

who said they were going to their farms, by the General's permission. "Deserters," said the President and his party.

Presently they met more, who told the same story. "There must be some misunderstanding," said the President and his party.

Half an hour later there came several well-to-do farmers whom the President knew for unimpeachable witnesses. They, too, said General De Wet had told them to go home, and to be at Brandfort, thirty-five miles north of Bloemfontein, in ten days' time.

The President and his party were dumbfounded. They knew De Wet for a leal burgher, and for a new-found military leader, such as they had longed for; but it was, surely, a deadly error—to abandon the capital to the enemy. They resumed the journey, sorrowing, and soon met a stream of disbanded burghers. Their inquiries were now for the whereabouts of the general, who had forsaken the field.

They were the first pursuers of De Wet in the war, who knew what man they were after, for the British had not by this time heard who was their most cunning adversary. It was two days before President Steyn found the farmer-soldier, at Kroonstad.

The eyewitness who is the authority for this narrative says that the meeting was painfully tense, on the President's part, and easy as a market day, on De Wet's side. There was reproach in the President's tone, as he asked the reason for abandonment of the field to the British.