

THE BOER IN THE AFRICAN WRITINGS OF STUART CLOETE

by

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A THESIS

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THE BOER IN THE AFRICAN WRITINGS OF STUART CLOETE

A THESIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to determine those characteristics and qualities of the Boer, the Afrikaner, as set forth in Cloete's works, which serve to set the Boer apart and make him unique to Africa--those characteristics which perhaps account for his ability to survive despite the hostile environment which he found in Southern Africa.

Methods

The data for this study were obtained by a careful reading of five novels, a collection of African stories, two non-fiction accounts, one biographical and one descriptive, and one magazine article by Stuart Cloete, all dealing directly with the Boer. Several other novels by Cloete yielded interesting sidelights or contrasts to the Boer but dealt primarily with Congo, Portuguese East Africa and Rhodesia. An examination of biographical material concerning the author and his works proved valuable in supplying

information as supporting evidence. With very few exceptions the bulk of this study comes from the novels themselves.

Findings

A careful analysis of the works studied revealed the following:

1. The Boer's strong religious convictions gave him a faith which armed him against many of life's adversities.

2. His belief in the Bible as the infallible Word of God influenced his concept of science, history, astronomy, and law. Such belief gave rise to his idea that the Boers were a chosen people, and all others were heathen.

3. The Boer despised innovations as irreligious, and accepted the land as God's gift to his chosen people.

4. The Boer respected his land, and accepted the isolation which it required of him as a part of stewardship.

5. His isolation, in turn, caused the Boer to learn to live extremely close to nature, thus preparing him to survive life on the veld.

6. The Boer had a robust physique combined with a tenacious nature which eventually resulted in his fighting to hold the lands and property he felt his from God.

7. The Boer was a good friend, but a formidable enemy.

8. His creativity allowed him to devise what necessities he wished and his nature allowed him to do without those things he could not devise.

9. The trek taught the Boer how to survive the worst of southern Africa's environment, the climate, the geographical features, and hostile tribes and animals.

10. Continual encroachment by English and tribesmen taught the Boers that the only solution to independence was to move on, and when further movement was impossible, to fight for his rights.

11. Since God was the only authority of the Boer, he refused to yield to any other authority.

Approved:

Supervising Professor.

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JOSEPH B. BISBY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On April 6, 1652, a small ship belonging to the Dutch East India Company anchored off the southern tip of the coast of Africa. For some time thought had been given to the establishment of a refitting and rest stop at the half-way point between Holland and the ports of the East Indies. The day had arrived. Off-loaded this historic day were Jan van Riebeeck and a party of about eighty Hollanders, all servants of the Dutch East India Company, intent on establishing a cooperative settlement which would produce vegetables and meat for the Company's ships. The Boers (farmers or husbandmen in the Dutch language) had begun their long history in South Africa.

Although the Phoenicians, Arabs, Portuguese, French and English had all investigated the prospects of Africa south of the Sahara, the Dutch were the first real settlers attempting to inhabit and tame the wild country. When the initial scheme for provisioning the ships of the Dutch East India Company met with little success, an alternate plan was adopted in 1656 whereby nine of the free burghers were given land grants of farms near the present city of Cape Town. This proved a better plan and resulted in the production of

meat, corn for meal, other vegetables and wine--all of which could be sold to the Company ships.

These Boers, expressly chosen for their robust physical condition as a precaution against the hazardous sea voyage and the rigorous life expected of them in Africa, rejoiced in their unexpected freedom. In contrast to the limited size of farms in their native Holland, the Boers enjoyed large tracts which challenged their abilities as agriculturists. Devout Calvinists in their homeland, the Boers gave religion an even more important place in their lives in isolated Africa. Their dependence upon the soil for their livelihood made them more conscious of their relationship to God, and they looked to the Bible as a book of law by which their lives must be regulated. Hardworking, honest, natural farmers and hunters, the Boers found Africa a primitive Garden of Eden.

Time brought additional settlers from France, England and Holland. The Boers, cordial enough to their own, had nevertheless grown used to their isolation, and unable to accept the encroachment of the strangers, the Uitlanders, as they were termed, left their coastal homes and moved farther inland. The inland press eventually resulted in Boer conflict with the Bushmen and Hottentots. Continual pressure from the English, who sought and found wealth and fortune in this land of opportunity, caused the Boers or Afrikaners to move still further inland. Their independent spirit and love of isolation kept

them insecure in the presence of the Uitlanders, who neither accepted nor tried to understand the strange life of the Boers.

With the discovery of gold and diamonds, fortune seekers made life unbearable for the individualistic Boers who finally pulled up roots again and trekked by ox-drawn wagons into the north and east, losing many lives to the wilderness and to the ceaseless raiding of hostile Kaffirs and Zulus. As long as land remained to farm and to graze, the peace loving Boers moved on, but the day arrived when there was nowhere to move. Reluctantly then, the Boers, like animals cornered by a hunter, turned on the Uitlanders, taking up arms as a sign of their determination to protect their rights. Had the English been familiar with the mind of the Afrikaner, war might have been prevented. Among his own people, the Boer was well known for appearing at an argument fully armed in order to punctuate his strong feeling of indignation. The English, with a long history of professional soldiery, took the bluff of these Boers as an act of treason against the crown. Open hostility flared into actual war between Briton and Boer. Though in the end Britain gained control over the whole of southern Africa, the Boers had "been beaten, but not defeated."¹

Strong in their own sense of justice and of right and wrong, the Afrikaners may never win the respect of the world

¹ Stuart Cloete, Rags of Glory, 598.

by their racial policies in Africa, yet in fairness to them, the world must recognize the greatness of a nation which is the fruit of the pioneering spirit of the Boers--a nation which boasts the highest educational attainment of any African country--the continent's most highly industrialized nation.

Statement of the Problem

When men are transplanted from one environment to another radically different one, a guess as to the ultimate outcome is hazardous, if not impossible. Some men will succeed; others will fail. Various explanations are offered. One asks whether there are definable characteristics, attitudes, inborn traits, instincts, native skills, cultural advantages, ideas, or habits which make one nationality more suitable for transplantation than another? Could a close look at the Boer, the Afrikaner, give us a better understanding of why today he remains almost the lone survivor of the white man's attempt to penetrate the frontiers of southern Africa?

My own interest in the problem results from having been five years in rural Africa working under the World Division of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church. My first years were spent as village school superintendent of nearly two hundred African teachers in thirty-two schools ranging in size from two to fourteen teachers each. After turning this work over to a trained African colleague, I became head teacher in

an African teacher training and high school. Our staff was composed of six teachers including several African gentlemen and one Afrikaner lady. Her husband is a direct descendant of the Boer who led the Steyn trek from the Rand in the Transvaal about the turn of the century and after several arduous months brought them safely into the Cashel valley where our school is located. The farming community of the Cashel valley is made up principally of descendants of or members of that trek.

My own children attended a Rhodesian Government boarding school in the Cashel valley, along with many of the children of these settlers. Often, these youngsters are unable to speak English when they first enroll in school, having heard only the Afrikaans language in their homes. Consequently, children like mine usually pick up Afrikaans as the Afrikaner children learn to speak English. The school was originally owned and operated by the Dutch Reformed Church, and they still hold Bible study for the students on Sunday evening after the meal is over, similar to the Boer custom mentioned in this study.

I have attended many Afrikaner social functions and have entertained many of these people in my home. Though reserved on first acquaintance, they are warm and outgoing friends. Our family looks forward to our return to Rhodesia in May of 1967.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine from a careful reading of Stuart Cloete's South African writings those characteristics and qualities of the Boer which serve to set him apart and make him unique to Africa--those characteristics which might account for his ability to survive the wild environment which he encountered in southern Africa. Of Boer extraction himself, Cloete appears excellently qualified to speak for the Afrikaner.

Very little work has been done in this area, which, for me, offers both a challenge and an opportunity. Furthermore, a study of this nature reveals the extent to which English literature serves to convey knowledge of persons and places far removed from the average reader. Thus is opened a road to understanding, if not always to agreement.

Limitations of the Study

This study is confined to those works of Cloete which pertain to the Boer and his life in South Africa. Although most of Cloete's novels give incidental reference to the Boer, only those five novels which deal almost exclusively with the Afrikaner, his life, and times are used. A collection of short stories by Cloete add a few additional insights, mostly modern in nature. To speak of the Boer without mention of the

Great Trek would be an impossibility, and much of the information concerning trek life comes from Cloete's threefold biographical work, Against These Three.

Methods of Investigation

The foundation of data for this study comes from a careful reading of the five selected novels of Cloete, as listed in the bibliography, and from the collection of short stories. Supplementary information comes from the non-fiction account Against These Three, and from the travel book, The African Giant. Reading included all of Cloete's novels about Africa--Gazella, Mamba, The Curve and the Tusk, and Congo Song. However, these novels deal with problems or themes peculiar to Portuguese East Africa, Rhodesia, or Congo, and consequently were not considered of value for this study. Although book reviews of the novels were located and read, no comments are included in this study since the reviewers were not concerned with the problem at hand.

Several magazine articles by Cloete were located and one was selected for use in the study. Standard reference works provided sufficient biographical material on Mr. Cloete. Standard works of Cloete not personally owned were obtained from the Estill Library, Sam Houston State College, Huntsville, Texas, and from the Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR AND HIS SOUTH AFRICAN WORKS

Africa is in the news today. Seldom does one pick up a magazine or newspaper without some article dedicated to the dark continent. Nearly every current book review circular announces the release of a new volume about Africa. Unfortunately, many articles are written by persons not fully qualified by reason of experience or familiarity of subject matter to write trustworthy accounts. Especially is this true in the political and social realm. A trip to any bookshop will yield books written by persons who either have never seen the country about which they write, or have only visited the country briefly. Stuart Cloete is not such an overnight expert on South Africa. On the contrary, he "has lived and worked among Africans in the Transvaal and the Cape, off and on, ever since World War I, as cattle rancher, dairy farmer, and author whose books are U. S. bestsellers."¹

Born in 1897 and educated as a child in Paris, Cloete completed his education in England, where he remained until

¹ Stuart Cloete, "I Speak for the African," 113.

the outbreak of World War I. Severe wounds ended his military career and left him unfitted for anything but an open air life which he chose to spend in South Africa, land of his heritage.

In an article for Life, Cloete writes of South Africa as "my land, where for 300 years my ancestors have lived and died, and lie buried from the Crocodile to the Cape."² Cloete's ancestor, Jacob Kloten or Cleoten, was among the eighty Hollanders who accompanied Van Riebeeck and landed at Table Bay in 1652. Four years later, in 1656, this same ancestor became recipient of the first land grant ever made to a white man in Africa.³ Another relative, Francina Cloete, married Hendrik Kruger, and the fourth generation of this union included Paul Kruger, legendary hero of the Boers, and four times elected President of the South African Republic.⁴

Cloete's great-great grandfather was a member of the Great Trek of 1836 and kept personal records of the event. These records became the foundation of Cloete's first great novel about South Africa, The Turning Wheels, published in 1937. The Turning Wheels became a Book-of-the-Month Club

² Stuart Cloete, "I Speak for the African," 113.

³ Stuart Cloete, The African Giant, 1.

⁴ Stuart Cloete, Against These Three, 13-14.

selection and a choice of the English Book Society--the first time any first novel had been so doubly chosen.⁵

Stuart Cloete is a believer in accuracy of detail. In Writers and Writing, mention is made of the many hours Cloete spends in verifying incidents, spellings, dates and other facts for his novels.⁶ With such devotion to accuracy, he provides for his reader both an interesting story and lessons in South African history, nature study, and geography.

Each of Cloete's South African novels deals with a particular segment of history, each fitting into the others like a piece of jigsaw puzzle. A further tie between the novels is achieved by the skillful introduction of a member of the Van der Berg family into each of the stories, that member usually a main character. Like Cloete, the Van der Bergs trace their South African heritage back to the landing at Table Bay in 1652.

The first of the novels, The Turning Wheels, 1937, tells the adventures of the Great Trek of 1836, while Cloete's next South African novel, Watch for the Dawn, 1939, serves to explain more fully the events leading up to the Great Trek, in particular, the Slagtersnek Rebellion in 1815. The Hill

⁵ Twentieth Century Authors, 289.

⁶ Robert Van Gelder, Writers and Writing, 135-6.

of Doves, 1941, involves the reader in the first Boer War of 1880. The great wheels turn again in The Mask, 1957, a novel covering the second trek period from 1852 to 1854, when the encroachment of the English caused the Boers to push into the northern Transvaal, resulting in trouble with the Kaffirs. The year 1960 brought the publication of The Fiercest Heart, the story of the earliest voortrekkers of the 1830's--those men, women, and children "with the fiercest hearts and the greatest love"⁷ who left the security of homes in the Cape Colony for a thousand mile journey through the bush to found the Transvaal state, where many felt the thrust of the assegais from the Zulu and Kaffir nations.

Perhaps Cloete's finest book since The Turning Wheels is his 1963 publication, Rags of Glory, a saga of the terrible war between Briton and Boer which began in late 1899 and lasted until May 31, 1902. Members of Cloete's family fought on both sides in this devastating war. When Cloete moved to South Africa, his nearest neighbor was the Boer General De Wet. Many of Cloete's fellow soldiers in World War I were also veterans of the Boer War, and much of his research for Rags of Glory included personal interviews with key persons who figured in the conflict. About this book Cloete writes: "This book has been thought about for thirty years, worked

⁷ Stuart Cloete, The Fiercest Heart, 435.

on for more than ten."⁸ The volume looks formidable with its 610 pages of text in small type, and 18 additional pages devoted to author's notes, appendices, and bibliography, but every page warrants reading.

