Dubois (Emile), *Mes souvenirs de l’Elysée*, s.d., s.é., p. 110.

110. Leyds in K. van Hoek, *Kruger Days (...)* London, 1939, p. 54.

111. AAE, TO, NS 26, p. 114.

Deschanel, gave notice of the following question that a member of the Opposition, Théodore Denis, an independent republican, wished to put to the Government: "Considering those events in Transvaal and the Orange Free State, will the French government request application of article No. 3 of the Hague Convention?" concerning mediation? Delcassé, being present, replied that the government considered it useless to reopen the debate, particularly at that moment and asked the *Chambre* to pronounce in favour of the indefinite adjournment of the debate on the question put. The Deputy, Denis, accused the Government of refusing to answer questions but consented nevertheless, to withdraw his motion, and proposed in its place, the following one: "The Assembly, on the occasion of the visit to France of the President of Transvaal wishes to express its deepest sympathy." All the deputies applauded and Denis wanted to take the floor to defend his motion but as the Chamber was unanimously in support of it, he renounced his right to speak. However, a socialist deputy, Eugène Fournière, then rose and proposed a similar motion except that he wanted to add after the first words "La Chambre" (The Assembly), the phrase - "tout en exprimant ses sympathies pour la démocratie anglaise" (and at the same time, express its sympathy for the British democracy ...). A discussion ensued. Denis and the deputy, Georges Berry, demanded priority for the first motion. In the end, Fournière decided to withdraw his motion and that of Denis was unanimously adopted. The next day, an almost identical motion was proposed to the Senate by several Senators and was also adopted unanimously.¹¹²

This was all in the way of concrete results that Kruger obtained from his visit to France. Just as he departed, he asked for prayers to be said "in memory of those French soldiers who died in Transvaal and that the big bell of Sacred Heart Basilica toll in remembrance of the dead".¹¹³ The warm demonstrations of sympathy that accompanied him from Paris to the Belgian frontier on 1st December, could not hide the failure of his mission. The failure proved even greater in Germany, where William II used the excuse of a hunting party to avoid receiving him. There was disappointment in pro-Boer circles while the British Ambassador sighed in relief; he even expressed his satisfaction with the behaviour of the Parisians:

"I cannot refrain from expressing my personal opinion of the admirable behaviour of Paris during the last two or three days. The crowds have never yielded to the temptation, which has been intensified by certain newspapers and caricatures, to mingle their sympathy with Monsieur Kruger and the Boers with abuse of England. I confess that I look upon this moderation as marvellous."¹¹⁴

The very day Kruger departed, the text of the Hague Convention was published in the *Journal Officiel*. The third article of the Convention gave a third power the right to intervene in a conflict for the purpose of arranging mediation or arbitration. The French pacifists expressed doubts about the agreement and wondered if the Conference of The Hague had not been simply a pretext for assembling "quelques diplomates pour banqueter" (a few diplomats for feasting)? They wanted explanations from Léon Bourgeois and d'Estournelles, France's representatives at the Conference. Furthermore, they wanted Delcassé to be requested in due form to speak and act in conformity with "des signatures apposées à la fameuse réunion pacifique" (signatures which were affixed during the famous pacific meeting).¹¹⁵ But the Minister of Foreign Affairs could see no possibility of acting then. On 24th November, 1899, he had told

112. J.O., Chambre des Députés, 29 November 1900, p. 2358-2359 and J.O. Sénat, 30 November 1900, p. 895.

113. *Le Petit Journal*, 1 December 1900, p. 2.

114. PRO, FO 27, 3498, 27 November 1900, Monson to FO.

115. *Revue Libérale*, December 1901, p. 5.

the deputies that the agreement of The Hague could not be invoked as Great Britain had not yet signed it.¹¹⁶

Efforts were nevertheless made by the powers to stop the conflict: at the end of October 1899, Russia, France and Spain agreed to propose to the United States of America their joint mediation. Nothing came of this intention, however. Another such attempt took place in March 1900. This time it was Germany that was asked by France and Russia to intervene to request Great Britain to put an end to the War. But William II shunned their proposal.¹¹⁷

On 15th March, 1900 Delcassé expressed his desire to do something in the Senate about the conflict; he confirmed that he had received a request for intervention from the Government of Pretoria¹¹⁸ and declared: "France maintains noble enthusiasms, many times proven, but a deep instinct warns her not to act in haste."¹¹⁹ At that time, a petition was circulating in France at the instigation of Francois Passy, Lucien Le Foyer, Madame Flammarion and other pacifists and intellectuals. It had no effect on the Government and neither did the request for protection that Dr Leyds then addressed to France and Russia on behalf of the two Boer Republics.¹²⁰ Likewise, Delcassé did no more than acknowledge receipt of a letter sent to him by the *Bureau International de la Paix* "with high sentiments of which I pay my deepest respect".¹²¹

