EARLY ATTEMPTS AT CLOSER RELATIONS BETWEEN NATAL AND THE CAPE COLONY, 1850-1879*

Historians of the British Empire have given considerable attention to the relations between the Mother Country and her colonial offspring, but very little to inter-colonial relations. One consequence of this neglect has been to credit with an undeserved originality the proposals made by Imperial statesmen and officials in the third quarter of the nineteenth century for the creation of closer ties between the South African states. It was the sponsorship rather than the novelty of the schemes of Sir George Grey and Lord Carnarvon that was significant. The tragedy of South African history derives in no small measure from the very failure of an almost uninterrupted series of locally-inspired attempts at closer relations between two or more of the states in the second half of the nineteenth century. Detailed study has, in recent decades, been made of the halting attempts of the Boer republics of the hinterland to take a united stand against the dangers which threatened to overwhelm them, and of the even greater hesitation with which the Cape Colony regarded any proposals for closer union with one or both of those northern neighbours.[1] But no account has yet been taken of the successive failures to link the two coastal British colonies, Natal and the Cape. That unsuccessful efforts were made from the earliest days from within those colonies themselves boded ill for the far bolder and more comprehensive plans of Lord Carnarvon in the eighteen-seventies.

I

At first sight the similarity of the problems confronting Natal and the Cape would seem to have guaranteed that their peoples and governments would move towards an ever greater co-ordination of enterprise and policies. Both were members of what had been, at least until the mid-century, a highly exclusivist empire. Both, sprawling along the southern coast of the African continent, were pre-occupied with the preservation of peace not only in the Indian Ocean, but also among the tribes settled in the territories which lay between and adjacent to them. Both had to face the formidable task of ruling disproportionately large numbers of primitive peoples within their own borders. Both sought to modify their inherited Roman-Dutch legal systems to make them more responsive to the needs of colonies whose fate seemed to hinge ultimately upon the degree to which they could extend their commercial operations.[2] Yet there was the rub. It

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1. See especially F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Eenheidstrewe van die Republikeinse Afrikaners: Deel I, Pioniershartstogte* (1836-64) (Johannesburg, 1951); and Eileen M. Attree, "The Closer Union Movements between the Orange Free State, South African Republic and Cape Colony, 1838-63" in *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 1949, I.
2. *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, VIII (Cambridge, 1936), chap. 31.

was often for the very reason that their spheres of interest overlapped and because they resorted to different remedies for the solution of their common problems that their relationship came to be characterised by conflict rather than by co-operation.

As early as 1850 the need for closer ties between the new settlement of Natal and the old colony of the Cape had been acknowledged in at least three quarters. In April the Cape Town Mail proposed a united Federal Government for the Cape, Albany, the Orange River Sovereignty and Natal".[3] This, the editor claimed, would not merely provide for a joint administration of common services, such as customs and internal communications; it would also, by the establishment of separate local governments, do much to heal the longstanding political rift between the Eastern and Western districts of the Cape Colony itself. But neither in the Cape nor in Natal was public opinion as yet at all receptive to so drastic a proposal. The Natalians, still smarting at the "irregular, unbusinesslike and unjust method" by which the Cape Governor had recently allowed the bulk of the colony's Crown land to fall into the clutches of absentee landlords and speculators, were in no mood for higher thoughts. They could not be lured into such a scheme even by the prospect of having the constitutional status of the colony raised to the level of its elder sister.[4] The Commissioners of the Cape Town Municipality, after a debate lasting several days, likewise offered little encouragement to the sponsors of the scheme. "The blacks (of Natal)", declared one member in alarm, "are in proportion to the white men as fifty to one!";[5] as for neigbouring Zululand, the most that could be said for its was that, like India after Waterloo, it was "as quiet as gunpowder".

Within months of the publication of this proposal, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Earl Grey, himself drafted a despatch to the Cape Governor on the subject of a South African confederation. Caught unawares by the High Commissioner's recent annexation of the Orange River Sovereignty and by the uncertainty as to the precise political status of British Kaffraria, and casting about at the some time for a way to come to terms with the fierce separatist feeling in the Eastern Cape, he believed that he might unburden the Home Government of responsibilities in all these directions simultaneously by federating the two parts of the Cape with Natal, the Sovereignty and British Kaffraria. But the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, shrank from the prospect of having to force federation upon the Cape, which would of necessity be the senior partner. The draft was cancelled.[6]

Only a month later, a group of merchants from both the Western and

3. 20 April 1850. Cf. the issues for 23 March and 18 May 1850.
4. *Natal Witness*, 7 June 1850.
5. *Cape Town Mail*, 20 April 1850.
6. C. W. de Kiewiet, *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics*, 1848-72 (London, 1929), 33-4.

the Eastern halves of the Cape Colony visited Natal on a mission which has not previously been recorded.[7] Although no evidence can be found as to the purpose of the visit, it is noteworthy that at a public dinner given in honour of the visitors in Pietermaritzburg, no advantage was taken of the opportunity to promote closer formal bonds between the colonial neighbours. On the contrary, few of the speakers would condescend even to make the right noises, and the local press was at pains to explain that the "little politics" that was heard was intended simply "to give zest to the speeches". The Chairman summed up the virtually unanimous sentiments of the Natalians when he declared weakly that "however desirable unity might appear, and no one had a higher estimate of the potency of unity than himself, yet the Right Hon. the Secretary for the Colonies had placed them at such a distance from their brethren at the Cape that the thing might appear rather impracticable". It is true that, for exampple, a treaty of customs reciprocity could not at this stage legally have been concluded between Natal and the Cape, because, in the early forties, the Colonial Secretary had forbidden the introduction of differential duties such as the Australian colonies had begun to adopt.[8] But, as we shall see, it is not without significance that a decade later, when the Natal authorities were at their wits' end, they were prepared to make representations to H.M. Government on this very subject.[9]

