

1913-1914

PC/117/9-10



degree

**Greats,*

Hofmeyr, because of his high South African qualifications, was entitled to qualify as a senior student, which meant that he could take the Honour Moderations in two terms instead of five, and could complete the classical course in three years instead of four. This he decided to do, and he was assigned to the late A.W. Pickard-Cambridge. He wrote to Cruse that everybody at Oxford held up his hands in horror at the idea. He was very impressed by the standards that had already been achieved by the English schoolboy before he entered Oxford; "in these entrance exams they give them unseens which a man who has taken Honours in S.A. would not even see daylight through".

A month before his examination he wrote to Cruse:†

"I have my exam on March 15, but find it a hopeless task. The work is far too much for me and I shall have to be content with a second-class (if that). Still fortune favours the brave, and it is a plucky thing attempting Mods in two terms".

This was an odd communication, because he almost never wrote or spoke in this way about his studies. He never boasted of his ability, but he never made light of it. For him to say that any work was "too much" for him was strange. Ronald Currey, who later attended some of the same lectures as Hofmeyr, and who had never seen him in action before, was astounded to observe that the model and industrious student seemed to be paying no attention, not even during the lecture when several books were mentioned in which certain passages had to be looked up. However, he visited Hofmeyr after the lecture, and there were the books on the table, all open at the right places.

Hofmeyr succeeded in his hopeless task. He passed first class in Honour Moderations, with twelve Alphas (distinctions) out of thirteen possibles. Cyril Bailey was one of his examiners, and speaks of his sound knowledge of the prepared books, most of which he had already read in South Africa, and had to offer again because of the shortness of time. Bailey also regarded his translations and compositions as competent, but lacking in distinction and elegance. He said of Hofmeyr's mind that it was sound and sure.

follow

□ "He had a clear and synoptic grasp of what came before him, assimilated it thoroughly and formed a reliable judgment on it. A wide-embracing and retentive memory enabled him to cover much ground and to recall his conclusions for future use. I shall not say that his mind worked quickly - certainly not hastily - or that it was imaginative or inventive. Rather it was a most trustworthy critic of what was presented to it."



Just what kind of genius did Hofmeyr possess? Bailey came near the mark. Hofmeyr had a prodigious ability to make order of any material presented to him, to comprehend it, to analyse it and to put it together again, to remember both it and his own conclusions for future use.

Bailey was wrong about the quickness of his mind, but for a good reason. Hofmeyr was never a lover and a comprehender of the classics in the way that Haarhoff was. He sucked the juice out of literature as one sucks it out of an orange, but he could not distill from the whole fruit an essence. What is more, he knew he could not do so, and he knew it was desirable and advantageous to do so, therefore he approached literature with caution. Bailey contended that Hofmeyr was much more at home later, with Ancient History, and there can be no doubt that it was so. History he understood, and the actions of rulers; most of all he understood noble actions, and gave to them his whole approval. History which told of the deeds of good men was to him the best of all literature, just as verse which dealt with good deeds and noble sentiments was the best of poetry. If he had had to study the works of T.S. Eliot for an examination, he would have had no choice but to memorise the criticisms of others. He would have been a brilliant student of the law, and a judge without peer.

His magnificent gift of ordering and comprehending material was the subject of countless stories, many of them told by persons who did not unreservedly admire him. One of the most difficult things to do is to master the contents and significance of correspondence containing statements, contradictions, amendments, and reaffirmations, that suffers from deaths of participants, changes of governments and policies, and besides all this deals with a technical and intricate subject. Persons who presented such material to him were staggered by his ability to master the contents, and sometimes failed thereafter to argue their cases adequately; some of them blamed him for their discomfiture and said he made them feel like schoolboys. Certainly he did not suffer gladly any person who presented an unprepared case.

ital Bailey, in his mention of Hofmeyr's analytic and synoptic gift, remarked also on his powers of memory. One does not know in how far these are related gifts, but in any event his powers of memory were so great as to constitute a quality of his genius worthy of independent mention. The stories of these powers are also countless, and the relation of them could become tedious. Hofmeyr would say, if asked, that he could see the printed text when he was answering an examination question. He used the briefest of notes when speaking, but on one important occasion, he was reported to have held a sheaf of papers behind his back, and without looking at them, to have peeled them off one by one as he reached the bottom of each of them.

