

THE CULPABILITY OF SIR BARTLE FRERE IN THE  
DESTRUCTION OF ZULULAND IN 1879

by

Earl M. Friedman

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Lowell J. Satre  
Adviser

March 7, 1972

Karl E. Kiehl  
Dean of the Graduate School

April 7, 1972

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

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In 1878, the proud and independent Zulus were presented with an ultimatum, which if accepted would have deprived them of both their pride and their independence. One man, Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape Colonies, was responsible for the preparation and presentation of this ultimatum. Further, these conditions were prepared and delivered against the expressed wishes of the British Government. Presented with the fait accompli, the British Government had little choice but to back up Frere, and the consequent invasion and destruction of Zululand followed.

This paper investigates the problems associated with the delegation of powers and authority at a far distance from the actual seat of that power, exacerbated by lack of facile communications, by the preoccupation of the delegating authority, and by the willfulness of Sir Bartle Frere.

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## PREFACE

At the beginning of 1879 Zululand existed as a black enclave in South Africa almost completely surrounded by colonies of European countries. Culturally and militarily, it was probably the strongest native state in Africa at the time. Yet, it was destroyed later that year.

Preliminary investigation by the author revealed that one man, Sir Bartle Frere, the High Commissioner of South Africa, was responsible for magnifying incidents, aggravating existing animosities, and misrepresenting events. This culminated in an extraordinary ultimatum which precipitated the invasion of Zululand by British Imperial Forces.

This paper will investigate Frere's policies, actions, the extent of his responsibility, and London's response or lack of response. It will become evident that this is a study of a man's initiative and the consequent effects of his willfulness.

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 Britain at home and beyond the seas.

James A. Williamson, *A Short History of British Expansion* (London, Macmillan Co., 1907), pp. 153-54, *passim*.

## CHAPTER I

## Benjamin Disraeli and The New Conservatism

In the 1860's there appeared a new conservatism in England, the chief exponent of which was Benjamin Disraeli, later, earl of Beaconsfield. The members of the new conservative party believed in government for the people rather than by the people. In contrast to the slogan of "peace, retrenchment, and reform" of the new Liberal party under the leadership of William Gladstone and advocacy of a wider suffrage and new legislation for the improvement of the masses, the new Conservatives believed in a moderate extension of the suffrage, contending that legislative power should be in the hands of educated and wealthy men. Their leading articles of political faith were a firm foreign policy, an extension of British territory in most parts of the world, and a federation of all the colonies in a great British empire. This policy differed from that of the Liberals in that it entailed not peace, but war; not retrenchment, but heavy expenditures on army and navy; not legislation shaped only for the United Kingdom, but legislation for the greater Britain at home and beyond the seas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James A. Williamson, A Short History of British Expansion (London: Macmillan Co., 1967), pp. 183-204, passim.

The Conservatives gained a majority of fifty in the general elections of February 1874 and for the first time since 1841 they controlled in the House of Commons a majority upon which they could rely. Disraeli became prime minister and was immediately confronted with the Irish problem. The question of Home Rule for Ireland was the main domestic preoccupation of Disraeli's second ministry until his fall in 1880. In foreign affairs he determined to safeguard all routes to India. To this end he intervened in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 and secured the island of Cyprus at the Congress of Berlin the following year in order to protect both the integrity of the Porte and the Suez Canal.

Disraeli was also preoccupied with the northern accesses to India. The key was Afghanistan, and in 1878 a war for the control of this backward but strategically located country was fought against the Afghans. The strife in the East interested the British government more than the conflicts in South Africa, but events in the latter continued to intrude at Downing Street.

The route to India around the Cape of Good Hope was still of major importance and Disraeli was intent on controlling it. In addition to its strategic location, discovery of the diamond fields around Kimberley in 1869 led to increased British interest in South Africa and to pressure for annexation of these semi-autonomous lands. Griqualand West was made a crown colony in 1873, Basutoland was annexed to the Cape Colony in 1871, and the Transvaal was annexed in 1877. Zululand remained independent and

potentially a thorn in the side of the contemplated federation.

Under the chieftain Shaka, the Zulus, in the early nineteenth century, had become the most powerful tribe that South Africa had ever seen. Ravaging both north and south, Shaka swept Natal almost clear of inhabitants and established his rule over territory coincident with the limits of Natal and Zululand as constituted in 1803. After a series of internecine succession struggles, Cetywayo came to the throne in 1872. In 1878, Zululand, a country of some 570,000 square miles<sup>2</sup> with a population variously estimated at from 150,000<sup>3</sup> to 400,000<sup>4</sup>, was bordered by British Natal on the south, British Transvaal on the west, Portuguese territory and Swaziland (already under mortgage to the British) on the north, and the ocean on the east.

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<sup>2</sup>Hammond Medallion World Atlas, (Maplewood, New Jersey: Hammond, Inc., 1966) p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, Vol. 244, col. 1879.

<sup>4</sup>John Martineau, The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere (London: John Murray, 1895) II, p. 278.

## CHAPTER II

FRERE: GOVERNMENT SERVANT, IMPERIALIST, AND  
SELF-APPOINTED SAVIOR OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA

Henry Bartle Edward Frere, sixth son and ninth child of Edward and Mary Anne Frere, was born at Llanelly, Carmarthenshire, on March 29, 1815.<sup>5</sup> He was educated at Bath Grammar School and at Haileybury, which had become renowned for training civil servants for the East Indian Service. He had a classical education, including a grounding in Oriental languages. Entering the Indian service in 1834, he remained in India for over thirty years with only brief visits to England. He rose rapidly in the hierarchy and for nine years was Chief Commissioner in Sind. He became Governor of Bombay and a member both of the Council for India and of the Viceroy's Council. In 1872 he was sent to Zanzibar to negotiate the suppression of the slave trade. The Geographical Society made him its president; he was honored by both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Indeed, Frere belonged to the new generation of imperialists announced by David Livingstone and realized by Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Martineau, I, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius William de Kiewiet, The Imperial Factor in South Africa (Cambridge, England: Cambridge U. Press, 1937), p. 127.



Frere's South African career began on October 13, 1877. Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, asked Frere to become Governor of the Cape Colony. Frere agreed to the position, sailed from England with his family on the ship "Hesperus" and arrived in Capetown on March 31, 1877.<sup>7</sup>

Frere was immediately confronted with a "native problem". He arrived in South Africa with a set attitude towards "uncivilized" indigenous populations which had been formed during his long years of service in India. Before becoming governor, he summarized his general system of dealing with these native populations in this way: "I like to see the natives and Europeans living in peace and harmony. From the experience of the British Government in every part of the world, but especially in India, it is quite possible for a native and comparatively uncivilised power to exist alongside a European power, and to be gradually raised by it to a higher stage of civilization, without losing either its individuality or such natural customs as are not inconsistent with civilisation. But it is absolutely necessary that the two powers should be from the first which is to be superior, and the other to be subordinate. This point settled, a system of even-handed justice administered to all alike without distinction of race or colour, so that the natives and Europeans can live together in peace and harmony. But it is absolutely necessary that the Government which is civilised on European principles should have the upper hand. I know of no instance in history when a native Government, based on native and uncivilised principles, has succeeded either in ruling European subjects or in maintaining its own independence in the neighbourhood of European power."<sup>8</sup>

Frere declared that he was not actuated by "any desire..

to spread 'civilisation, commerce, and christianity' by

Frere, *Frere's Journals*, II, 164.

*British State Papers*, 1878-9, LII, 643.

the sword."<sup>9</sup> However, he later (June 18, 1879) stated, euphemistically but clearly, that policy must be based on, "a fundamental principle that the supremacy of the British Crown, as representing civilised government, should be unquestionable in any native state surrounded as the Zulus are by British subjects and their allies."<sup>10</sup> There was also an ecclesiastical aspect of Frere's doctrine. This is probably best expressed in a letter of December 17, 1878, by a missionary, the Reverend P. D. Hepburn to Frere:

God, our God, put it into the minds of our rulers that all tribes in Southeast and East Africa must submit to British power and that it is in the interest of all Africans to do so. Heathenism must perish; God wills it so. . . only the utter destruction of the Zulus can secure peace in South Africa. . . we have the approbation of God, our Queen, and our own conscience.<sup>11</sup>

Based on these premises, what Frere would wish to do with Zululand was not doubtful, and to find a cause for war would not be difficult. It never is. Joseph Chamberlain, at the time an M.P., put it well on March 27, 1879, during a debate in Commons on the recent course of events in South Africa, "When a man like Sir Bartle Frere asserted the high moral obligation of imposing their [the government's] superiority on his neighbours, they might be sure that a pretext for war would not be wanting."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 454.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., LIV, 150.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., LIII, 309.

<sup>12</sup>Hansard, Vol. 244, col. 1913.

Frere was also unequivocal when it came to the question of confederation. His superior, Lord Carnarvon, a Tory, during his brief stint of eight months as Colonial Secretary in the Earl of Derby's 1866 cabinet, had introduced the bill that led to the confederation of the North American colonies. When Carnarvon again assumed the same post in 1874 he immediately began to push for the same scheme in South Africa. This was clearly in accord with the new Conservatism. He explained this desire in a letter of January 25, 1876 to Sir Henry Barkly, then Governor of the Cape Colony: "As long as South Africa continues as at present, split up into several provinces having no common bond of union between them, Her Majesty's Government cannot accept or be a party to any extension of territory by the South African Republic. . ."<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding various vicissitudes, Carnarvon pushed ahead. First, James Anthony Froude, the historian, then, General Sir Garnet Wolseley, were sent to South Africa to persuade the recalcitrants. Indeed, it was at Froude's suggestion that Frere was invited to accept the Governorship, and in the aforementioned letter of October 13, 1876 Carnarvon explained to Frere his concern with confederation:

. . .But the war between the Transvaal Republic and the natives has had this further effect: it rapidly ripened all South African policy. . .It brings us near to the object and end for which I have now for two years been steadily labouring--the Union of South

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<sup>13</sup> Sir Arthur Hardinge, The Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, Fourth Earl of Carnarvon 1831-1890, Edited by Elisabeth Countess of Carnarvon (London: Oxford U. Press, 1925), II, 228.

African Colonies and States. I am indeed now considering the details of a Bill for their confederation. . . and I propose to press, by all means in my power, my confederation policy in South Africa. . . [You are] the statesman who seems to me the most capable of carrying my scheme of confederation into effect. . . I do not estimate the time required for the work of confederating and of consolidating the confederated states at more than two years.<sup>14</sup>

Frere replied in his letter of acceptance that "there are few things which I should personally like better than to be associated in any way with such a great policy as yours in South Africa."<sup>15</sup>

Very shortly after his arrival in Africa, March, 1877, Frere recommended the annexation of the whole of Damaraland and Namaqualand, territory extending seven hundred miles along the west coast. His recommendation was based upon the belief that these annexations would eliminate a potential threat to the security of British colonies. To his great regret, the protectorate was refused by Carnarvon, who believed these wastelands would be of no economic or strategic value.<sup>16</sup> On December 19, 1877, Frere interpreted Carnarvon to mean: "Your object is not conquest, but simply supremacy up to Delgoa Bay."<sup>17</sup> Up to Delgoa Bay included Zululand. Clearly, Frere desired British control from coast to coast.