For great adventure, one need not look to outer space. Ample true life adventure is found in Cloete's Against These Three, a scholarly, yet interesting tale involving three of southern Africa's history makers--Paul Kruger, Cecil Rhodes, and Lobengula, last King of the Matabele. To read Cloete's novels alongside this non-fiction guidebook gives ample proof of the author's care in remaining faithful to history and fact.

The African Giant, published in 1955, is the result of Cloete's travels throughout Africa. Cloete has tried to synthesize his observations into what he calls "one facet of the transition of a continent from the iron age into the present."⁹ Unfortunately, he spends little time on either South Africa or the Boer, probably because he felt he had already said more than enough about them in previous publications. Still his commentary on the beginnings of South Africa were helpful.

A volume of the collected short stories of Stuart Cloete was published in 1959 under the title, "The Soldiers'

⁸ Stuart Cloete, Rags of Glory, 612.

⁹ Stuart Cloete, The African Giant, v.

Peaches," and Other African Stories. Of these stories,

Cloete writes:

They have all been sold to the Saturday Evening Post, or to Esquire, have passed the acid test of their editorial boards and been read by millions of people.

.....

They are light reading. They have no great emotional impact. They are not slices of life in the accepted sense.¹⁰

On the contrary, as a student of Cloete's writings I take exception to the last statement, as I find many of the stories do give a slice of Boer life to the reader.

¹⁰ Stuart Cloete, "The Soldiers' Peaches," and Other African Stories, 9.

CHAPTER III

THE BOER, THE BIBLE, BELIEF, AND GOD

Although the Dutch immigrants who landed at Table Bay in 1652 had not come to Africa because of religious persecutions, they were nevertheless very devout in their faith in God, being Protestants in the Calvinistic tradition. The Christian life was thought to be evident in the fact that God's will became stronger and stronger in one's life so that he belonged less and less to himself and more and more to God.

The Bible was a very revered book and had a special place in every Boer home or wagon. Most of the family Bibles were quite old, having been passed down from generation to generation, and accompanied the original settlers to the Cape in 1652. Between the brass-bound covers of the Bible was not only the Word of God, the law of the Boers, but his record of vital statistics--his births, baptisms, weddings, deaths. In The Turning Wheels, Hendrik reads the fly-leaf:

Turning the fly-leaf of his Bible, he read her the names of his ancestors. The name of Jacobus who had landed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, his name heading the list of the seventeen free burghers who had come from Holland with van Riebek. The name of Gerhart, his son, who had married Catalyn Harmaans of Middleburg, and by whom he begat Jacob, who had married Sibella Passman, and

begotten Hendrik, who had married Hester Anna Laurentz in 1780, whose son he was.¹

Another very similar passage is found in The Hill of Doves, when Katarina du Toit wishes to show her granddaughter all that remains of her immediate family.

"What are they but names, some in my hand, some in my husband's--names, names," she said. "The name of my father, Rudolf de Wet, married to Maria Bezuidenhout in 1790. Stephanie, born March 3, 1800. Katarina Hendrika--that is me--born June 20, 1813, and here, married to Johannes Philippus du Toit on the 11th of December, 1830. Names," she said again, "dates...And those, look well at those, Lena; those are the names of my sons. Your six great-uncles, who died before your birth, and that of your father. All boys," she said. "Seven boys that were my pride."²

Lena turned back the pages. How many names there were! The Bible was more than two hundred years old. She was descended from all those people--from all those names.... She looked at the first entry...made by Joachim Abraham du Toit:

Landed today, Tuesday the sixth day of March in the sixteen hundred and fifty-third year of Our Lord at the Cape of Storms...

That was when the first of them had landed at the Cape, bringing this Bible with him.³

The Bible was the directing force of the Boer--a force which governed his every action. Few Boers possessed any other

¹ Cloete, The Turning Wheels, 164.

³ Ibid., 391-2.

² Cloete, The Hill of Doves, 391.

book. They found its laws sufficient for their needs, and endeavored to follow them. They were familiar with the Pentateuch, and the Commandments they knew from memory. The only laws necessary were those written by God and what man could improve on God's own law by making more of them?

Francina Marais treated the wounds of a man who had tried to dishonor her, saying, "'He is still a man, Ouma, and he can do no more harm. Surely it is written that it is right to turn the other cheek and succor the distressed?'"⁴

Authority, any authority except that of God was unbearable to these people who had lived alone in a world almost empty of men for so long that they refused to recognize any form of government.⁵

They wanted "no laws but our own, which are God's."⁶ The Boers complained especially of the tax laws which the English tried to enforce:

"...Taxes!..."for roads and schools and police. Taxes for things that no good Boer needs or requires. Before the Uitlanders came we had no police. The roads are good enough for us who live in a godly manner and make no haste. And schools--is not the Bible-reading in our homes to which we are accustomed school enough?"⁷

The Bible was read regularly in every Boer home, most often after the evening meal:

She took away the coffee-cups. Her grandmother got out the Bible. They all sat with their heads bowed while she read.

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⁴ The Fiercest Heart, 371.

⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁵ Ibid., 144.

⁷ The Hill of Doves, 33-4.

Her grandmother closed the Book. They all leaned forward, their elbows on the table in prayer.⁸

The Fiercest Heart tells us "...they sat listening to their great Bibles that were read each evening."⁹ In the morning after breakfast the Fouries "knelt down to pray...and Jacoba prayed and read from the Bible in a hard dry voice."¹⁰

Some Boer families used the Bible as a sign by which to read the future. When this was desired, the Bible was opened at random and the reading begun from where the eye or finger first rested.

"I will read from the Book," Prinsloo said, and got up to fetch it from the small side table where it lay with the hymnals. He put it down in front of him and opened it at hazard....

'Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you....'¹¹

As in this case, the reading was often taken as a literal saying. In this instance Prinsloo takes the passage to mean that if the Boers were faithful to God, they would be able to repossess the land of their fathers.

In The Turning Wheels a parallel example occurs as Hendrik van der Berg sought guidance in handling the love

⁸ Ibid., 67-8.

⁹ The Fiercest Heart, 228.

¹⁰ The Mask, 60.

¹¹ Hill of Doves, 256.

affair of his son and Sannie van Reenan. Hendrik wanted the girl for a wife himself, and was jealous of Herman. Taking his Bible he opened it at random and his eyes fell upon Genesis 22:10, "And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son." For Hendrik, these words were almost a command. Had Hendrik made his own plan he would have chosen to do as David did to Uriah, and send Herman out to fight the Kaffirs. In the end however, Hendrik decided that it was God's will that Herman die, and that he himself was only the instrument of God. The Abraham and Isaac story is twisted with Hendrick. Isaac's life was saved because Abraham found a ram entangled in the thicket. Hendrik found a buck at large in the heat of day, a very unusual occurrence. Where Abraham saw the ram as a way out of slaying the son whom he loved, Hendrik saw the buck as an excuse for slaying accidentally his son--a son whom he hated for taking the woman he himself desired. Consequently both the buck and the boy died: God's will must not be questioned.¹²

Bible reading and prayer were an everyday occurrence in the life of the Boer. For many, the Scriptures brought comfort. When President Kruger learned that the Boer troops were disheartened, he wired his officer, Louis Botha, to "halt and read the Bible, as he [God] counseled, 'Victory is in the

¹² The Turning Wheels, 104.

hand of the Lord alone and not with the multitude of horses and chariots."¹³

Boetie van der Berg, young and troubled, looked to the words of his New Testament which his mother had given him just before he left for war on his sixteenth birthday. Cloete says of Boetie "...if ever a boy needed God's help it was he."¹⁴ Finding words to suit his needs he then knelt and prayed.

Catalina van der Berg, widowed and her sons off to war, entertained Louis' fiancée and her mother:

When the meal was over grace was said again. Then Catalina read a chapter from the Bible and they prayed for the success of the Boers, for the freedom of their country, for the dead, the sick, the wounded on both sides....¹⁵

Boers were able to quote Scripture readily when they desired:

"They will make songs of this," an old man said. "The song of Boetie's climb." ... "It was the will of God that he should lead us," another said. They were pressing against him, man after man taking his hand and shaking it.

"It is as the Lord Jesus said...'A little child lead them.' ...It is a miracle, it is a sign...."¹⁶

Ouma du Toit thought aloud of David and Absalom on hearing of the death of her grandson and Botha replied:

¹³ Rags of Glory, 272.

¹⁵ Rags of Glory, 392.

¹⁴ Ibid., 364.

¹⁶ Hill of Doves, 446.

...She had said "Absalom."

"Absalom, the son of David," he said, "was killed in the forest of Ephraim, caught in the branches of an oak tree by his hair and there slain by Joab in spite of the King's orders to deal gently with his son....Second Book of Samuel, chapter eighteen, verses nine to fifteen." He was proud of that. Not everyone would have remembered not only the quotation but the reference.¹⁷

Much of the stubborn nature of the Boers found its basis in their belief in the infallibility of the Bible:

There was, for instance, Hendrik Neethling, who claimed that the world was round. It was said that he had told Paul Kruger that he was on his way round the world. "Round it?" Kruger had said. "You mean on a voyage in the world."

.....

But it was an interesting lie all the same. It made one think. Suppose the world was round as he said--like an orange. Why did one not fall off it? The same Neethling had said that in the Southern Seas, islands were made by little goggas ...insects. He said insects made islands of coral. He said they were still making them.

This was a strange thing. If it was true, it meant that the whole world was not created, as it said in the Bible. A thing could not have been created in six days if the creation was still in progress, if it was still being made. To believe this would shatter all belief. It was certainly a lie, and therefore, since this was not the truth, it would follow that the world was not round....¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 487.

¹⁸ Hill of Doves, 504-5.

Bible analogies came easily and naturally into Boer thought and speech, their language itself "a mixture of biblical and bucolic:"¹⁹

"He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it, and it shall be as it says in the Book: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, and a foot for a foot; aye, and more than that, for not one of these [Kaffirs] will we leave alive." ...In his mind Hendrik saw the burning huts and heard the cries of the wounded. Men, women, and children they would kill and the word of what he had done would go out.²⁰

[Jacoba Fourie] ...saw her husband running. ...The house was filled with the smoke of powder....Her husband's exhortations. His cry that God was with them. That the Philistines were being smitten once again.²¹

At the news of her favorite grandson's death, Katarina du Toit thought,..."To him that hath shall be given; to him that hath not...shall be taken away."²²

Oom Paul Kruger's thoughts about the Bible are an excellent summary of Boer ideas about the Book of Books:

Anything that was not in the Bible was untrue. Giraffes were camels because there were no giraffes mentioned in the Holy Writ. The world was flat. The Garden of Eden was a real place. For the Boers there was no myth, no allegory. All was true--the Tower of Babel, the Flood, the Fiery Tablets, Jonah and the Whale. The Bible was their book of law, their natural history book. It was from it they got their science and astronomy. It was upon it they based their lives--an eye for an eye, a

¹⁹ Rags of Glory, 36.

²⁰ The Turning Wheels, 24.

²¹ The Mask, 11.

²² Hill of Doves, 485.

tooth for a tooth; increase and multiply; the belief that the black children of Ham were condemned to hew wood and draw water forever.

Oom Paul saw the Boers as Israelites, the Transvaal as Canaan, the English as Philistines, and Johannesburg as Sodom and Gomorrah rolled into one.²³

Not a single Boer existed but was convinced that they were in some mysterious way a people especially belonging to God, His "chosen people."²⁴

General Botha was encouraged by De Wet's victories:

He was no longer ready to surrender. God, using De Wet as his instrument, had come to the rescue of the Boers, his chosen people.²⁵

The early voortrekkers were

...at once driven and inspired. Driven by an inner urge that forced them forward. Inspired by the belief that they were God's chosen people whose duty it was to conquer and civilize a continent.²⁶

They were out

...to punish, to smite in the name of the Lord like the Israelites of old, for they were a chosen people and this was the land of Canaan.²⁷

A small people, Boers--farmers, but a race that believed in God and worshipped Him, not perfunctorily once a week, but daily, each time that they broke bread; upon waking, before they worked: a small, but chosen people, and mighty in their faith.²⁸

²³ Rags of Glory, 12.

²⁶ The Fiercest Heart, 145.

²⁴ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ The Mask, 170.

²⁵ Ibid., 359.

²⁸ Hill of Doves, 290.

God, for most Boers was seen as the God of the Old Testament:

The god of the Kaffirs was Milimo the frightful, who could only be pacified by the blood of men--and that of the Boers the terrible Jehovah of the Old Testament.²⁹

Andries Van Rensburg was a hard man. He believed in God, his rifle and his sjambok. God revealed himself to him in the Old Testament. For the New he had little use. His God was a jealous, savage God. An eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth God.³⁰

"Kruger's God was the terrible, just God of Israel."³¹

On the veld God was

...not a gentle, loving Jesus, not a Savior, but the terrible God of the Jews of the Old Testament, Jahweh--Jehovah.³²

"To most Boers, God was all-powerful, omnipresent, and terrible."³³

Jacoba Fourie believed in the God of the Dutch Reformed Church--a very great and powerful deity. This was the God she worshipped....³⁴

Belief in such a God could not help influencing the actions of the Boer People, invading even their manner of speech and giving them the profound feeling that God's hand was in all activities.

²⁹ The Mask, 128.

³⁰ "Interlude", The Soldiers' Peaches, 84.

³¹ Against These Three, 47.

³² Rags of Glory, 303.

³³ Rags of Glory, 36.

³⁴ The Mask, 12-13.