56

He had yet another outstanding gift which is also no doubt closely related to the others, and which was to show itself soon after he left Oxford. He was an administrator of superlative ability. He knew every part of his machine, sometimes better than his departmental heads, a gift which did not always endear him to them. He was also able to look after the machines of others, and when he was a Minister, was sometimes in charge of five portfolios besides his own.

Therefore this gift of ordering, comprehending, and remembering material was by no means solely academic, but was put to use in public affairs. But was it limited to a mastery of whatever machinery existed already, however complex? Why were people to say that he was not creative? One of those who said so, but privately, was himself, and he was speaking then about his political life. One of the questions we shall have to consider is whether his creative gift was limited by South Africa itself, a country whose parliamentary politics have for many years been devoted to a preservation of white supremacy, a strengthening of racial barriers and a raising of new barriers like them; we shall have to ask what creativity was possible under such circumstances, ~~and to ask what truly creative work was done by Betha, Smuts, Hertzog, Malan, Strijdom, and Verwoerd. We shall have to consider the irony of history that placed him in the shadow of a greater man than himself who would neither retire nor die, and against whom one could not rebel because one preferred loyalty to rebellion, because one was already disposed to obedience, because one thought one could do more in Pretoria than in the wilderness.~~

He was as keen as ever on debating, and was a member of Balliol's own undergraduate society, the Arnold. But of course it was the famous Oxford Union, where were gathered the wits of all the colleges, that attracted his attention. The Union, in the year ~~just past, had heard the voices of M.H. Macmillan of Balliol, whom~~ ^{before the war, and} the magazine ISIS called "quite the most polished orator in the Union", of A.P. Herbert, Victor Gollancz, H.J. Laski, J.B. Raju, all of New College, Philip Guedalla and C.M. Joad of Balliol. H.G. Strax of Christ Church, G.D.H. Cole of Magdalen, and also, in what ISIS called the sound but dull class, four Balliol men, Secretan, Wedderburn, Baines, and Adam.

ital w/c.

Hofmeyr's first chance came in the third debate on October 30, 1913, "that military power is economically and socially futile". From 11.00 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. speakers were allowed only five minutes, but what would ordinarily have been the closing speech ended at 11.29 p.m., so that Hofmeyr was able to denounce war for one minute to an inattentive House. ISIS was kind to him, and said that he must try again. He tried again on January 29, 1914, and spoke against a motion "that this House would welcome some scheme of Imperial Federation", a proposal which had been made by New Zealand at

the Imperial Conference of Prime Ministers in 1911, and had been condemned by Canada and Australia, followed by South Africa represented by General Botha. This time Hofmeyr was able to catch the eye of the President at 11.10 p.m., and got his five minutes, but he complained that the President and Secretary were talking behind him, and he gave what he called a poor performance; the resolution was carried by 140 votes to 69; ISIS reported that better than most was "J.H. Hofmeyr (Balliol), who spoke as a South African and a Dutchman. He reassured us as to the pro-British feeling of that colony".

His next chance came a week later. Just at this time there was considerable labour unrest in South Africa, and the South African Federation of Trades had declared a general strike throughout the country. The Government declared martial law, called up 60,000 white men on commando, and arrested the leaders. Fighting broke out in the Fordsburg area, and Smuts, who was Minister of Defence, rushed up from Cape Town to Johannesburg. A famous story is told of his arrival at the scene of fighting. As he left his car, an angry striker came up to him with his rifle at the ready, but Smuts, holding up an impatient hand, walked past him saying, Man, I'm in a hurry. I've no time for that now. ⁽¹⁾ Smuts soon had the SITUATION UNDER CONTROL; DEPORTED NINE SYNDICALISTS to England that very day, and went back to Cape Town and secured the passage of the Riotous Assemblies Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, measures ~~only less authoritarian than those of Malan, Strijdom, and Verwoerd. Which were highly authoritarian.~~

These events aroused anger in Labour and Socialist circles in Britain, and (February 5) saw the Union debating the proposition "that Parliamentary action is discredited as a solution for labour disputes", the affirmative being taken by that formidable pair, Laski and Joad. Hofmeyr must have arrived late, for he wrote to Cruse;

"When I got there I heard some people slanging our Government with the most complete ignorance of the true facts. So though I was not prepared - or partially so - I got up and let them have it."