Lord Carnarvon resigned in January 1878 in protest over the ordering of the British fleet to the Dardanelles

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<sup>14</sup> Martineau, II, 161-2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., II, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., II, 190-1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II, 259.

to protect British interests and was replaced by Sir Michael Hicks Beach, a rather "shy and diffident man."<sup>18</sup> Hicks Beach concurred with Lord Beaconsfield's "forward" policy but was much more concerned and knowledgeable with regard to the Porte, Russia, and Afghanistan than the muddled situation in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> In any case, there was an older, experienced diplomat in the latter area to advise and guide him. This man was Frere, who, on August 9, 1878, urged the following:

The time has come when it is necessary we should assert distinctly and unmistakably the position in which we have been placed by the annexation of the Transvaal and the consequent addition to our duties and responsibilities as regards all tribes between Natal and the Portugese border. That position is one of civilised sovereignty as regards our own possessions, not compatible with any undefined frontier rights of other powers within our borders and not brooking any division of such rights with other less civilised neighbours.<sup>20</sup>

The "tribes between Natal and the Portugese border" were the Zulus. The following day Frere again emphasized to Hicks Beach, "You must be master, as representative of the sole sovereign power, up to the Portugese frontier, on both the East and West coasts."<sup>21</sup>

As the outline of the High Commissioner's design for the independent Africans became clearer, however, the

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<sup>18</sup>Lady Victoria Hicks Beach, Life of Sir Michael Hicks Beach (Earl St. Aldwyn), (London: Macmillan and Co., 1932), I, 7.

<sup>19</sup>William F. Monypenny and George E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920), VI, 417.

<sup>20</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 461.

<sup>21</sup>Martineau, II, 259.

chorus of admiring acquiescence which had hitherto greeted Frere's proposals at the Colonial office was suddenly broken by a dissentient voice. There followed a verbal duel between two of Hicks Beach's advisers (Frere, for one), which, though brief, was of an intensity and significance unprecedented since the inception of the Confederation policy. The voice of protest was that of Edward Fairfield, who, after Sir Robert Herbert, had become the permanent official with the most knowledge of South Africa; it was raised almost simultaneously with the growth of Cabinet anxiety over the possible repercussions of a Zulu war.

In a minute written on October 8, 1878, Fairfield delivered a deliberate and far-reaching attack on Frere's proposals for the annexation of the whole South African coastline. Boldly recalling the disgraced abandonment policy of the 1850's, he remarked that it "had much to recommend it," and cautioned that "Sir Bartle Frere's proposals should always be regarded as possibly connected with the project of an 'African Empire' which policy and phrase he himself invented at the time of the Ashanti War. He is doing his best to make his phrase a . . . [sad] reality."<sup>22</sup>

The foregoing extracts make perfectly clear that Frere regarded war with the Zulus as inevitable because of

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<sup>22</sup>Minute quoted in, Clement Francis Goodfellow, Great Britain and South African Confederation 1870-1881 (Cape Town: Rustica Press, Ltd., 1966), p. 163.

the relations which exist between civilized and "comparatively uncivilized" peoples. He was well aware, nevertheless, that people of British methods of thought would not agree with him, and that their crudities necessitated the discovery of pretexts, which, being accepted, would appeal to their sense of justice. Understanding, moreover, that government sanction of war could be secured only by convincing the ministers that it would not be unpopular, he set himself to the work of formulating complaints which he hoped would be regarded as sufficient reasons for war.

of the land belonging to their unlettered neighbors. This process was described by Henry Osborn, formerly resident magistrate at Newcastle, later Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal Government, in a letter of September 27, 1878:

The Boers--as they have done in other cases and are still doing--encroached by degrees upon native territory commencing by obtaining permission to graze stock upon portions of it at certain seasons of the year, followed by individual graziers obtaining from native headmen a sort of license to squat upon certain defined portions, ostensibly, in order to keep other Boer squatters away from the same land. These licenses, temporarily extended, as friendly or neighborly acts, by uneducated headmen, after a few seasons of occupation by the Boer, are construed by him as title, and his permanent occupation ensues.

These encroached upon Boer concepts and encroachments with an old system of cover and religious rationalizations:

The Boers had force of their own, and every right of democracy but they also had what they seriously believe to be a higher title, in the old commands they found in parts of their Bible to exterminate the Gentiles, and take their land in possession.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Sir James G. Colenso and Dr. Carl Friedrich Schlegel, History of the Bible Wars and the Original Nations, Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1911, p. 112.

## CHAPTER III

## UNEASY NEIGHBORS: ZULUS, BOERS, AND BRITISH

The Dispute between the Boers and Zulus concerning the boundary line of their respective countries had existed for many years, its origin and growth being entirely attributable to the well-known and usually successful process by which the Dutch Boers had gradually possessed themselves of the land belonging to their unlettered neighbors. This process was described by Henry Osborn, formerly resident magistrate at Newcastle, later Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal Government, in a letter of September 27, 1878:

. . . The Boers--as they have done in other cases and are still doing--encroached by degrees upon native territory; commencing by obtaining permission to graze stock upon portions of it at certain seasons of the year, followed by individual grazers obtaining from native headmen a sort of license to squat upon certain defined portions, ostensibly, in order to keep other Boer squatters away from the same land. These licenses, temporarily extended, as friendly or neighbourly acts, by unauthorised headmen, after a few seasons of occupation by the Boer, are construed by him as title, and his permanent occupation ensues.<sup>23</sup>

Frere defended these Boer conquests and encroachments with an odd mixture of power and religious rationalizations:

The Boers had force of their own, and every right of conquest; but they also had what they seriously believed to be a higher title, in the old commands they found in parts of their Bible to exterminate the Gentiles, and take their land in possession.

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<sup>23</sup>Letter in Frances E. Colenso and Lt. Col. Edward Durnford, History of the Zulu War and its Origin (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1881), p. 122.



We may freely admit that they misinterpreted the text, and were utterly mistaken in its application. But they had at least a sincere belief in the Divine authority for what they did, and therefore a far higher title than the Zulus could claim for all they acquired.<sup>24</sup>

Other contemporary British were not so comfortable with this type of specious reasoning. The following account, by British soldiers who had just fought a bitter war with the Boers' adversaries, characterized the Boers:

The typical Boer is doubtless a pattern of hospitality, simplicity of heart, fondness for his home and family, and of those general domestic attributes which are so dear to an Englishman. But in his relations and contact with the native races and real owners of the soil, the Dutch Boer seems to lose all sense of reason and justice, and to remember only those early and bloodstained annals of pioneering when the white man and black neither gave nor asked for quarter in their struggle for supremacy in the land. Indeed his intolerance of a native is so intense that he cannot be induced to look upon him as a human being, but he regards the unfortunate aboriginal as a wild beast to be hunted and shot down.<sup>25</sup>

Since 1873 the office of President of the South African Republic (the Transvaal) had been held by a Dutchman, Reverend Thomas Francois Burgers, whose wisdom did not equal his ambition and whose schemes of aggrandizement soon landed his adopted country in a morass of difficulties. By the beginning of 1877, though the territories of the Republic were nominally widely extended, her southeastern border was seriously threatened by the Zulus whom Burgers's

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>25</sup>Major Waller Ashe and Captain E. V. Wyatt Edgell, The Story of the Zulu Campaign (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1880), p. 12-3.

policies had irritated to the verge of open hostility.<sup>26</sup> Added to this, a disastrous campaign against the native chief Sikukuni had been concluded by a humiliating peace for the Republic. Against this background Carnarvon worked toward Confederation.

In September 1876 Carnarvon appointed Sir Theophilus Shepstone as Special Commissioner to the South African Republic. The latter apparently had received wide discretionary powers and after long political maneuvering involving the connivance of Burgers and other Dutch officials, the annexation of Transvaal by Great Britain was formally proclaimed on April 12, 1877.<sup>27</sup>

The Zulus watched uneasily to see the effect of the combination of British with Boer interests. They had looked upon the British in Natal as their friends, or at any rate as a rival power to the Boers, and therefore a useful ally for themselves. Cetywayo had previously sent a message to Shepstone, "to urge, what has already been urged so frequently, that the government of Natal be extended so as to intervene between the Zulus and the territory of the Transvaal Republic."<sup>28</sup> Shepstone had dealt with the Zulus on the most friendly terms, but their suspicion was aroused by his sudden accession to power in Transvaal.

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<sup>26</sup>Hicks Beach, I. p. 75.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>28</sup>Colenso and Durnford, 10.

Relations had been pacific between the Zulus and their British neighbors. There had been other native trouble, however, in the Cape Colony on its northeastern border. The Ninth Kaffir War had erupted in 1877 and had led to an interesting incident which foretold something of Frere's imperious method of handling problems.

There arose a dispute about whether colonial or imperial forces should be used to subdue the Kaffir Gaikas and Gcalela. Those in favor of using the Colonials were the elected (1872) Prime Minister of Cape Colony John C. Molteno; the Cape Commissioner of Crown Lands; the Cape Secretary for Native Affairs; and the Commandant General of the Colonial forces. Frere, representing the imperial interests, determined to take control of the conduct of the war, and when Molteno resisted, he used his power to dismiss the elected Chief Executive and his ministry. One observer had this comment about Frere's actions:

Frere's dismissal of the Ministry was an act almost unique in the constitutional history of the British Empire. In the light of the subsequent growth and practice of parliamentary government his action stands condemned as unconstitutional and a threat to some of the most important principles of colonial responsible government.<sup>29</sup>

Frere was quite dismayed and shocked at the "innocent trust" displayed by the British in Natal towards the Zulus' intentions. He had to go so far as to search for signs of general alarm and apprehension to justify his actions. People said in Natal, "There will be no fighting.

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<sup>29</sup>de Kiewiet, 172-3.

The Zulus are too good-natured."<sup>30</sup> As Frere began to sow the area with the seeds of fear, mistrust, and conquest, the British began to look with suspicion upon faithful blacks who had worked as servants and performed other duties for many years under the most peaceful conditions. It was only long after the disaster at Isandhlwana, when the military situation had stabilized in favor of the Imperial forces and the fruits of a victory became apparent that "at large and enthusiastic public meetings held in every town of any consequence unanimous votes of approval and sympathy [for Frere] were passed."<sup>31</sup>

The basic and very general difference between the way the Dutch Boers and the British tended to regard the Zulu was that the former held the native in less than contempt, the black was chattel and treated as livestock. The British looked upon the natives as heathen children, to be given religion and a modicum of civilization. Most British were willing for this process to be evolutionary--Frere was more impatient. If the natives must be forcibly spoon-fed, Frere would do the feeding. He would use an ultimatum to open the Zulu mouth.