The reply of President Kruger to Chief Justice Gregorowski and the deputation of lawyers sent to urge Kruger to stop the war was typical of the attitude of the Boer:

"The beast," he said, "would war with the Church and seem to overcome it, but in the end God will intercede."³⁵

Kruger was quoting Revelation, and was implying that the English were the beast, while the Boers, of course, were the Church. Shortly after this General Joubert

...commended the men to God, assured them that He was with His chosen people and that right, unquestioned right, was on their side.³⁶

Boers frequently spoke of persons or events being God sent.

Boetie van der Berg thought how utterly alone he would have been if God had not sent this girl [Renata van Reenan] like an angel from heaven to care for him.³⁷

While his mother, Catalina van der Berg, thought

...perhaps this Moolman of whom they [her sons] wrote had been sent by the father, by God, to replace him.³⁸

And in the campaign, a particularly good maneuver by the Boers caught the British off guard and the "Boers opened a furious fire on this second God-sent target."³⁹

³⁵ Rags of Glory, 323.

³⁶ Ibid., 39.

³⁷ Ibid., 352.

³⁸ Ibid., 266.

³⁹ Ibid., 206.

A humorous treatment of this same theme occurs in The Turning Wheels, when Tante Anna de Jong's plan to get a brood sow from the Widow Coetzee does not go as expected. A stranger told Tante Anna about the plight of the poor Widow Coetzee who had a child who needed milk, yet had no cow. In the course of the conversation Tante Anna collected that the widow had a sow, but that she had not had much success with pigs. Tante Anna wanted a start of pigs, as she had all the other animals, but loved pork best of all. She thought she was being slim, or sly when she had the idea of sending her grandson Gert Kleinhouse to the widow's with a fine milk cow and a few other gifts. She had instructed Gert to accept the widow's gratitude by accepting the pig in return, for knowing Boers, she knew that something would be given in return. Mrs. Coetzee had plans of her own, however, when she saw Gert, and before Tante Anna knew what to expect, word got back that the widow was now Mrs. Kleinhouse. Later, Tante Anna got back her cow, but it was dry and thin. She prayed that the widow would receive her "just dues." The following passage illustrates her satisfaction.

[Tante Anna de Jong] ...smiled at the efficiency of Providence, at the justice of God.

Only today had the news come in that the Widow Coetzee who had married her grandson had suffered some losses of stock, and that a great flight of locusts had passed over her farm, resting there in such numbers that they

weighted down the branches of the trees. That they had passed on meant nothing, for while they were there they would have laid their eggs, driving the long horns of their ovipositors deep into the ground, and with the spring rains the voetgangers would hatch out and climb, wingless, to the tops of the high grasses; clinging there, insignificant little clumps of black on the grass heads. Ach, ja, so small and yet so strong, for soon they would grow, and changing colour, become striped with red and yellow and then they would trek, armies of them, marching like Zulus. Insatiable, they would eat all that was in their path, missing nothing, sparing nothing, not even the bark of the trees, and none would stay them for not only were they as numerous, as numberless, as the grains of sand in a dry river bed, but, being set by God, were accepted as a manifestation of his displeasure which would be blasphemous to thwart.⁴⁰

The Boers frequently sought and received signs from God.

From God he [Hendrik van der Berg] demanded signs, and God gave him signs. Once, when short of water the Boers had stood gazing at a trickle which ran out from between two rocks, he had cursed them for their lack of faith and, dismounting, rolled away one of the great stones. Water in abundance leapt forth, the very eye of the spring was exposed; held in abeyance for centuries, the water, as cold as ice, bubbled out, tumbling down the thirsty hillside.⁴¹

Later, when Hendrik was unsure of the direction to travel God sends another sign.

⁴⁰ The Turning Wheels, 240.

⁴¹ The Turning Wheels, 131.

...Hendrik watched the mountains in the northwest burning. A pillar of smoke by day, a pillar of fire by night. Once more God had directed him, given him guidance....He led the wagons towards the fire. To him it was a signal, a sign, and not a danger....⁴²

Melvina Brink, a war widow left without home or food when the English burnt her farm, was a Dopper like Kruger. One who is rigid in keeping all the laws of God, all those restrictions listed in the Pentateuch, Melvina would have starved had Moolman not found a young foal, killed it, and cooked it for them. The woman had finally been persuaded to eat, not for herself, but so that she would have enough milk to feed her toddler. Uncomfortable in having violated one of God's laws, Melvina was moved when out of the rubble of the farm, the baby found a small puppy. Melvina cried,

"It is a sign from God. He has forgiven us. A puppy. A child. Ja, a little child shall lead them...Out of the mouth of...."⁴³

As the Boers thought of themselves as God's chosen ones, a nation set apart, they thought of outsiders as heathen, the Philistines, to be driven out of Canaan. For guidance concerning the blacks they knew no better place to look than to the Scripture, as all life was a part of God's creation. Their attitude is demonstrated in the following conversation from The Turning Wheels:

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rags of Glory, 552.

"...The Kaffirs are the children of Ham, it is their duty to serve us. Does it not say so in the Holy Word?"

"Ja, it says so...but do the Kaffirs know of this? Do they understand that they are the children of Ham?"

.....
I do not think they do, on the contrary, it is in my mind that they think they are a people who have been dispossessed, and they are angry."⁴⁴

The Boers did not trust the English missionaries whom they thought much too familiar with the black man, and demanding too many rights such as equal justice for Hottentot, Kaffir, and whites.

As the Boers ruled by the Bible, they considered this attitude infamous and unchristian, since the Bible had cursed the descendants of Ham. "Cursed be Canaan. A servant of servants shall he be..." Nothing could be clearer than the Word of God, and this double talk of equality was merely to cause trouble between black and white when there was already enough trouble without such outside interference.⁴⁵

In the story "Interlude," Andries van Rensburg sat at the only water hole for miles around. The place was on the edge of the great Kalahari desert. Gun in hand, he watched while a half-dead bushman youth dragged a limp girl to the edge of the water. Van Rensburg watched them

...as he would have watched an animal-- a baboon. That was the way he thought of bushmen--like baboons.....

⁴⁴ The Turning Wheels, 278-9.

⁴⁵ Against These Three, 47.

He knew of a man who had trained a baboon to lead oxen...Well, why not tame these bushmen monkeys? As he watched the bushman care for the ill female he thought they were almost like human beings. Ja, there was no doubt that in many ways they resembled people.⁴⁶

In many ways the actions of the Kaffirs seemed to impress their animalistic nature upon the mind of the Boers. Many Boers knew the torture methods of the Kaffirs who left their victim, black or white

...stripped, spread-eagled, his wrists and ankles tied to pegs in the ground, by a broken ant heap, with his eyelids, ears, and lips cut off; or buried alive up to the neck, in such a way that he would live for days while the ants slowly ate their way into him.⁴⁷

However, the Boers in their retaliatory raids, even if following the law of "an eye for an eye," were almost as brutal as the Kaffirs.

Well equipped, angry at being delayed, led by the visionary Paul Pieters and the coldly raging Hendrik, they were going to smite the Philistines. Where before they might have been content to defeat them, they now intended to destroy and to leave nothing, not a roof on a hut, not a pot unbroken, not so much as a calf or a lamb alive. What they could not drive off they would kill, what they would not kill they would burn.⁴⁸

On the trek, even those Kaffir servants who died in defending the whites must be buried separately from the whites.

⁴⁶ "Interlude," The Soldiers' Peaches, 87-8.

⁴⁷ The Turning Wheels, 71. ⁴⁸ Ibid., 105-6.

A few yards the other side [of the hartekoal tree] ...they were also digging graves for the coloured folk who had been killed. These could lie near, but not beside, the white man.⁴⁹

However, those servants who had been with the families since before the slaves were free, were treated much better than one might expect. In The Fiercest Heart the trek had barely reached their Canaan, when old Hendrik, Francina Marais' servant was attacked and killed by a lion. He had been more than a servant. He was a friend, counsel, and father to the girl.

"...We must do him honor...The first man to die here in our new home, the first to lie in our own graveyard....

•••••
Oupa, I want your coffin."⁵⁰ •••••

So was the fate of Hendrik, buried in the white Baas' own coffin and packed in with herbs and leaves.

⁴⁹ The Turning Wheels, 30.

⁵⁰ The Fiercest Heart, 418.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOER, HIS LAND AND LIFE

A good general description of the Boer may be seen in the observation of the smous, the Jewish traveling salesman, who helped supply the needs of the frontiersmen in Africa.

They had come to lead a "lekker lewe" [good or free life] and considered themselves happy because they were free to live a comfortless life, to hunt and to fight without let or hindrance, who were content to rest on their stoeps smoking their carved stone pipes while they waited for their cows to calve, or their heifers to be old enough to put to the bull, or for their tollies young oxen to be big enough to train. People who sat heavily awaiting the increase promised them of God, accepting both good and evil as God sent. Immovable in their faith and because of their simplicity, their lack of elasticity, very terrible, for nothing would sway or move them. Unexcitable in pleasure, implacable in anger, these folk were very interesting to Isaak Rosenstein.¹

In Rags of Glory we are told that Kruger

...epitomized the Boers' character, which may have accounted for his power as a leader. He had all their virtues and all their faults. Brave, inured to hardship, a farmer, hunter, and good citizen-soldier since boyhood, generous and hospitable, a good friend and a dangerous enemy.

He was like his fellows, obstinate and opinionated, bigoted and mule stubborn.²

¹ The Turning Wheels, 237.

² Rags of Glory, 12.

A physical description of Kruger yields a better understanding of what one might expect in a Boer man.

His eyes were dark brown, almost black. They had heavy bags beneath them, his left eyelid drooped, both eyes were inflamed and he held them partially closed. His eyebrows were heavy, his nose prominent, with wide nostrils. He had big ears. His mouth was large. He held his lips tightly compressed. His face was clean shaven except for a gray beard that went from ear to ear below his chin. His expression was melancholy.... His most striking characteristic was his voice, a deep double bass. When irritated, he used it with terrifying effect. This was Oom Paul. A man. The husband of two wives. [His wife died young.] Father of sixteen children, grandfather of a hundred twenty.

His Bible was always with him. It was not a book to him, not even a holy book. It was his life's guide. Still the farmer, he rose at daybreak. His first action was to go to his study and read a chapter of the Bible. Then he had a cup of coffee....

At meals the women and girls of his household had to sit with the heads covered. He ate fast...did not drink...smoked heavily. He drank a great deal of coffee... He wore... klapbroek, flap fly, trousers.³

The Boer woman in Cloete's books and in reality, tends to be very attractive and lively in her youth, growing heavy and wise with age. However, there are exceptions.

The Mask presents a very good description of Jacoba Fourie, one such exception to the statement above.

³ Rags of Glory, 11-12.

Mevrou Fourie was a small thin woman of fifty-two. She dressed in black. A black dress buttoned up to her neck with long sleeves and a black kappie when she went out of the house into the scorching sun. She had ten living children, tall sons and daughters who took after their father. Three of her children were dead. She had thirty-one grandchildren. She had lost count of the grandchildren who had died....

...She was of French Huguenot origin, having been born Marais. It showed in her appearance. Her dark, almost black eyes, her small size so different from most Boer women who ran to flesh. Her fiery nature. The flame of her character which burned like fire within her and dominated all those who belonged in her life....⁴

In The Turning Wheels we have a description which fits not only Tante Anna de Jong, for whom it was intended, but also Martha Coetzee Kleinhouse, and Tante Maria Prinsloo of The Hill of Doves and The Fiercest Heart, respectively.

...Rolls of fat round her neck...heavy breasts...bulging thighs...arms, like legs of mutton, incased in black cotton.... Her small eyes, black, shining buttons sunk into her cheeks, opened and closed, like those of an animal that rested watchfully.⁵

The beauty of youth in Cloete's novels may be seen in Francina Marais of The Fiercest Heart, Sybella Fourie of The Mask, Louise and Renata van Reenan of Rags of Glory, or Sannie van Reenan of The Turning Wheels who

...prided herself on her golden hair and the milk-white complexion which she guarded so carefully from the sun with a mask of breyed goat skin.⁶

⁴ The Mask, 4.

⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁵ The Turning Wheels, 13.

Sannie was not alone in her pride. Most Boer women dressed in long sleeves, wore kappies when out-of-doors and like Sannie, took the additional precaution of a face mask of soft breyed skin..."to prevent...being burned" if they expected to remain in the sun for some time. "These masks had been used by South African girls since the Great Trek and even before it."⁷

Stuart Cloete writes lovingly of the country of his heritage and of the people who inhabited it.

This is the land of the lion. It is an empire, not a kingdom. Not a toy for businessmen to develop like a garden city. And who has seen this? How many great men have had the vision? Cecil Rhodes and his rival Paul Kruger, the Boer president, each in his own fashion....

The old Boers, like De la Rey, De Wet, Joubert and their men who fought so bitterly for their land, loved it in their curious Calvinistic fashion. To them it was Ons Land, the land of Canaan, where they dwelt like patriarchs. Hard masters, sometimes brutal--the Kaffirs understood them as men, as fighters, as pastoralists, as they were themselves. They administered a rough justice, but they knew no law as we interpret it today. And they developed nothing. They were farmers and hunters who left Africa alone. They dug no holes in the land. They made trails not roads. They opposed all innovations. And had it not been for the discovery of gold and diamonds the country would have remained much as it was a hundred years ago. Paul Kruger saw this when he cried out that these discoveries would only bring blood and tears, not only to the white man, but to the black as well, for under

⁷ Rags of Glory, 389.

the Boer rule there were no town slums, no mines where men would work a mile under the surface and are herded in compounds away from their wives and children for the months of their contract. There were no factories, and if the black men were required to work it was in the air and under the sun. And the work was something they understood--the plowing of lands and the herding of cattle.⁸

Against the changes which the English brought the Boers rebelled bitterly:

They were against all modernity, against all progress, all business, all wealth. For wealth they saw as the source of all evil.⁹

The Boer had a very close association with the land.

