

LORD GLENELG'S FOUR VISITORS

The period, August to September 1835, was of momentous significance for the history of South Africa. It was during this time that the philanthropic forces openly entered the lists against Sir Benjamin D'Urban's frontier settlement of 10 May 1835. This was strikingly illustrated by four visitors, two from the Cape and two from England, who within a matter of five weeks had their first interviews with the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg.



Lord Glenelg

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The first of these visitors to be discussed here was the young Lieut. George de la Poer Beresford who landed in England on board the *Thomas Peile*¹ on 9 September 1835, bringing with him the first official news of the D'Urban-Smith settlement.² This was the famous despatch of 19 June with its enclosures which he immediately submitted to the Colonial Office. Three days later he had a personal interview with Glenelg, but the minister had not yet given attention to the despatch, and Beresford therefore arranged for another inter-

1. GH 23/11, no. 17: B. D'Urban to Aberdeen, Grahamstown, 19 June 1835.

2. GH 1/22, no. 1583 (Separate): Glenelg to B. D'Urban, Downing Street, 20 October 1835.

view later. He also had a long conversation with Glenelg's brother, (later Sir) Robert Grant, who was Glenelg's private secretary. Beresford found that the officials at the Colonial Office were "all evidently pleased" with D'Urban's "able arrangements", and he foresaw only a "little stumbling block" regarding the question of the abstract justice of retaining the conquered territory.³

The main terms of D'Urban's frontier settlement set out in the despatch were the annexation of the territory between the Keiskama and Kei rivers, and the expulsion, "for ever", of all the hostile tribes from it — his so-called "extermination" policy. It was argued that the new border would require less troops to defend than the two previous frontiers of the Fish River, and the Keiskamma and Tyume rivers. The annexation was declared essential in order to place a "defensible barrier between the heart of the Colony and the savage tribes of central Africa", and was "the only measure that could promise to repay the expenses of the war". Hintsa, the paramount chief of all the amaXhosa (whom D'Urban on very flimsy grounds had accused of being the prime instigator behind the invasion), was to pay an indemnity of 50,000 head of cattle and 1,000 horses in two instalments. The Xhosa were described as "irreclaimable savages" for whom the sword was the only remedy. Hintsa's death in compromising circumstances by the hand of one of Lt.-Col. Harry Smith's Corps of Guides, George Southey, was also reported.⁴

At the time of writing the despatch the news of the fall of Sir Robert Peel's short-lived first ministry in April 1835 had not yet reached the Cape. It is possible that D'Urban would have couched his ideas and policy in different words if he had known about the fall of the Tories.⁵ Nevertheless, he was aware of the fact that none of the British political parties at the time favoured any expansion of the Empire, as a result of the aversion of all to an increase in governmental expenditure.⁶ To sugar the pill of his addition of another few thousand square miles to a colony already stretched beyond the limits of its scanty population, the new territory was called the "Province of Queen Adelaide", and names such as Kingwilliamstown, Fort Wellington, and Fort Waterloo were adopted. The name of the King and Queen were used obviously because of William IV's spirit of partisanship with the Tories ... "He is a true King of the Tories", and "a

3. Acc. 519/2: G. d.l. P. Beresford to B. D'Urban, London, 12 September 1835.

4. GH 23/11, no. 17: B. D'Urban to Aberdeen, 19 June 1835.

5. Cf. W. M. Macmillan, *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, pp. 144-145.

6. Cf. J. S. Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire — British Policy on the South African Frontier, 1834—1854*, pp. 1-4.

thorough party man", Charles Greville wrote on two different occasions in his journal.⁷

Beresford was the grandson of George de la Poer Beresford, Earl of Tyrone and first Marquis of Waterford, and the son of one of Tyrone's illegitimate sons William Carr, later Lord Beresford, who had fought with the Duke of Wellington and distinguished himself in the Peninsular War. The historian J. S. Galbraith declares that Beresford "had the ability to act as a persuasive advocate", and, "in Beresford, D'Urban had a most useful assistant".⁸ But in actual fact Beresford did not have a good reputation and after a scandal resulting from some youthful indiscretions D'Urban had taken him under his wing. Although he was the scion of one of the most influential families in Britain, whatever influence he had was not with the humanitarian party.

D'Urban, not knowing about the change of ministries had sent Beresford to England "expressly for the purpose of imparting to the Secretary of State every information on the affairs of the Frontier".⁹ Beresford also had an interview with Sir Herbert Taylor, the King's private secretary, and an audience with the King himself. The King "evinced much knowledge on the subject" and appeared to be highly satisfied and pleased with D'Urban's measures. All important personages whom Beresford visited, including the Duke of Wellington, approved of D'Urban's settlement.¹⁰

Beresford, unfortunately for D'Urban's policy, had no idea of the power the philanthropists wielded with the Government and public, and was unable to assess accurately the political situation in England. After a second interview with Glenelg he reported on 22 September to D'Urban that Glenelg had expressed his approval of his measures and had told him that if it had not been "for [his] energy and promptness" there seemed to him little doubt that the frontier districts "would have been completely sacrificed". "I have little doubt that in the main points your measures will be confirmed here," Beresford confidently declared.¹¹ In fairness to Beresford it must be conceded that at the time of his second visit to Glenelg, the Secretary of State had not yet seen the last two visitors of the four, and it is possible that Glenelg could have given him a non-committal answer. But, taking into consideration the notes Glenelg had been making on the different aspects

7. H. Reeve (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs*, III, p. 365 (24 July 1836); p. 402 (31 March 1837).

8. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

9. PRO 727.CO 48/164: G. d.l. P. Beresford to R. W. Hay, 12 November 1835.

10. Acc. 519/2: G. d.l. P. Beresford to B. D'Urban, 12 September 1835.

11. *Ibid.*, 22 September 1835.

of D'Urban's settlement, it is improbable that he would have given a favourable opinion at all.

Even two months later Beresford was still optimistic about the reception of D'Urban's measures, and could report that the Colonial Office appreciated their wisdom, but was "feeling the pulse of the Saint Party" (i.e. the Evangelical humanitarians or "Clapham Sect" to whom Glenelg belonged).¹² Only in December did he begin to send worthwhile information to D'Urban. He now mentioned the influence the Radicals had with the Whig Government, and for the first time he mentioned Thomas Fowell Buxton's name in connexion with the Aborigines Committee. For the first time he sounded a warning note: the Government wanted to delay discussions on the subject as long as possible before the session of Parliament, "to see what ulterior measures you may take with the Chiefs still hostile to us in order that you may bear as much responsibility and they as little as possible".¹³

A few days before sending off his famous despatch of censure to D'Urban (dated 26 December 1835), Glenelg summoned Beresford. Within a week he had two interviews with the Colonial Secretary, and three with Sir George Grey, the Under-Secretary. Many questions were put to him as to the nature of the ground composing the old and new frontiers and their respective defensibility, but he could not really make out what were the ultimate intentions of Glenelg and Grey. But he thought that they would not settle anything finally before some further communication had been received from D'Urban.¹⁴ This information was unfortunately of little use to the Governor, for he received it three weeks after the arrival of Glenelg's despatch.¹⁵

Fortunately D'Urban was able to obtain a much better idea of the political climate in England and the possible future of his measures from the accounts sent to him by a second visitor to Glenelg. This was Maj. (later Maj.-Gen. Sir) Abraham Josias Cloete. He had arrived in London on 17 August 1835, about three weeks before Beresford. During his first three days in London he had interviews with Lord Fitzroy Somerset (first Baron Raglan), Military Secretary at the Horse Guards and brother of Lord Charles Somerset, and R. W. Hay, Permanent Under-Secretary for Colonies.

Cloete did not have Beresford's connexions in high places, but he had met Glenelg before. Shortly after being called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1807 Glenelg (at that time still Charles Grant, junior)

12. *Ibid.*, 3 November 1835.

13. *Ibid.*, 8 December 1835.

14. *Ibid.*, 29 December 1835.

15. Beresford's letter was received on 11 April 1836, and Glenelg's on 21 March

had been obliged by an ailment of the chest to make a voyage to St. Helena and the Cape Colony. At the Cape Grant had come to know Cloete's father, Pieter Lourens Cloete, and the Cloete family reasonably well. Although Cloete had been a boy in his early teens at the time of Grant's visit, a valuable opportunity was offered to renew Glenelg's acquaintance. On 21 August Cloete met the Colonial Secretary by appointment and put D'Urban's case to him. Glenelg, who had not yet received anything official regarding D'Urban's settlement, had little to say. But Cloete was sure that Glenelg saw the "reasonableness" of the plans proposed by D'Urban and would give him "every support in their principle".

Despite his optimism regarding Glenelg, Cloete feared the influence of the "Saints" who had set up the cry of "poor Caffres, taking away their country".¹⁶ A few days later Cloete again wrote to D'Urban, warning him against the tremendous forces operating against his measures, and the "scandalous prejudice of condemnation" with which the Aborigines Committee was treating the question.¹⁷

Cloete did his best to counteract the actions of the "Saints". He submitted documents and a sketch-map of the scene of war to Sir Herbert Taylor who in turn submitted them to the King. The King fully approved of "the measures adopted by my excellent friend Sir Benjamin D'Urban".¹⁸ These documents were presumably the reason why Beresford a few weeks later found the King so well-informed about the subject of frontier affairs. Unfortunately Cloete had no information about D'Urban's modified policy of September and consequently he was not very successful in his attempts to create sympathy for the Governor's settlement. Early in November he informed D'Urban how strongly the "Saints" party had influenced the public during the recess of Parliament.¹⁹

Communications were extremely slow to and from England. Nevertheless D'Urban received the first three of Cloete's letters in December, while he was still in the Eastern Districts, and another at George on his return journey to Cape Town.²⁰ Thus he was able to obtain some idea of what to expect from the British Government, even before his arrival in Cape Town.