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<sup>30</sup> Lt. General The Right Honorable Sir William F. Butler, An Autobiography (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 196.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wilmot, History of the Zulu War (London: Richardson and Best, 1880), p. 170-1.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROVOCATIONS, REAL AND IMAGINED

On December 11, 1878, Frere's ultimatum was delivered to the Zulus. The ultimatum took the form of "two Messages" to Cetywayo dealing with: (1) "the disputed boundary question"; (2) the Sirayo's sons' affair; (3) the Smith and Deighton affair; (4) the Umbelini affair; (5) the coronation promises; (6) the Zulu "military system"; and, (7) the treatment of missionaries.<sup>32</sup> Compliance with the demands in respect to numbers two and three was required within twenty days, and assent in respect to number five, six, and seven within thirty days. Each of the above points will be discussed.

The boundary dispute had gone back to 1848 when the Zulu chief Mpande had agreed with the Boers to the Buffalo River as his western boundary, but, since there was no established government in the territory to the north of him the actual boundary remained in doubt. Nevertheless, the Transvaalers, land-hungry as ever, took possession of all they could. A large number of messages were sent from the Zulu kings to the Natal government between 1861 and 1876 complaining about this encroachment and asking for help. Finally on February 26, 1878, a Boundary Commission was appointed to investigate the matter; but by that time

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<sup>32</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 633-41.

Transvaal farmers had settled in the district and established quasi-legal rights over the Zulu protests. The Commission heard evidence from March 21 to April 13, 1878, and issued its report on June 20, 1878. The report was unexpectedly favorable to the Zulus and the boundary proposed left a number of Transvaalers in what is now Utrecht on the Zulu side of the boundary line. In essence the report stated "there has been no cession of land at all by the Zulu kings, past or present, or by the nation."<sup>33</sup>

The report had to be submitted to Sir Bartle Frere for his final decision. He received it on July 15, 1878, but did not announce his decision until nearly five months later on December 11, 1878. During this period he searched for ways to evade the decisions of the Commission. The Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, Sir Henry Bulwer, had completely concurred with the findings of the Commission and argued that the right of the Zulus to the land awarded to them was being acknowledged, so far as it was occupied by the Boers who chose to remain in possession, "in name only."<sup>34</sup> Frere replied by saying that the British government could not "make over to Cetywayo more than we ourselves possessed, viz., the sovereign rights over the land . . . I do not agree with you . . . regarding what it is just to cede to Cetywayo in the disputed territory."<sup>35</sup> Frere

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<sup>33</sup>Colenso and Durnford, 156.

<sup>34</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LIII, 59.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 61-2.

knew that the British government had nothing to cede. The finding of the Commissioners had been that the land had always belonged to the Zulus.

Even though Bulwer advised prompt action on the Report of the Commission, Frere did not notify the Zulus until December 11, 1878, and he kept the Colonial Office in the dark until his letter of October 14, 1878 was received by Hicks Beach on November 16, 1878.<sup>36</sup> Frere "accepted" the Commission's recommendations but, instead of paying cash compensation as the Commission had suggested, he left the Transvaal farmers with full private rights to the land which they occupied under Cetywayo's sovereignty. Patently, this was no solution, but as we shall see, by December Frere could only see one possible solution to the entire "Zulu dilemma".

Point number two in the ultimatum was probably less significant, but Frere chose to magnify it. In July, 1878,<sup>37</sup> two of the wives of Sirayo (a Zulu Chief-tain) had fled across the Buffalo River and taken refuge in a border hut in Natal. The women were pursued across the border by two parties of Zulus led by three sons and a brother of Sirayo. The women were captured, taken back into Zululand, and apparently killed. Bulwer immediately demanded reparation from Cetywayo for the border violation, at the same time admitting that "There is no reason whatsoever as yet to believe that these acts have been committed

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<sup>36</sup>Hicks Beach, I, 108.

<sup>37</sup>The exact date is uncertain. Most sources are divided between July 26 and July 28, 1878.

with the consent or knowledge of the king." And later, on November 18, 1878, he said, "I do not hold the king responsible for the commission of the act, because there is nothing to show that it had his previous concurrence or even cognizance. But he becomes responsible for the act after its commission, and for such reparation as we may consider is due for it."<sup>38</sup> Bulwer initially asked that the leaders of the raiding parties should be surrendered for trial in Natal.

Cetywayo, after inquiring into the matter, acknowledged that the young warriors had done wrong, but observed that he was glad to find out that they had hurt no one belonging to the English. He wrote further to Bulwer: ". . . His Excellency will not take it in the light he sees the Natal Government seem to do, as what Sirayo's sons did he can only attribute to a rash act of boys, who in the zeal for their father's house did not think of what they were doing."<sup>39</sup> The request of the Natal Government concerning the surrender of the offenders, he said, should be laid before the great men of the Zulu people, to be decided upon by them; he could not do it alone. He acknowledged that the boys "deserve punishment" and sent fifty pounds as a solatium, which Bulwer refused to accept.

Agreement not having been reached when Frere arrived in Natal, he gladly perceived the value of the

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<sup>38</sup> Colenso and Durnford, 167.

<sup>39</sup> British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 282.



incident for insertion in a war-ultimatum, and at once wrote to Hicks Beach, September 30, 1878, that if the ringleaders were not "given up to justice, it will be necessary to send to the Zulu King an ultimatum which must put an end to pacific relations with our neighbours."<sup>40</sup> Disagreeing with Frere, Bulwer said, October 25, 1878, that the affair could not, "be held to have any connection with the political excitement or uneasiness referred to. They were acts of violence committed by individual Zulu subjects, and connected solely with domestic troubles at the kraal to which the men belonged."<sup>41</sup> He further proposed on November 18 that Cetywayo might be given the option of surrendering the ringleaders, "which secures the personal punishment of the offenders, or else by the payment of a fine by the King and nation so heavy as to be a punishment on the nation and a sufficient guarantee and security against the commission of similar offences in future."<sup>42</sup> Frere, however, insisted on severer measures, saying, "I think it quite necessary that the delivery up to justice of the offenders in this case should have been demanded, and should now be peremptorily insisted on, together with a fine for the delay in complying with the reiterated demand."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 1880, L, p. 296.  
<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 1878-9, LIII, p. 621.  
<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 605.  
<sup>43</sup>Colenso and Durnford, p. 169.

At this point Hicks Beach interceded and in his dispatch to Frere of November 21, he stated:

The abduction and murder of the Zulu woman [sic] who had taken refuge in Natal is undoubtedly a serious matter and no sufficient reparation for it has yet been made. But I observe that Cetywayo has expressed his regret for this occurrence; and although the compensation offered by him was inadequate there would seem to have been nothing in his conduct with regard to it which would preclude the hope of a satisfactory arrangement.<sup>44</sup>

Frere agreed with nobody. He much later stated his defense:

I cannot think that the fact of his not being personally concerned in either of the two cases for which he has been fined is any excuse for him. It is a penalty which an autocrat of his position, at the head of such a Government as that of Zululand, always has to pay, that he must be personally responsible for everything done by his own people of which any of his neighbours can complain. A constitutional monarch is of course not responsible, and can plead municipal laws and the individual responsibility of subjects, and can give satisfaction for insults or injuries to other powers without loss of personal dignity; but an autocrat, whether Zulu or European, cannot do so, and unless he submits to the personal humiliation, if it is involved in the Act, of giving up the offenders (who in this case happen, I believe, to be court favourites), he cannot plead personal irresponsibility.<sup>45</sup>

Where Frere found support or authority for his view of the liabilities of autocrats he did not say. In the course of the subsequent debate in the House of Lords, on March 25, 1879, Viscount Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India, speaking on behalf of the government, disapproved of the affair having been made a casus belli.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, p. 336.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., LIII, p. 60.

<sup>46</sup>Hansard, vol. 244, cols. 1626-7.

And Lord Kimberley, afterwards Colonial Secretary, said, "With regard to the carrying off of two women, it should be remembered that border forays are of constant occurrence; and if they are to be regarded as insults to the British nation, scarcely a month will pass in South Africa in which there will not be an occasion for war with some tribe or other."<sup>47</sup> In the Commons, Leonard Courtney said on March 31, 1879:

. . . in Zululand every woman was the property of some one man. . . If the Government had realized this relation between the sexes, then the pursuit of the women who ran away in our territory by the sons of Sirayo, and their recapture, would have been seen to be nothing more in the eyes of the Zulus than the pursuit of two runaway colts. And if this was kept in mind, the House would understand what was admitted in this Correspondence--that over and over again such claims had been acceded to, and women had been taken back from one side to the other as property--lost, stolen, or strayed.<sup>48</sup>

It is somewhat of a paradox, at least, that Frere did not look at the affair so lightly, inasmuch as he held these "uncivilized" savages in such small regard. But, it should be more and more apparent that any event, no matter how trivial, could serve as a pretext.

If Sirayo's case could not be overlooked, less stress might surely have been laid on the case of Smith and Deighton. Smith<sup>49</sup>, a surveyor in the Colonial Engineer's department, accompanied by a trader, Deighton, had gone to inspect a road down to the Tugela River, near

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., col. 1675.

<sup>48</sup>Hansard, v. 245, cols. 31-2.

<sup>49</sup>Only surnames are given in all consulted sources for the two white men.

Fort Buckingham in September 1878. The Zulu mind being in a very excited state at the time owing to the obvious British preparation for war--the natives had received reports from Natal of troop arrivals and had seen warships close to the Zulu shore--Smith was specially instructed to proceed upon his errand alone, and with great discretion. When the white men reached an islet in the middle of the river (one which was generally in the middle of the river when it was full--it was low at this time), they were seized by Zulus whom Cetywayo had sent to guard all border crossings. The two men were detained for about an hour and a half, while questions were asked: "What are you doing here?" "What had the soldiers come to Greytown for?" "What did the white men want coming down there?" They were finally allowed to depart. Wheelwright, a Government official to whom Deighton reported the matter a week after it occurred, said: "The fact that two white men took no notice of 'lots of Zulus shouting out' from their own bank, 'What do you want there?' but 'walked quietly along' as if they had not heard, or as if they were deaf, very naturally confirmed the suspicion that they were about no good."<sup>50</sup>

Originally, Frere blamed the two white men. In a dispatch of October 6, 1878, all that he said on the subject was as follows:

His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor regards the surveyor's going down to the ford as an indiscretion, and it, no doubt, was one of those acts which, however allowable in ordinary time, may, at a period of excite-

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 175.

ment like the present, lead to serious consequences. But it is evident that it is but a precarious state of peace which is liable to be broken as a consequence of such an indiscretion.<sup>51</sup>

In his reply of November 21, Hicks Beach agreed with that view, saying "I concur with you in attributing no special importance to the seizure and temporary arrest of the surveyors, which was partly due to their own indiscretion, and was evidently in no way sanctioned by the Zulu Authorities."<sup>52</sup> Bulwer was uncertain whether the incident had occurred on territory of Natal or of Zululand. It occurred he said, "on the very border line."<sup>53</sup> But, in any case, he considered, as he said on November 18 that:

The visit paid by Mr. Smith with his companion to the Middle Drift, for the purpose of inspecting the drift, was a step much to be regretted and condemned. The Zulus have always looked upon the new road which was lately made to that drift with very great mistrust of its object. . . . The time chosen by those who sent Mr. Smith to inspect the drift was a time when the Zulu mind was greatly excited, and not altogether without cause, by the reports which reached them that a great number of troops had arrived in Natal, that these troops had come with the intention of invading Zululand, and that such was the talk everywhere in Natal both on the part of soldiers and Colonists. . . . The Zulu people living on the other side could only look on this act from one point of view. . . . I am bound to say that I think the proceeding was, under the circumstances, a very injudicious one, and almost amounted to a culpable provocation on our part which must in some degree extenuate the offence of the Zulus. . . .<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 321.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 618.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 605-6.