"...I'm used to the ground. I like it. You know," he said, "out in the veld it is strange, when we sit on the ground. Africa is like our mother's breast. The ground is what we fight for. Ons Land,...our sacred soil. Much of it is hard and stony. Poor land, but ours. Won by our fathers' blood."¹⁰

Love of land was high on the list of the Boer's loves.

As they rode Boetie thought of this other mystery. A man's love for his homeland. Not just his own bit of it. Not just his farm, his lands, but the whole of it. The wide veld, the rugged mountains, the great skies. The whole vastness of it that was their heritage, the land of their fathers, that their fathers had wrested from the wilderness, taming it with gun and plow, tending it, reaping it. They themselves as much a part of it as the red soil, as the swirling dust devils, as the bush and the trees. This was something no

⁸ Cloete, "I Speak for the African", Life, 124.

⁹ Rags of Glory, 80.

¹⁰ Rags of Glory, 350.

man could explain. He could only feel it with every beat of his heart, with every pulse of it. This was another face of love. How many faces did it have?...Did any man know? For a land, for a woman, for in-animate things, for a home, for a child, for a dog, a horse--for his rifle and his tools.¹¹

"His herd of mares was to a stallion what his farm was to a Boer, his very life, something he must fight to hold."¹² So greatly did the Boer value the land.

Most farms were about sixteen hundred acres in extent, and the presence of water was the most important single factor involved in the selection of a site. In the old areas, the land had been laid out already by the heads of each family. In new areas this task was handled by the field cornet or trek leader who had the first choice of the new lands.

...After him the others drew lots, and then rode off their properties.

To do this the head of each family or his representative started from where the last man had stopped and rode for two hours in each direction. As he changed his course, he would dismount to make a rough beacon and, mounting, gallop on, coming back in the end to the point he had started from.

Roughly, the farms were sixteen miles in circumference. And varied in size from ten to twenty thousand morgen. Though theoretically they were square, in actual fact they were of all shapes, natural obstacles having been avoided and changes of direction made to include springs or patches of particularly good

¹¹ Ibid., 306.

¹² Ibid., 36.

grazing. Each man, as soon as he had chosen his farm, drew out, collected his herds and began to build his homestead.¹³

Against These Three expresses almost exactly the same procedure:

The Boer's idea of a farm is a block of land of not less than four thousand morgen, preferably eight thousand; that is, sixteen thousand acres. His method of staking it out was to ride it off under the direction of the field cornet. Drawing lots for the turns they were to take, each man--and a Boer was a man, a burgher at sixteen--rode for a specified time enclosing a rectangle of land. Each rode fast and tried to include the best water and land and to avoid the worst. His conception that an area is becoming overpopulated begins on the day that he can see another man's smoke from his house.¹⁴

The idea that a Boer becomes a man at the age of sixteen is illustrated by the following passage from Rags of Glory, and involves the conscription of horses for war:

"They shall never take my horse.... They cannot. No,...you have forgotten something. They cannot take a burgher's horse.... I'll ride him to war myself."

"Ja," Boetie said, drawing himself up to his full height. "I was sixteen today. I am a man."¹⁵

When a Boer became a burgher at sixteen, he was expected to take up his responsibilities as a man. By the

¹³ The Turning Wheels, 147.

¹⁵ Rags of Glory, 16.

¹⁴ Against These Three, 15.

time a boy was sixteen he had learnt how to ride a horse and was an expert rifleman and hunter. As soon as Boer boys could hold a gun, they were sent into the wilds hunting for meat with one bullet and one charge of powder. If they wasted it, they were beaten, and a careless shot would bring the wrath of an aroused and still-living beast down on the youngster.¹⁶

Oupa du Toit remembered this from his own childhood and looked with scorn upon the new repeating rifles.

He did not think anything of repeating rifles. There was no skill in their use; there was no risk, he said. It was something else to face a charging elephant or a lion with a single shot in your muzzle-loading roer.¹⁷

As boys, Kruger and a hunting companion made a pact as a reminder not to take rash action. "It was agreed between them that should one of them behave recklessly, or through cowardice allow game to escape, he should receive a thrashing with a sjambok from the other."¹⁸ Rashness was deadly.

Boers all married in their teens or very early twenties. A widower remarried quickly. ...In Africa a man had to marry. He could not run a farm or even a house alone.¹⁹

"It was in fact impossible for a man to farm without a wife."²⁰ "Not only could a man not farm without a wife, but he had no heart for it."²¹ Very rarely were men single.

¹⁶ Against These Three, 28. ¹⁹ Rags of Glory, 381.

¹⁷ The Hill of Doves, 78. ²⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸ Against These Three, 29. ²¹ Turning Wheels, 107.

The life of the Boer was hard, frugal, filled with days of "hunting, farming, working, and worshipping the Lord."²² At intervals, the only diversion was "to foregather for a nachtmaal [communion] or, inspanning their oxen to go on a tour of visiting which might last months, calling on everyone they knew...."²³

...A nachtmaal was a nachtmaal, and people go to it from all around.... There would be a great reunion, where the men would talk and trade and women show each other the children they had borne since their last meeting. The young people would dance and make merry, despite the disapproval of their elders, and out of their meeting would come weddings and more children.

Some would even profit by this event to get married under the auspices of the church instead of the landroost of the district.... It would be a fine spectacle to see so many wagons assembled, and a veritable town of tents go up. There would be hundreds of wagons there, all drawn up, lying side by side.²⁴

Preparations at home varied from place to place, but there was no doubt why young men and women went to nachtmaal.

Sybella was collecting eggs and hard boiling them, seeing that her prettiest dresses were washed and ironed and getting out her most decorated and pleated kappies. She had a project in her mind. This was her chance to find a young man who was willing to adventure in the north and needed a fine brave girl for company.²⁵

²² Against These Three, 29.

²³ Turning Wheels, 146.

²⁴ Ibid., 374-5.

²⁵ The Mask, 40.

"For the young people this was a chance to do some courting, to seek a mooi meisie, a pretty girl...."²⁶

Courting, for a young Boer couple was controlled.

"...The young couple courted, sitting in a room lit by a candle stuck in a bottle. The length of the candle a clear indication to the visiting swain as to how welcome he was, for when it went out, he was expected to leave."²⁷

The Hill of Doves opens with a chapter about the Boer custom of courting which was called "up-sitting".

Lena's heart was beating fast.... She wondered if all girls felt like this. Dirk was sitting opposite to her. The candle on the table between them made a little circle of light that held them enclosed.... A draught ruffled the flame of the candle....then the flame surnt steadily again.

...Soon when Dirk proposed, they would get married.... It was harder for a man. He had to make a speech of some kind. All a woman need do was say yes to what he said. The fact that she was there at all showed her willing, and all she could do was to choose longer and longer candles, if they could be found, and wear her best clothes....

It was a long time since Dirk had spoken: or had moved. The last time had been to get up and go to the dresser for a pinch of salt to put round the wick of the candle to make it burn longer. When it burnt out, he would go. That was the custom....²⁸

The nachtmaal was bound to be occasion for at least one wedding. And though the ceremony itself might be sedate enough, the celebrations following the marriage were not.

²⁶ Rags of Glory, 28.

²⁸ Hill of Doves, 1-2.

²⁷ Turning Wheels, 146.

They were firing their guns in the air,
the wedding shots...

...
Never...had there been such a killing of
all manner of beasts and fowls, both wild and
domestic; never such bringing of gifts of ev-
ery kind--things to eat, preserves and dainties;
of household goods, linens, furniture, cutlery,
china; never such a variety of livestock as
presents to a young bride and her man.
...There were shooting matches...There were
horse races...love-making, trading, the ex-
change of presents and of blows, for...there
was drink. There were dogs and dog fights...
headaches...bruises...beauty...happiness....²⁹

The gifts of livestock were joined to those which had
been given the boy and girl as birth gifts and at baptism,
communion, and other special occasions.

...It was a Boer custom on the birth of a
child to give the infant presents of livestock.
These came from parents, relations, and close
friends of the family--a couple of horses,
a cow or two, some sheep or goats--and formed
the nucleus of the herd a boy would own when he
became a man, or a part of the dowry a girl
would take to her husband.³⁰

Boer couples took seriously the Biblical injunction to
be "fruitful and multiply" having large families yet losing
many to illnesses and tragedies. Hendrik van der Berg desired

...his sons should be numberless and his
grandsons fill the earth. Hunters, fighters,
prophets, men like himself, they should be
reared to fear God and to serve Him.³¹

²⁹ Hill of Doves, 602.

³¹ Turning Wheels, 157.

³⁰ Against These Three, 17.

And when old white-haired William Prinsloo was scolded by his sister-in-law for wanting to remarry he replied,

"I am following the Word, woman! Do you not know what God said?" he asked. "Are you so ignorant of the Holy Writ? God blessed them," Oom Willem said, "and said unto them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it.'"³²

On the move they [the Boers] got on well enough with each other, but any form of closely knit communal life was contrary to their nature, their ideal being the patriarchal family unit, but even this, to please them, must be subdivided into its integral parts of a man, his woman, and their children....

What they liked was to live apart, so far apart that they could not see each other's smoke.... Hidden from each other, they could live their secluded self-contained lives....³³

In the novel, The Mask, Jacoba Fourie had this same Boer concept of space, isolation, and individualism.

She was a woman consumed by what some men considered the Boer disease of land hunger. She must own as far as she could see. To her the smoke of a stranger's fire was anathema.³⁴

Next to their families and land, the Boers were "a simple race who valued, above everything, their cattle...."³⁵

"It may be foolish, the way I love them, but my oxen are like children to me and never since they were trained have they felt the whip.... To us Boers our cattle are like our hands, as much a part of us as our fingers."³⁶

³² The Fiercest Heart, 432.

³⁵ Turning Wheels, 237.

³³ Turning Wheels, 145-6.

³⁶ Ibid., 223.

³⁴ The Mask, 28.

"...Cattle are true riches. See how they increase and multiply and can gold do that?"³⁷

Among the Boers, as among the natives, a man's standing was inextricably tied up with the size of his herd, his importance being to a great extent measured by the number of his cattle. A man was important when he had thousands of cattle, negligible when he had none.³⁸

The importance of farming and hunting are pointed out in this passage from Against These Three:

Farming among the Boers was a matter of staying alive, of perpetual vigilance against animals and men, of hunting as much for food as for sport, and much wild game had to be exterminated before any crops could be planted. There were other reasons, too, for hunting: where the game was plentiful so were the lions and leopards...that raided the cattle kraals and chicken pens, and occasionally even killed herders in the open. Having nothing but courage, skill, and the simple tools they had brought with them, the Boers made their homes in the wilderness.³⁹

A description of Jacoba Fourie's tasks on the farm help us see the role of the Boer farm wife:

She thought of all the work on the farm. The biltong--the dried meat--to be prepared, the pig bowels to be washed for sausage skins, the rusks, the boerworst, the candles, the butter to be salted, the pickles and chutneys, the konfyts to be put into jars and sealed with green bladders. There were wild immortelle flowers to be picked for the mattresses, the geese to be plucked of their down, the poultry

³⁷ Ibid., 236.

³⁹ Against These Three, 27.

³⁸ Turning Wheels, 100.

to be raised. First, the eggs to be set and then, the chicks attended to. She kept hens, turkeys, guineas, ducks, geese. Then there were vegetables and fruit trees of the kitchen garden and the seeds to be saved for the next season, and the clothes to be made and mended. All the endless work of the great farm and its people, where little but powder and shot, sugar and coffee, and clothing material was ever brought from the town a hundred miles away twice a year.⁴⁰

One of the immediate tasks after receiving a farm and marking out the boundaries, was to site and build the house and farm buildings.

The houses they built of poles placed in holes in the ground and tamped in. The wood had to be hard and immune to white ants. The spaces between the poles and the poles themselves had to be covered with dagga--clay wetted and tramped till it reached the consistency of cement. It was then thrown against the framework in great dabs and plastered on by hand. The roofs on the houses were thatched with the long harsh grass that grew everywhere. They had no ceilings, and the roof timbers were made, when possible, of white poplars, which grew very straight, were light, and ant-resistant, and which every Boer planted as soon as he could obtain the rooted slips and suckers. The floors were also of dagga mixed with ox blood and hair. Into them, to take up the friction, were inset peach pips. The floors were then polished with beeswax till they glistened.⁴¹

The Boers were never really idle, as they always had some task to do

...developing their homes, breaking land, and building. There was no end to their building; they needed shops for their craftsmen, blacksmiths' shops, where the great bellows could

⁴⁰ The Mask, 6-7.

⁴¹ Against These Three, 28.

be set up, carpenters' shops, store houses, chicken hocks. They had to make innumerable kraals for their stock; those for the milk cows, for the calves, for the heifers, for the tollies, for the fat oxen, for the working oxen.⁴²

Before farming, the trees had to be stumped, the branches and limbs drawn off for fence making. Furrows had to be planned so that the fields had water when there was no rain. Dams had to be sited and dug. Only then would the plough be brought out, the oxen inspanned, and the task of ploughing begun.

The plough-shears tore long new furrows through the virgin soil, ploughing up rectangular acre after rectangular acre, working inwards till at last it was done. The sun glinted on the now shining mould-boards as they were lifted out at the headlands and dragged over the rough grass till they bit the soil again.... Soon the black patches of ploughland would be green....⁴³.

