



I feel inadequate in my roll as reviewer of Hofmeyer as I am ill-equipped intellectually to tackle such a difficult task. I can only tell you my own opinions and hope to awaken in you an interest in a book which I consider to be among the best written in South Africa and one of the <sup>fewest</sup> ~~best~~ biographies of our time.

Alan Paton's Hoffmeyer is a definitive biography and as a source book ranks beside Morley's Gladstone and Money Penny and Buckle's Disraeli. One attribute of these two is missing from Hofmeyer and that is tedium. It is five hundred pages long or I should say five hundred pages short. I was carried away from the first beautiful and compelling paragraph to the tragic end. Hofmeyer comes alive at once and his character is well established in the first few pages. Throughout the book I felt great anger for the mother who turned her son into an emotional cripple and could not help but feel that had he enjoyed a happy marriage it would have eased the tensions engendered by his fantastic load of work and that he might be alive today. But such speculations are fruitless.

Let me just say that one's heart bleeds for the rather grotesque little boy in thick spectacles who was so very keen to join <sup>the</sup> rugby and cricket matches of his fellows but was forever set apart by his brilliance and ~~his~~ the domination of his mother. She would not allow him to wear long trousers when he went to the university at thirteen and so he went to lectures in shorts. He was, however permitted to wear long trousers when he went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar but Mrs Hofmeyer went with him. He was a dutiful and devoted son but when he was dying the sickroom was filled with an atmosphere of recrimination because he had disobeyed her and gone to play cricket when he was ill.

Mr Paton does not gloss over Hofmeyer's faults and mistakes, there is no attempt to white wash or excuse, only to explain. This is an honest book and the author's own steadfast character is very evident in his handling of such matters as the Stibbe Affair and Hofmeyer's early vacillations. We are shown how Hofmeyer grows away from his ~~early~~ narrow and rather priggish outlook and because of his great moral courage and belief in Christian principles very gradually divorces himself from the racial prejudices of his people. When Hertzog, in 1938, appointed as one of the nominated senators, who were expected to be acquainted with the reasonable wants and wishes of the coloured races, one of his cronies, Fourie, who had no knowledge of such matters whatsoever Hofmeyer resigned from the Cabinet and thereafter was the but

of much criticism from both sides who considered his action a dramatic gesture without purpose. But it was a matter of principle alone and Hofmeyer didn't care what people thought. It was bad for his career but this never mattered to him when right and wrong were involved.

His relations with Smuts are interesting. I would like to quote from the book, the paragraph which serves to introduce the reader to Smuts. It is an example of the author's style which is ever a delight. Page 89

The author shows that at first Hofmeyer resisted Smuts and later came under the great man's spell. But although he worked brilliantly and heartbreakingly hard, bearing more and more of the ministerial loads and at times, being responsible for five or six portfolios, his inner core remained independent and unlike so many he was not dominated by Smuts and turned into a yes man. Of course, the work killed him. With the exception of about five days about once a year when he went camping at the Boy's camps which he loved and where he relaxed and enjoyed practical jokes and schoolboy games, he worked unceasingly for the war effort, driving himself ever harder while his mother watched with growing anxiety and bitterness towards the man she considered was killing her son. While Smuts spent a good deal of the war years conferring with leaders overseas, Hofmeyer did his work at home. Smuts seemed incapable of showing gratitude and this hurt Hofmeyer. Smuts was, however, devastated by his death. But Hofmeyer did have one trip up north to visit the theatre of war. He enjoyed the sixteen day break enormously except for having to wear a khaki bush shirt and khaki trousers in which he felt foolish. I quote page 388.

Throughout the book, sometimes to the fore, sometimes submerged by work, runs the thread of Hofmeyer's liberalism. It began when he championed small white minorities like the Jews and ended with his realization that only in a common society where men walked without fear, guided by Christian principle lay hope for South Africa. He hoped that the idealism brought into being by the war would grow and bear good fruit in peacetime. The hope was doomed to disappointment when young soldiers who had mixed with all races on the battlefield soon forgot the experience and settled into traditional moulds of prejudice.

Hofmeyer had few close friendships. One of them was with Alfred King, a member of the Balliol Boy's Club which Hofmeyer helped to run. He was to see him only twice after the Oxford days but corresponded they corresponded from the time Hofmeyer left Balliol in 1916 until his death.

Their letters are filled with allusions to past wrestling matches which amused Hofmeyer enormously, particularly as his short, stocky body was as hard as granite as many protagonists discovered to their cost.

His passion was cricket which he played indifferently and with great gusto. He told many cricket jokes against himself in his brilliant speeches. He relaxed completely at matches and enjoyed the friendly atmosphere while he scored or gossiped with friends. Some of you here may have seen him in a floppy hat with a half smile on his face and eyes hidden by the thick spectacles leading the parliamentary cricket team.

Perhaps his happiest time was the day he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Common Laws at Oxford. He was capped with Eisenhower, Mark Clark, Montgomery and many other distinguished persons. It was with joy that he looked up old Balliol friends and inspected his old rooms. And Mrs Hofmeyer stayed at home.

Hofmeyer's health was indifferent from about 1943 onwards. His blood pressure was very high and his kidneys were troublesome. He died on Friday 3rd of December 1948 of a coronary thrombosis the day after he was to have lead the parliamentary cricket team against the M.C.C.

What did he accomplish? As minister of various portfolios especially finance an enormous amount. One cannot imagine how smuts could have managed without his brilliant administration. He was the great hope of all liberally minded people and these felt his death the most. + quote page 525.

Who could fill his place? I can think of only one - the author Mr Alan Paton who wrote this moving, honest, informative and immensely readable book about his dear friend.