Glenelg's last two visitors turned up together. They were Thos. Fowell Buxton and the Rev. William Ellis, secretary of the London

16. Acc. 519/2: A. J. Cloete to B. D'Urban, London, 23 August 1835.

17. *Ibid.*, 29 August 1835.

18. Acc. 519/2: C. H. Taylor to A. J. Cloete, Windsor Castle, 29 August 1835 (Copy), encl. with letter from Cloete to D'Urban, 30 August 1835.

19. Acc. 519/3: A. J. Cloete to B. D'Urban, 12 November 1835.

20. Notes by D'Urban on the respective letters in his own hand.

Missionary Society, and their visit took place on 26 September. The circumstances which led to this visit were various. A mere nine days after D'Urban's frontier settlement of 10 May, Buxton had been able to secure the appointment of the Parliamentary Select Committee generally known as the Aborigines Committee to consider what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of British settlements and to the neighbouring tribes "in order to secure to them the observance of justice and the protection of their rights".²¹ At the same time Dr. John Philip, superintendent of the L.M.S. in South Africa, was studying the terms of D'Urban's settlement. On 29 May he wrote to Buxton: "It will be of great importance to get the ear of the Ministers before they shall have time to form an opinion on the Governor's Despatches on this subject, and one word from you in the present state of England will be enough to prevent them taking the wrong course."²²

During the Parliamentary recess Buxton began to launch his campaign behind the scenes. His sister-in-law, Anna Gurney, was instructed to compile an epitome of Philip's letters to Buxton, "because I do believe that an able digest of these letters, sticking close to the text, might save a nation of 100,000 beings and several flourishing missions from destruction". These were Buxton's words to his sister and he added, "It is a cause well worth an effort."²³

On 23 September the L.M.S. also received a batch of letters from Philip dealing with the causes of the war, so-called eye-witness reports, details of the murder of Hintsa, and attacks on D'Urban's policy. Ellis, without fully digesting Philip's letters, approached Buxton.²⁴ Buxton's acquaintance with Glenelg dated from their youth when both had been members of the same debating club, "The Academics", in London after completing their studies at university.²⁵ After Wilberforce's retirement from politics Buxton had succeeded him as leader of the humanitarians in Parliament. He decided to see Glenelg immediately, and a few days later, on 26 September, he introduced Ellis to Glenelg.

Buxton found that he had not been the first in getting the ear of the minister, and that Glenelg had already made a study of D'Urban's despatch and the evidence supplied by Beresford and

21. Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee (Reprinted by the Aborigines Protection Society), p. 1. Cf. Macmillan, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

22. PRO.CO 48/165, fol. 207: J. Philip to T. F. Buxton (Copy), Cape Town, 19 May 1835.

23. C. Buxton, *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Bart.*, p. 309: T. F. Buxton to Miss S. M. Buxton, Earham, Norfolk, 28 September 1835.

24. Cf. Macmillan, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

25. Buxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

Cloete. Yet, he and Ellis were able to overawe Glenelg with their mass of counter-evidence and refute any of the timid arguments he tried to bring. This was how Buxton described their meeting to his sister. "I gave our new Colonial Secretary a disquisition to my heart's content on the treatment of savages, the death of Hintza [*sic*], the atrocities of white men, and above all, on the responsibilities of a Secretary of State; and I gave him to understand that I knew there was a corner in the next world hotter than the rest for such of them as tolerate the abominations which we practise abroad. I feel happy that I let loose my mind, but I am afraid Ellis of the London Missionary Society was almost shocked at the recklessness of his lordship's feelings with which I spoke. I believe, however, that Lord Glenelg feels both soundly and warmly on the subject."²⁶

Ellis's account of their visit to Glenelg bears Buxton out.²⁷ Enjoying his own sense of importance, Ellis now became a regular visitor to Glenelg and the Colonial Office, bringing each time more of the arguments supplied by Philip. An analysis of the decisive Glenelg despatch of 26 December 1835 shows that the information coming from Philip through Buxton and Ellis formed the basis of the majority of statements and accusations contained therein.

Undoubtedly the last two of Glenelg's four visitors, that is Buxton and Ellis, had a decisive influence on him. After their exertions there remained no possibility of D'Urban's policy being approved of. In the words of a prominent historian on humanitarianism, G. R. Mellor: "Whatever blame may be attached to D'Urban for not keeping the Colonial Office fully posted, it cannot be denied that the presence in London of 'witnesses for the prosecution', with direct or indirect access to a Colonial Office with negrophile tendencies loaded the dice against him."²⁸

J. G. Pretorius.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 309: T. F. Buxton to Miss S. M. Buxton, 28 September 1835.

27. The same night after their meeting with Glenelg, Ellis reported fully in a letter to Philip, the text of which is found in Macmillan, *op. cit.*, pp. 161—164.

28. G. R. Mellor, *British Imperial Trusteeship, 1783—1850*, p. 254.