The Boers performed all the tasks of necessity--

...that of planting crops that they might eat, of making shoes that they might walk, of building furniture, beds, stools, tables, and chairs that they might have more comfort....⁴⁴

For blankets, protection against the very cold weather, the Boers had karosses made of tanned skins sewn together. Furniture consisted mainly of wooden frames with bottoms made of riempies--thin rawhide strips latticed

⁴² Turning Wheels, 162.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴³ Turning Wheels, 163.

back and forth across the frames. These pieces of furniture are still in use in many Afrikaner homes today, and furniture makers follow the same pattern of lattice work. Everything in the home was put together with pegs rather than nails. Metal was expensive and dear to find, and pegs enabled articles to be taken apart easily when a move had to be made. What the Boer did not have, he devised and what he could not devise, he did without.

The isolation of the Boer caused the development of something near a sixth sense--being almost psychic:

Living so close to nature, all Boers except those of the towns were a part of it, almost psychic in their apprehension.... Oom Paul... in his youth had been able to tell where game was long before it was seen.... Often, he even named it.⁴⁵

Such abilities allowed the Boers to know in which kind of country to expect which kind of game, and later, during the conflict with the English this closeness to nature allowed the Boers to know the placement of English troops and troop movements. They watched for signs-- the signal of the baboon leader, or the sudden flight of birds:

The first baboon barked again. That was the old man, the leader giving warning. If the

⁴⁵ Rags of Glory, 37.

English knew anything of the veld, they would know something was happening.⁴⁶

The Boers had no doctors. God sent and God took away.

The women understood most illness and had herbal cures.

Tante Martha Kleinhouse...was making something, stirring something in a copper pan over the fire, simmering a concoction of herbs, or straining the juice from steeped roots. She had remedies and simples of every sort in bottles, jars, and pots, in little bags, in paper parcels neatly tied with string and labelled, or hanging in great clusters from the roof-beams--veld medicines for every ill. She said there was nothing that could not be cured by some plant or root. Bark, branches, dried flowers, bulbs were all collected and saved.⁴⁷

"For stomach-ache...roast flour, stir it into hot milk, and give it quickly. It must be drunk hot and fast. For earache, if hot turnip does no good, go out and dig around for a worm, char it in a porcelain saucer, mix the ashes with good brandy, and pour it into the sore ear a drop at a time. Willow leaves for lameness and pomegranate roots for worms," she said. "For baldness, a dried cock's gizzard rubbed into dust and then mixed with goose fat into a paste; and old tea leaves for a burn. These things are important.... I have tried them all with much success, they are the accepted remedies of our people. All are natural things for natural ailments."⁴⁸

Older women served as mid-wives to child-bearers, since "only a woman could understand" this malady which came

⁴⁶ The Hill of Doves, 443.

⁴⁸ Hill of Doves, 518.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

with pain since the sin of Eve. "The delivering of children is a woman's business,"⁴⁹ the mid-wives said and were shocked at the idea that English women were seen by doctors--men--when delivering.

The Boers faced all things bravely, but men feared one thing above all else--of all ways to die, to have to die in bed was the worst fate of all. Now in his late nineties

Oupa was afraid that death...would come the way it came for a woman. Unless he took the matter into his own hands, he would die in bed without his shoes on his feet or his gun at his side. Before God, he despised a death that could do no more than this....⁵⁰

Schalk's brother...was an even bigger man than Schalk, a man like a mad bull who could bend iron bars in his hand and bite six inch nails in two. It was strange that he had died in bed only two years later.⁵¹

In "The Claws of the Cat" Jan Swart explained to his twelve year old son, who must be left alone, why he must not worry about the operation he will have in Cape Town:

"Do not fear for me," his father said. "I cannot die. I can only be killed. It is not reasonable to think that I shall be the first of my race to die in bed like a woman."⁵²

Conditions for living in the early years on the veld were difficult indeed. The weather was severe in winter,

⁴⁹ The Turning Wheels, 159.

⁵⁰ Hill of Doves, 101.

⁵¹ The Mask, 11.

⁵² "The Claws of the Cat," The Soldiers' Peaches, 156.

scorching in summer. Where the growth was lush and green, to eke out a life was even more difficult because of the beasts that stayed nearby to feast on the fattened animals and wild game. That families were large was only a safeguard that the name go on, as the hazards from beasts, disease, and war took a deep toll from the Boers. In the isolation of their lives, the Boers never were exposed to diseases, so like the Kaffirs, when they came into contact with the English and others who lived in communities, they easily contracted every communicable disease to which they were exposed.

Of all his foes, nature was most formidable to the Boer.

Adventure and hardship these folks could stand, it was something which they were capable of facing, gun in hand, but could one face the bos-lice, the mosquitoes, the fleas, and other vermin with weapons?⁵³

⁵³ The Turning Wheels, 268.

CHAPTER V

THE BOER AND THE TREK

The coming of the English to southern Africa as settlers brought anxiety into the life of the Cape Boers. They saw the routine of Boer life jeopardized by the changes the English brought with them. These Boers early moved away from the Cape into more northern parts of the colony for they did not like the restraint of government under either the Dutch East India Company or the English. More and more people came to be dissatisfied with conditions until they decided they must move.

"We are going because some others have already gone. Not many, but a few, and we wish to be among the first and to pick the best farms. Then we want our freedom. We want no more taxes, no quitrent, no laws but our own which are the laws of God. We wish to build a republic in the wilderness where we can live in our fashion as farmers and hunters. Just look at what the English have done. They have freed our slaves. They have allowed servants to testify against their masters. They have taken away our language and tax us for the land which we have tamed. And this is only the beginning. First one law and then another, and then before we know what has happened we will find ourselves knee-haltered and our freedom gone."¹

At Slagtersnek, in 1815, Frederik Bezuidenhout was shot by the English while resisting arrest. A group had been sent

¹ The Fiercest Heart, 37.

to bring him to court for failure to pay his taxes. A rebellion led by Bezuidenhout's brother Johannes sprang up almost immediately, but the leaders were captured and sentenced to hang. Nearly all the Boers in the area were forced to attend the hangings as a lesson. Unfortunately, the ropes used were poor quality and broke. The witnesses were convinced that God had a hand in the situation, that the hangings were unjust. There was no crime; there were no taxes to be paid. Despite angry protests, the offenders were hanged a second time, but the incident was never forgotten by the Boers. Men still speak bitterly of Slagtersnek. "It is a Boer characteristic never to forget a friend or forgive an enemy."²

Another major point of discontent concerned the freeing of slaves in all British colonies. The Boers were not so much distressed about the slaves being free as they were incensed that their fields stood ready for harvest, with the rains imminent, and no laborers were available to complete the task. Though the British had agreed to pay compensation for the slaves lost, the amount was much too inadequate,

...was made payable in England and could only be collected by an agent. The expenses in many cases amounted to more than the capital value of the slaves involved.³

² Against These Three, 19.

³ Ibid., 17.

Kaffir raids had carried away large numbers of cattle. In the past, the Boers simply organized their commandos, pursued the thieves, and regained their animals by force. As an additional lesson to the Kaffirs, they usually took some native cattle as well, and burned their villages. But with English control in the Cape, such treatment of the Kaffirs was forbidden by law. Under the new regime, an "official war party" was sent after the animals, often including the Boers whose animals had been taken. Having done most of the fighting, the Boers were enraged when "...the government declared the beasts to be war booty which must be sold for war costs before they could be distributed among their former owners...."⁴ Many of these animals were childrens' pets, given them at birth, and the Boers saw no reason to pay for animals rightly theirs already, especially to support the Rooineks.

With these major complaints and a goodly list of more minor ones, the trek was

...the logical outcome of the freeing of the slaves by the English in the middle of a harvest so that the farmers starved while their crops stood ungarnered in the field, rotting.... Of the hangings at Slagtersnek and of the ravagings of the Kaffirs with which they were no longer allowed to deal after their own fashion.

It was the migration of a people, who feeling they could stand no more, were prepared to face almost inconceivable risks for an ideal which they would have been unable to describe.⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Turning Wheels, 3.

Secure in the knowledge that they were the chosen race, certain of their capacity to endure, and forced on by the Boer necessity for space and freedom, they followed rivers to their sources, crossed the great watersheds, and followed new rivers, hunting, fighting, and reading the Bible as they wandered.⁶

Much preparation was necessary before the actual trek could get underway. First, the wagons had to be built, the canvases prepared, and oxen procured and trained. There was also the matter of having a trek leader, one person unto whom was left the responsibility of major decisions. The leader was elected by the people forming the trek. The organization was very loose, following the independent nature of the Boer.

Having chosen him to lead them, they felt their responsibility at an end.... If they left him the greater decisions, he also left them the lesser.

In this lay the great strength of this nation, their capacity for decentralization; in it also lay their weakness. For so competent were they as individuals that they hesitated to combine even when it was necessary to do so, for acknowledging no man their master, each wished to lead and declined to follow.⁷

The Mask contains a passage illustrating the good qualities of a trek wagon:

A wagon was for life, for more than your life. You passed it on to your sons, for in

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ The Turning Wheels, 50.

these great hand-built homes on wheels a man could live his whole life....

At last he heard of a wagon builder who had built a wagon that all men spoke of with wonder....

And it was this wagon that Simon bought. It was big, eighteen foot long and five foot wide. It was heavy and immensely strong, being built of selected and seasoned assegai wood, wild pear, blackwood, stink- and iron-wood, with a bed of yellow wood planks. All these woods except for the bed were iron hard. Neither the heat of the sun, nor frost, nor water affected them. They were the working parts of the wagon--the wheels, the schamel and tongue or forecarriage as it were, which enabled the wagon to turn sharply, the front wheels being much lower than the back, passing under its body. It had extra wide iron tires. They were seven inches across, which would make the going much easier in sand or mud. The frame for the canvas tent was beautifully made and there were wagon boxes and compartments for storage fitted into the sides.

The wagon was painted bright red with dark blue designs of interlacing daisies....

Having bought his wagon he now began to look for oxen and finally bought a matched span of sixteen black oxen. They were in their prime, all rising six years old and still had their full strength and weight to come. Moreover, they had not been ill used and were very tame. He bought mealies for them and fed them himself on the outspan, calling them by name as he fed them, so that before long they came like dogs to his call.⁸

The finish of the wagons, the out-fitting, is detailed a little more in The Fiercest Heart.

⁸ The Mask, 73-75.

The wagons had four kists or chests in them. One in front on which the driver sat, one behind and one along each side. They were lashed in position. Nothing in a wagon was nailed. Everything was held by pegs, wedges, and riems to make running repairs easier and to enable the wagon to be taken apart and carried plank by plank and wheel by wheel over any obstacles that proved impassable, and rebuilt the other side. The kartels fitted across the boxes at the back or were suspended by riems from the framework of the tent.⁹

Three layers of extra canvas, each layer painted white against the rain and heat, were fastened to the hoops that supported the wagon tents. The hoops were strengthened--no assegai could pierce these tilts. The wagons, by agreement, were all painted one color--bright blue with yellow wheels. On each farm the spans of draft oxen were being rested, fattened up and admired.¹⁰

The trek wagons of the Boers were heavily laden.

There were many essentials which the pioneers knew would be needed once they reached their Canaan. Some wagons were entirely goods wagons, while others were living wagons, the rear portion filled by a big kartel or bed that usually ran from rail to rail within it. Under the kartel were stowed smaller, more precious objects--a few china cups, an odd piece of silver or two, little bags of money for buying essentials such as powder when the smous came.

In each living wagon there was a beautifully ornamented chest of hardwood in which the Boers carried their

⁹ Fiercest Heart, 142-3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

best clothes. On the move they wore only rough clothing--trousers of fine tanned buckskin with side flaps, a shirt and short jacket, and a broad-brimmed hat made out of mealie stalks. The Boers wore no under garments or socks, and their shoes were veldschoen--roughly made field shoes of rawhide. Each man carried a heavy sheath knife in his belt, bullets, and a powder horn. Over his wrist hung his sjambok, a quirt usually made of rhinoceros skin. His rifle was either strapped over his shoulder across his back, or carried at the ready, butt on hip.

Though the women were as anxious to escape the English as the men, they were less anxious to make the trip. They were brave, courageous women who knew the hardships involved in a trek--cooking on the veld over a fire between stones, baking bread in ovens scooped out of the ant heaps, washing clothes in rivers of icy cold water and trying to dry them while on the move, caring for children, nursing weak animals, mending goods, trying to keep ahead of the dust raised by the great lumbering wheels, watching out for wild beasts, dreading a sudden ambush by hostile Kaffirs, knowing that many of their number, perhaps husbands or children would be lost along the way.

These people, men, women, and children, with their flocks and herbs, were leaving their homes for good to seek new ones in the wilds of

the North. Dried meat--biltong--had been prepared, and Boer rusks, that would keep for weeks. Powder had been bought in barrels, lead bullets had been moulded and the trek gear gotten ready. All the furniture in their homes, everything inessential was sold and the money for the sale used to buy stock which could move on its own four legs.¹¹

To trek means to go: to go towards something or away from something: to go away from the English and towards new pastures. It was part of the restless nature of the Boer to trek anyway as soon as any place got overpopulated, or the game was killed off, or the seasons were bad.¹²

When the trek finally got started, the entire veld was covered with herds of sheep, cattle, spare oxen, goats, mares and stallions, all forming a sea of motion about the great ships of the veld, their white sails blown out by their underframing. This mass, which began in a more noticeable stream in the middle 1830's, had no road to follow. Only the sun and the stars guided the Boers in the right direction toward the land they had read about in their Bibles and had heard tales about by travellers and hunters. All Africa called to these wanderers who sought a new home.

