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Edited by W. K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel

Excerpt

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PART VI
DEFEAT AND RECOVERY

I JUNE 1902–16 SEPTEMBER 1905

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The documents in Part VI open with a group of letters, written during the second half of 1902, which show Smuts, after disbanding his commandos and visiting his relations in the Cape Colony, returning to Pretoria to re-occupy his rifled house and start practice all over again as 'plain Mr Smuts' while his wife remained in Pietermaritzburg to recover from an operation. They also show him suffering from the emotional effects of defeat. He found assuagement to some extent by writing about the war—besides the *Memoirs* and the earlier attempts at a book on the Cape Expedition, there are some war-time sketches among his papers. Assuagement was also sought in trying to help his stricken countrymen. Several letters reveal his efforts to ease the lot of the Cape rebels, to help prisoners of war and members of the war-time Boer Deputation to get home, and to organize relief for the ruined farmers.

At the end of 1902 the news that Chamberlain was to make a South African tour and visit the Transvaal roused the Boer leaders there to concerted action against certain aspects of Milner's regime, especially his assault on the Dutch language in his education policy and his intention to import Chinese labourers for the gold-mines. Soon they were committed to a political struggle. Evading Milner's attempt to include them in the nominated Legislative Council, they decided to create an organized opposition. They called a great meeting of Boer delegates at Heidelberg in May 1904, and in January 1905 launched *Het Volk*—the party of the Transvaal Boers. In these activities Botha was the acclaimed leader with undoubted prestige and popularity. He was the heart of the movement but Smuts was the brain. It was Smuts who formulated the arguments, presented the Boer case, devised the strategy of encounter with the High Commissioner and his officials, forged every major documentary weapon that was used in the fight against 'Milnerism'. Some of the papers printed below provide striking proof of that.

The later letters in this section show that in 1905, though still mistrustful, Smuts felt growing confidence that the worst wounds of the war could be healed by the achievement of self-government in the conquered Republics. He noted the appearance of a movement for responsible government among the 'moderate English' in the Transvaal (258); he bade Milner a generous, but no doubt relieved, farewell (266); he watched the disintegration of the Unionists in Great Britain and speculated on the quality and intentions of the Liberals who would soon replace them.

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The most interesting developments in Smuts's personal life as recorded in the letters of this period are the birth of two daughters, a steadily growing legal practice (264), a renewal of the correspondence, interrupted during the war, with Wolstenholme and Merriman, and the beginning of a new one with Emily Hobhouse (233). Only his early letters to her are extant. Of special interest are his filial letter to Kruger and a unique letter in reply (217 and 218).

181 To S. M. Smuts

Vol. 2, no. 110

Pretoria

1 June 1902

My darling Isie, The tragedy is over. The curtain falls over the Boers as British subjects, and the plucky little Republics are no more. Peace was signed last night at Pretoria.¹ You can imagine my feelings on the subject; you will perhaps not be surprised to hear that I worked for peace. I did my best for our cause as long as there was any chance; but I had become convinced that the struggle had become hopeless. So we shall start afresh, working along the lines opened by the new conditions. I accept my fate—that is the only manly course left.

Tomorrow I am going to the Cape Colony to explain the new situation to the commandos there and to direct their surrender.² The rebels will all be amnestied with loss of their franchise, with the exception of the commandants and ex-officials of the Cape Government. These I must try to save in some other way. I hope they will be amnestied on the occasion of the coronation. This tour through the Cape Colony will take about a month. After that I shall return to Pretoria, and hope that our home will then again be at our disposal. I dare say everything there is in a deplorable state and will take some time clearing up. But I hope we shall soon be settled again and try to forget the past. Jim Roos will inform you when the house is vacant and I advise you to write to him. I hope your health will soon be so improved that you can come back to Pretoria; perhaps you will be there already to await my return from the Cape Colony. Perhaps I shall have an

¹ Smuts was not a signatory since he was not a member of the Executive Council of the South African Republic.

² He reached Concordia on 14 June.

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opportunity of visiting Klipfontein and Stellenbosch,¹ but I shall be much pressed for time. I spent part of the forenoon with the Roosees; they were very glad to see me.

I shall be very glad to hear how your health is progressing; write to me c/o General Sir John French and don't forget I have reverted to plain J. C. Smuts. I am very sorry to tell you that President Steyn's health is quite gone; sort of gradual paralysis; he cannot last long. He was the last of the Romans.²

I am anxious to come back to Pretoria as soon as possible, as I think I may be of some service to our poor ruined people there. Their condition is really most deplorable and I can only hope that through the generosity of the new Government their recovery may be more rapid than I expect. Let us do our best to bind up the old wounds, to forgive and forget, and to make the future happier than the past has been. With love and best wishes for your health, Ever your Mios.