ISIS reported on his speech as follows:

"Mr. J.H. Hofmeyr (Balliol) speaking as a citizen of the South African Union, deplored the ignorance of Englishmen on Colonial questions. He denied that the South African Government was hand in hand with the capitalists. He knew

⁽¹⁾ "Kerel, ek is haastig, ek het nou nie tyd daarvoor nie."

something about the subject. He was very good, though unsympathetic to the "natives" to a curious extent. He should undoubtedly be heard on the "paper" in the immediate future. (2) But he should really omit the fallacy of "the man who has been there"; why does a South African know more about South Africa than an Englishman knows about England?"

ISIS concluded that Mr. Laski, Mr. Haldenstein, and Mr. Hofmeyr were excellent.

The Oxford Magazine of February 12/ 1914, reported that Hofmeyr's speech was interesting. He has a clear and lucid style, despite an uncomfortable-looking rigidity in his attitude and a slight tendency to monotonous.

On May 7/ South Africa was again the subject of debate, and Victor Gollancz, supported by Laski, Macmillan, and G.D.H. Cole, moved "that this House deplores the policy initiated by General Botha with regard to the South African labour troubles".

ISIS reported on Hofmeyr's speech as follows:

peep
"Flying Dutchman (following precedent of last week of deserting Teller's seat for despatch-box) recalled his own great effort of last Term, and gave House into his lurid past. "I remember", he said with tears almost choking his words, "throwing up my cap for joy at news of General Botha's defeat." Hon. member for South Africa's speech cut short by Presidential note at end of his exordium. Its length ~~was~~ chiefly due to enormous list and detailed explanation of things "it would not be worth my while pointing out".

quotes as here

It is not easy to interpret Hofmeyr's remark about General Botha's defeat. It is inconceivable that he should have been referring to Botha's election defeat at the hands of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick in 1910, after he had already been asked by the Governor-General to be the first Prime Minister of South Africa; it is inconceivable because, in as far as he had any politics in his early youth, Hofmeyr was a Botha man. Nor does it seem likely that he was so strong a supporter of Merriman's candidature for the Premiership that he rejoiced when Botha was beaten in an election. There seems to be only one possible explanation, that Hofmeyr was talking of 1902,

(2) To get on to the 'paper' meant to be one of the movers or seconders, and therefore to be recognised as a speaker of merit.

54

when as a mere boy of eight, at the English-speaking South African College School in the English-speaking city of Cape Town, in childishness and ignorance, he had thrown up his cap because the hero of his own people had at last been defeated; and he no doubt told this story to make the point that his present advocacy was born of enlightenment, and to give his hearers some idea of the kind of world in which he was born and educated. ³ This may have been the debate when a future Prime Minister of Great Britain passed him a note which read, May I venture - or would you think it terribly impertinent of me - to congratulate you on one of the most interesting, lucid, and moving speeches I've ever heard? Yours, Harold Macmillan. ~~Or it may not have been this debate, for the OXFORD MAGAZINE agreed with ISIS that Hofmeyr's speech was too long.~~

In any event, his first year as a debater in the Union was promising. Both ISIS and OXFORD MAGAZINE recommended that he should be heard earlier in future. ⁴ ISIS wrote teasingly and affectionately about another South African College man, Basil Melle of Brasenose, who was distinguishing himself in rugby, and it portrayed him in its feature 'Isis Idol', and twitted him with his Cape pronunciation:

Indones "Your industry and versatility was, in your own words, "yuge"... At the age of 21, with no worlds left to conquer in South Africa, you came over "yere"."

A few months after these events, Britain went to war, and though the Union debates continued, the great ones came to an end, so that Oxford, which was later to honour Hofmeyr the statesman and administrator, never really heard Hofmeyr the orator.

The Michaelmas term ends ^{in mid-} on December 27, and the Hilary or Lent term begins ^{in mid-} on January 14. Mrs. Hofmeyr and her son, accompanied by their second cousin Freddie Krige, later a well-known gynaecologist in Johannesburg, spent Christmas as paying-guests on the farm Ashstead, near Godalming in Surrey. Krige was the 1914 Rhodes Scholar from Victoria College, Stellenbosch, and was reading Physiology at Hertford, as a preliminary to doing medicine at St. Bartholomew's. He had been an enthusiastic member of the Student's

③ It was Prof. Haarhoff who suggested this explanation. I cannot conceive of another. Yet in 1948 Hofmeyr told H.C. Bosman that in the year 1902, staying on a farm near Malmesbury, he had heard the rifle-fire from a raiding commando, which must have been the one led by General Smuts. Hofmeyr told Bosman, I thrilled at the thought that it was a Boer commando in action. How does one reconcile these stories? I think the answer is that Hofmeyr was a child of eight, and responded to both these excitements.



