

DCI/1/9/26/77

Toc H T^B Settlement,
P.O. Box 27,
BOTHAS HILL.

1st October, 1953.

Dr. E.H. Brookes
88, Pietermaritz Street,
MARITZBURG.



Dear Edgar,

You will remember that at a meeting of the Hofmeyr Trustees held in Cape Town early in 1952, the question of the Hofmeyr biography was dealt with. At this meeting we discussed certain portions of the biography, notably the affair at the Witwatersrand University which was known as the "Stibbie affair"; we discussed also certain aspects of Mr. Hofmeyr's life itself, notably the dominating influence which his mother exercised over him, and her jealousy of any person who came close to him. It was, I think, the unanimous opinion of the Trustees that these things could not be omitted from any true biography, but that such a biography could not well be published during Mrs. Hofmeyr's lifetime. I was in complete agreement with these views.

You have, I think, felt that some kind of statement should be made, and further, that perhaps the material should be made available to some other biographer, who might be able to produce a Life which would not be found painful or offensive by Mrs. Hofmeyr.

I am quite willing that some statement should be made, but before you decide on its nature I think you should know something of the relationship between Mrs. Hofmeyr and myself.

When I returned from England from a visit made a few months before our meeting in Cape Town, she expressed her displeasure that I should have gone to see Professor MacMillan at St. Andrew's, and Professor McMurray in Edinburgh, after she herself had given me an account of the difficulties experienced by Mr. Hofmeyr at the University of the Witwatersrand. Shortly after our Capetown meeting, I visited Professor Le May at Mauchline, and Professor Murray at Cambridge. All this I reported to her, as I was in the habit of doing, especially as some of these gentlemen sent personal greetings to her.

I think these latter actions confirmed her in her belief



that the Life would not be the kind of book which she had had in mind. I think that Mrs. Hofmeyr would find an objective account of her son's life very painful. She would find any treatment of her own possessive and dominating part quite intolerable.

At this time her attitude to me, especially when she found that I was not intending to write an uncritical biography, underwent a great change. I attempted to reassure her that in my eyes her son was a brave and noble figure, and that this would emerge clearly from the book, even though it was an objective one. These attempts were not successful, and our last two meetings were very uncomfortable; indeed at the second meeting she made it clear that she had no wish to meet me again, and that she had no desire to give any further help or have any further part in any biography that I might produce. It was my impression also that she feared such a book, but her pride would not allow her to ask if it would be produced in her lifetime.

Now I myself have never let her know that I had decided not to publish any Life during her lifetime. This was partly because of the emphatic way in which she had brought our relationship to an end, partly because I hesitated to let her know beyond doubt that she would find the biography painful.

I am still in this position, and I think you will understand why I found it difficult. It may be that you will find some way of meeting the difficulty.

If under these circumstances, the Trustees decided to entrust the biography to some other person, I would fully understand their decision. The great bulk of the official Hofmeyr material is in the strong room at the University of the Witwatersrand Library; other material can be found at various places, for example Cape Town, Oxford, etc., but none of this is of a voluminous nature. Any help I could give I would, but I would not be prepared to discuss the personal aspect of the biography, nor the personal difficulties which Mr. Hofmeyr encountered because he was the man he was, nor the relationship between mother and son, these being the very things that have made it inadvisable to proceed.

If there is any other information that would be helpful to you, I should be glad to give it if I could. I feel sure you will judge wisely what is the best course to pursue.

You yourself have made the suggestion to me that no difficulty should prevent me from writing the biography. I have already written some seven chapters, and have the material wherewith to finish the book, with two exceptions. It is my intention



to finish the writing as soon as we leave the Settlement, for it is clear we shall find no time here. The two pieces of material lacking are

- (i) an account of Mr. Hofmeyr's administrative acts while he was Administrator of the Transvaal,
- (ii) an account of Mr. Hofmeyr's Ministerial acts as distinct from his actions as a politician.

I have not yet decided how important these pieces of material are, in a Life which will be essentially the story of a human being. But if they seem later to be important, I shall just have to try to collect the material.

I regret any concern I may have caused you as Trustees, and trust that this letter will help to remove it.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,