The arrival of Sir George Grey at the end of 1854 again provoked discussion of the subject of closer relations. Rumours spread that he was bringing a new constitution for Natal, which would create some form of closer constitutional union between her and the Cape. The Natalians reacted promptly to this news. Only a year before, the Cape had emerged from her most disastrous frontier war ever, and had caused further dismay among the Natalians by the introduction of a "colour-blind" franchise. The control of Natal's teeming native population by such a government, declared the *Natal Independent*, would be "the greatest evil that has yet been inflicted upon us".[10] In addition, the difficulty of finding suitable representatives to attend a Parliament sitting a thousand miles away would leave Natal "practically unrepresented", so that her political life would be dominated by Cape politicians, whose interests were in many respects "directly antagonistic to those of Natal". The scheme concurred another Natal editor, would be no less than "a death-blow" to the colony.[11]

Although Grey had not brought a new constitution for Natal, he had, as early as 1855, concluded that Britain's abandonment of the republics had been a grave error and that salvation from the evils of "Balkanisation"

7. See the account in *Natal Independent*, 14 November 1850 and *Natal Witness*, 15 November 1850.
8. W. P. Morrell, *British Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell* (Oxford, 1930), 189-90.
9. *Vide infra*.
10. 14 September 1854 and January 1855.
11. *Natal Mercury*, 17 January 1855.

in Southern Africa could best be attained by a federation of all the states.[12] When, three years later, the Secretary of State, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, requested his views on the feasibility of federating British Kaffraria with the Cape and Natal, Grey seized the opportunity to insist that a federation would necessarily have to embrace all of the South African states. Natal, he protested, could not be conveniently united in a federal union with the Cape "unless the Orange Free State was included in the same union, otherwise it would be entirely separated from the colony of the Cape of Good Hope by large intervening tracts of country occupied by another nation".[13] In this way, one of the most distinguished British Governors in the history of South Africa came to dwell upon the disadvantages of a federation merely of Natal, the Cape and British Kaffraria, not because he was opposed to their closer association, but, on the contrary, because he had set his sights higher still.

Even had Grey's proposed federation not been disallowed by the Secretary of State, it is doubtful whether it would have enjoyed enough sustained support within South Africa itself to ensure its survival.[14] Only the Eastern Districts of the Cape contemplated with enthusiasm a scheme which would create that best of all possible worlds, in which they would achieve their long-desired local selfgovernment.[15] Both the Western Cape and Natal, on the other hand, were still utterly unwilling to commit themselves to the ideal of a general South African federation, let alone to a union merely of the two coastal colonies. In addition to the general objections which the Natalians had already expressed, they continued to live in hopes (especially in view of Grey's avowed hostility to the efforts of the Colonial Office to extricate itself from South African affairs, and in view of the alarm caused by the Basuto War) that it was merely a matter of time before British supremacy would have to be asserted unequivocally over the entire highveld.[16] When Grey was recalled in mid-1859 Natal displayed far less concern about the *coup de grâce* which this would administer to his federation scheme than about the threatened shelving of his plans to extend British dominion over all of the interior.[17] The *Natal Witness*, indeed, twitted the Home Government for neglecting its Divine mission: "It may be quite certain that British dominion must rapidly extend to wherever the white man's enterprise will extend, but it would seem that the Home Government shrink from the work assigned to

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12. J. Collier, *Sir George Grey, Governor, High Commissioner and Premier* (London, 1909), 122.
13. G.H. 23/27, Grey to Lytton, 19 November 1858.
14. Cf. the arguments in J. Milne, *The Romance of a Pro-Consul* (London, 1911), 217.
15. W. Shaw, *The Story of My Mission in South-Eastern Africa* (London, 1860), 69.
16. See especially W. J. de Kock, "Federation and Confederation in South Africa, 1870-80, with special reference to the Cape Colony". (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1938), 4.
17. See, for example, *Natal Star*, 6 August and 3 September 1859; *Natal Witness*, 12 August 1859; *Natal Mercury*, 18 August 1859.

it by Providence, and will not keep pace with the demand for British supremacy in Southern Africa".[18]