Since there was a degree of safety in numbers, the trek sometimes met up with another laagered group, and if the leaders agreed they normally joined together in the stream, yet retained a certain amount of separateness.

¹¹ Against These Three, 14.

¹² Ibid., 15.

There were no doctors on the trek. The women took with them what simples and remedies they knew and collected other things on the veld. Women gave birth to babies while kneeling on skins behind their wagons.

The main impetus of the trek lasted for about ten years. During that time hundreds of families moved out of the Cape Province and into the Orange Free State. Others turned toward the east to Natal, while others, the bitterest and most determined to be rid of the English, drove farther north in the Transvaal and some even into Rhodesia. The voortrekkers, those who went ahead, commonly called themselves "the children of Israel fleeing from the rule of the Egyptians." Pharaoh was, for them, the authority of the Queen's government.

Though the trek was not easy, progress necessarily slow, crossing rivers, climbing over mountains, enduring the hardships of winter on the veld, the spirit of the voortrekker was not defeated. They talked about life "before the English" and dreamed of what it would be like when they reached their new homes.

In many ways the trekkers must have looked like Noah's ark, with all the animals streaming along with the wagons, crates of chickens riding along underneath waiting patiently for the trek to stop, the cattle to be outspanned, and then loosed:

Tante Maria told Hendrik to loose the chickens. Their wicker crates hung under the bed of the wagon, but already they knew what was taking place and had thrust their heads out between the bars. As soon as the crates were opened they ran out and began to scratch and peck about.¹³

...The poultry got so used to travel that when they saw the oxen being inspanned they would run and jump into the crates by themselves.¹⁴

The trek proceeded slowly. Some days ten miles, some days five. Some days not moving at all. Never at any time did they move more than fifteen miles in twenty-four hours. The distance covered depended on the condition of the live-stock. Cows with young calves, ewes with small lambs, and the ability of both to travel were the measuring-rod of progress; and if the Boers had little else they had time in plenty. Their movement was a drift rather than a march.¹⁵

As the trek moved along, scouts constantly rode well ahead seeking the best route, watching for possible ambush by Kaffirs, hunting for game for meat, fat, or hides to use for riems, seeking out grazing places for the cattle or looking for good water supplies. The following passage concerns hunting zebra for fat.

The Boers rode at a walk to save their horses. Soon at any moment, they might see a herd of zebra; when they found them they would ride down, galloping after them and stabbing them with their long hunting knives. Ammunition was too scarce to use on zebra, and they needed fat to grease their riems, and to make soap.¹⁶

¹³ Fiercest Heart, 148-9. ¹⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁴ Against These Three, 22. ¹⁶ The Turning Wheels, 1.

Each night as the trek stopped at a suitable camping place the wagons went into laager, drawn up closely,

...the disselboom of one lashed securely under the bed of the next. The spaces between the wheels the Boers blocked with small thorn trees and left a single opening, as a gate where, in the event of attack, a wagon could be rolled in.... Oxen were fastened in a ring outside the laager, tied by riems--rawhide thongs--to the wagon rails to add a wall of living beef to the protection of the camp.¹⁷

The choicest mounts and working oxen were usually brought into the laager for protection lest the beasts on the outside all be slaughtered and the wagons be left helpless with no way of moving on. Others were allowed to forage during the night outside the laager.

An ox requires eight hours for sleep and to chew its cud as it lies. Another eight hours is needed for it to graze. So that eight hours is as long as an ox can stand in the yoke and still hold condition.¹⁸

Children during the trek were not idle. Most of the boys had responsibility for the herds, keeping them moving where there was no grazing, and spreading them out when the grass was good. The wealth of the trek depended on the health of these beasts.

As the trek moved slowly on, day following night and night following day, new problems arose. Wagons broke down.

¹⁷ Against These Three, 20.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Cattle became foundered. Water ran short. The veld caught fire. Rains made river crossing impossible. Kaffirs ambushed and stole cattle. Nights were cold; days hot. Life was hard. The way rugged, but adventurous.

Slowly the blue paint was rubbed from the wagon bodies and the wheels. All that was left of the gay red paint was to be found on hubs. Most wheels had been repaired at the portable forges the Boers carried with them, new spokes and felloes had been fitted, the iron tires shortened, and many axles, that were made of hardwood, had been replaced. Brake blocks had to be fashioned continually; so had dissel-booms--the long poles to which the wheel oxen were inspanned. The white new tents of the wagons were torn and red with the ingrained dust, and people were themselves thin and hard with exposure.¹⁹

Where crossing a river was extremely difficult or presented a serious problem, the trek leader had the responsibility to locate an alternate route.

In the late afternoon Hendrik decided to look for a new drift across the river. The one they used now was all right for mounted men, but he hoped lower down, to find a place which would be better suited to the heavily laden wagons of the convoy.²⁰

Such decisions affected not only the convoy themselves, but the many others who would travel this way afterwards following the spoor of these voortrekkers, the new "line of advancing civilization,"²¹ and proved the interest of the leader in groups other than his own.

¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

²¹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Turning Wheels, 75.

The trek leader had to be especially watchful of the morale of the trekkers. He knew how easily they could get discouraged, and how difficult it would be to mold them together again once they had fallen prey to fear.

Their well-being was something of which he never ceased to think--their health, that of their horses and cattle, the condition of their wagons and gear were all matters of supreme importance on a trek where the speed of all had to be reduced to that of the slowest member of the convoy. And above all else, their spirit had to be kept up, which was why he had suggested the dance that night.²²

And so the trek continued with...

...the herds gaining in strength from the new births and losing much of their gain by disease and the depredations of savages and beasts. On, like ships, these eighteen and twenty-foot wagons rolled across the veld, the great rear wheels, six foot high, crashing through anthraps and riding over rocks. Sometimes they had to double-span--thirty-two oxen being hitched to one wagon--to get it through a river drift, or through sand or mud. Then the whips cracked, bending the long sixteen-foot bamboo whip sticks like willow twigs, in the hands of the drivers.

Driving oxen is an art, and the Boer loves his span next only to his wife and children and his horse. His wagon is his second home. With it, and the beasts he has trained to draw it, all Africa is his. Each beast knows his name. "Engelsman! Swartkop! Ireland! Bosveld! Witboii! Rooiland! Witpenze!" the drivers shout, and the oxen, lying low in the yokes, get their knees under them and pull.²³

²² The Turning Wheels, 47.

²³ Against These Three, 21.

The voortrekkers had plenty of food on the trip, for they always had an abundance of game, and the women baked their whole-meal bread faithfully whenever they were laagered long enough. Bread and meat were the staple foods but the women longed for the day there would be vegetables, and the children wanted fruit. Only the fruits of the veld trees could be of any help and they were soon finished. The Dutch always had a kitchen garden from which to get fresh food for table use, and this was badly missed now. In anticipation of the end of the trip women sat in their wagons and tenderly handled the seeds and bulbs which would one day be fruit and flowers. There would be mealies or corn, Kaffir corn, green and gray peas, beans of several varieties, pumpkins, cabbages, lettuce, oranges, peaches, apricots, onions, shallots, and all kinds of flowers. The women, especially, wanted the long trip over.

All this, their old culture, their way of life they were anxious to resume, to force their lives back into its static pattern. It was as much for this as for anything that they had left the Cape where outside influences, French and English, were creeping in, where the customs to which they clung were being modified and their ways laughed at, even by the more progressive of their own people.²⁴

All along the way the trekkers had reduced in numbers. Some found places to their liking, still others had not yet

²⁴ The Turning Wheels, 146.

found the place they sought. In a large group the trekkers had been relatively safe from the Kaffirs and Zulus, but as one by one, the smaller groups turned and broke away, they were a very great temptation to the Kaffirs who were eager to let their assegais drink blood again. When the great chief of the Matabele, Moselikatze, heard that the group of whites were coming up from the south, he sent an impi of two thousand warriors down to massacre them. The first group of trekkers were "eaten up" almost before they realized what had happened, their goods looted, wagons burnt, and the iron tires removed for making spearheads.

The success of this first onslaught gave the Matabele confidence in themselves. They were a fearsome lot, tall, nearly naked, with plumed headdresses and cuffs around the thighs and upper arms. As they attacked they hissed between their teeth and rattled their spears against their stiff rawhide shields. They returned two weeks later for a second attack, but by this time the trekkers had begun defensive preparations.

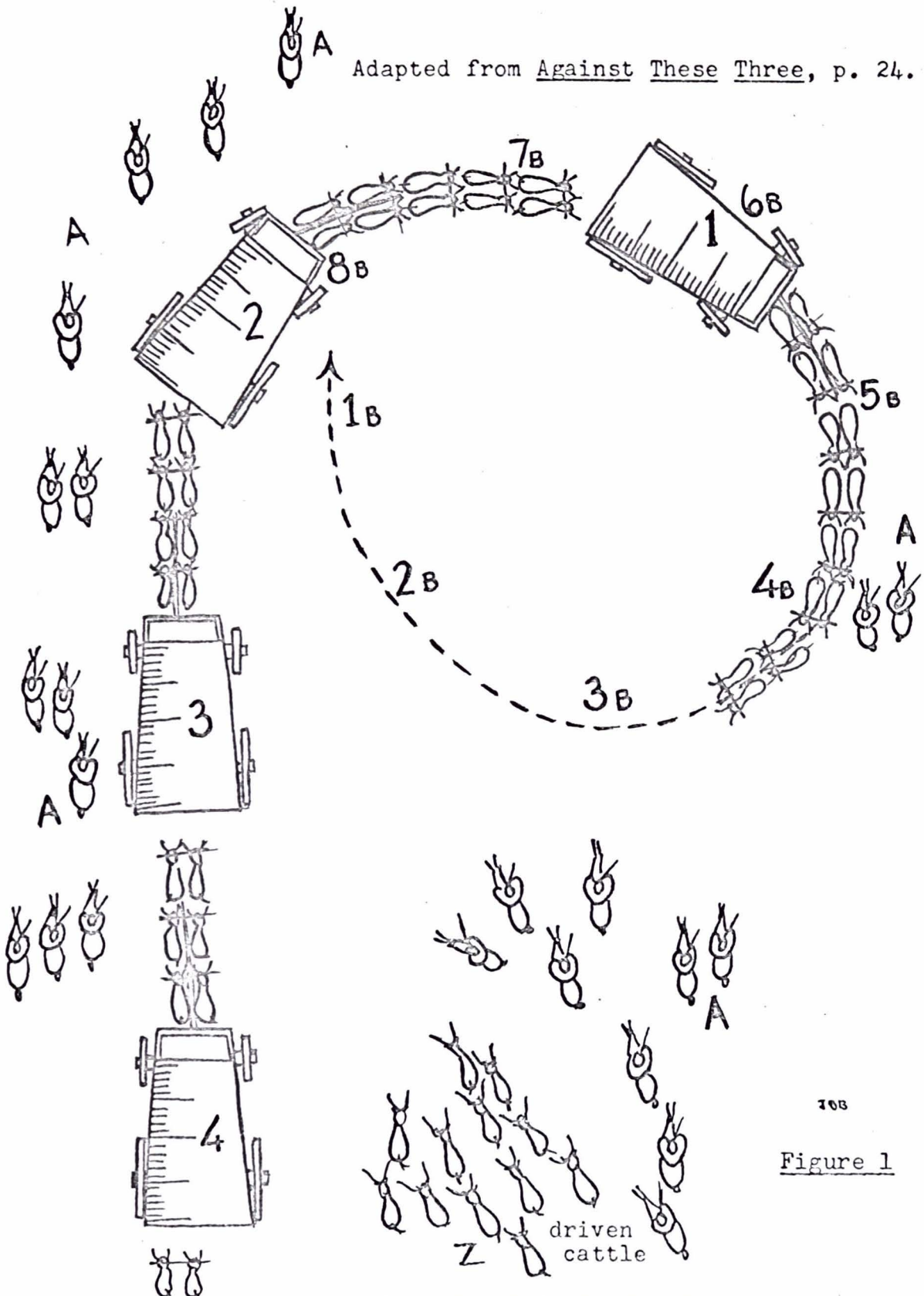
Boers did their defensive fighting in the open when possible. This left their commando room to maneuver and gave clear vision to what was taking place. The Boers carefully chose a spot to form their laager, making certain there was access to water, and yet a way to protect the wagons from that direction. They burned off what grass

remained so that the enemy could not burn them out later. The first wagon made a wide arc to the right so that the last wagon of the convoy could pull up in the spot where the first one originally began the turn. The last wagon would then form the gate wagon which could be rolled in place when the enemy attacked. As each wagon drew into place its draught oxen were outspanned and the best driven inside the laager area. The commando began to form and rode guard on the outside of the laager, herding the extra draught cattle to the wagons where they were tied in place to the wagon rails. (See figure 1.)

...The wagons were lashed together in a great circle,...the patient oxen spent the night tied to their trek tows, a wall of living flesh about the wagons.

The ring of wagons was set against one of the arms of the river, so that there would be no difficulty in getting water. Sometimes the enemy would simply wait for the trekkers to die of thirst or to become too weak to fight for lack of water.... Every gun was loaded and the powder and ball distributed so that all had ammunition.... Such lead as there was they melted down into slugs, which they set in cylinders of hard fat or wrapped in little bags of oiled rawhide which would easily slip down the barrels of their smooth-bore guns.... The shining tin plates of the women that were among their most treasured possessions were sacrificed and melted to mix with the lead to give it hardness,...and hunting knives were sharpened till their blades were like razors, and such Kaffirs as were faithful stropped their spears, rubbing them continuously against soft greased stones or fitting new shafts to old discarded heads.²⁵

Adapted from Against These Three, p. 24.