182 From O. Schreiner

Vol. 2, no. 83

Hanover

4 June 1902

Dear Friend, I hear you are about in this part of the world³ and am longing to see you once more. I heard from Isie yesterday and I know it would be a joy to her if I could tell her I had seen you and you were looking strong and well.

I am sending this line to Major [G. D.] White at the station and asking him very kindly to forward it to you if he knows where you are.

I would come to the station or anywhere where I was allowed just to shake hands with you: but if you could come here for a day or an hour it would be a great joy.⁴

Your little son will be with you no more when you and Isie form your home again; but it be such joy to me to know you are together again.

¹ To visit his and his wife's parents.

² 'the last of all the Romans.' Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, v. iii. 99.

³ The north-eastern Cape Colony.

⁴ Olive Schreiner did not meet Smuts, who had already gone on to the south-western Cape Colony.

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My husband joins me in warmest and most heartfelt greetings. Yours ever,

Olive Schreiner

183 To S. M. Smuts

Vol. 2, no. 110A

Klein Libertas

26 Juni 1902

Mijn liefste, Gister ontving ik uw lieven brief waarin U echter niet zeide hoe of het met U ging. Ik ben echter zeer verheugd te vernemen dat jij zoo spoedig hersteld zal zijn, want ik verlang onuitsprekelijk veel naar mijn dierbaarste—de eenige ziel die ik in waarheid ooit heb lief gehad of nog zal kunnen liefhebben. Ach Lappie, alles hier te Stellenbosch herinnert mij zoo aan jou, aan die gelukkige dagen van het gulden verleden voor wij kommer en zorg, pijn en vernedering kenden, toen onze zielen als twee takken op één stam bloeiden — dat het nu voor mij te pijnlijk is alhier te zijn zonder jou. De huisgenoten en vrienden zijn bizonder lief en goed, maar er is een ledigheid welke niets en niemand kan vullen behalve mijn hart dat daar ver te PMaritzburg op een krank bed ligt. Ik ga a.s. week terug naar Pretoria en zal U diezelfde week komen opzoeken; wees dus nog maar geduldig wetende dat ik nog meer ongeduldig ben om jou te zien dan jij om mij te zien. Ik ben zoo trotsch op mijn ou vrouwtje omdat allen hier onder denzelfden indruk verkeeren als Pres. Kruger dat nl. ‘mijn vrouw beter is dan ik’. Onze oude vriend Hobson heeft alhier aan een belangrijken persoon gezegd dat ‘Mrs Smuts is the most remarkable woman I have ever met’. En onze oude vriendin O.S. maakt ook geen geheim van hare opinie. Dus moet ik hier tot mijn groot leedwezen (!) vinden dat ik maar ‘second fiddle’ speel in publieke estimatie. Maar ik zal maar mijn lot geduldig dragen, wetende dat er meester bo’ meester moet zijn.

Op mijn weg van Clanwilliam kwamen ik en Tottie over Klipfontein en Riebeeck. Allen waren zeer lief en goed maar de ledige plaats heeft mij zeer smartelijk aangedaan. De nieuwe moeder kende ik goed in vroeger dagen daar wij in dezelfde klas op school waren. Wij hebben geen reden met de keuze ontevreden te zijn. Bools gade had ik niet de eer te

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ontmoeten daar zij naar haar ouders op een visite weg was. Kitty en Bibas waren uitbundig blijde mij te zien. Zoodra wij weer thuis zijn moeten wij Bibas laten afkomen om jou behulpzaam te zijn. Zij zal jou van veel nut kunnen zijn.

Ik weet niet wanneer ons huis vrij zal zijn; ik zal mijn best doen de Imp. Yeomanry er uit te krijgen maar of ik zal slagen moet nog gezien worden. De boomen zijn mooi groot maar de tuin is in liederlijke toestand. Binnen was ik niet, maar het zal zeker tijd nemen om alles weer in order te krijgen. Ik ben echter zeker dat wij er zeer gelukkig in zullen zijn.

Ik zal geen nieuws van hier schrijven daar jou familie zulks zeker doet. Ik weet ook niet wanneer jij dit gekrap zal in handen krijgen.