With the advent of the sixties, it seemed as though fission, rather than fusion, was still to be the fate of the South African communities. Before the depression of that gloomy decade settled upon Natal, strenuous efforts were made to attract the attention of investors and immigrants by an aggressive propaganda campaign, notably at the 1862 International Exhibition in London. The *Graham's Town Journal*, deprecating the failure of the Cape to emulate this example of her young neighbour, declared, both in sorrow and in anger: "Natal has helped to create an impression of well-to-doism by a vigorous trumpet-blowing, not often exceeded by the most strongly-lunged colony in the Empire".[19] To Natal, on the other hand, the Cape was "a bloated aristocrat down South, running to seed and shabbiness". As the Cape subsided into the depression, the *Natal Mercury* gloated over her well-deserved misfortunes: "The Cape, clearly enough, is in a bad way. Its condition just now seems to be of the lowest. For years past it has been, politically speaking, in a deppressed state, but it appears now to have reached all but the last stage of decline".[20] Such was the apathy, if not antipathy, which prevailed between the Cape and Natal that in two successive decades they had to confess their inability to negotiate even a free trade treaty for each other's produce. Both in 1866 and in 1876 the Cape's wine farmers and Natal's sugar planters sponsored moves to secure privileged access to the markets of the sister colony.[21] But this pandered too obviously to sectional interests. Natal would be given a monopoly for her sugar at the Cape in return for a small market for Cape wine and grain. Should Natal's sugar be allowed free entry to the Cape market while the duty on Mauritius sugar was retained, this would amount to imposing a protective duty upon Mauritius sugar in the interests of the Natal producers; yet Mauritius was a far greater consumer of staple Cape produce (such as wine, grain and cured fish) than was Natal. Then, too, the Cape Government's revenue would suffer heavily, although the Cape consumer would not benefit correspondingly, if at all. The imbalance in the trade between the two colonies was such that the Cape Government would lose far more than would its Natal counterpart from such a treaty: In 1865, for example, the duty collected at Durban on Cape produce amounted to £922, whereas the duty payable at the Cape on Natal produce had been £5,233.[22] A similar position obtained in the 1870's, when it

18. 12 August 1859.
19. 11 February 1862.
20. 30 September 1862 and 21 August 1863.
21. Details of the negotiations and the reactions of the colonists can be found in the despatches between the respective governors and with the Colonial Office; in the private correspondence between the colonial secretaries of Natal and the Cape (Southey Papers, filed in the Cape Archives); in press reports and comment; in the debates of the Legislative Council and in the reports of various committees (especially N.P.P. 248 and G.H. 352, Natal Archives).
22. N.P.P. 248, Report of Select Committee of the Natal Legislative Council.

was again pointed out that since Natal's tariff was already low, the quantity of Cape goods entering Natal free of duty would not increase sufficiently to compensate for the loss in customs revenue by the Cape Government on imports from Natal.[23] The Cape authorities therefore remained deaf both to the blandishments and to the dire predictions of Natal's Colonial Secretary.[24]

The seventies bore witness to further efforts to forge closer links, not only economically but also politically, between the South African communities, and not least between Natal and the Cape. At the beginning of the decade, the Secretary of State, Lord Kimberley, cherished the hope that Britain would be able to withdraw as a principal from South African affairs by thrusting responsible government upon the Old Colony and inducing it to absorb its smaller and weaker neighbours.[25] But, much as the Cape itched to lay hands on many of the territories in the north and north-east, where diamonds had recently come to light, the formidable racial and economic problems of those parts gave it pause. Even a proposal made in the House of Assembly in July 1871 to invite the governments of Natal and the republics to discuss merely a South African federation, in which all would theoretically be equal, was summarily rejected by 26 votes to 5, while the Joint Commission of seven members which the Eastern members had had appointed despite stiff Western opposition, was concerned with the creation of a federal state out of the three parts of the Cape Colony, and not with a general South African confederation.[26] The Natalians, though they might censure the short-sightedness of their Cape neighbours, continued, like them, to live in hopes that in God's good time events might leave the Home Government with no option but to shoulder the responsibility for bringing all the states under one rule. The High Commissioner's annexation of the diamond fields to the Crown had so infuriated the Dutch throughout South Africa that, as the imperialist Theophilus Shepstone confided to his son with undisguised satisfaction, "if they show it by any overt acts, the end of it will be that all the country and both states will be annexed".[27]

In the middle of 1874, when the Cape's assistance against the chief Langalibalele had temporarily brought some cordiality to her relations with Natal, the *Times of Natal* proposed yet another plan. It suggested that one way of coercing the Boer republics to return to their former allegiance to the Crown and therefore of paving the way for a general closer union in South Africa, would be for Natal to ally herself initially

23. G.H. 352, Annual report of the Committee of the Port Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce for 1876, enclosed in a letter from the Secretary of the Chamber to Lieutenant-Governor Bulwer of Natal, 8 February 1878.
24. Southey Papers, Erskine to Southey, 27 August 1866.
25. C. W. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1937), 12.
26. House of Assembly debates, 6 July 1871 (reported in *Cape Argus*, 8 July 1871); *Natal Mercury*, April-May 1872.
27. Shepstone Papers, Theophilus to Henrique Shepstone, 25 November 1871. Cf. the Natal press comment in the latter months of 1871.

with the Cape alone.[28] This idea again received prominence a few months later when the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Barkly, visited Natal at the same time as the eminent historian James Anthony Froude, who had been sent by Earl Carnarvon to sound out the attitude of the South African states to a possible confederation. There was much speculation as to whether the High Commissioner intended to engineer a confederation between Natal and the other states or, alternatively, the annexation of Natal to the Cape.[29] Members of the Natal Legislative Council expressed fears that the British Government might find itself forced to counter attacks by the Peace Society upon its handling of the Langalibalele affair by promising to annex Natal to the Cape. "Few questions," observed the *Natal Mercury* in November 1874, "have come to the front in Natal so suddenly and fully as annexation to the Cape. A year ago the mere idea would have been scouted as outrageous and impossible. Now we find it seriously debated, not merely as a possible, but a probable contingency." There were two possible ways, noted the editor, of achieving union with the Cape: either by a simple federal union or by complete absorption "in the way that British Kaffraria was swallowed up and governmentally obliterated. The one is a partial eclipse; the other a total." The idea of annexation was commended to the *Mercury's* readers on several grounds. Natal would share in the admitted advantages of self-government. Small as Natal's proportion of representatives in a joint Parliament with the Cape was likely to be, they could achieve much if only by exploiting the disagreements between the Eastern and Western Cape members, as the Kaffrarian representatives had done. The Cape's military and police forces could be called upon in an emergency. Natal's educational institutions would form part of a larger system, and the colony would be able to draw upon more extensive and varied resources when planning public works. "The one supreme advantage" would be that Natal would "have a strong, instead of a weak government at the helm in dealing with the natives".[30] By the early months of 1875, when it was announced that Lieutenant-Governor Pine was to be superseded, many Natalians had become convinced that his successor would arrive from England armed with an Imperial Act annexing Natal to the Cape.[31]

