

P. O. ANERLEY,  
South Coast,  
Natal.

4th April, 1950.



Dear Edgar,

My wife thanks you for your letter of March 23. Here I am back again and I have been reading the past copies of the FORUM which my wife kept for me. I am thinking particularly, of course, of your DIARY OF A LIBERAL which seems to me to say the most important things and to say them clearly and without rancour.

Yes, I am willing to do the biography of J.H.H. but I am not clear as to whether you regard the classification of papers and the writing of the biography as two separate tasks. From a talk I had with Cope it seemed clear to me that the Committee would have the classification done by someone else and I think that a good idea.

I think, however, that I should know the conditions under which this biography which you distinguish as "official" is to be written. I am willing to state at the outset what I would wish to do, that is, to write a critical account of J.H.H., which, without hero worship, would bring out his great qualities and, indeed, his greatness as a man. At the same time this would not attempt to conceal the difficulties which this human being experienced in adapting himself to the difficult demands of life, especially South African life - in fact I would state them quite clearly, believing that they are essential to the whole picture.

I state also at the outset that it is my opinion that his extraordinary gifts, in one sense prepared him badly for life, and this, coupled with the early death of his father, brought him into a special relationship with his mother, which must itself be described truly, neither its good nor its other features being underestimated. I believe also that his strange boyhood in which General Smuts was already an important figure was to influence his attitude towards this great man in a deeply important way.

I should enter into an examination of all the available material with these rough ideas in mind, but should I find anything in the material which leads me to suppose that this working hypothesis needs modifying or even seems quite wrong, then I should not hesitate to approach the Committee and inform them of these basic changes which would need to be made. You may be sure that, just as I would avoid uncritical hero worship, equally would I avoid any tendency to sneer at Haffie or to regard him merely as an object of pity or to regard his life and work as a failure. You may be assured that the book

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would be written out of a very deep affection, even though it would not pretend that he was a man who gave and received affection freely.

There is one last point which I should mention. Some people have reproached me for suggesting that HOFFIE died in some sense broken by his experiences of life, by the fact, for instance, that there was a great deal of whispering against him in the U.P., that, for example, by his outspokenness he had done great harm to the political machine (the only political machine he favoured, you will remember) which allowed people like himself to express their views; but the almost continuous attacks levelled against him in the National Press (to which attacks I believe he never really got used. Some correspondents have told me that they found him lively and full of jokes at this time; I myself say that I regard this as quite irrelevant and that the main fact was his grave, quiet, and very often humble demeanour. He was not fearless; he was fearful and courageous. However, again, if the material convinces me that I was mistaken, I should inform the Committee that this was so.

Once the Committee had agreed that the "official" biography should proceed along these lines, then I could set about the writing, with this assurance, I think, that if the Committee wished to discuss the biography as it progressed, they would not find me difficult, except of course, in so far as the picture itself is concerned. Perhaps the Committee has no such intentions to supervise the work. Let us hope that this may be so. But should the Committee at any stage feel that this could no longer be regarded as "official" biography, then I should withdraw at once on one condition, namely, that I should have full access to the material. I hope that you consider this a fair proposition.

Yes, I am anxious to see you also. I have some things for you to read, but I am just as anxious to listen to you

Yours sincerely,

P.S. I went to see Mrs. Hofmeyr on Tuesday, March 28, and found her willing that I should write the biography, to which she added, half in play, half in earnest, provided she could criticise. She agreed that it was important that I should come to see her so soon as your Committee had come to its decision, so that much material about Hoffie could be set down at once before it is too late.