Ik denk veel aan mijn liefste. *Ach keine, keine find ich je, Die so mich liebt wie Du.* Ik hoop dat wanneer ik a.s. bij jou aankom jij niet meer in bed zal zijn, hoewel jij natuurlijk nog niet hersteld zal zijn. Met diepste liefde

Jan Mios

TRANSLATION

Klein Libertas¹

[Stellenbosch]

26 June 1902

My dearest, Yesterday I received your dear letter in which, however, you did not say how you were. I am, however, very glad to learn that you will recover so soon, for I long inexpressibly much for my most precious one—the one soul that I have ever truly loved or ever will be able to love. Ah Lappie, everything here in Stellenbosch reminds me so much of you, of the happy days of the golden past before we knew worry and care, pain and humiliation, when our souls burgeoned like two branches on one stem, that it is too painful for me to be here without you. The family and friends are particularly dear and good, but there is an emptiness which nothing and nobody can fill except my heart who lies far away in Pietermaritzburg on a sickbed. I go back to Pretoria next week and shall come and see you the same week; so be patient knowing that I am still more impatient to see you than you are to see me. I am so proud of my little wife because

¹ The farm of Isie Smuts's parents.

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everyone here is under the same impression as President Kruger, namely, that 'my wife is better than I'. Our old friend Hobson [J. A.] has told an important person here that 'Mrs Smuts is the most remarkable woman I have ever met'. And our old friend Olive Schreiner also makes no secret of her opinion. So I find here, much to my regret (!) that I only play 'second fiddle' in public estimation. But I shall bear my lot patiently, knowing that there must be a master above the master.

On my way from Clanwilliam I and Tottie came via Klipfontein and Riebeek.¹ Everyone was very dear and good but the empty place affected me very painfully. The new mother I knew well in earlier days as we were in the same class at school. We have no cause to be dissatisfied with the choice. Bool's wife I had not the honour of meeting as she was away at her parents on a visit. Kitty and Bibas were excessively pleased to see me. As soon as we are home again we must let Bibas come up to help you. She would be of much use to you.

I do not know when our house will be free; I shall do my best to get the Imperial Yeomanry out of it but whether I shall succeed remains to be seen. The trees are nice and big but the garden is in a filthy state. I was not inside, but it will no doubt take time to get everything into order again. I am sure, however, that we shall be very happy in it.

I shall write no news from here as your family will no doubt do that. I also do not know when you will receive this scrawl.

I think much of my dearest. *Ach keine, keine find ich je, Die so mich liebt wie Du.*² I hope that when I arrive presently to see you you will no longer be in bed, although you will of course not yet have recovered. With deepest love,

Jan Mios

184 To S. M. Smuts

Vol. 2, no. 111

Bus 1081

Zorgvliet

18 Juli 1902

Liefste Lappie, Het spijt mij dat ik gister geen tijd had aan jou te schrijven daar er zoo een toeloop van menschen en

¹ Riebeek West.

² Ah, never never shall I find one who loves me as you do.

vrienden was dat ik niet voor den avond laat eerst vrij was en toen moest ik met Jim Roos over onze private bezigheid spreken. Zelfs nu heb ik alleen een oogenblik tijd om jou het een en ander mede te deelen. Wat ons huis betreft zijn zaken niet zoo slecht als ik dacht. Ons zitkamer is nog alles compleet. Ons slaapkamer is ook zoo goed als compleet. Papier in huis is tamelijk goed met uitzondering van voor portaal reeds door Ella geplakt en mijn studeerkamer die nog moet geplakt worden. Ik denk met Ella dat jij jou slaapkamer moet behouden; zij is de grootste en beste in het huis; het is nu mijn slaapkamer. Ik zal boekrakken laten maken voor studeerkamer en dan boeken van v.d. B. laten halen en erin plaatsen. Wat wij noodig hebben is kombuis goed (behalve stove) en voorhuis tafel en stoelen. Ik denk dus dat het ons niet veel zal kosten om ons ou huisje weer in goeden order te krijgen.

Dan blijft er de tuin die in miserabelen toestand is. Veel boomen zijn verdroogd en alles is in een toestand van achteruitgang. Geen emmers, geen water pijpen; geen pomp daar die aan stuk is. Ik zal zoo gauw mogelijk een kaffer en gutta percha pijpen krijgen en dan den tuin in order tracht te krijgen. Er zijn er bijna geen boomen dood, dus is het verlies nog geen zins onherstelbaar. Ik zal jou later laten weten welke vordering ik maak.

Ella is bereid tot einde der maand in mijn huis te blijven. Wanneer zij weggaat zal ik iemand anders krijgen. Daar is Mrs Lambert die jij van gesproken hebt, en Jim spreekt van zekere Marthina Herbst ook niet aan jou onbekend. Eersgenoemde houdt van den bottel zooals jij weet; van tweede weet ik niets; wat is jou beste raad? Ik zal natuurlijk een kaffer krijgen zoo spoedig mogelijk. Hier vinden spoedig enige sales van huisraad plaats en dan zal ik het noodige koopen.

