

23 Lynton Road,
KLOOF,
Natal.

13th March, 1963.

Dear Don,

The great book is almost finished. When I say "great" I mean in size, not in quality. I start tomorrow on the last chapter, and then at the end of the month I hope to take it to Cape Town to work on it for a month with Leo Marguard. It has proved to be a task of a magnitude that I never contemplated, but I believe it is as full and as true an account of Hoffie's life as anyone could have written, with all his virtues and all his faults. It is therefore a story of him and his mother, his religion, his sexual nature, Smuts, politics, the nature of his intellect, the great influence of Oxford, the compulsive drive to work, and ultimately - the thing which he tried to hide, I believe - his weariness with it all.

Now of course I would like nothing better than for you and O.B. to read it, but I would not ask you to do this unless you were able to do nothing else for about three days. I would especially like your opinion because I have had to deal fully with Hoffie's health and I am not a medical man. You might be able to advise me on this point.

Meanwhile, Don, I am enclosing an extract from the last chapter but two, dealing with his visit to Port Elizabeth and your talk to him. Please comment on this extract, including of course the part which deals briefly with yourself.

Love to you and Doris, your mother, Dot, and the Bulls, from us both.

Yours ever,

EXTRACT

Dec, '47

In Port Elizabeth Donald Craib, his friend and admirer of the Cape Town student days, was shocked by his appearance. Craib had become Professor of Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, and then, dissatisfied with the interference and nigardliness of the authorities, had thrown it all up, and had taken up specialist practice in Port Elizabeth. But his reputation as a heart specialist was national, not local. He too, whether because of change in Hofmeyr or change in them both, felt a warmer feeling for his old friend than he had felt for thirty years. The arrogance, the self-satisfaction, seemed to have gone, leaving a man humble and approachable.

However, Craib did not speak to Hofmeyr about these things. He spoke to him about his health, about his weight, about the amount and kind of food that he ate, about his heart and his kidneys, and about the way that he was working. Craib said to him, you must go slow, and if you don't go slow, you soon won't be able to go at all. When Hofmeyr said, what do you mean?, Craib said bluntly, you'll be dead. Hofmeyr told him that he saw no chance of taking his advice while he remained Minister of Finance and Leader of the House. He thought that Craib was surprised to hear that Hofmeyr would willingly lay down these tasks, and he assumed that Craib could not understand that he had lost his ambition. Craib asked why he didn't lay down the tasks, and Hofmeyr admitted that he had tried to. It was then that Craib decided that he would write to Smuts himself.

When Hofmeyr returned to Pretoria, he was still far from well. On the Sunday, December 21, he went to Mrs. Smuts's birthday party at Doornkloof, and then to lunch with the Millins in Johannesburg, but he enjoyed neither. On the day before Christmas, when he was clearing up his office so that he could spend four days at home, Smuts sent for him, and said he had received a letter from Craib. Henry Gluckman, Minister of Health, was there too, and Smuts had no doubt showed him Craib's letter. Smuts said he hoped Hofmeyr would have a holiday before the session commenced, which would not be until January 16. Hofmeyr recorded in his Diary

I said there was not much time left but I hoped to be able to take things pretty easily the next two or three weeks. He said that I had had a very heavy burden and wished he could make me a Minister without Portfolio (at which Gluckman remarked that in that event everyone would be putting jobs on me) - also that he had thought of relieving me of Finance,

but there were difficulties about replacing me. That was all - but I suppose he feels that he has now cleared his conscience about me - and that things will continue as before.*

What was wrong? Why could these two men not reach any final clear-cut decision? Had Smuts, even in spite of Craib's letter, failed to realise that Hofmeyr was tired out? Or did he not want to realise it? And why did not Hofmeyr speak out, and say he could endure it no longer? Was it implicit in the relationship that Hofmeyr could not speak frankly to Smuts, except on political issues? Was Kilpin perhaps right, that because Smuts would not spare himself, Hofmeyr could not ask for relief? Eighteen years earlier, in 1929, Hofmeyr had kept Smuts at arm's length. But now he no longer seemed able to do so.

*Diary, December 24, 1947.