Yet, whatever the colonial press might claim, the scheme had the defects of its virtues. Natal, as even the *Mercury* had to admit, would lose its individuality and its status as an independent colony pursuing a course primarily in its own interests. There were many issues — notably Indian immigration and the non-white franchise — on which there were sharp differences of opinion between the Cape and Natal. Nor could the Natalians forget that the difficulties which would confront their importers if the colony's customs tariff were raised to the level of that of the Cape,

28. 8 July 1874.
29. *Ibid.*, 4 November 1874.
30. 5 November 1874.
31. *Natal Witness*, 12 February 1875.

had already twice wrecked the negotiations for a commercial agreement between the colonies.[32]

The charms of annexation were even less apparent to the colonists of the Cape. The Eastern Districts of the old colony believed that they stood to gain far more from a general South African confederation, in which a native policy more to their liking would probably be inaugurated. In such a confederation, decisive steps could be taken, too, to undo Britain's grievous error of abandoning the republics and also to secure additional backing in their now traditional conflict with the Western Districts.[33] For this very reason, the Western Districts were afraid that Natal would join forces with the East. In March 1875, the *Natal Witness* could therefore report from its excitable Cape correspondent that "neither the Cape Ministry nor the Cape opposition are in favour of annexation", because Natal was "like a can of nitroglycerin; no one will touch her for fear of dangerous consequences".[34] This determined resistance of the Cape to the proposed incorporation of Natal seemed to acquire additional justification when Sir Garnet Wolseley, sent to head the government of Natal between the departure of Pine and the arrival of his successor, "drowned the independence of Natal in champagne and sherry".[35] The Natalians acquiesced in this in the hope that closer supervision of their affairs by the Colonial Office would bring a correspondingly greater efficiency to the administration, more vigorous control over the Zulus and an influx of urgently needed capital for their public works schemes. Equally clearly, now that the constitutional gulf between the two colonies had been widened, the annexation of Natal to the Cape was out of the question.

II

It was against this unpromising background that in May 1875 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, sought to interest the South African states in a scheme of general confederation. Abandoning the objections which he had himself raised to Sir George Grey's scheme almost two decades previously, he instructed Barkly to invite representatives of all the governments in South Africa to a conference on the means whereby common action in the sphere of native policy and other similar matters might be achieved. If, during the conference, an actual confederation of the various states were to be proposed, H.M. Government would "readily give their earnest and favourable attention to any suggestions that may be made".[36]

At the Cape, the Western-dominated ministry of John Molteno made no secret of the distaste which it felt for Carnarvon's proposal. Confedera-

32. 2 March 1875.
33. *Votes and Proceedings*: *Cape House of Assembly*, 30 July 1874.
34. 19 March 1875.
35. P. A. Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno* (London, 1900), I, 451.
36. G.H. 1/71, Carnarvon to Barkly, 4 May 1875.

tion would tilt the balance of political power in the colony against the West and revive the separatist agitation of the Eastern districts. It would involve the Cape in considerable expenditure on defence, particularly because of Natal's disproportionately large native population. It also implied sharing with the states of the interior the desperately needed customs revenue collected on transit traffic to those parts.[37] Wolseley gave special emphasis to the ways in which Natal had contributed to the development of this aloofness on the part of the Cape Government. In addition to the lack of cordiality and sympathy between the Cape and the republics, he informed Carnarvon, there was "an undefined feeling of jealousy entertained by the Cape towards Natal". "Formerly," he explained, "Natal was under the authority of the Cape Government, and originally it was but an offshoot from that colony. Natal having been rendered independent of that authority, and having created for itself local and commercial interests in which the Cape has no part, having in fact become a rival instead of a dependant, and having established a community of interests with the neighbouring republics, it is not difficult to account for the feeling of jealousy to which I have referred."[38]

Rebuffed by the Cape, Wolseley prepared to convene a conference of the remaining three states, Natal and the republics. With the increasingly vocal support of the Natalians, he publicised his plans for a confederation of the three Eastern states, leaving the Cape to its own devices. At a public dinner in August 1875, Froude, who had again been sent to promote the confederation cause in South Africa, announced to the elated Natalians that since the Cape would have nothing to do with the proposal, Carnarvon hoped that a conference would soon meet in the Natal capital, Pietermaritzburg. Should the Cape persist in its refusal even to discuss closer relations, the only alternative would be "a close league between the states north of the Orange River, which might hereafter merge into some closer union."[39]