Frere, however, now committed a volte face and regretted his previous stance. In the formal ultimatum of December 11, 1878, he gave the following version:

These two British subjects, Messieurs Smith and Deighton, were, whilst at or near the Drift, in the month of September last, surrounded by a party of 15 Zulus, who, armed with guns and assegais, in an excited state, took hold of the two white men and made them sit down, demanding what they were doing there, as the grounds belonged to Cetywayo. Gradually the Zulus became more quiet, and, after detaining the two white men for an hour and a half, or thereabouts, they allowed them to go. This interference with and treatment of two British subjects was an interference and treatment which were unwarrantable. It was an offence against the persons of two British subjects which cannot be passed over without notice, and, as a punishment for the offence and a warning against the commission of similar offences in future, the High Commissioner requires that a fine of 100 head of cattle shall be paid to the British Government. This fine also must be paid within the period of 20 days from the date of this communication being made.<sup>55</sup>

Frere followed this up the next day with a dispatch to Hicks Beach which must have come as a shock to the latter. Now, disputing Bulwer's view, Frere stated, "I cannot at all agree with his Excellency in the doubt here expressed, or in his general estimate of the outrage." Smith and Deighton, he said, "were on the British side," were pulled about and maltreated "for at least an hour and a half." He went on, "The action of the Zulus would have been, in my opinion, an outrageous insult, for which exemplary satisfaction should have been exacted." And then, reverting to his pet theory of the relations between the civilized and uncivilized, Frere added:

Nor can I find in what the Zulus did any excuse for which allowance should in my opinion

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 637.

be made, knowing, as I do full well, that in dealing with people in the Zulus' state of civilisation, there is no more fatal mistake, especially at times of tension and irritation like the present, than to pass over, or to slightly notice, insults like that in question. Such a course may be wise in dealing with an exceptional outrage committed by servants of a strong civilised Government, but its only effect, when we are dealing with a power like the Zulus, is to increase arrogance and insolence and render serious collision inevitable.<sup>56</sup>

Other people might imagine that in dealing with the "comparatively uncivilized" nations certain allowances ought to be made, and that the way to maintain good relations with them was by exhibitions of forbearance, consideration, and kindness, rather than by the elevation of a trumpery affair into "an outrageous insult for which exemplary satisfaction should have been exacted." When studying Frere's methods, one cannot help contrasting them with those of Livingstone.

In the course of the subsequent debate in parliament, Viscount Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India, remarked, "With respect to the case of the surveyors, I do not think there was really much in that at all."<sup>57</sup> Lord Kimberley, a member of the Opposition, added, "I need not refer to the case of the surveyors, for it is too trumpery a matter."<sup>58</sup> Lord Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said, "I agree that there were demands, such as those relating to the engineers, which it was

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 621-2.

<sup>57</sup>Hansard, 1879, vol. 244, col. 1627.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., cols. 1674-5.

not desirable to put in a communication of this importance."<sup>59</sup> Hicks Beach himself passed off the affair with the remark that he would "not touch upon it." "I think it is a very small matter." That Frere should have declared it to be "an outrageous insult" is indisputable evidence of his purpose.

In addition to the demands over the surveying affair, Frere's ultimatum contained the following:

There is also the case of Umbelini, [also known as Mbilini], a Swazi refugee living in the Zulu country, who is charged with having recently made a murderous raid into the country north of the Pongola, which is claimed as British territory by the Transvaal Government. It will be necessary for the offenders in this case to be given up to be tried by the Transvaal Courts for the offence of which they are accused; and a further communication will be made to Cetywayo when the Transvaal Government has stated who, besides Umbelini, must be given up to be tried.<sup>60</sup>

Umbelini was a Swazi chief who, having been unsuccessful in a local quarrel, took refuge in Zululand, whence he returned to his country to try again. Frere knew perfectly well that the Transvaal had never claimed the territory into which Umbelini made his "murderous raid." In his dispatch of January 24, 1879, he even admitted, "I was not aware when Umbelini's raid was first reported that to reach the people he massacred he must have passed out of Zululand over the strip of country which we, as successors to the Transvaal Government, are

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., vol. 245, col. 118.

<sup>60</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 637.



bound to interpose as a barrier to Zulu aggressions north of the Pongola."<sup>61</sup> Frere was not very scrupulous when engaged in constructing reasons for attacking Zululand. His lordly attitude may be seen in his Memorandum on Mr. Rudolph's Report of Zulu Encroachment at Luneberg of October 6, 1878, in which he said that if Cetywayo "has any claims to the north of the Pongola river, he must state them for the consideration and decision of Her Majesty's Government, who will not permit any aggression either on the Transvaal territory or that of our friends and allies the Swazies."<sup>62</sup>

Hicks Beach, when dealing with the ultimatum in parliament, passed over the Umbelini subject very lightly. He did not attempt to justify it further than by quotation of an ambiguous document which, he argued, showed that Cetywayo had authority over Umbelini. He made no attempt to substantiate the allegation of the ultimatum.

One section of Frere's ultimatum dealt with a Zulu coronation. Panda, the Zulu king, died in 1872. Shortly thereafter, messengers were sent to the Governor of Natal asking that Theophilus Shepstone should attend Cetywayo's coronation. In his ultimatum, Frere stated:

In consenting to this, the British Government had no selfish object of any kind. . . . In taking part, therefore, the only conditions it made were in favour of the good government of the people. At a formal meeting, held previous to the installation, between Mr. Shepstone and Cetywayo and the

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., LIII, 55.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., LII, 323.

headmen of the Zulu nation, several matters were discussed, chief among which were certain regulations or laws for the better Government of the Zulu people which were to be proclaimed on the occasion of the installation. Subsequently, on the day of the installation, those laws were formally proclaimed by Mr. Shepstone . . . who represented the British Government in Natal, and proclaimed with the formal assent of Cetywayo, of the chief men of the nation and of the nation there assembled. . . . These laws for the well-being of the Zulu people were the conditions required by the British Government in return for the countenance and support given by it to the new Zulu King by the presence of its representative, and by its taking part in the King's coronation; and once spoken as they were, they cannot be broken without compromising the dignity, the good faith, and the honour of the British Government.

Alleging failure to observe "these laws," Frere added:

The British Government cannot, then, allow that the words which were once spoken on its part should be empty words, or that the promises which were made to it, and for which it became the mouth-piece and the guarantee to the whole Zulu nation, should be treated as if they were mere idleness and empty sound. But for five years they have been so treated, and now it can be no longer so. . . . But in future, it will be necessary that the promise be kept, for the British Government holds itself bound to see that this is so, and, in order that they may be kept, and that the laws regarding them may be fully carried out, the Queen's High Commissioner, on behalf of the British Government, will appoint an officer as his deputy to reside in the Zulu country, or on its immediate border, who will be the eyes, and ears, and mouth of the British Government towards the Zulu King and the Great Council of the Nation.<sup>63</sup>

It was simply not true that Shepstone represented the British government, or that the "laws. . . were the conditions required by the British Government," or that promises "were made to it." If Frere had thought such statements were accurate, he would, immediately after acquiring knowledge of them (at the latest, soon after his

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 638-40.

arrival in Natal on September 23), have put them in the forefront of his complaints against Cetywayo in his dispatches. He did not. Not until his dispatch of October 23 was there any reference to coronation promises, and in that dispatch Frere accepted the statement of a Norwegian missionary that Cetywayo, in breach of his coronation promises, had killed converts. He accompanied it, not with an assertion that such conduct furnished a casus belli, but with the observation that, "What notice should be taken of his treatment of the missionaries will be a matter for serious consideration whenever final settlement with Cetywayo takes place."<sup>64</sup> In his missive of November 5, Frere referred to the coronation as having "placed him [Cetywayo] firmly on the throne", but he did not suggest the existence of contemporaneous promises.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, all that appeared in the dispatch of November 16 was a statement of Frere's intention to demand "observance of the promises made by Cetywayo at his coronation."<sup>66</sup> This last message was not received in London until December 19-- eight days after delivery of the ultimatum.

Frere put forward the testimony of Shepstone in support of the existence of "promises". But he did so unfairly. For while Shepstone did declare that he "represented the British Government in Natal" at Cetywayo's

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 455.

installation, and that Cetuywayo on that occasion entered into "special obligations" and agreed to the proclamation of "new laws", he gave no support to Frere's statement that the laws "were the conditions required by the British Government". Shepstone had said on November 18,

Then again there are the special obligations which Cetuywayo entered into on the latter occasion, obligations in the fulfillment of which the Zulu people were, and are, especially and deeply interested; obligations, too in the fulfillment of which we, as a civilized and Christian Government, were and are also interested on the same and additional grounds as his immediate neighbours.<sup>67</sup>

On another occasion, November 30, Shepstone said that at the coronation he had represented the British government, and added,

My presence, therefore, as representing Her Majesty's Government in Natal, and the action I took in that capacity, were a tacit pledge to the Zulu people that if the stipulations were broken by Cetuywayo, upon which we enabled him to become the head of the Zulu nation, we should exercise the right in their behalf which we then acquired of insisting upon their observance.<sup>68</sup>

In Shepstone's view, there were no stipulations of "conditions" between the Zulus and the British government. He regarded his presence as "a tacit pledge to the Zulu people". Frere ought to have been careful, moreover, about acceptance of Shepstone's statement as to his having acted as representative of the British government; not only was it not true but no support for it could be found. Frere had consulted Bulwer upon the subject, and his reply of November 18 stated:

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<sup>67</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII 564.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 610.