Christian Association in South Africa, and his ambition was to become a medical missionary; he also attended the morning services at Mansfield College Chapel and had attached himself to the Presbyterian congregation. He was therefore as close to the Hofmeyrs as any other person at Oxford, and even helped his cousin with the Balliol Boys' Club after the war had emptied the colleges. The Kriges, like the Meyerses, were a notable Stellenbosch family, and produced such notabilities as Isie Krige (Mrs. Smuts), Japie Krige, the legendary rugby footballer, and Uys Krige, the only Afrikaner troubadour. Freddie Krige was an all-round sportsman, and had played for the famous Victoria College at Stellenbosch, and later captained Barts against Oxford. He would have got his Rugby Blue, if it had not been for the war, but got his half-blue for swimming. He was what is known as a character, and stood in no fear of Mrs. Hofmeyr; he would never argue with her, and considered that Theo Haarhoff and the others did not know how to manage her, but allowed themselves to be drawn into a contest of wills. Mrs. Hofmeyr, on her side, realised that Krige had a strong will of his own, and made no attempt to pit hers against his; she tried to dominate only those who feared to try conclusions with her. In his turn, Krige avoided clashing with her, and when she told him her son would play a great part in the world, he did not argue with her, even though he did not believe it. But he did not really like living with her; for one thing, he did not care for the extreme frugality of mother and son. At that time check caps were a ^{bit of a rage} in Oxford. At the shops in the town they cost anything from 7/6 to 10/-. Hofmeyr went down to London and came back with one of them which he showed with some pride to Krige and asked what he thought of it. Krige replied that it looked cheap, and Hofmeyr said, 'How much?' Krige said, 'One and six,' and Hofmeyr was quite crestfallen, and ^{asked} said, 'How did you know?'

7s. 6d.
10s.

Why was it that a man like Krige could refuse to do battle with Mrs. Hofmeyr, while others, both men and women, had their most pugnacious impulses aroused by her, and chose to avoid her company rather than disgrace themselves? How was Krige able to stand aside from the battle, and watch, not without a certain mischievous pleasure, one supposes, the torments of these whom like angry moths, hurled themselves against her indomitable flame? He did not like her, but she aroused no old Adam in him; and he noted that although she was so frugal, there was food, not expensive but rich food, in plenty. Her son had to be fed, and her son ate twice as much as any of them, his diet being particularly rich in protein.

said Krige

It is true that Hofmeyr ate a great deal of rich food, and it is also true that he did not eat elegantly. He did not eat in any outrageous way, but he shovelled his food into his mouth in what one might call a mechanical manner, like a stoker stoking an engine, and one felt in some way that that was precisely what he was doing. He could enjoy a specialty, but he dealt with his meals

expeditiously. One wondered sometimes whether this matter-of-fact shovelling had something to do with a past obedience, for he did not appear to enjoy eating. It is difficult for a person like ~~W. H. W.~~ ^{W. H. W.}, whose appetite has declined with age, to understand how one can possibly eat without wanting to, yet that is what he appeared to do. It seems very probable that he ate because once he had been told to eat, and because his mother's continuing approval depended on his obedience. This seems probable because it was the experience of many other people besides himself. When they did not want to eat any more, Mrs. Hofmeyr simply put another piece of cake or another piece of meat on their plates, and they had to eat or take the consequences. Probably Krige would not have eaten at all, or would have shrugged and eaten, but for others it was a contest of wills, and they ate with all the juices of rebellion warring with those of digestion. But the young Hofmeyr had no doubt made a treaty long before; what its clauses were we shall never know, but one would imagine that he had been on the losing side.