Nothing came of this scheme, because Carnarvon, Wolseley and Froude had all misjudged the attitude both of the republics and of the Cape. The reports of Colonel Colley and Major Butler, two of Wolseley's staff sent by him to sound out public opinion in the republics on the possibility of federation with Natal, were by no means encouraging.[40] On the other hand, the Cape had not as a whole been so antagonistic to Carnarvon's scheme as the frothings of the Ministry had seemed to indicate. The sensitivity of the Port Elizabeth merchants to the expansion of republican trade through Delagoa Bay had been quickened by the 1869 treaty between the Transvaal and the Portuguese. The merchants were convinced, too, that the only way to ensure that they did not lose all of the £1,000,000 owed them by the Transvaal was by dragging the republic into a confede-

37. Molteno, II, 21 *sqq.*
38. G.H. 299, Wolseley to Carnarvon, 2 July 1875 (Confidential).
39. Reported in *Natal Mercury*, 2 September 1875.
40. G.H. 870, Colley to Wolseley, 10 August 1875; Butler to Wolseley, 24 August 1875

ration of South African states.[41] Such was the popular agitation in favour of Carnarvon's proposal that when a further despatch on the subject was received from him, the Cape Parliament was summoned to a special session.[42] The Governor's opening address was condemned in the Legislative Council for failing to recommend that Parliament should agree to the holding of a conference and that the Cape should be officially represented.[43] The Natal Legislative Council, with unwonted unanimity, likewise passed a series of resolutions expressing full support for Carnarvon's proposed conference and the hope "that our elder and sister colony will yet regard with greater favour the prospect of a more friendly intercourse and closer union with colonies and states whose interests are by nature and circumstances inseparable from her own".[44]

Pious resolutions were of no real value. Natal resembled the Cape in nothing more than in her determination to have it both ways. Since the Cape Ministry was profoundly suspicious even of the Imperial Government,[45] and since Carnarvon hoped to be able to exert more direct pressure, the Secretary of State convened a conference in London rather than in South Africa in August 1876. None of the major states was represented at the conference, so that even the most ardent protagonists of confederation did not expect that much would emerge from its labours.[46] Carnarvon, having again failed to force the hand of the most powerful colony, turned his attention to the weak Transvaal, which he proposed to use to lever first the Free State and then the Cape into confederation. At the end of the year, Shepstone, Natal's Secretary for Native Affairs, was sent back to South Africa with secret instructions to annex the Transvaal to the Crown if a majority of the republic's Volksrad favoured the step.[47]

Nothing could have pleased the Cape and Natal more. With no effort on their part, it seemed that they would yet see the mantle of British authority cast over the entire Southern Africa.[48] Such plans as did exist for positive and constructive moves towards confederation on their own part were abandoned with alacrity, and the press of each colony put its smear campaign against the Transvaal in to top gear. Even the Colonial Secretary of Natal, F. Napier Broome, using material supplied by Shepstone himself, portrayed the republic in the most lurid possible guise to readers of the *London Times*. "I can tell you I have put the case pretty strongly against the Republic," he confessed to Shepstone.

41. P. Ffolliott and E. L. H. Croft, *One Titan at a Time* (Cape Town, 1960), 170.
42. G.H. 23/33, Barkly to Carnarvon, 14 July, 19 August and 20 October 1875; cf. *Votes and Proceedings: Cape Legislative Council*, 10 November 1875.
43. C.4—'75; G.H. 23/33, Barkly to Carnarvon, 16 November 1875.
44. G.H. 637/251, Bulwer to Barkly, 26 November 1875; Natal Legislative Council Debates, 23 November 1875 (reported in *Natal Mercury*, 27 November 1875).
45. Merriman Papers, Julia to Agnes Merriman, December 1876(?); cf. *Cape Argus*, 22 June 1876.
46. Shepstone Pappers, Bulwer to Shepstone, 26 September 1876.
47. G.H. 157, Carnarvon to Bulwer, 28 September 1876 (Confidential).
48. See, for example, *Natal Mercury*, 2 December 1876.

"Of one thing you may be quite certain, namely that any action you may take which will bring the Transvaal under British rule will be thoroughly backed by the home ministers and the public, however barely decent the pretext you may be driven to make use of may be, when taken by itself."[49]

This apparent willingness of the Imperial Government itself to control the interior also destroyed what little colonial interest there might have been in the general Permissive Federation Act which Carnarvon had meanwhile introduced into Parliament at Westminster. Natal was particularly averse to his proposal to compute the number of representatives for each state in the federal legislature according to its European population. With its very small European and very large non-European population, Natal would be entitled to no more than six seats in an Assembly of 100 members. The Cape alone was estimated to have a European population thirteen times the size of Natal's, while her aggregate population was only twice as great.[50] For Natal, confederation would therefore be "an act almost amounting to political extinction".[51] Yet, the fluidity of the situation and the confusion of colonial thought which now prevailed on the subject of closer relations was well illustrated when John Robinson, who, with Shepstone and J. W. Akerman had represented Natal at the London conference in the pprevious year, was asked for his views on the bill. "Rather than be extinguished in a numerical and political sense, as they would be were the bill passed as it stands," he declared, "the colonists (i.e. of Natal) would probably be disposed to link their fortunes indivisibly with those of their neighbours in the Cape Colony."[52] Coming from the man who, less than two decades later, was to become Natal's first Prime Minister, this assessment was significant. But it was inaccurate. When, in June 1877, the Natal Legislative Council considered Carnarvon's revised Permissive Federation Bill, some members reiterated Robinson's view. But when a Select Committee was appointed to report on the bill, a proposal that it should also examine the pros and cons of the incorporation of Natal by the Cape was rejected *sans phrase*. There was no need, declared members haughtily, for the Council's having "to sell itself for a mess of pottage" or of "giving themselves away to the Cape before even (*sic*) the later had expressed a wish to have them".[53]