. . . I assume that it is held there was a sufficient representation of the British Government through the Natal Government, at the installation of the present Zulu King in 1873 to establish a responsibility for what may, by declaration or by inference, have been said and undertaken on that occasion. I am obliged to assume this, because on an examination, with reference to that point, of the papers relating to the proceedings, I am struck by the defectiveness, as it appears to me, of the proof of such a position having been sufficiently declared, accepted, and sustained, and one is left uncertain as to whether any responsibility was assumed or was intended to be assumed by the Government of Natal.<sup>69</sup>

Until Frere arrived in Natal, Bulwer had never imagined that any such obligations had been assumed. In one of his dispatches on March 10, 1880, he said:

It will be seen, therefore, that in the month of July 1878, and up to that time, there were no questions arising out of the relations between the Natal Government and the Zulus which in any way, or in any degree, compromised or threatened to compromise the relations between British authority in South Africa and the Zulu King.<sup>70</sup>

And in his Minute of November 29, 1878, Bulwer referred to the coronation promises as one of the "demands which raise new questions".<sup>71</sup> A Memorandum supplied to Frere by Charles Brownlee, Resident Commissioner of Native Affairs, Cape Colony, on November 12, 1878, indicated that any "condition" attached to Shepstone's presence at the coronation applied only to the few days of Shepstone's visit.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 601. In his later Minute of November 29, Bulwer prefaced his observations with reference to the proceedings at the coronation with the words "assuming always that there was a due and formal representation of the British Government", ibid., 619.

<sup>70</sup>British State Papers, 1880, LI, 215.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 1878-9, LII, 619.

Brownlee said:

Before crossing the Tugela to perform the ceremony of installation, Mr. Shepstone sent to inform Cetywayo and the Zulu nobles that the courtesy and condescension of the Natal Government in sending to install Cetywayo were not to be stained by one drop of blood, and that should anyone be adjudged to die for any political offence during the presence of Mr. Shepstone in the Zulu country, such sentence should not be carried out till the charges and evidence had been submitted to him, otherwise he would refuse to proceed to the installation.<sup>72</sup>

Notwithstanding the unsupported character of Shepstone's Memorandum, the explanation of Brownlee and the doubt raised by Bulwer, Frere, in a dispatch to Hicks Beach on December 27, said:

It is, I think, superfluous to argue that, having taken those promises as a condition for affording our help in imposing such a tyrant on the Zulu people, it is now our bounden duty to see that he performs his promises or makes way for administration which will afford to Natal and Zululand the very moderate degree of security for life and property which the people of both countries desire.<sup>73</sup>

Frere was well aware that no such "conditions" existed. The dishonesty of his assertion in the ultimatum was subsequently admitted by himself in a Minute of February 3, 1879, in which he said,

Of course I should not have pressed such a question merely in the interests of the Zulu people, but I felt assured that it was absolutely necessary to our own security that we should ascertain the real disposition of the King, whether he was, as I believe, inclined to break loose from all restraint, and to re-establish the regime of Chaka's unmitigated barbarism, or whether he was a really well-meaning and intelligent savage, who only needed plain speaking

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 568.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 658.

and firm guidance to keep in a path of gradual improvement.<sup>74</sup>

In this way Frere contradicted his statement that "promises" had been made by Cetywayo to the British government, and that for the fulfilment of them the British government had become "the mouthpiece and the guarantee of the whole Zulu nation". Moreover, Frere really did not believe that he stood in need of the information which he said he was seeking. He had already on several occasions denounced Cetywayo as a bloodthirsty tyrant.

In his dispatch of December 31, 1878, Hicks Beach expressed dissent from Frere's views. He said,

Although on more than one occasion remonstrances have been addressed to Cetywayo by the Government of Natal, more particularly on subjects falling within Sir. T. Shepstone's injunctions, it would seem that the power of imposing obligations upon the Zulus in matters relating to their internal government which Sir. T. Shepstone, somewhat unexpectedly, found to be attributed him at Cetywayo's coronation, was rather a concession on the part of the Zulus to his personal influence than a recognition by them of the authority of the Government of Natal; nor has that Government hitherto undertaken the responsibility of compelling the execution of the promises then made. It is evident that the assumption of such a responsibility could be justified only by full proof of its imperative and pressing necessity for the safety of the interests of Her Majesty's subjects in South Africa, and of the practability of securing compliance on the part of Cetywayo with the undertakings into which you have apparently required him to enter.<sup>75</sup>

In rather contemptuous tone Frere replied (March 1, 1879):

It seems to me that, unless the clear statements as to the coronation promises made in these public documents are fictions, nothing but extreme prejudice can fail to see in the transactions recorded a solemn

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., LIII, 133.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., LII, 547.

act by the King, undertaken as the price of British support and recognition, at the instance of, in the presence of, and under the guarantee of the British representative.

That was a wild statement. In no public document can there be found any support for it. Frere added, "But I should certainly not have anticipated the approval of Her Majesty's Government in urging any demands made solely in the interests of the Zulu people. The demands I made were based on our rights of self-defence and in obedience to the law of self-preservation."<sup>76</sup> That was another contradiction of the assertion that the British government had become "the mouthpiece and the guarantee of the whole Zulu nation." Frere was stumbling badly. The truth was easily ascertainable. The evidence of Sir Henry Barkly, who was, at the date of the alleged promises, High Commissioner in South Africa, and of Sir Benjamin Pine, who was at the same time, Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, was available; in the course of the debate in the House of Commons on March 28, 1879, Sir Henry Holland produced it. He said:

Again, Sir Bartle Frere was wrong in stating that the making of those laws was a condition imposed upon the King by Sir Theophilus Shepstone, or, "a price required by the British Government in return for its countenance and support". Looking back at the share taken by him at the installation of Cetywayo, it appeared that the only condition made by him was that no Zulus should be killed at the time of the Coronation, and that no blood should be spilt while he remained in the country. . . . Upon that point, he [Sir Henry Holland] had the direct authority of Sir Henry Barkly, then Governor of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner, who had permitted him to state positively that it was never for a moment supposed that the Natal Government was bound to see to the performance of those laws.

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., LIII, 324.



And that view was clearly confirmed by the despatch of Sir Benjamin Pine, then Lieutenant Governor of Natal, who, when sending, in 1875 an account of the proceedings of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, wrote - "He has succeeded in inducing the King to alter some of the fundamental laws of his kingdom in such a manner as to check cruelty. It is, indeed, likely that the new laws may not be strictly adhered to; but their promulgation will doubtless work ultimate good." Sir Benjamin Pine contemplated therefore, the non-observance of the laws; but he never hinted that there was any obligation or right which bound the Natal Government to enforce their observance.<sup>77</sup>

In the course of the debate in the House of Lords on March 25, 1879, Lord Kimberley, Colonial Secretary at the time of Cetuyayo's coronation, said:

As to the so-called Coronation promises, which have been placed in the forefront by Sir Bartle Frere, as obligations which we were bound to enforce, even at the cost of war, nothing in the Papers so much astonished me as the idea that they constituted an engagement between us and the Zulu nation. There was certainly nothing further from the intention of the late Government<sup>78</sup> than to enter into such engagements; and if I had thought that any such engagement had been undertaken, I should not have lost a single mail in disavowing Sir Theophilus Shepstone's proceedings.<sup>79</sup>

Having these authoritative statements, and noting Frere's own modifications, we may feel assured that the assertions in the ultimatum as to coronation promises were unwarranted.

Another aspect of Frere's ultimatum of December 11, was the demand that the Zulus should content themselves with a position of military helplessness. Due to the importance of this item, it must be quoted at length. He

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<sup>77</sup>Hansard, vol. 244, cols. 2042-3.

<sup>78</sup>That is, the government of which he had been a member.

<sup>79</sup>Hansard, vol. 244, col. 1675.

said:

The army is made an instrument, not for the defence of the country, but for the oppression of the people. All the best interests of the Zulu country and the happiness of the Zulu people are sacrificed in order that the King may keep up this large army. For what purpose is this army kept up? Is there any enemy? Where is the enemy? Cetywayo knows very well that there is no enemy, and that there is no occasion for this large army. . . . The King knows very well that the British Government is a peaceful and friendly power, that it wishes well to the Zulu people, and that it wishes them to live in peace and comfort. . . . For what purpose, then, does the Zulu King keep up this large army, which brings so much hardship and so much misery upon the Zulu people themselves? It can serve no good purpose. It can be made of no use, except it be used for the oppression of the Zulu people, or for aggression upon British subjects or the allies and neighbours of the British Government. . . . Besides, whilst the King keeps up this army, whilst he is constantly calling it together, it is impossible for his neighbours to feel secure. They never know what may happen, and the British Government is obliged to keep large numbers of the Queen's troops in Natal and the Transvaal in order to protect British subjects against the dangers of a possible aggression by the Zulu King. This state of things cannot last. It is dangerous to the peace of all the countries adjoining Zululand, and it is hurtful to the Zulu people themselves. The British Government cannot allow it to continue. It has become absolutely necessary that some changes should be made. It is necessary that the military system which is at present kept up by the King should be done away with, as a bad and hurtful one; and that the King should, instead, adopt such military regulations as may be decided on after consultation with the Great Council of the Zulus and with the representatives of the British Government. It is necessary that the Zulu army, as it is now, shall be disbanded, and that the men shall return to their homes.<sup>80</sup>

Seldom has a more dishonest statement been transmitted from one power to another. Cetywayo might be assured that "The British government is a peaceful and friendly power"; but the man who represented the British government had determined to put into execution his theory of the duty

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<sup>80</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 639-40.

of the civilized towards the "comparatively uncivilized" neighbor, to compel the Zulus to recognize their inferiority and to submit to British overlordship. Frere required that the military system of the Zulus was to be as approved by the British government, i.e., Frere, himself. Cetywayo was not, of course, to enjoy any reciprocal authority.

If Frere had believed that he could find in the military system of the Zulus an adequate reason for a declaration of war, he ought to, and would have, so reported to his government long before delivering his ultimatum. But he did not. It was not until November 16, 1878, after preparation of the ultimatum, that he sent to London a dispatch disclosing his purpose for demanding disbandment of the Zulu army.<sup>81</sup> The document did not reach London until January 2, 1879.<sup>82</sup>

The British army invaded Zululand in January, 1879. Within a few weeks, all four columns of the invading army were either destroyed or paralyzed and the frontiers of Natal were open to invasion by the Zulus, if the latter's army had been intended for offensive operations against the British. There was some panic in Natal stemming from reports that the Zulu warriors were urging raids into Natal. General William F. Butler noted later:

No doubt it would have been possible for detached parties of Zulus to carry into effect this idea, had their king been inclined to accede to the wishes of his soldiers; but he would not sanction it. All

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 455.

through this time he never abandoned his old belief that he was the friend of the English, and their ally against the Dutch; and he clung to the promises made him by the Government of Natal through Mr. Shepstone at the time of his coronation, all of which are now forgotten.<sup>83</sup>

During the debate in Parliament, very little was said in support for disbandment of the Zulu army. Lord Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India, when speaking on behalf of the government, said on March 27, 1879, that the time for demanding disbandment would have come "at a period not long after" the date of the ultimatum.<sup>84</sup> Hicks Beach could not urge any better defense. He said that the demand for disbandment was "the real question in the ultimatum".<sup>85</sup>

That was as much as could be said, and a little more than ought to have been said, by a man who declined to defend Frere "on the question of policy".<sup>86</sup> During the same debate, on March 31, Leonard H. Courtney said that while the Zulu army certainly was a power it just as surely was not a proven menace. He further quoted War Department dispatches to prove that the British Army considered Zulu army movements purely defensive in nature.<sup>87</sup>

Discussion of the Missionary Question demands that the complete text of that portion of the Ultimatum be pre-

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<sup>83</sup>Butler, 199.