After the holiday at Godalming, Krige went off to London to stay at the Oxford and Bermondsey Mission, and Mrs. Hofmeyr and her son travelled up to Swanwick in the Midlands to attend the Student Movement Bible Training School from the 2nd of January till the 7th. Hofmeyr was extremely critical of the training school and looked at it from a Baptist and fundamentalist point of view. He was surprised that Professor Kennett of Cambridge regarded the book of Amos as a patchwork, and that the Rev. Mr. Strachan of St. Columba's, Cambridge, questioned the accuracy of the narratives of the Fourth Gospel. He wrote to Bull that

"everybody who was there swallowed everything that was said with the greatest gullibility and without the least sense of discrimination and affected a most superior scorn of the old-fashioned people who still cling to the old ideas."

Swanwick disappointed him by its search for "the truth in modern terms", and he said that he came away from it rather a believer in Verbal Inspiration - "always of course bearing in mind the conditions of the times and the character of the writer".

Yet in fact he was only writing words; already and unknown to him, his fundamentalism was breaking down. Pietas, gravitas, virtus - law, order, truth - justice, mercy, love - these were the stars by which he was beginning to set his course. But the faith remained the same, in a God who was the Maker, the Judge, the Ruler, and the Father of men, to whom men owed a humble and a filial duty. There is surely no task more difficult and dangerous than to imprison in words one's deepest beliefs about God and man; some evade it by expressing their religion almost entirely in worship, others in action, in living according to the loftiest ideals. Hofmeyr was

undergoing an apprenticeship to this last class, but it was only begun and was not to be easy. At this time his interpretation of the great universals was strongly puritanical; and that of course was largely the influence of his mother.

Mrs. Hofmeyr was meanwhile living in her lodgings in Wellington Square. During that first year of her son's time at Oxford she certainly did not obtrude herself. Macmurray, as we have seen, learned only at the end of the fourth term that she was there. She encouraged, as she had always done, her son's fullest participation in college activities, the debating society, the Boys' Club, and the various outings. Cyril Bailey, that gentlest of critics, thought that she kept away from her son as much as possible in order to show how baseless was the belief that she would not let him out of her sight. Even an informed person like Bailey thought that Mrs. Hofmeyr was the first mother to accompany a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford, but he was wrong. Sir Francis Wylie, the Oxford Secretary of the Rhodes Trust, could remember at least four cases; his own view was that it was undesirable, and Mrs. Hofmeyr knew that he thought so. Accustomed to quail before none, she tackled Wylie at a Rhodes Scholars' function, and said, ~~with that stutter of hers,~~ 'I hear you don't ap-p-prove of me.' She then went to Lady Wylie, and expressed her belief that she had been very necessary in Oxford, because her son had been able to come to her to relax in a way that he could not do in his own rooms. Lady Wylie was very courteous, and did not explain to Mrs. Hofmeyr that her husband opposed the mother's presence ~~at Oxford~~ on quite other grounds, namely, that her presence at Oxford was preventing her son from preparing himself for an independent life, the life of leadership that Cecil Rhodes had had in mind. Another mother might thereafter have felt constraint with the Wylies, but not Mrs. Hofmeyr; she had a massive self-containedness, and if there were constraint in her presence, it was invariably others who felt it.

cap 5

Both the mother in her lodgings and the son in his college continued to live the simplest of lives. The Rhodes Scholarship was worth £300 a year, but in the first year they saved enough money to be able to visit South Africa for the long vacation, sailing from England on the WALMER CASTLE on June 20, 1914. Hofmeyr later told Haarhoff that he saved £240 in the three years he was at Oxford, and that was after he paid for all their travelling. Nor did they deprive themselves of holidays, as we shall see. But these holidays were austere in the extreme; both mother and son were able, to an extraordinary degree, to enjoy a holiday without extras.

ital

For the short vacation between Hilary and Easter, they went to Margate, but Hofmeyr found time to spend a few days at the Oxford and Bermondsey Mission, in which Secretan was actively interested, though this never enjoyed the same place in Hofmeyr's affections as the Balliol Boys' Club. He had bought himself a bicycle,

and did a great deal of cycling. All through his life he believed in the importance of physical exercise, until it became dangerous for him to take it. He played hockey at Balliol, and was selected for the second team; he played tennis in desultory fashion, but there is no record that in his first year he indulged his passion for cricket except from afar. When the war came and everyone was swept away, he actually represented the college against Balliol Boys' Club, though one presumes that he could not have said, "I played for Balliol," nor would he have done so.

