

St. Bartholomew's
Hospital



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St. Bartholomew's Hospital Journal,

OCTOBER, 1900.

"Aquam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem."—Horace, Book ii, Ode iii.

Reminiscences of the War in South Africa,
being the Opening Address delivered before the Abernethian
Society, October 11th, 1900.

BY ANTHONY BOWLBY, F.R.C.S.

THIS seems a peculiarly appropriate date on which to speak of reminiscences of South Africa, for it is just one year to-day since the war in South Africa commenced, after the receipt by Great Britain of the only ultimatum ever sent to her by any country. The audacity of the Dutch Republics was the subject of very general comment, and it was difficult for Englishmen to understand by what possible hopes of success it could be

justified. No one here entertained the slightest doubt of the result of the war, and a cheap and easy victory was generally foretold when it was decided to send so large an army as that of 40,000 men. On the whole we certainly at that time despised our foe, and I think many of us would have been much surprised, as well as mortified, to find that they, for their part, despised us even more. Let me occupy your time for a few moments with this aspect of the subject, for to a large extent it explains how the Boers came to fight us.

I have spoken on this matter to various men who have spent their lives in the Dutch Republics, and they very justly say that the experience of the present generation of Boers largely justifies their contempt. They attacked and beat us at Majuba, and our troops then undoubtedly yielded to panic, and ran away. They had previously trapped and shot down a small force at Bronker's Spruit, and finally we yielded to their demands rather than fight to a finish. The natural conclusion was that we were afraid of the results, and that we had not enough troops to afford to lose more. Needless to say, our losses were exaggerated, and the great ignorance of the majority of the people left them quite satisfied that the Boers had defeated the whole British army, ridiculous as such an idea may seem to us. From that time forward the regular troops, or "rooibattjes," were literally despised, and then, when the colonial troopers of Jameson were also defeated and captured with practically no loss to the burghers, each Boer felt that he was a match for any number of British. This feeling was always most marked amongst the Transvaalers, for the more enlightened Free Staters were certainly not so arrogant, and undoubtedly treated our fellow-countrymen better than did their neighbours.

We can better enter into the feeling of the Transvaal Boers at the commencement of the war when we come to know what were their avowed intentions. They proposed to march straight to Durban, to occupy and annex Natal, and drive the English into the sea. That they entertained no doubt of their ability to do so is proved by the fact that