Not self-respect but gratification at the achievement of their heart's desire accounted for this attitude of the Councillors. In April 1877 Shepstone had at least annexed the Transvaal to the Crown. Eagerly seizing the opportunity, Robinson had himself already revived in the *Mercury* a suggestion which had been mooted for some years, and which

49. Shepstone Papers, Broome to Shepstone, 7 March 1877.
50. E.C. 10, 98-100 (Confidential); G.H. 281, 135-43, Bulwer to Carnarvon, 1 May 1877.
51. See G.H. 157, Carnarvon to Bulwer, 8 March 1877 (Confidential); Shepstone Papers, Bulwer to Shepstone, 4 April 1877; *Natal Mercury*, April-May 1877.
52. Robinson Papers, 4/4, Robinson to Frere, n.d.
53. Natal Legislative Council Debates, 19 June 1877 (reported in *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1877, Supplement).

he repeated in a private letter to Shepstone: "Should our big neighbour (i.e. the Cape) assume a hostile and unfriendly attitude," he wrote in the *Natal Mercury*, "we are now in a position to play our own game. We can establish an Eastern Union. We can link our fortunes with the Transvaal, or at any rate we can establish such close and friendly relations with the new government as to reap all the practical benefits of Union without, perhaps, incurring all the sacrifices that federation might entail. The Transvaal has a common interest with ourselves in three questions—defence, railway extension and native policy. Upon these wecan without difficulty ensure harmony or uniformity of action. If the Cape Colony is determined not to federate, Natal will have no alternative but to protect itself, even although the measures to which it may have to resort would be injurious, if not hostile, to Cape interests."[54]

That the Cape was fully alive to these threats to her predominance in South Africa's affairs was evident in a number of ways. The colonial press pulled out all the stops and entered upon a sustained campaign of denunciation of the Transvaal annexation. The Cape Governor and High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere, reported to Shepstone from Cape Town that his Cape ministers were so alarmed at the potential effects of the annexation that he had had great difficulty in persuading them even to mention the event in his speech for the opening of Parliament.[55] Lieutenant-Governor Lanyon of Griqualand West told Shepstone, in a confidential letter, that his colonists were so disappointed at the mere four members granted them in the Cape House of Assembly that a petition was being circulated in favour of annexing the colony to the Transvaal instead of to the Cape.[56] Recorder J. D. Barry, writing also from the diamond fields, confirmed this. Whereas previously, he declared, he had favoured the annexation of Griqualand West to the Cape, in order to give strength to the confederation cause, he now believed that there was much to be said in favour of "the creation of a large thoroughly British colony in the east and north to counteract Dutch influences".[57] Yet the Cape Ministry stood its ground. In a minute on the confederation bill, it spelled out its oft-expressed view that the only acceptable form of alliance with the other South African states would be by absorption rather than by federation.[58] When the Natal Legislative Council's Select Committee on confederation came to consider this minute in July 1877, it not surprisingly discussed simultaneously "the advisability of confederation with the Transvaal".[59]

Carnarvon had meanwhile not abandoned hope that the colonies would see the light. In August 1877 his Permissive Bill completed its passage

54. 8 May 1877. Cf. Shepstone Papers, Robinson to Shepstone, 9 May 1877.
55. Shepstone Papers, Frere to Shepstone, 22 May 1877.
56. *ibid.* Lanyon to Shepstone, 14 August 1877 (Confidential).
57. *ibid.* Barry to Shepstone, May-July 1877.
58. Quoted in *Natal Mercury*, 19 June 1877.
59. N.P.P. 272, Select Committee proceedings.

through Parliament, and in the following February, Molteno's Western party which had been the chief source of opposition to confederation, was dismissed and replaced by a predominantly Eastern Cape group under Gordon Sprigg, who favoured confederation. Frere and Lieutenant-Governor Sir Henry Bulwer of Natal prepared to make arrangements for holding the long-deferred confederation conference in Cape Town during the current session of the Cape Parliament.[60]

The Cape showed no less reluctance than before to commit herself to the confederation cause. Scoffing at the reference to confederation in Frere's speech at the opening of Parliament as "mere incense offered to the official memory of Lord Carnarvon", the *Cape Argus*, the mouthpiece of the opponents of confederation, delivered itself of the verdict that confederation could "safely be left to another generation of statesmen".[61] When, during the session, John Paterson of Port Elizabeth, acting independently, moved in the House of Assembly that the government be authorised to convene a conference of the South African states on confederation, the motion was again defeated by the Westerners. They might share Paterson's hope that confederation would put a stop to Natal's levying of customs duties detrimental to the Cape's interests, and also to her alleged provocation of frontier incidents in Griqualand East and Pondoland. But they were even more conscious of the fact that at that very moment the Natal Legislature was debating measures for the defence of the colony against a threatened Zulu descent upon the tiny white settlement.[62]