It was a wonderful year, that first year at Oxford. He brought it to an end on June 9 by writing for the Hertford scholarship, with no deeply serious intention, as he recognised that his Latin verse was not of the first quality and probably recognised that it never could be. He wrote a postcard to Haarhoff, who was then a student in Berlin, that the Hertford papers were "most wierd [sic] and wonderful"; however he had got amusement out of it, and expected the examiners to get more. He told Haarhoff that his mother and he were sailing on the WALMER CASTLE in a week's time. He wrote with unusual abandon, "Heigh-ho for the SUNNY SOUTH!" 5 caps #

Mother and son arrived in Cape Town to find glowing reviews of the recently published LIFE OF JAN HENDRIK HOFMEYR (ONZE JAN). ONS LAND, the Dutch-language newspaper, gave a six-column review to the book, calling it a "rich contribution to South African history". In an editorial it said that although it could hardly be expected "that the language and style could be compared with the works of the famous Dutch prose writers", even the reader with the "Boer Matriculation" would be able to understand it. It was a book "written by an Afrikaner for Afrikaners". The CAPE TIMES gave it a seven-column review, and called it "the work of a pious and discerning hand", and a "most moving story". It thought that the biographer was unjustified in his comments on the post-raid Cecil Rhodes, but said that the book contained no "petty or narrow comment". It paid the young author the tribute that his judgment of Onze Jan would be the final judgment. It suspected, incorrectly, that the work was originally written in Dutch, and afterwards translated. The SOUTH AFRICAN NEWS said that the young Hofmeyr had discharged his task "with brilliant success", and sub-titled its review, "A Splendid Work".

A more critical appraisal came from J.H.H. de Waal, who was a member of the Committee which commissioned the book, and who was appointed the first Nationalist Speaker of the House of Assembly when General Hertzog came to power in 1924; he reviewed the book in DE GOEDE HOOP, using the new language Afrikaans. He paid tribute to the thoroughness of the book - that was to be expected from such an industrious young man. But he criticised it for its purely factual nature, and its lack of insight into the character of its hero. He further thought it unfortunate that young Hofmeyr

65

had given to Onze Jan's political character the same colour as his own, and said forthrightly that the young man had grown up in an environment which did not encourage passion for the Afrikaner cause.

ikat
De Waal's political criticisms were to be expected. However, his non-political criticisms were more penetrating than those of other reviewers; he considered that the biographer had failed to understand the person, and that much of Onze Jan's conservatism was in fact timidity; de Waal told the story of how, when the Anglo-Boer war was threatening, Onze Jan had said to President Steyn, 'You are going to fight, but do you see any chance to win?', to which President Steyn replied, 'We shall at least save our honour.' De Waal considered that Onze Jan, had he been President of the Transvaal, would have yielded to Chamberlain's claims one after the other. He was no admirer of Onze Jan's steady refusal to take governmental responsibility, and considered this a proof of his cautious and unadventurous nature.

These criticisms are important, because Hofmeyr was to say in later life that one must read the life of Onze Jan to understand his own politics.

Mrs. Hofmeyr's pride in the long and complimentary reviews was boundless. Her son was now admired, not only for gifts which were God-given, but for the use made of them by steady and honest industry. For her there was no greater virtue.

Mother and son received a great welcome from their many relatives and friends, but the young man was not in Cape Town long. He raced up to Robertson, where a students' conference for men only was being held under canvas on the showgrounds. There he met Bull and Gruse, and all his old friends of the Students' Christian Association, and was able to give them firsthand accounts of the student movement in England. There was also a warm welcome from the Baptist community, and more than one person remembers the meeting of testimony held at the Alhambra Theatre. Mother and son sat in front, and the young man, asked to give his testimony, mounted the platform and stated that it was his mother who had instructed him in the Scriptures and brought him to Christ, thus moving many of his hearers to tears. After the service people said to Mrs. Hofmeyr, as they were to say all through her son's life, 'You must be proud of your son; and she replied, 'You must thank God for that, not me.' It would have been a visit of idyllic happiness had it not been for the fact that on August 4, 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Nothing could have subjected the new Union of South Africa to greater stress and strain.