However, within the scope of the Universal Exhibition, Delcassé permitted a Peace Congress to be held in Paris in October 1900. This Congress issued an appeal in favour of arbitration. In November, 1901, the Administrative Council of the Court of Arbitration at The Hague met to examine the possibility of accepting a request for arbitration from the Transvaal. The application was rejected. This meeting, once again, made it clear that no power wanted to run the risk of arousing the anger of the British by proposing mediation.¹²²

Delcassé's prudent attitude was criticised by certain deputies. On 14th September, 1901, the Abbé Lemire indicated his desire to question the Foreign Minister about it. On 4th November of the same year, it was Georges Berry who wanted to question the Government about "the practical means by which the French government may obtain in accordance with the other powers that England do not keep Boer women and children in concentration camps". Again, on 26th November, Clovis Hugues, a socialist deputy, made a similar demand. The questions thus accumulated, were finally debated on 20th January 1902. It was the biggest debate on the Anglo-Boer conflict that took place in the French Parliament; but it came late, as at that stage the War had already been going on for over two years. What arguments in favour of mediation did the different speakers use? Georges Berry spoke the longest. With eloquence, he used the usual arguments: it was a War "to satisfy the insatiable appetites of the city's gold merchants". He described the concentration camps as certain witnesses had done, among others, Emily Hobhouse. In conclusion, he asked the Foreign Minister to offer his mediation. Clovis Hugues declared that he was speaking "in the name of the international bureau which has decided that a motion will be carried in all European parliaments about concentration camps". He moved many in this audience by saying: "that he cannot kiss his grand children anymore without

116. Delcassé's speech, J.O., Chambre des Députés, 24 November 1899, p. 1941.

117. About these confused attempts to ask Germany to act, see Combarieu (Abel), *op cit.*, pp. 50-53; Carroll, E.M., *French Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs 1870-1914*, New-York, 1931, The Century p. 199.

118. Request addressed via the Consul of France in Pretoria, AAE, TO, NS 14, 9 March 1900, p. 62.

119. Delcassé to the *Sénat*, J.O., 15 March 1900, p. 141.

120. AAE, TO NS 29, p. 138: Delcassé considered the moment ill-chosen.

121. AAE, TO, NS 29, 15 June 1900, letter of Delcassé to the *Bureau international de la Paix* at Berne, p. 131.

122. AAE, TO, NS 25, 20 November 1901, pp. 81-104 and pp. 135-144.

thinking about children who are dying in the camps". But he was careful to insist that the socialists hated no country, "no more the English than the other people".¹²³

In his speech which was of a bombastic nature, the Abbé Lemire, whose Flemish origin predisposed him to intervene in favour of the Boers, asked France to aid them to remain free.¹²⁴ After him, Leon Bourgeois explained why the Transvaal had not participated at the Conference of The Hague: had it done so, Great Britain would not have participated. Delcassé replied to all the above criticisms. He claimed to be in favour of arbitration, personally, but said Great Britain was not ready to accept it: "in a way, to have a successful mediation, we should impose it, that is to say, in a word, make war to stop war".¹²⁵ The Government's agenda for that day having already been adopted, no further questions were accepted.

This grand parliamentary debate gave rise to passionate commentaries. The various political groups, while condemning the War, could not agree on the reasons for condemning it. This debate had brought the Boers to the forefront of the news again.

In March 1902, a spectacular victory engendered fresh hope for the Boers: no less than the capture of a British General, Lord Methuen. But the Boers freed their prisoner a few days later and Guyot remarked that although this defeat had caused jubilation in the anglophobe camp, he wondered if it could change the course of events much.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the new King, Edward VII, fearing hostile demonstrations, cancelled a trip to France using the pretext of work.¹²⁷

The Boers' supporters in France then attempted yet another initiative: the sending of a field hospital to South Africa. This project was not new. As early as October, 1899, *L'Association de Dames Françaises* had collected money to send a field-hospital and several volunteers had offered to accompany it. Later, the Consul of France in Pretoria, acknowledged having received "the entire inventory for several ambulances and clothing for the women and children".¹²⁸ In March 1902, Christian Villebois-Mareuil, brother of the Colonel, came to tell Roëls that he was ready to organise a French hospital for the Boers and to accompany it to Africa himself, with the Colonel's daughter. Roëls said that Villebois-Mareuil had encouraged him as "the movement starting well, the English will not dare forbid the trip".¹²⁹

Leyds, who knew that foreigners were no longer admitted to the ex-Republics' territory, encouraged Roëls in this direction, declaring that it was a favourable moment for the French Red Cross to make an effort to get the French Government to approach Britain on the subject of an ambulance, because - "Moment psychologique venu" (it is the right moment). He gave him the following advice on how to convince the British: "The British popular opinion is ready for a generous gesture, England should be convinced to let go a few ambulances in return for the freeing of a general". Roëls was optimistic, as he declared: "The campaign has begun, I think all newspapers will be with us".¹³⁰ Indeed, certain newspapers mentioned this humanitarian proposition.