<sup>84</sup>Hansard, v. 244, col. 1627.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., col. 1926.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., col. 1934.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., v. 245, cols. 32-3.

sented:

The late King, Panda, allowed several European missionaries to settle in Zululand. Cetywayo, also, allowed them to stay in the country, but during the last two years some of the natives living on the Mission Station were killed without trial or form of trial, and others were terrified; and thus the missionaries have, most of them, been obliged to abandon their stations; and the High Commissioner desires that all those missionaries who, until last year, lived in the Zulu country and occupied stations, be allowed to return and reoccupy their stations. He desires, also, that all missionaries be allowed to teach as in Panda's time, and that no Zulu shall be punished for listening to them. If any Zulu wishes of his own choice, to listen to the missionary, he is to be free to do so. If any native living on a Mission Station does wrong, he will be liable to punishment, but he must be tried first. If any case of dispute occurs in which any one of the missionaries, or in which any European, is concerned, such dispute will be heard by the King in public and in presence of the British Resident; and no sentence of expulsion from Zululand shall be carried out until it has been communicated by the King to the Resident, and until it has been approved by the Resident.<sup>88</sup>

Presentation of that demand was a distinct breach of instructions. Lord Carnarvon, Colonial Secretary at the time of Frere's appointment, in a letter to Bulwer, dated August 31, 1877, said, "I request that you will cause the missionaries to understand distinctly that Her Majesty's Government cannot undertake to compel the King to permit the maintenance of mission stations in Zululand, and that it is desirable for them (if they cannot live there in peace) to retire for the present from the country".<sup>89</sup> Hicks Beach reiterated on May 4, 1878 in a letter to Bulwer, "While Her Majesty's Government were at all times desirous to befriend the missionary bodies, they could not undertake

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<sup>88</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 641.

<sup>89</sup>Martineau, II, 232.

the obligation of protecting them in Zululand."<sup>90</sup>

Being in close touch with Bulwer when framing his ultimatum, Frere was, no doubt, well aware of the instructions.

When replying, a year afterwards, December 2, 1879, to criticism of his attitude, he said:

I never contemplated any further interference with his [Cetywayo's] freedom of action in regard to missionaries than I would have recommended in the case of secular persons of European race who had been allowed, under the laws of Zululand, by special permission of the reigning chief, to settle there for their own gain and profit. I would always have advocated the same respect for the national rights of Zulus as would have been shown by Her Majesty's Government in the case of Turkey or Spain, but I would have advocated no more.<sup>91</sup>

Frere was a reckless writer. He knew perfectly well that no British government would have told a Spanish government that its disputes with British nationals in Spain must be heard "in presence of the British Resident"; and that no British nationals must be expelled without the approval of the British Resident.

Frere stated in a dispatch dated October 23, 1878, that, "Cetywayo's conduct in sending impis to kill converts has been clearly a breach of his solemn coronation promises".<sup>92</sup> As already noted there were no coronation promises. Further, Shepstone had said, "I did not consider it wise to attempt to make any arrangements in favour of

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<sup>90</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 452.

<sup>91</sup>Martineau, II, 358.

<sup>92</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 356.

native converts. The position of the missionaries and all concerned is so anomalous that sooner or later a compromise will relieve the difficulty, or mission operations will have to be given up."<sup>93</sup> Bulwer's evidence is to the same effect:

No concession was either obtained or sought from him [Cetywayo] and it cannot in justice be said that he has broken any promise on this score. He made no promise regarding native converts, and none was asked of him. Some sort of a promise he gave regarding the existing missionaries, and he has not gone back from what he said. He has not expelled, as far as I know, any missionary, and some are still in the country.<sup>94</sup>

Hicks Beach, too, made clear that he disapproved both Frere's action and his assertion as to coronation promises. When replying on December 13, 1878 to Frere's dispatch of October 23, he said:

While I have read with feelings of regret and of sympathy this record of the unfortunate termination of the self-denying labours of these worthy men, I must at the same time remind you that (as I explained to Sir Henry Bulwer in my despatch of the 4th of May last), though Her Majesty's Government are at all times desirous of befriending the missionary bodies, no agreement was entered into with the Zulu King on their behalf, nor was any responsibility undertaken for their protection, and that there appears to be no sufficient reason for departing from the policy that has hitherto been pursued on this subject.<sup>95</sup>

In the course of his speech in parliament, Hicks Beach said on March 27, 1879; "I regret that Sir Bartle Frere should have included that demand in his Ultimatum. I quite adhere to the opinion that the enforcement by the Government of missionary enterprise is a thorough and entire mistake; and

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<sup>93</sup>Shepstone quoted by Bulwer, in British State Papers, LII, 603.

<sup>94</sup>British State Papers, LII, 604.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 452.

certainly, so long as I hold my present Office, I should be not only reluctant, but entirely disinclined, to take any steps for that purpose."<sup>96</sup> When peace terms were being dictated the British representative refrained from insisting upon the missionary demands of Frere's ultimatum.<sup>97</sup> Missionaries were to come and go as the Zulu chiefs desired, and Hicks Beach expressed the hope that dispossessed missionaries who were disposed to comply with reasonable regulations might be allowed to return.<sup>98</sup>

Clearly, Frere knew that all of these demands, or at least enough of them to force the issue, would be unacceptable to the Zulu chiefs. In anticipation of their refusal, he had early begun to make certain military moves. As will be seen, these could hardly be construed as purely defensive in nature.

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<sup>96</sup>Hansard, v. 244, col. 1925.

<sup>97</sup>British State Papers, 1880, L, 277.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 403. The missionaries voiced their disappointment: ibid., 361-2; 364; 396; 454; 484-5; 496-7; 503; 591-3.



## CHAPTER V

## FRERE'S MILITARY MOVES

Three months before reaching Natal, Frere telegraphed to Bulwer, June 25, 1878, "Your Excellency is aware that Her Majesty's 90th Regiment is now moving towards Natal overland, and that Her Majesty's 2/24th is almost ready to follow by sea."<sup>99</sup> Taking that as an announcement of Frere's intention, Bulwer made no reply. But when Frere asked for an expression of his views, Bulwer recommended on July 14, 1878, that the 2/24th should for the present remain at the Cape, "because its arrival at the present time, and simultaneously with the arrival of the force which has commenced its march overland, could not fail to give rise to rumours tending to create unnecessary suspicion and distrust in the minds of the Zulus at this juncture."<sup>100</sup>

But Frere was by no means satisfied, and, as the time for his visit to Natal approached, he communicated with General Frederic Augustus Thesiger (later Lord Chelmsford), the Chief of the military forces. Thesiger (in Natal) excused himself from intervention by saying that he was unwilling to ask for reinforcements on the border without the full concurrence of the government of that colony. Appealing to Bulwer for con-

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<sup>99</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 774-5.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 418.

currence, Frere found that the Governor retained his former view. He was, as Frere reported on September 10, 1878, to Hicks Beach, "especially anxious that nothing should be done in Natal which could possibly justify to the Zulu Chief the belief that we were preparing for active hostilities against him". That, to Frere, was very annoying. In his dispatch, he said: "I confess that, as at present informed, I very imperfectly comprehend the grounds on which the objections of his Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, as I understand them, to strengthen the Natal frontier are based." And, proceeding in his own confident way, Frere said that he was:

. . . certain that the preservation or speedy restoration of peace will be rendered much more certain if General Thesiger had two more battalions of Her Majesty's army within his reach, and I would strongly recommend that one battalion should be directed at once to Cape Town, and another kept in readiness to follow should any necessity arise for it. . . . I would suggest that at least six more staff officers whose rank would not interfere with the senior staff officers now in South Africa should be placed at General Thesiger's disposal, and directed to join without delay.<sup>101</sup>

In reply on October 5, 1878, Hicks Beach said, "I am led to think from the information before me that there should still be a good chance of avoiding war with the Zulus".<sup>102</sup> He repeated the same opinion in his dispatches of October 17<sup>103</sup> and November 21<sup>104</sup>. Doing, in the meantime, what he could, Frere arranged the removal from the south of three companies of the 1/24th regiment, one going part of the way, and the

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<sup>101</sup> British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 248-9.

<sup>102</sup> Hansard, v. 244, col. 1860.

<sup>103</sup> British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 289.

other two all the way, to Natal.

On September 12, Bulwer, in a dispatch to Frere, made clear the grounds of his objection to accumulating troops in Natal:

It is unfortunately the case that the recent arrival of additional troops, both by sea and overland by way of Kokstadt, has been made the occasion for a good deal of loud and ill-advised talk in the Colony. It has been freely and openly said that the troops were come to fight the Zulus, and there can be no question that reports of this kind have been carried to the Zulu King. It is possible, therefore, that he may consider there is a design on the part of the English against Zululand.<sup>104</sup>

That was not bad news for Frere. Bulwer and he were working towards different ends. One wanted peace with the Zulus, the other insisted that war was necessary. One was careful about provocations, the other was not unwilling to supply them, and proceeded with his preparations.