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Figure 1

BOER TREKKERS FORMING A LAAGER FOR EIGHT WAGONS

- 1, 2, 3, 4, wagons in line
 1B, 2B, etc., final positions of wagons
 A, mounted guards

As an extra precaution an inspection of the laager was held. The leader tested the lashings of the wagons, dragged at the thornbrush beneath the beds and between the wheels and finally noticed the unprotected wheels.

"We have here forty wagons. That is eighty wheels on the outside of the ring, and I want eighty oxen killed that their hides may be spread over the wheels and harden there before we are attacked."²⁶

Such orders were extremely difficult for the Boers to carry out, because of their love for these animals-- many of which were called out by name to be inspanned. However, knowing that the lives of their wives and children were at stake, men did as they were told. By the time the warriors attacked, the Boers were ready.

Women and children fought alongside their men. Mooi meisies like Sannie van Reenan saved the lives of their husbands or lovers more than once. "Women and girls...were shooting as consistently and coolly as the men, handling firearms as they handled their domestic utensils."²⁷

Children loaded for older brothers and sisters or for their parents, often getting in a few shots themselves. Young Marais, who "could not have been more than eight blew the head off a warrior who had reached his father's wagon while his mother was reloading."²⁸

²⁶ Turning Wheels, 404. ²⁸ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

As the attackers approached, the leader of the commando led his group out in a counter-attack.

They fired from the saddle in the Boer manner and swung their horses away to load again, all the time retreating towards the wagons, while they inflicted as many casualties as they could. One last charge, the Boers lying low on their horses and firing under their necks; and then the commando came back and the laager gate--the loose wagon that completed the defensive ring--was rolled into place.²⁹ (See figure 2.)

For six hours the Matabele attacked, charging with regiment after regiment, shouting their battle cries, their plumes tossing in the air. Thousands of spears ripped through the wagon hoods; hundreds of Matabele fell, but they could not break the laager, and finally they retired, taking forty-six hundred head of cattle and fifty-thousand sheep with them as booty.³⁰

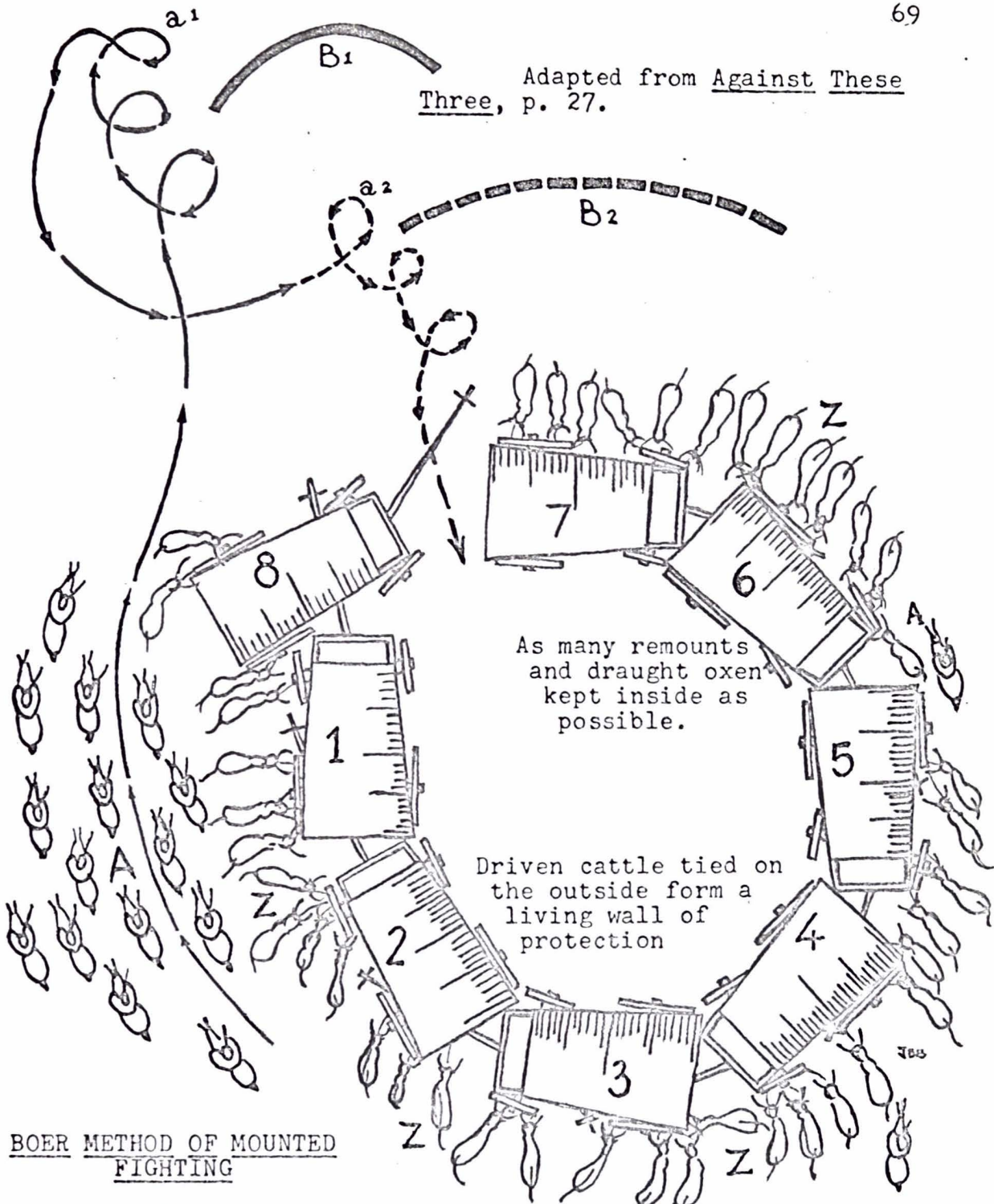
Many deaths resulted from such battles. It was to be expected according to most trekkers, and if one must die it was as good as any way. Such deaths were usually avenged by the Boers as soon afterwards as possible, following their "eye for an eye" philosophy of justice.

While the Boers in the North were being attacked by the Matabele, those Boers who traveled more easterly were attacked by the Zulus under Dingaan. The other tribes, the Kaffirs, were as much in fear of these warriors as the whites. Both groups depended on raids into Kaffir villages for wives

²⁹ Against These Three, 24.

³⁰ Ibid.

Adapted from Against These Three, p. 27.



...firing from galloping horse and then swinging away out of spear range to reload

- . A, mounted force attacking (a1, a2, first and second positions of attack before riding into laager)
- . B1, B2, the moving Kaffirs (first and second positions)
- . Z, driven cattle tied to the wagons by riems
- . 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc., wagons in final position of laager. No. 8 is gate wagon to be rolled into position.

Figure 2

and children to bring up as future warriors. Both groups were "a savage fighting community that knew no mercy and loved blood for its own sake."³¹

Here in their new land, the Boers could retaliate without dread of the English, and they began to establish themselves in this new country. So ended the Great Trek, leaving its dead scattered all the way from the Cape northwards in their struggle to flee from the English.

The trek pad...was dotted with the graves of the men, women, children who had been killed or died on the way...littered with the bones of their livestock.³²

The dead of the trek were buried as soon as possible, the grave filled with carefully packed stones after burial to prevent molestation by animals. A pile was usually built up on top, these stones serving as a marker. A trip up the tar-mac Great North Road today will still reveal some of these markers, a memorial to those who did not make it to the Canaan in Africa, but whose spirit lived on in the people they begat.

The spirit of the voortrekker may be summarized in this passage from The Turning Wheels.

The Boers worked to build up the life to which they were accustomed, one place being to them much like another, the health of their beasts, their own freedom of movement their one criterion of happiness. Hardship, provided

³¹ Ibid., 27.

³² The Turning Wheels, 48-9.

they suffered no master, being infinitely preferable to controlled safety.

Rootless, the whole of Africa was theirs while their wagon wheels would roll, their horses carry them and their powder horns remained full; the wide horizon the limit only of their unhurried movement. Loosely bound by the ties of kinship, religion and war their bond, they lived as their ancestors had lived, content with little, and eminently capable of wresting that little from the land which was their home, from any part of it where the water was plentiful and the grazing good. Tough and strong as their own riems, they battled with the forces of nature that pitted themselves against them, taking flood and drought, the encroachment of wild beasts and the attacks of insects as the normal lot of man, but always ready to inspan their oxen and to ride on, always watchful of their guns, always attentive to the conditions of their wagons.³³

³³ The Turning Wheels, 244-5.

CHAPTER VI

BOER, BRITON, AND BATTLE

Pushing into the far north into what is now the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, the Boers thought that they had escaped once and for all the English. Some few, however, had observed enough of the English in earlier days to suspect the inevitable, that wherever they, the Boers, God's chosen people might go, the English, Philistines, Rooineks, would follow them. Conflict was almost impossible to avoid.

One of the foremost differences between the Boer and Briton concerned the attitude toward the country. To the Boer, Africa was Ons Land; to the Briton, a means of wealth. "...Ons Land meant more than Our Land,...it had something to do with God."¹ Involved in all the conflict was the deep sense within the Boer that no innovations were allowed by God's laws.

Life is not something to be avoided. It must be taken, and it is useless to fight against it.... Nor is it good to try to change things or endeavor to explain them.... Curl not your locks nor pluck the hair from your legs. Leave such things, they have a natural course. Another hath care of such things. "To change

¹ Rags of Glory, 237.

them is to deny their creator; to change them is to know better than God..."²

In the short story "Far Enough," Danie de Wet had been forced to move twice already to get away from the English prospectors. His third farm he renamed Far Enough, because he was determined to go no farther. However, even in this third attempt Danie was a failure, for an Englishman came and wanted to buy this farm. Impatient, Danie refused to sell, but pressed, he named what he felt was an outrageous sum just to be rid of the Rooinek, demanding that he be paid in gold. To his surprise the Englishman agreed and heart-broken, Danie kept his word. His wife cleverly came up with the only sure suggestion. Together they went to the mineral surveyor and inquired about the purchase of farm land which had been prospected and declared free of mineral value. The cost was lower, and it was the land after all which Danie loved and desired.

In Danie's discussion with the Rooinek, he revealed a typical attitude of the Boer about mining, or digging below the soil of the earth. The conversation concerned digging a borehole, a deep water well.

"Borehole water is not real water," he said. "And it is not right. Nee, Meneer, it is a sin to pump up water out of the bowels of the earth. If God had meant it to be up he would have put it up. It is in my heart

² Hill of Doves, 281-2.

that all things should stay as they are--that they should stay as God made them."³

One of the burghers at Brennersdorp cried,

"And what do they want of us, these others, these Englishmen, but the gold and diamonds of our land?--the dross, the ornaments of it, to clothe their harlots. Our land they do not love. They would milk it as a cow is milked and leave it dry and empty, desecrated with the abrasions of their mines. If we had the gold loose, we would give it to them and let them go, for all the gold of Mammon is not worth one dead burgher. But the gold is not loose, it is spread on the rocks and under the rocks. The riches that they want are beneath our sacred soil. To get it they must stay. To stay they must have us in bondage. To get the riches they must take our rights, our freedoms, and before we submit to that, we are ready, to the last old man, to the last young boy, to die."⁴

The occasion of the words above was the annexation of the Transvaal by the English without the consent of the Boer population. A similar explanation comes from Rags of Glory:

The Boer population of South Africa had never been consulted about becoming a British colony. The Cape had been the booty of another war, handed over to England with other territories after the defeat of Napoleon, where unwilling Dutch allies had fallen with him. The Boers did not feel themselves British subjects and had no desire to become so. But to most people in England the English who did not support their country and the Dutch who were British subjects at the Cape were traitors, the whole damn lot of them. This was the time of black or white, of wrong or right. Few people could see gray or recognize finer shades of opinion.⁵

³ "Far Enough," The Soldiers' Peaches, 36.

⁴ Hill of Doves, 34-5.

⁵ Rags of Glory, 85-6.

Years earlier, the voortrekker women looked with scorn upon prospectors, and the older men saw them as a menace

...for if they found gold, the English that they had suffered so much to avoid, would follow them. Maytig, ja, if there was gold the red-coats would come, setting them, good free burghers, on an equality with the Kaffirs, making them buy the farms they had taken by the sweat of their brows and the strength of their hands on gun and bridle. Before God, this was their country, they had paid for it with their earnings and bought it for their blood.⁶

To all this talk the women listened, for among the women were to be found the bitterest of them all. It was children they had borne

...who had died, it was their men who had been killed. It was they who had, in many cases, urged the men to trek from the colony. It was the women who now called to their men, when with tight-lipped mouths they had listened to such talk for long enough saying, "And if the English come and you are not still men? Have you not good horses under you and guns in your hands? Will our wagons not still roll? Are our oxen not strong in the yoke? Wherever we are there is always room beyond; we have come far but we can go farther; or is it that all those who were men are dead, and that we who rode out defiant and entire are to be gelded and inspanned to draw the English ploughs? That the freedom we demand for our children is a joke, an idle word, a sham?"⁷

⁶ The Turning Wheels, 252.

⁷ Ibid., 253.

When there was land into which the voortrekkers might move, they simply pulled up roots and left the English behind them, but even the vastness of Africa was limited.