Despite these setbacks, Frere reported to the Secretary of State that the serious obstacles to closer union were steadily disappearing.[63] Significantly, all of these concerned the relations between Natal and the Cape far more than the relations between any other states. Frere expressed his conviction that the lessons of the recent Galeka War on the frontier could only bring nearer the day when the responsibility of each colony for its own defence was formally acknowledged and defined, without which no Cape Ministry would for one moment consider undertaking greater responsibilities in Natal or the Transvaal. Territorially, the war had helped to bring the borders of the Cape and Natal closer together: Fingoland, the Idutywa Reserve, Griqualand East, Tambookieland, the St. John's River Territory and Bomvanaland were all in process of being annexed to the Cape. This in turn would facilitate the introduction of a uniform system of native policy in the Cape and Natal, and make possible the formulation of a single customs tariff and the supervision of the clandestine seaborne trade between the two colonies. The only remaining obstacle to confederation seemed to be the absence of self-government in Natal and

60. G.H. 353, Frere to Bulwer, 13 May 1878.
61. 11 May 1878.
62. Reported *ibid.* 18 July 1878, Supplement.
63. G.H. 23/34, Frere to Hicks Beach, 22 July 1878.

the Transvaal, which wary Cape politicians feared might involve the assumtption of additional responsibility by their own colony.

Frere's interpretation of the omens was belied by events. The outbreak of the Zulu War at the beginning of 1879 finally doomed Carnarvon's confederation scheme.[64] Wolseley returned to South Africa, this time to be Governor both of Natal and of the Transvaal, and to have full power to deal with matters relating to the adjacent tribal territories. Cape politicians inferred from this that in any conference on confederation, the representatives of Natal and the Transvaal would merely be mouthing the views of Wolseley, and suspected that the new Governor's aim was to cajole the South African states into relieving Britain of the responsibility for a possible second Zulu War or an anticipated Swazi or Amatonga war.[65] It would obviously be better, they concluded, to avoid the duties and responsibilities which confederation would inevitably thrust upon the colony by leaving administrative power in all the territories embraced by Wolseley's commission in the hands of the British government.[66] "In fact," declared John X. Merriman in characteristically cavalier vein, "to ask us to swamp the germs of self-government and self-reliance by joining a mass of barbarism, still more to fetter ourselves with the delusive charm of Imperial guarantee, is to ask us to commit suicide. There is only one policy for South Africa," he continued, admirably epitomising the attitude which the Cape had for so long adopted, "that is to build up from the foundation of the Cape Colony, to strengthen the hands of that government and trust to the law of centripetal attraction, if I may call it so, which brings small badly governed communities into the arms of their more prosperous and better governed neighbours. Instead of this the Colonial Office sets to work deliberately to destroy existing relations for the purpose of making a new edifice out of the ruins."[67] When Frere prorogued Parliament in September 1879, he proclaimed with classic understatement that "the great question of the union of the South African communities has been postponed for a time".[68]

One of the factors which had made the colonies disinclined to take an active interest in confederation was the existence of the office of the High Commissioner. Natal had always hoped against hope that confederation would be consummated under the protective wing of the Imperial Government, whose chief representative in South Africa was the High Commissioner.[69] The attractiveness of such an arrangement was enhanced by the belief, even in the highest official circles, that the High Commissionership was to be transferred from the Cape to Natal. In the early part of 1870, when the Cape Parliament was discussing a bill to discontinue

64. Merriman Papers, Merriman to Goldwin Smith (Toronto), 17 March 1879.
65. *Cape Argus*, 28 June 1879.
66. *ibid.* 12 July 1879.
67. Merriman Papers, Merriman to (?), 15 July 1879.
68. *Cape Argus*, 13 September 1879.
69. See. for example, the comments of the Natal press upon Barkly's mission in South Africa: *Natal Witness*, 14 April 1871; *Natal Mercury*, 3 October 1874.

the payment out of the colony's revenues of a salary to the Governor in his capacity of High Commissioner, the Attorney-General informed the House that when responsible government was introduced at the Cape, it was not improbable that the office of High Commissioner would be attached to the Governorship of Natal.[70] Both Shepstone and the Natal press expressed their belief that there was good authority for this prediction. When, in the same year, D. D. Buchanan, Daumas and Tsekelo had returned from their mission to England in regard to the annexation of Basutoland, Tsekelo had informed Shepstone that the British Government was so impressed with his handling of the tribes in Natal that the Secretary of State himself was contemplating the abolition of the High Commissionership as it then existed, the annexation to Natal of all the territory between Natal and the Cape (including Basutoland), and the appointment of Shepstone to administer native affairs throughout those territories.[71] By 1873 Shepstone was still convinced that it was only a matter of time before the High Commissionership would be transferred to Natal.[72]

The value of the High Commissionership seemed to increase as crisis followed crisis in the disastrous years of the seventies. There was universal agreement on the need for uniformity in native policy and other common problems; but if confederation was so slow of attainment, the task of maintaining steady centralised control necessarily devolved in the interim upon the High Commissioner. This had become especially clear when, in 1876, Shepstone was sent out to annex the Transvaal. He was careful to assure the High Commissioner that he was anxious to "act under him and with his full concurrence".[73] Two years later, Frere emphasised that centralised control of relations with the surrounding chiefs and their tribes was imperative. "It is impossible," he argued, "to calculate how much waste of life and money and evil results of every kind might have been avoided by a single official charged, as deputy High Commissioner, with the duty of conducting our relations with these border tribes. I cannot see how we are to dispense with something of the kind if we are to avoid endless petty wars and complications of every kind."[74] Sensitive as Natal was about her hard-earned separate identity, even lieutenant-Governor Bulwer agreed with Frere that it was inexpedient to have two representatives of Britain dealing with the Zulus simultaneously. Since the extension of British authority northwards demanded a revision of the system, it was clear that the time had come for all of these matters to be placed in the hands of Britain's chief representative in South Africa, the High Commissioner — as had originally been intended.[75] Bulwer