General Botha had not had an easy time as the first Prime Minister of the Union. His South Africa Party had entered Parliament with 66 seats, and the largely English-speaking Unionists with

39 seats, out of a House of 120. He himself had been Prime Minister of the Transvaal, and he took into his Cabinet representatives of the Cape, the Orange Free State, and Natal, though it is certain that he would rather have seen the Free Stater, General J.B.M. Hertzog, ascend the Bench. Botha was a big-hearted man, and was prepared to let things, under the guidance of his winning personality, take their course; but Hertzog was convinced that this would mean the final absorption of the Afrikaner people. While Botha therefore stressed the goal of unity among the white people of South Africa, and the need to overcome the bitterness of the past, Hertzog argued that there could be no real unity unless the parties to it were strong, virile, and self-respecting. Botha's personality appealed to those who wished to avoid further conflict, who were peace-loving by nature, who were satisfied with the new compact and wanted to give it a chance; Hertzog appealed to those who felt the deep injustice and humiliation of the Anglo-Boer War, and who were not only determined to resist any further decline of Afrikaner interests, but were also determined to advance them publicly, without undue concern to be nice and polite and forbearing about it.

On December 7, 1912, while Hertzog was still a member of the Botha Cabinet, he made his famous speech at a small place called de Wildt, in which he declared that imperialism was good for him in so far as it was good for South Africa. He declared that he was not one of those who always talked of conciliation and loyalty, for they were idle words that deceived nobody. He further stated that the reason he dwelt so much on national feeling of the Dutch-speaking Afrikaners was that they understood loyalty more deeply than most of the English, because their forefathers had come to South Africa ~~two hundred years~~ earlier.

Hertzog's speech caused a crisis. What was one to make of a man who spoke of national unity at the same time that he spoke of a separate language, history, religion, and customs? And a man who, while he spoke of national unity, reserved all his fire and warmth and passion for the Afrikaner cause? What was more, ^{confusingly} he used the word Afrikaner in its less usual sense, (and as far as I know he did so all his life); he used the word to mean white South African, and not merely Afrikaans-speaking South African. But this was not always clear, and English-speaking people were always doubtful of him, and made anxious by his speeches, just as white people in Africa today are often made anxious by the ambiguous word African; for a black speaker may say 'Africa for the Africans', and yet mean by African any person who gives his love and loyalty to the new continent. In any event Hertzog's Afrikaner zeal was so warm and passionate that he evoked the love and admiration of those very zealots of whom the English-speaking were most afraid.

On December 16, 1912, Botha resigned, and asked by the Governor-General to form a new Government, excluded Hertzog from

the Cabinet. On May 21, 1913, the South African Party Provincial Congress in the Free State voted 47 - 1 in favour of the views of Hertzog. On November 20, 1913, the Party's National Congress in Cape Town voted 131 - 90 in favour of Botha. General Christiaan de Wet, beloved Anglo-Boer War hero, thereupon led most of the Free Staters out of the hall. On January 7, 1914, the National Party (invariably called by its opponents the Nationalist Party) was launched on its historic career, with General Hertzog as its unquestioned leader.

Such was the situation when Great Britain declared war on Germany. It was the view of both General Botha and General Smuts that South Africa, as part of the Empire, was automatically at war. Parliament was not in session, but Botha immediately offered to set free the Imperial garrison of the Union, and he mobilised the Naval Volunteers and portions of the Union Defence Force. Botha reminded his people of the noble action of Campbell-Bannerman, who in 1906 had restored responsible government to the Transvaal, and in 1907 to the Free State; and he told them that they could not be merely fair-weather friends of the Empire, and pointed to the aggressive nature of Germany's actions. These arguments fell coldly on the ears of many of those who twelve years before had lost their countries in what they too considered a war of aggression, and General Hertzog declared that he possessed no proof of the aggressive nature of Germany's action. Such was the confusion in South Africa that many a Boer veteran, including some of the highest rank, expected Botha and Smuts to take advantage of Great Britain's extremity and to declare South Africa a republic; and the story was told of one of Botha's trusty commandants that when he received a telegram from his old General calling on his services, he replied instantly, 'Certainly, on which side do we fight?' But what was most feared was an angry and uncontrollable reaction from Afrikaans-speaking South Africa when it learned that Botha expected its sons to fight for the British cause.