Thesiger was "very unwilling to ask for reinforcements," but was nevertheless, induced to express, "his views in regard to his military requirements in the event of hostilities breaking out with the Zulus." He wanted, as Frere reported on September 14, 1878, twenty-one more officers for special duties, and considered, "that an addition of two regiments would be essential, and that the presence of a cavalry regiment would be of enormous advantage."<sup>106</sup> Nine days afterwards Frere was in Natal and on the day of his arrival, he telegraphed as follows: "I find that the urgency of support-

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 270.

ing General Thesiger's request conveyed in my telegram by last mail is much greater even than I supposed. I trust there will be no delay in complying with his request to its full extent."<sup>107</sup> Thesiger had made no request. He had stated merely what would be necessary "in the event of hostilities breaking out." Frere was arranging that they should; and he soon afterward persuaded Thesiger to make a "demand upon England for additional troops."<sup>108</sup>

Keeping up the pressure upon London, Frere declared in his dispatch of October 6, 1878:

The intelligence received since then from Zululand and its borders seems to me to confirm the view I then took of the temper of the Zulus and of the very precarious prospect of preserving peace much longer. The reports generally, even when apparently intended by the writer to be pacific and reassuring, indicate mutual suspicion and distrust on both sides the border. Royal hunts organised where there is no game to be hunted, the hunters ordered to carry war shields never used in hunting parties, and the movements of Zulu regiments occasion as much anxiety to our frontier officials and people, as the arrival and movements of Her Majesty's troops evidently cause to Cetywayo and his subjects.<sup>109</sup>

That was all quite true, and was exactly what Bulwer told Frere would happen as a consequence of following the annexation of the Transvaal with accumulation of troops in Natal. Another two weeks, and Frere telegraphed to London on October 19, 1878, that the military failure against Sikukuni in the Transvaal had rendered, "the Zulu . . . more menacing

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 271.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>109</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 321.

and confirms opinion as to the necessity for the additional troops applied for."<sup>110</sup> He ought to have said that the reverses in the Transvaal had made less advisable the commencement of military operations against the Zulus. Still another nine days, October 28, 1878, and Frere telegraphed, "I have received your telegram of the 5th October. News from Zululand is as threatening as possible, short of actual hostilities. Both Sir H. Bulwer and Lord Chelmsford concur with me that it is not safe to delay sending the additional troops applied for."<sup>111</sup> Bulwer, of course, had agreed to nothing of the sort.

On the same day, Frere wrote to Hicks Beach telling of a gathering of Zulu troops because of Cetywayo's alarm; "at being told that the English and the Dutch had joined together to surround him, and to occupy the disputed territory, and that the English had sent across the sea to have Cetywayo seized for having said he was a greater potentate than the Queen of England."<sup>112</sup> Frere said that an assurance would be sent explaining "the entirely defensive character of all movements on this side of the border," and this was to be followed by a probing question to Cetywayo as to the Sirayo's sons' affair.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 761.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 761.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 375.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 375.

London remained unexcited by Frere's reports and appeals. Hicks Beach telegraphed him on October 12, 1878, that he was doubtful whether more troops could be spared.<sup>114</sup> The purport of a further telegram of October 18 must be guessed. Guided by Frere's reply to it<sup>115</sup> and by Hicks Beach's dispatch of the day previous to it, we may surmise that Frere was told in effect to pacify himself and by prudence and reasonableness to avert war. Both these telegrams reached him on or prior to November 11, 1878, one month before the delivery of the war-ultimatum. In his dispatch of October 17, Hicks Beach said that transport officers would be sent:

Her Majesty's Government, however, are not prepared to comply with the request for a reinforcement of troops. All the information that has hitherto reached them with respect to the position of affairs in Zululand appears to them to justify a confident hope that by the exercise of prudence, and by meeting the Zulus in a spirit of forbearance and reasonable compromise, it will be possible to avert the very serious evil of a war with Cetywayo; and they cannot but think that the forces now at your disposal in South Africa, together with the additional officers about to be sent, should suffice to meet every other emergency that may arise without a further increase to the Imperial troops.<sup>116</sup>

We do not know precisely what day it reached Frere, but his reply to it<sup>117</sup> was dated December 10, 1878--one day before the delivery of his ultimatum. As Hicks Beach's later (three weeks later) dispatch of November 7, reached Frere on December

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 448.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 391.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 289.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 393.

13<sup>118</sup>, it may be supposed that the one just quoted arrived at least ten days prior to the delivery of the ultimatum. It had no retarding effect on Frere.

To the first of these telegrams, received by Frere on November 4, 1878, he replied the next day by telegraph. Troops, he said, were: "urgently needed. . . . State here as described to Her Majesty's Government by Sir Garnet Wolseley three years ago. On the other side of fordable river Zulu army, 40,000 to 60,000 strong, well armed, unconquered, insolent, burning to clear out white men."<sup>119</sup> In reply to the second, he telegraphed on November 11, impatiently if not indeed impertinently, as follows:

Your telegram of 18th received. That Sir Henry Bulwer and Lord Chelmsford concur with me in considering the reinforcements we asked for to be indispensable, former telegrams and letters will have assured you, and that the crisis of the situation is gradually approaching. It will now be necessary to concentrate our forces, and when the time arrives when peace can no longer be maintained with honour, we must do our best to meet the dangers which arise from causes in existence long before the arrival of any of us in South Africa.<sup>120</sup>

Preparing for war, Frere saw to it that the Boers were being stirred up to take part in the proposed invasion of Zululand. In September, Colonel Evelyn Wood had been sent from Natal to a district in the Transvaal abutting upon Zululand, and among his activities he held on December 4, 1878,

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<sup>118</sup>Martineau, II, 262.

<sup>119</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 440. The telegram was received in London on Nov. 23; Hansard, v. 244, col. 1852.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 761. .

a meeting of, "Landdrosts, Field-cornets and Dutch settlers . . . for the purpose of ascertaining the views of the inhabitants as to their line of conduct in the event of a war with the Zulus."<sup>121</sup> Offering five shillings a day and rations and a liberal share of the booty,<sup>122</sup> Wood succeeded in getting the assurance of material assistance. Frere was, of course, delighted, and he wrote to Hicks Beach on December 23, 1878, "Colonel Evelyn Wood has done admirably on the Utrecht frontier. He has got a large number of the Boers to meet him, and won their hearts by a frank, soldierlike address. They volunteered to go with him, and he has, I think, done more than local service by turning the flank of Boer sulkiness."<sup>123</sup>

Replying by letter on November 5, 1878, to Hicks Beach's telegram of October 12th, Frere referred to the annexation of the Transvaal, the military failure against Sikukuni, and other things as:

. . . increasing the present risk of collision with the Zulus. . . . It may possibly occur to Her Majesty's Government, that a settlement of the Zulu question may be deferred to a more convenient season. I cannot think that this can safely be done as regards the Zulus.

After declaring that solution of difficulties in the Transvaal depended upon mastery of the Zulus, Frere added:

Are we then forcibly to coerce the Zulus in order to secure the allegiance of the Transvaal? Certainly not, if any one can show us reasonable grounds for expecting that the Zulus will be content to remain in

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 650. Col. Wood afterwards commanded the column which invaded Zululand from Utrecht.

<sup>122</sup>Hansard, v. 244, col. 1911.

<sup>123</sup>Martineau, II, 264.



peace within their own borders. . . . But nothing of the kind can be expected from Cetywayo.<sup>124</sup>

Coercion of the Zulus ought, therefore, to proceed. And there ought to be no delay.

When Frere referred to the possibility of the Zulus breaking the peace, he was himself making preparations to break it. Six days after sending the dispatch just quoted, he followed it with another on November 11, enclosing a report "on the military situation at the present time."<sup>125</sup> Another two days and he had his ultimatum ready for delivery to Cetywayo.<sup>126</sup> On November 16, 1878, he notified Cetywayo to send "qualified persons" to receive communications,<sup>127</sup> and he wrote to Hicks Beach that he proposed to deliver to the Zulus, "a statement of the demands of the British Government for reparation for the past and security for the future, including the observance of the promises made by Cetywayo at his coronation."<sup>128</sup> He said that he enclosed a copy of the statement, but he neglected to do so,<sup>129</sup> and he offered no apology for, or explanation of, his intention to disregard his instructions. The three Frere dispatches, November 5, 11, and 16, reached London together on December 11, the day upon

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<sup>124</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 437-9.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 449.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 524-7.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 539.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>129</sup>The enclosure reached London on January 2, 1879; ibid., 455., note.

which Frere delivered his ultimatum. Martineau summarized a dispatch sent by Hicks Beach to Frere on November 7, 1878 as follows:

In answer to Frere's and Lord Chelmsford's renewed applications, dated September 20, for reinforcements, he wrote (November 7) that the decision of the Cabinet remained the same, and deprecated a Zulu war, in addition to the other greater and too possible troubles. This letter reached Frere on December 13.<sup>130</sup>

Replying to Frere's dispatches of September 30 and October 6, in which he had insisted upon "the very precarious prospect of preserving peace much longer", Hicks Beach said on November 21 (*Italics now added*):

The several circumstances which you have reported as tending to cause an open rupture do not appear, in themselves, to present any difficulties which are not capable of a peaceful solution. Reinforcements will be sent. But in conveying to you the decision at which, in compliance with your urgent representations, Her Majesty's Government have arrived, it is my duty to impress upon you that in supplying these reinforcements it is the desire of Her Majesty's Government not to furnish means for a campaign of invasion and conquest, but to afford such protection as may be necessary at this juncture to the lives and property of the Colonists. Though the present aspect of affairs is menacing in a high degree, I can by no means arrive at the conclusion that war with the Zulus should be unavoidable, and I am confident that you, in concert with Sir H. Bulwer, will use every effort to overcome the existing difficulties by judgment and forbearance, and to avoid an evil so much to be deprecated as a Zulu war.<sup>131</sup>

On November 25, Frere sent to Hicks Beach a copy of a dispatch which Chelmsford had sent to the War Office.<sup>132</sup> From this Hicks Beach learned (December 27--sixteen days

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<sup>130</sup>Martineau, II, 262.

<sup>131</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 336-7.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 538.

after delivery of the ultimatum) for the first time<sup>133</sup> that Frere intended to require disbandment of the Zulu army. This latter was the item in Frere's ultimatum which Hicks Beach declared in the House of Commons on March 27, 1879, was "the real question in the ultimatum." Chelmsford added particulars as to the preparations which he was making.

Frere delayed delivery of his military ultimatum for tactical reasons. In the words of his Military Secretary:

By the beginning of the new year, 1879, the British troops were nearly ready; the Zulu army was not. Our commissariat arrangements were on the point of being completed; theirs had not begun. In other words, the Zulus had not been able to commence getting in their harvest, for the mealies, which form their staple food, would not be ready for picking for another two months at least.

It was all-important that the terrain of operations should be in Zululand, and not in Natal, and also that we should gain the moral advantages to be drawn from making the first attack.

The Buffalo and the Tugela rivers, which in the months of January, February, and March are sometimes in full and rapid flood, almost always unfordable, and therefore a formidable barrier to the invasion of Natal by a Zulu impi, become in the later months of the year streams of water of insignificant volume, and consequently very generally fordable.