70. Cape House of Assembly Debates, 29 April 1870 (reported in *Cape Argus*, 30 April 1870).
71. *Natal Mercury*, 14 June 1870; Shepstone Papers, Theophilus to Henrique Shepstone, 16 August 1870.
72. Shepstone Papers, Theophilus to Henrique Shepstone, 31 March 1873.
73. *ibid.* Shepstone to Herbert, 23 October 1876.
74. G.H. 23/34, Frere to Hicks Beach, 1 July 1878.
75. G.H. 281, 414-7, Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 31 August 1878.

went so far as to concur in Frere's suggestion that one means of preparing the way for confederation would be by instructing the Lieutenant-Governors of Natal and the Transvaal to send through the High Commissioner all correspondence with the Secretary of State on matters reserved by Carnarvon's Permissive Act for legislation in future by the Union Parliament. So far as Natal was concerned, Bulwer believed that most of the conditions which had formerly made it necessary for her to be administered as a separate and distinct colony had disappeared. As late as October 1878, a Cape visitor had complained from Pietermaritzburg that communication with the Old Colony was so unreliable "that we keep on dropping our effusions with nothing better than a vague hope that they may in some indefinite future reach the hands of those for whom they are meant".[76] But, only two months later, an optimistic Bulwer reported in far more glowing terms. There was now frequent and regular inter-colonial communication by sea; railways were being constructed both at the Cape and in Natal, while the telegraph had reached Pietermaritzburg from Cape Town, and would soon be extended as far as Pretoria. Until confederation or some other form of inter-state co-operation throughout South Africa was attained, he urged, it was necessary and desirable to achieve greater co-ordination of policy and administration at least between Natal and the Cape.[77]

Yet events were now moving so fast that the High Commissioner's increased control over Natal did not long remain operative. When Wolseley was sent out in 1879, civil and military powers in all the parts of South Africa mainly affected by the Zulu War — Natal, Zululand and the Transvaal — were united in his hands, for he was to be "H.M.'s Special High Commissioner in South-Eastern Africa". As Governor of Natal, he was to have Bulwer continuing to act as his Lieutenant-Governor in terms of the Charter of 1856. Bulwer was directed to ignore the instructions he had been given in the previous year to report to Frere as High Commissioner "on matters relating to native affairs or not connected with the internal affairs of Natal", and to communicate instead with Wolseley.[78] This instruction was bitterly resented by Frere: for, as his apologist comments, its effect was "to divide the field of the High Commissionership at the very moment when it was essential that the execution of British policy in all the European states and native territories should be in the hands of one man".[79] Wolseley offended Frere by refusing to take him into his confidence, and, for example, haughtily rejected his request for assistance from Natal in preserving peace on the Natal-Pondoland border.[80]

By the end of 1879 there was less cause than ever for optimism about the prospects of confederation, whatever form it might take. The Imperial

76. Merriman Pappers, J. Sivewright to Merriman, 19 October 1878.
77. G.H. 281, 490-5, Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 21 December 1878. The *Mercury* (16 April 1879) boggled at "this astounding proposition".
78. G.H. 32, Hicks Beach to Bulwer, 28 May 1879.
79. W. B. Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1923), 52.
80. G.H. 363, Frere to Wolseley, 31 October 1879.

Treasury, recognising the magnitude of the task still confronting Frere in South Africa, agreed to extend for yet another year the special allowance of £2,000 p.a. originally granted to him out of Imperial funds in 1877 because of the special duties which had developed upon the High Commissioner.[81] At the Cape, meanwhile, the popular view was now firmly rooted that Wolseley's appointment foreshadowed the adoption of a retrograde policy in regard to responsible government in Natal,[82] and when, in May 1880, the subject of confederation was once again raised in Parliament, it was summarily rejected. When the relevant blue books on the outbreak of the Zulu War were published, it became clear that, in the interests of confederation, Frere had been intent upon forcing the Zulus into a showdown as early as the beginning of 1877.[83] The indignant Natalians, like their Cape counterparts, therefore ceased any longer to pay even lip-service to the ideal of closer relations. In the 1882 Legislative Council elections, they once again rejected responsible government and opted for continued Imperial protection.[84]

Friction also developed between Natal and the Cape over the possession of the St. John's River territory, Nomansland and Basutoland. But these crises merely highlighted the tension which already existed between the two colonies for the more fundamental reasons outlined in this paper. Had either the Imperial Government or the colonies themselves been able to bring about a closer relationship merely between Natal and the Cape in these years, this may well have been a decisive step towards coercing the land-locked republics into a significantly greater co-ordination of action with the coastal colonies. When, in the mid-eighties, the gold deposits of the Witwatersrand were revealed to the world, the problem almost overnight became infinitely more complex. This is the measure of the failure of two at least of the South African states to give a lead towards the closer co-operation of all the states. For the most that could be said for the confederation campaign itself from that date was that it was proceeding steadily in one direction in particular — sideways.

Dr. B. A. le Cordeur.

81. G.H. 23/36, Frere to Hicks Beach, 27 December 1879; cf. G.H. 1/77, Hicks Beach to Frere, 28 November 1878.
82. G.H. 23/36, Frere to Hicks Beach, 17 June 1879.
83. Shepstone Papers, Broome to Shepstone, 11 September 1879; *Natal Colonist*, 16 September 1879.
84. CHBE,, VIII, 498-9.