The British, however, failed to give their consent and Roëls suggested to Villebois-Mareuil that he obtain permission to send medicines only.¹³¹ The Colonel's brother attempted this

123. J.O., Chambre des Députés, 22 October 1901, p. 1906, 4 November 1901 p. 2018. 29 November, p. 2423, 24 November 1901, p. 2400 and 20 January 1902, pp. 63-68.

124. Mayeur (Jean-Marie), *L'abbé Lemire*, Tournai, 1968, Casterman, p. 209.

125. J.O. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-72.

126. *Le Siècle*, 12 March, 1902, p. 3.

127. Monson to FO, PRO, FO 27, 3577, 14 March 1902.

128. AAE, TO, NS 13, Consul of France at Pretoria to Delcassé, 6 February 1900, p. 115.

129. Roëls to Leyds, 13 March 1902, Leyds Collection no. 702, Leyds to Roëls, 14 March 1902, no. 703 and no. 704; Roëls to Leyds, 15 March 1902, no. 710.

130. *Le Petit Journal*, 20 March 1902, p. 1 and *La Liberté*, 27 March 1902, p. 1.

131. Roëls to Leyds, 5 April 1902, Leyds Collection no. 754.

unenthusiastically; ex-royalist deputy of the Mayenne, he had above all wished to draw attention to himself as the general elections drew near. In the end, a certain Doctor Senlecq, who was to have headed the ambulance, sent, on Roëls's request, a letter of protest to the British Government "au nom des docteurs de France" (in the name of the French doctors). The British agreed to accept the medicines. Meantime, the War had ended, so the Quai d'Orsay asked Villebois-Mareuil if he would go and distribute the boxes of medicines among the concentration camps and hospitals at the Cape, where French soldiers were treated. Vexed, Villebois-Mareuil chose to telegraph instructions to the Cape not to unload the boxes of medicines which were arriving there, but to return them to Europe. He explained that the medicines were reserved for the Boer Generals who, after the War, were making a tour of Europe for the purposes of propaganda. And so the affair ended sadly on a note of pique and all the more so, as the moment had proved to be ill-chosen to launch a humanitarian appeal in favour of the Boers. On 8th May, 1902, the eruption of the volcano, *La Montagne Pelée*, took place at Martinique, which resulted in the death of 30 000 victims and absorbed, according to the French Red Cross, "les ressources de la charité française".¹³² This disaster, and the fact that France happened besides to be between two rounds of a general election, caused the South African conflict to be forgotten.

These general elections of 1902, the first since 1898, allow the importance accorded to France's foreign policy to be evaluated. Previously at the time of the partial Senatorial elections of January, 1900, the theme of the Boer War had not been raised. On the other hand, the funeral of Colonel Villebois-Mareuil which had taken place in the middle of the election campaign, had been a good source of publicity for the Parisian nationalists: they were the victors in the Municipal Council.¹³³ Research concerning possible allusions or mentions of the South African conflict in the election period of 1902 has proved disappointing. The War was referred to only once, in a right-wing electoral brochure.¹³⁴ Two pro-Boer newspapers also alluded to the elections. On the eve of the elections, *L'Ami des Boërs*, which had hardly any readers, launched an appeal to electors to insist that candidates set down as part of their programme:-

"A motion asking that the Boer War be ended as soon as possible for the benefit of the South African Republics."¹³⁵

This appeal seems hardly to have been heeded: the newspapers reported no such promises by any candidates. One deputy alone, who was of the Vienne region, published a pamphlet of pro-Boer propaganda, in December, 1901. He announced a second number for January 1902, which it would seem, never saw the light of day.¹³⁶ The governmental coalition led by Waldeck-Rousseau emerged victorious from the ballot-box. Pro-Boer sentiment (as indeed foreign policy in general), had not played an important role in the choice of the voters.

A month later, the War in South Africa came to an end. The news of the peace was welcomed by each group in France, according to its political tendencies. Most were satisfied: "un immense soupir de soulagement" (an immense sigh of relief) said *l'Aurore*.¹³⁷ *La Revue des Deux Mondes* noted that the Treaty "marks the end of a glorious moment in British history. This is probably not the most glorious of all, but we had the demonstration of a people, who kept their 'sang-froid' and supported their government. But the stronger England appeared, the greater the Boers seemed".¹³⁸ Some even found the peace conditions "assez

132. From same to same, 18 April 1902, Leyds Collection no. 762, and AAE, TO, NS 20, p. 240, 21 May 1902, NS 20, 16 June 1902, p. 247 and NS 25, p. 233, 13 May 1902.