. . . The last reason was that, in the beginning of May, the grass on which the waggon [sic] oxen and the horses of the mounted men would depend is dry enough to burn, and would be burnt by the Zulus, and the difficulties of moving troops would be thus a hundred-fold increased, were we not able to finish the campaign before the end of this month.<sup>134</sup>

On December 2, 1878, Frere wrote to Hicks Beach picturing Cetywayo as massacreing "hundreds of young women," and relying "solely on a regular course of murder and

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>134</sup>Captain Henry Hallam Parr, A Sketch of the Kafir and Zulu Wars, Guadana to Isandhlwana (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), pp. 170-3.

plunder." Frere added, "I will not attempt to measure our national guilt, or innocence, for allowing such a state of things to continue under a virtual, if not avowed protection, supplying the despot with arms to keep his people down, and preventing all natural remedies by foreign conquest as well as by internal resistance to his tyranny."<sup>135</sup> So far from "supplying the despot with arms", the British Government had prevailed upon the Portugese government to prohibit Zulu importations through the most available port.<sup>136</sup> Frere continued:

But our right to interfere with him, and compel him to govern as well as a good and peaceable ruler can govern, rests on the first law of nature, the instinct of self-preservation. . . . It seems to me worse than folly to shut our eyes to such facts, and quite unnecessary to seek other justification for whatever measures may be necessary to enable us and all who belong to us to sleep in absolute peace and security against foreign outrage within our own border.<sup>137</sup>

It will be remembered that besides telegraphing his views on the 12th and 18th of October, Hicks Beach had embodied them in a dispatch of the 17th. Frere's answer to the last, December 10, was characterized as a "contemptuous reply". He said, "I am not, of course, aware what information may have reached Her Majesty's Government on this subject, other than what has passed through me. But I confess

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<sup>135</sup>British State Papers, 1878-9, LII, 461.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 561-2. On a later occasion (Dec. 13) Frere reaffirmed that "Our right to interfere in the present state of Zulu misgovernment rests on the very simple ground of our duty of self-preservation, rather than on treaty rights, expressed or understood": Ibid., 622.

that, looking back at the information I have had the honour to submit to Her Majesty's Government for the past 12 months, I can find little ground for any such hope of avoiding a war with Cetywayo."<sup>138</sup> He then added:

. . . it is impossible to evade the necessity for now settling this Zulu question thoroughly and finally, and that there is no apparent course, consistent with our own safety, unless we lay down definite conditions for the future government of Zululand, and compel the ruler, if necessary by force, to observe them.

The next day he delivered his ultimatum to the Zulus, euphemistically styling it "two messages".<sup>139</sup>

On December 11, the day on which Frere delivered his ultimatum, Hicks Beach received Frere's dispatch of November 5 in which he had referred to "the supremacy of the English Imperial Government" and "disaster in delaying" coercion of the Zulus.<sup>140</sup> In his reply of December 18, Hicks Beach confirmed the decision to send reinforcements, but specified they were to be used only for the "protection of the settlers in the present emergency" and "not to furnish the means for any aggressive operations not directly connected with the defence of Her Majesty's possessions and subjects."<sup>141</sup> Answering Frere's dispatch of November 16 in which he had announced, in general terms, his intention to deliver to the Zulus a statement of demands, Hicks Beach sent a rather hesitating reply on December 31, 1878. Upon all questions save

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 614.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 633-41.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 392. .

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 453.

that relating to "the disputed boundary", he said that he was, "unable to express an opinion in the absence of any definite information as to the nature of your demands, or the reasons for which you have deemed it necessary to make them."<sup>142</sup> This after the copious exchange of messages!

The British Government was well aware of the military and administrative nature of the dispute. It had also long since declared its policy that its policy was the sovereignty over the land. And for some time had received no response of that policy. On the other hand, more than nine years prior to the delivery of the ultimatum, Sir John Lubbock had written (October 5) that "there should still be a good chance of avoiding war with the Zulus"; on October 12 and 13, he telegraphed that further troops would not be sent; and on October 17, he wrote referring to sent troops. These received that dispatch before delivering his ultimatum. On November 7, Sir John Lubbock reported his refusal to send troops and departed a Zulu War. That dispatch was received by Frere on November 11, two days after delivery of the ultimatum.<sup>143</sup> But even ten days prior to the outbreak of war on January 4, 1879, it too, was disregarded. On November 21, the British Government retained

anyway and in fact, Sir John Lubbock wrote "I have expressed this view to Sir G. Frere, both officially and privately to the best of my power, but I cannot really control his conduct or behaviour. I don't know what I could do more. I don't think there was any other way to send troops and telegrams to Cape Town were made by Sir John Lubbock. I don't know how many letters he sent and how many

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 547.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

In delivering an ultimatum to the Zulus, did Frere act conformably with his instructions, or in violation of them? The British government was well aware of his impetuous and domineering nature.<sup>143</sup> He had also distinctly declared to them that their policy must be supremacy over the Zulus. And for months he had received no disclaimer of that policy. On the other hand, more than nine weeks prior to the delivery of the ultimatum, Hicks Beach had written (October 5) that "there should still be a good chance of avoiding war with the Zulus"; on October 12 and 18, he telegraphed that further troops would not be sent; and on October 17, he wrote refusing to send troops. Frere received that dispatch before delivering his ultimatum. On November 7, Hicks Beach repeated his refusal to send troops and deprecated a Zulu War. That dispatch was received by Frere on December 13, two days after delivery of the ultimatum,<sup>144</sup> but twenty-two days prior to the declaration of War on January 4, 1879. It too, was disregarded. On November 21, the British government relented

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<sup>143</sup>Monypenny and Buckle, vi, 420. Hicks Beach wrote: "I have impressed this view on Sir B. Frere, both officially and privately, to the best of my power. But I cannot really control him without a telegraph. (I don't know that I could with one.)" N.B. At that time there was no cable to South Africa, and telegrams to Cape Town were brought by steamer from the Cape Verde Is. Telegrams took between two and three weeks; letters between three and four weeks.

<sup>144</sup>Martineau, II, 262.

and promised to send troops, only for protection. The question arises, why at this time did the Government decide to send reinforcements? Hicks Beach answered this question in a letter to Disraeli: ". . . I feel it is as likely as not that he [Frere] is at war with the Zulus at the present moment; and if his forces should prove inadequate, or the Transvaal Boers should take the opportunity to rise, he will be in a great difficulty, and we shall be blamed for not supporting him."<sup>145</sup>

A summary of the dispatch of November 21 reached Frere on December 14, twenty-one days before the declaration of war and twenty-seven before the British troops began to enter Zululand.<sup>146</sup> It had no effect on Frere. Indeed, as far as this writer can ascertain, he disregarded it to the extent of never replying to it. That he understood perfectly that he was acting contrary to the wish of his government, was made indisputable by his admission of the fact. In a dispatch of February 3, 1879, he said: "This brings me to the question why, knowing the anxiety of Her Majesty's Government to avoid a Zulu war, I did not delay at least until reference had been made for the orders of Her Majesty's Government."<sup>147</sup> He went on to plead emergency and military necessity. But was there an

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<sup>145</sup> Monypenny and Buckle, VI, 420.

<sup>146</sup> Martineau, II, 262.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 279.



emergency?

According to the most reliable liason between Cetywayo and the white, John Dunn:

Although the Ultimatum never reached Cetywayo, but was left at my place . . . I nevertheless despatched one of my own men to the Zulu King, conveying through him the full purport of the document, as I felt convinced that his own messengers would not tell him one-half of it. My men arrived some days before the King's own messengers reached him, and brought back a message from Cetywayo, complaining of the short time given to collect the cattle demanded. . . .<sup>148</sup>

The Editor of The Natal Witness stated that many colonists were completely unaware of the tension that seemed to arise suddenly in the last few weeks of the year.<sup>149</sup> In the Annual Register, "A very languid interest was taken in the announcement that Sir Bartle Frere had declared war upon the King of the Zulus."<sup>150</sup> Gladstone later declared that, ". . . 10,000 Zulus had been slain for no other offence than their attempt to defend against our artillery with their naked bodies their hearths and homes."<sup>151</sup>

The primary reason Frere was not immediately dismissed after the spirited debates in Parliament was the

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<sup>148</sup>Duncan Campbell Francis Moodie, The History of the Battles and Adventures of The British, the Boers and the Zulus, & C. in Southern Africa from the time of Pharaoh Necho to 1880 with Copious Chronology (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1888) p. 495.

<sup>149</sup>F. Reginald Statam, Blacks, Boers, and British--A Three-Cornered Problem (New York: Macmilland and Co., 1881), p. 169..

<sup>150</sup>Annual Register, 1879, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup>John Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. II, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1903), p. 592.

Queen's unequivocal backing.<sup>152</sup> She complained "of the tendency of the House of Commons to trench upon the business of the executive." Disraeli undoubtedly was peeved at the embarrassing position in which Frere had placed his Ministry<sup>153</sup> and would have replaced him but for the Queen. It was not until three months after Gladstone took office in 1880 that in spite of the Queen's protestations, Frere was finally recalled, ending his sorry and sordid adventures in South Africa.<sup>154</sup>

The war lasted from January to the beginning of July 1879, when the final major engagement at Ulundi resulted in a crushing defeat for the Zulu army. On the British side, over 32,400 men had taken the field in the campaign. The official returns listed 76 officers and 1,007 enlisted men killed in action and 243 officers and men wounded. Over 600 native Kaffirs had been killed and many wounded. An additional seventeen officers and 330 men died of disease, and 1,385 were invalided home. The official approximate cost of the war was 5,230,323 pounds beyond the normal expense of the military establishment.<sup>155</sup> After much inner turmoil, the British

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<sup>152</sup>Hector Bolitho, The Reign of Queen Victoria (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), p. 288.

<sup>153</sup>Robert Blake, Disraeli (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 672.

<sup>154</sup>Morley, III, 22.

<sup>155</sup>French, Gerald, Major the Hon., Lord Chelmsford and The Zulu War (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1939), p. 428.

formally proclaimed a Protectorate in February 1887 and on May 9, Zululand finally became a British possession.

At almost the same time that these events were transpiring in South Africa, almost parallel actions were taking place in the East. A brief comparison of the leading figures in the two arenas might be instructive. Frere's character has already been described as imperious and somewhat straight-laced; his counterpart in India was Edward Robert Lytton Bulwer, First Earl of Lytton. The latter, of a poetic bent, and more unorthodox than Frere, came to feel only after Shere Ali's refusal of Lytton's envoy that Afghanistan "must be destroyed."<sup>156</sup> Still, Lytton, like Frere, devoid of quick communications from London, had precipitated the confrontation unilaterally, apparently without waiting for concrete instructions. The major difference was that Lytton did not evidence that disdain for the "less civilised" races and prejudge them as unfit for independence when bordering on British possessions. The chief opprobrium attached to Lytton was the shortage of twelve million pounds rather than fomenting the war with Afghanistan. Frere, on the other hand, had to defend his actions in instigating a war.

Lytton sailed for England in July 1880, Frere in September 1880. Lytton's defense of his Indian policy was much more successful than was Frere's in Parliament. The acrimonious debate concerning the latter's actions has been

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<sup>156</sup>Harlan, Aurelia Brooks, Owen Meredith, A Critical Biography of Robert, First Earl of Lytton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp. 220-5.

alluded to. Frere never again held an official post with the Government, and died in bed on May 29, 1884. He was denied an honored burial at Westminster Abbey for "want of space."<sup>157</sup> Perhaps the last is a fitting epitaph.

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<sup>157</sup> Martineau, 451.

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