Botha and Smuts had another anxiety. On August 7 Botha had been asked by the British Government to proceed against South West Africa, but he was not at all certain that he commanded the loyalty of General Christiaan Beyers, Commandant-General of the Union Defence Force. Beyers, though born in the Cape, had gone to the Transvaal to practise law, and had served with distinction in the republican forces during the Anglo-Boer War. He had presided over the conference of delegates at Vereeniging in May 1902, and in 1907 when the Transvaal had received responsible government, he had been chosen as the first Speaker of the House, and had again distinguished himself. He was Botha's nominee for the Speakership of the new Union House of Assembly, but the Free State and Merriman, fearing that the Transvaal wanted to control the whole of South Africa, had helped to elect J.T. (later Sir James) Molteno. Botha later appointed Beyers to be the first Commandant-General of the

67

new Union Defence Force, and on a visit to Germany, Beyers had, according to Eric Walker the historian, "been made much of by the Kaiser".

Now Beyers was also a cousin of the Hofmeyrs, almost as distinguished as Onze Jan, and his photograph was given a proud place on the mantelpiece of the young undergraduate in his Balliol rooms. Although Mrs. Hofmeyr could hardly have been described as knowledgeable or interested in politics, and although she observed a curious neutrality towards Nationalists throughout her life, she and her son were Botha supporters, and they were disappointed on their arrival to hear the rumour that the Commandant-General, who had first sided with Botha in the Hertzog dispute, was thinking of resigning his commandant-generalship, and of returning to politics as a supporter of the Nationalists, who now numbered twelve in the House. The Hofmeyrs were relieved when Beyers said publicly that he had no such intention.

Parliament was not in session, but on August 10 the Cabinet agreed to send an expedition to South West Africa, though Botha did not make it clear at the time that only volunteers would be sent. On August 15 Botha met his commandants, and Beyers and six others declared themselves opposed to the expedition. On the same day another of Botha's old colleagues, General de la Rey, fully intended to address a meeting of burghers at Treurfontein, and to urge them to rebel; but Botha by argument and kneeling with him in prayer persuaded the old man that such a course would be dishonourable. On August 26 the first Congress of Hertzog's new Nationalist Party condemned any proposal to attack South West Africa. On September 9 Parliament met and supported Botha's policies by 92 - 18, Hertzog being the leader of the minority, and saying, That war is a war between England and Germany, it is not a South African war. On September 15 General Mackenzie occupied the South West African town of Luderitzbucht, and that same day General Beyers resigned his commandant-generalship in protest. He met General de la Rey in Preterita, and the two of them soon after left for the Defence Force camp at Potchefstroom. What was their purpose? No one has ever found the answer to that question, for they never reached their destination. Police were searching for the desperate and dangerous Foster gang, and had set up road blocks round Johannesburg; Beyers either did not hear the order to stop, or heard it and ignored it, with the consequence that the police fired, killing de la Rey almost instantly. The country was shocked by the tragedy, and so great was the distrust that even General Hertzog said that there was something strange about the whole business; however, Mrs. de la Rey reported that she had asked Beyers why he had not stopped, and that he had replied that de la Rey had told him not to do so.

Generals Botha and Smuts made the long journey from Cape

Town to Lichtenburg to attend the funeral of de la Rey on September 20. Generals Beyers, de Wet, and Kemp were also there, three men who now regarded Botha and Smuts as traitors to the Afrikaner people. There was the car in which de la Rey had been killed, a silent accuser with its bullet hole and its blood. The great majority of those who attended had been commanded by one or other of the Generals. So tense was the atmosphere, that Campbell-Bannerman's noble act of reparation now appeared like a cheap device, a stratagem to divide and rule. Botha suffered the painful experience of encountering the hatred of people who once had adored him, but he did not hesitate to move amongst them. He told them that he himself would assume the commandant-generalship, that he would lead the campaign against South West Africa, and that he would depend entirely on volunteers. The next day he made this information public, and not too soon, because simultaneously Generals Beyers, de Wet, and Kemp publicly demanded the dropping of the South West Africa campaign; they further demanded a decision by September 30, failing which, a great gathering would be organised to compel them to drop it. (4)

It was on the day of General de la Rey's funeral that mother and son sailed out of Table Bay on the WALMER CASTLE, back to a country which, though at war with a deadly enemy, was at peace within herself.



(4) om hulle daer van af te dwing, C.M. v. d. Heever, GENERAL J.B.M. HERTZOG,

Bombich