Jij moet betijds bij Dr Ward uitvinden wanneer jij den reis kan maken want dan zal ik jou hierheen krijgen. Jij zal zoo maar weer vet worden in de lucht van Zorgvliet. Ik zal veel naar mijn oudje verlangen maar natuurlijk moet jij niet komen alvorens zulks zonder gevaar kan geschieden.

Ella heeft zich zeer goed gedragen en neemt baing moeite met het huis. Jim heeft nog £500 van jou. Dus geen nood voor broodsgedrek. Zeg Daisy dat ik de gevraagde papieren van Charles Trevett ontvangen heb en bij de eerste gelegen-

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heid mijn best voor hem zal doen. Laat haar zulks aan hem
schrijven. Met hartelijkste groete

Mios

TRANSLATION

Zorgvliet

[Pretoria]

18 July 1902

Dearest Lappie, I am sorry that I had no time yesterday to write to you for there was such a concourse of people and friends that I was not free until late that evening and then I had to talk to Jim Roos about our private affairs. Even now I have only a moment to tell you a few things. As to our house things are not as bad as I thought. Our sitting room is still quite complete. Our bedroom is also as good as complete. The paper in the house is fairly good with the exception of the hall, already papered by Ella,¹ and my study which still has to be papered. I think with Ella that you should keep your bedroom; it is the biggest and best in the house; it is now my bedroom. I shall have bookshelves made for the study and then fetch books from v.d. B. and put them into the shelves. What we need is kitchen stuff (except a stove) and a hall table and chairs. I think therefore that it will not cost much to get our little house into good order again.

There remains the garden which is in a miserable condition. Many trees are withered and everything is in a backward condition. No buckets, no water pipes; no pump as it is broken. I shall as soon as possible get a Native and gutta-percha pipes and then try to get the garden into order. Hardly any trees are dead, so the loss is by no means irreparable. I shall let you know later what progress I make.

Ella is prepared to stay in my house until the end of the month. When she leaves I shall get someone else. There is Mrs Lambert of whom you have spoken, and Jim talks of a certain Marthina Herbst also not unknown to you. The first likes the bottle as you know; of the second I know nothing; what is your best advice? I shall of course get a Native as soon as possible. There will soon be some sales of household goods here and then I shall buy what is necessary.

¹ Ella de Wet.

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You must find out in time from Dr Ward¹ when you can make the journey as I shall then get you here. You will quickly get fat in the air of Zorgvliet. I shall long much for my little one but of course you must not come until that can happen without danger.

Ella has behaved very well and takes much trouble with the house. Jim still has £500 of yours. So no threat of starvation. Tell Daisy² that I have received the requested papers of Charles Trevett³ and shall do my best for him at the first opportunity. Let her write this to him. With heartiest greetings,

Mios

185 To S. M. Smuts

Vol. 2, no. 114

Zorgvliet

22 Juli 1902

Zoetste klein Lappie, Dinsdagnamiddag, — ik ben niet naar kantoor gegaan daar ik begeerig was de stukken in een zaak bij mijn huis door te werken en op mijn kantoor is er zoo'n drang van menschen die meestal van commando terug zijn en nu posten willen hebben of die permitten voor een of ander doel wenschen dat ik aldaar geen werk kan doen. Daar ik reeds een groot gat in gemelden zaak heb gemaakt wensch ik nu alvorens verder te gaan weer een kort gezelsje met jou te hebben. Krohn brengt deze week mijne boomen in order; mijn kaffer beantwoordt goed; mijn gezondheid is eerste klas etc. etc. zoodat jij kan zien dat het met mij eerste klas gaat. Ik verlang maar net naar tijding wanneer ik jou zal kunnen afhalen. Ik heb een fraaien Franschen brief ontvangen van de moeder van het heilige hart waarin zij mij terugbedankt voor mijn dankbrief. Ik zal nu dat zaakje voor afgehandeld beschouwen. Jou eerste brief is mij ook ter hand gekomen en was zeer welkom. Ik kan Miss Naser niet krijgen, maar er is een ander meisje van 17 jaar bij Mrs Jan Malherbe die gewillig is te komen en zij zal heden namiddag voor inspectie alhier zijn; dan zullen Ella en ik haar behoorlijk doorzien en dan

¹ Charles Ward, a surgeon and gynaecologist trained in England, was district surgeon of Pietermaritzburg.

² Daisy Trevett, born Krige, sister of Isie. She died in 1921, aged 44.

³ Husband of Daisy.