133. This election was held on 6 and 13 May 1900.

134. Bonhomme (Jacques), *Les opinions (...)* Paris, 1902, pp. 155-157.

135. *L'Ami des Boërs*, April 1902, p. 1.

136. Ridouard (Maxime), *op. cit.*

douces",¹³⁹ or less hard than one could have feared.¹⁴⁰ However, there were some who could not accept the peace. Even although they did not go so far as the schoolboy of the Vienne region who immolated himself by fire because he felt unable to bear the pain that the Boers' surrender caused him, they accused the Boers who had signed the peace, of having committed a felony: "Why had they surrendered themselves so hopelessly? It is inexplicable, incomprehensible. Old Kruger alone could negotiate with Albion and baffle her. But he was not consulted."¹⁴¹ Others again, were optimistic; according to them, the Boers had, in fact, won the War and their capitulation was only for the purpose of saving face for Great Britain as the latter had, in reality, ceded on every point.¹⁴² Others still, chose to be prophetic, declaring that "the British, seemingly victorious, will be very soon overcome by the Dutch, and the Boers will imitate French Cavaliers to reconquer by degrees all their political rights by an increasing birthrate".¹⁴⁴

The peace did not bring to an end the French people's interest in the Boers. It was even proposed that they should be encouraged to settle in the colony of Madagascar. However, the idea was never taken seriously by the French authorities.¹⁴⁵ In October 1902, *Le Journal d'Alsace* published an appeal for aid to the Boers.¹⁴⁶ Also in October, 1902, the French population gave a triumphal welcome to three Boer generals: Botha, De la Rey and De Wet. To mark the occasion, Hayard edited a song in their honour.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, their visit did not arouse the same degree of enthusiasm as President Kruger's visit had done. France was already on the way to the *Entente Cordiale*. The prologue to this was Edward VII's trip to Paris in the spring of 1903. During his visit a few pro-Boer incidents occurred again. There were cries of "Vive les Boers!" in the crowd; *La Patrie* published letters from readers in which the King was termed: "Edouard le Sanguinaire" and in which they protested against his visit.¹⁴⁸ The same daily newspaper also organised a 50 centime collection in order to give Kruger a work of art. On the other hand, King Edward had the pleasure of seeing a horse named, *John Bull*, win a race, while two others, called *Boer* and *Kruger* had to be withdrawn before the end.¹⁴⁹ The ultimate popular success of the King's official visit is well known. Several days afterwards, in an atmosphere of general indifference, President Kruger passed through France on his way from the Côte d'Azur to Holland with a stop in Paris. *Le Petit Journal* admitted this lack of interest and added that "la misère est grande chez les Boërs (...), la moindre occasion suffirait pour rallumer l'incendie" (misery is very great in South Africa, a small incident would be enough to stir up troubles again).¹⁵⁰ The pro-Boer epoch was over. Even President Kruger's death, the next year, to which certain papers accorded much importance, was received with calmness.

Does anything from that period still subsist in French contemporary opinion? During the

137. *L'Aurore*, 3 June 1902, p. 1.

138. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 June 1902, p. 958.

139. *Revue du Cercle Militaire*, 14 June 1902, p. 629.

140. *Le Protestant*, 7 June 1902, p. 249.

141. Adam (J.), *Parole Française*, 7 June 1902, p. 27.

142. *Le Grelot*, 15 June 1902, pp. 2 and 3.

143. *Revue Blanche*, May-August 1902, p. 311.

144. *Revue Française de l'Étranger et des Colonies*, July 1902, p. 404.

145. *France de Demain*, 15 August 1900, p. 247 and 15 December 1900, pp. 589-596.

146. *AAE*, TO, NS 30, 21 October 1902, p. 251.

147. Hayard (Léon), *Salut aux généraux Boërs*, Paris, 1903, p. 2.

148. *La Patrie*, 30 April 1903, p. 2 and 5 May 1903, p. 1.

149. Guilleminault (G.), *Prélude à la Belle Époque*, p. 196 and Aron (Robert), *La Troisième République*, vol. II, p. 276.

150. *Le Petit Journal*, 21 May 1903 and 22 May 1903, p. 3.

Second World War, German propaganda used the pro-Boer theme against the British. For that reason, it is difficult to discover what has survived directly from the beginning of the 20th Century and what was acquired during the Occupation. Nevertheless, two themes have stayed alive: Kruger and his white beard and the Englishmen's war for gold. As an ultimate proof of the South African republicans' popularity, there are the number of streets, places, bridges, and restaurants named after the President of the South African Republic, or again, after the Transvaal itself.