Before the trek, the world had been open, but now they were trapped, encircled, and surrounded. There was no more room, no more free land. They were without option. And when it came to this--that they must fight for their freedom to live as they wished, or give up their freedom--they would fight. A Boer would rather die than live in bondage. They were the freest people in the world. They had the habit of it. It had become their nature.⁸

Katarina du Toit was one of the bitterest of women:

Like dogs her people had been driven from their places even farther into the wilds, but separately or in little family groups. Only now were they united and of one heart. Only now had they turned, driven to bay by the endless pursuit of a foreign nation.

.
Today Africa was a virgin raped; strange hands roamed her secret places. Strange men, speaking a foreign tongue, came to buy with gold such favours as they could not snatch. They wanted her body and soul; to rule, to exploit, to use; and all that stood between them and their wish were the commandos in the field and the burning, bitter hearts of the women on the farms.⁹

The accumulation of many things gradually made a burden the Boers, men, women, and children could no longer tolerate.

⁸ Hill of Doves, 130.

⁹ Ibid., 289.

...the taxes, the impositions, the English excuse that they had only annexed the country because the Boers, despite the Sand River Convention, continued to raid slaves and trade them. As if the orphaned Kaffir children that were apprenticed could be called slaves! Would the English have troubled had gold not been discovered in the Lydenburg? And everyone knew that where the Boers went the English followed.... the murders of Slagtersnek, the Great Trek, and the other wrongs done....¹⁰

Paul Kruger had predicted that gold would bring the Boers trouble:

"These are not riches for us. We do not want them. They will only bring us blood and tears."¹¹

The Boers were bitter about other things as well. They remembered how the English had taken down their flag the Vierkleur, the four colors--green, red, white, and blue, dragged it in the dirt, and replaced it with the Union Jack. They thought of the loss of the use of their language, for it was no longer used in government or law.

The Hill of Doves points out many of the reasons the English and the Boers could not agree in outlook:

The English on the one hand with their desire for riches, gold, and diamonds and what they called progress: the Dutch, on the other, with their farms and cattle, their lack of interest in riches, and the hatred of all development. One, a people who like change; the other, a race who hated it.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹² Hill of Doves, 39.

¹¹ Rags of Glory, 17.

Those eager to see the English driven out were anxious to stir up the patriotism of the Boers:

"So it has come again," he said. "Wherever we go the Rooineks follow like dogs on our spoor.... Today is the child of yesterday. It is born of the past--of Slagtersnek, the Trek, the rape of Natal, the disaster of Boomplatz, and the perpetual overrunning of our land. Are we to sit while the Egyptians despoil us? Our Volksraad is gone, our independence as burghers is gone, our land is gone, and again the women call to us. On every farm mothers call to their husbands, young women to their betrothed, children to their brothers." ... "All cry to their men...to save the land of their fathers. The predikants, in the name of God, tell us to get our guns down from the walls and defend the land that is being ravished from us."¹³

With the annexation, promises had been made which were not kept. Kruger held a poll, approved by Shepstone after much insistence, and proved that the annexation was not in general favor with the Boers. London failed to listen to pleas from the Boers, and the injustices of the English boiled over. The Boers decided to have a secret meeting at one of their farms centrally located in the Transvaal. Here the burghers were polled and they were nearly all in favor of fighting. Thus began the first Boer War of 1880.

Cloete uses an incident over a trek wagon as the final straw that broke the camel's back, in his novel The Hill of Doves:

¹³ Hill of Doves, 33.

Piete Bezuidenhout's wagon has been taken to the out-span where it is to be auctioned off to pay the overdue taxes assessed the Boer by the new English government.

"My father built it," Piete said. "It came up from the Great Fish River in thirty-seven, and now...they say it is for sale. By God, they seem to think a voortrekker's wagon can be sold to pay his son's taxes to the English.

.....
My old Uncle Frederik died sooner than pay? Why should we pay? And to whom? And for what? Are our taxes to pay the expenses of Shepstone, the promise breaker? Or of Lanyon, the soldier? No, I say. They have taken enough. This is the end."¹⁴

Used to the veld of Africa, the Boers were too much of a match for the English in this war. The Boers had had much practice in veld fighting against the warring Kaffirs and the Zulus and Bushmen. They were used to the kind of war which Africa required of them. The English, on the other hand were not used to fighting men who did not stand up to fight, who did not march in formation. The English did not know the foe whom they chose to arouse.

The English

"...didn't think there'd be a war. They said it would be a massacre if it came--Boers against trained troops like them."¹⁵

Boers, trained to use guns from the time they were big enough to hold them in their arms, were expert riflemen:

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵ "Soldiers' Peaches," 21.

From all round guns cracked, the Boers shooting from where they stood, so certain were they of their marksmanship that they did not hesitate to shoot between their friends, one man firing past the arm of the man in front of him.¹⁶

The Boers had a second advantage of being used to the climate and knowing the country in which they found themselves fighting. The men were allowed to fight in the vicinity of their own homes since they knew the country and would fight harder to protect their own lands. This advantage won more battles than one.

The Boers were also clever horsemen. They had fought in commandos before against the Kaffirs. Their horses were trained to come at a whistle, and to follow them when they walked without having to be led by the reins.

The trek had also prepared the Boers for living in the veld. During this first battle with the Britons, the British suffered almost as much from the inconveniences of veld life as from the fighting casualties.

Every decisive battle in the War of 1880 was won by the Boers, often through the incompetence of English officers and the youth of many of the troops. The summer rains were the final blow to the English and after much deliberation during a long armistice, a peace was declared. The young

¹⁶ The Turning Wheels, 261.

Boers were not satisfied with the terms, for they were intent on driving the English from their shores once and for all. However, the war did bring about the freedom of the Transvaal.

The fiery spirit of the Boers was temporarily cooled, but the flames of hatred and discontent were difficult to keep under control long. Although the Transvaal had been given her independence under the suzerainty to England, she continued to be influxed by strangers. The cities grew in size, the railways pushed through, and though the agreement with England guaranteed non-interference with internal affairs, a large group of Uitlanders, not all English, sent a petition to the Queen complaining of being taxed with no voice in the government, no right to vote. Warnings were sent to the government in the Transvaal, and British troops were deployed toward the border in order to show the Boers that England intended that her suggestions be carried out. The Boers were not people to be bluffed easily. They had beaten the British once, and they were prepared to try again if necessary. The Boers met and sent demands of their own:

An ultimatum had been sent by the presidents of the two republics to the British, giving them twenty-four hours to withdraw their troops from the border. The alternative was war...

.....

Next day the English accepted the challenge.... The Boer War had begun.

With a splendid gesture, this tiny nation of "do it yourself" soldiers rode into Natal to face the might of the British Empire.¹⁷

With Moolman, the Boers were prepared for a long hard war of "discomfort, cold, boredom, and hunger,"¹⁸ providing they could be free again of English control.

When the War began, the Boers were very undisciplined. On parade before Commandant General Joubert on the President's birthday we see them

...in column of four, their rifles held butt on knee, the Boers rode toward the saluting point under the kornets and corporals, but once there, unable to control their enthusiasm, they all shouted and waved their hats and rifles.¹⁹

Bitter memories of the trek days filled the minds of the men as they looked over the beautiful lands of Natal:

...the plains of Natal lying spread out below them, with the Buffalo River, a silver ribbon running between low rolling hills. This was the Promised Land, Natal, which had been stolen from their fathers by the English.²⁰

The effects of war were visible in the faces of the men:

Their faces had changed since the order had been given. They were hard, as if carved out of some close-grained, dark brown wood.... This was the face that men put on to conquer fear--a

¹⁷ Rags of Glory, 39.

¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 40.

²⁰ Ibid., 41.

mask of iron that disguised all feeling, even to themselves.²¹

Joubert's troops put the British in retreat early in the war, but the old man did not press his advantage.

"I will not go on. When God gives you His finger it is wrong to take the whole of His hand."

.....

And the horsemen, who had waited trembling, eager as hounds to go, now sat watching the British escape. This they felt had been their great chance. God had delivered the Philistines into their hands. They could have swept them into the sea. But Joubert had misinterpreted God's message. He had only taken God's finger when he had been offered the whole hand.²²

Captain Turnbull had been placed in British Headquarters because he had lived among the Boers, knew their language and their methods, as well as the land. But

...no one believed him when he talked of Boer mobility or the accuracy of their shooting. The Boer military system of commandos seemed laughable to the regular soldier of that day.... Nor would anyone believe that mounted troops were essential to deal with the Boers....²³

Turnbull described how the Boers would fight and why the English would have a hard time against them:

"I know how they will fight. They'll just use their horses for transport. They'll shoot at us when we're on the move, force us to deploy, and then they'll hop on their ponies and ride away."

²¹ Ibid., 45.

²³ Ibid., 58.

²² Ibid., 48-9.

"But our horses aren't used to living in the open, and you never found out at Wynberg how hot and cold the Transvaal can be.... Those Boer ponies carry nothing. Just a man, a saddle, a rifle, some ammunition, a blanket, and an overcoat, two or three pounds of dry meat and bread. That's all."

"Their ponies live on grass, live on the veld, without corn, and can go seventy miles in twelve hours. More if they have to. The smaller commandos won't ever use wagons. No wheeled transport to worry about or defend. Their meat's alive, cattle on the hoof driven with their spare horses."²⁴

The settled commandos were very much like the old trek days with wives along to do the cooking, washing and mending, and children playing about the wagons.²⁵

One of the dangers of the Boers was their lack of military discipline. More and more burghers gave themselves leave to go home when the groups were not actively involved.²⁶ "They had no discipline, but their love of their land was fanatical, and each man was an army alone."²⁷

The Boers fought a gentlemen's war. "Knowing the British to be desperate for water, the Boers...allowed them to get it from the river without firing a single shot."²⁸

The Boers never fired before breakfast, knocked off for lunch, and stopped for the day at teatime. There was no fighting on Sunday, the one exception being a dozen shells dropped on a polo field where some British officers broke the Sabbath by indulging in a few chukkers.

²⁴ Ibid., 97.

²⁵ Ibid., 112-113.

²⁶ Ibid., 113.

²⁷ Ibid., 102.

²⁸ Ibid., 293.

The Boers were not going to have the Sabbath broken by anyone--friend or foe.²⁹

The morale of the English troops, like the Boers, came and went with the tide of the battles. The English suffered badly from enteric which they picked up from bad water at the Modder River, fouled from the killing of oxen and horses by the Boers several weeks before they retreated. With De Wet's victories the Boers rallied:

The Boers were exhausted but also exhilarated. Theirs had been a notable achievement. They felt themselves real veterans now, a picked body, the very bone and muscle of resistance from which all the useless fat had been whittled away. This was the beginning of the hard core, the very pulse of the Boer heart.³⁰

Though undisciplined at the beginning of the war, the Boers vastly changed:

These were no longer mounted farmers who all thought themselves to be generals, but soldiers--a body of irregular horse whose fighting qualities had never been equalled before, nor since surpassed.³¹

The mind of the Boer was something which the English officers did not count on. They were too used to fighting in India and in the East. Having captured the capital city, the English thought the war was over:

To the Boer farmers, towns, even capitals meant little. There was still plenty

²⁹ Ibid., 142.

³¹ Ibid., 329.

³⁰ Ibid., 328-9.

of Africa to fight for, plenty of room on the veld to maneuver....

.....

Commander Roberts did not know Africa or the Boers.³²

The Boers were a much more sophisticated foe than the English had at first anticipated:

The Boers were not the dumb peasant farmers they were assumed to be. They tapped telephones, they made their own ammunition, they even salvaged rifles that had been burned in pyres when prisoners had been taken, and fitted new stocks to them.³³

They were able to put tactics to use to delay the English if not defeat them:

"Leave the horses, lie down before you reach the top of the hill, look well, and if you see nothing, creep over and do not stand up till you are well below the skyline on the other side."³⁴

General De Wet cut off the water supply to Bloemfontein, and had he not been rushed away, the Boers might have retaken the city.³⁵

Once, when desperate for a means of transport, the Boers built...

...a vehicle by using a wheel from one and an axle from another, and before long a queer

³² Ibid., 330.

³⁵ Ibid., 324.

³³ Ibid., 406.

³⁴ Ibid., 37.

kind of wagon took shape under the skilled farmers' hands.³⁶

Throughout the war the Boers showed the same spirit they had demonstrated as voortrekkers. When Cordau, a convicted spy was sentenced to death by a firing squad he...

...refused to be tied, walked quietly to the chair in which he was to sit, asked to be blindfolded, and waited with folded arms for death.³⁷

Women, too, were courageous.

Hetta Beyers, left with only the clothes she wore after her home was attacked by marauding Kaffirs, rode to the side of her young husband. He and her horse were all that remained of her home.

"We will fight side by side as we would have lived.... I will not be a nuisance to you. I can fight.... Just look. My father taught me."³⁸

Even enroute to a filthy English concentration camp for Boer women and children they sang.

A girl with a beautiful soprano voice began a hymn. It was taken up by all. A sweet and terrible sound, a song of sorrow, of lament, of prayer to the Lord God, in whom they put their trust, rose over the noise.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid., 437.

³⁷ Ibid., 384.

³⁸ Ibid., 115-16.

³⁹ Ibid., 508.

In the concentration camp a spirit of hopelessness pervaded everything, but Catalina threw herself into the task of caring for the children whose mothers had died or were beyond caring what happened. She felt her duty was to the young and helpless, the babies, the weanlings.

Dora van Reenan personified the spirit of the Boer woman when she vowed that, "As they were Boer women, it was their duty to help their country as long as a single burgher remained to fight."⁴⁰ Thus she organized her home into a three woman "petticoat commando" seeking valuable information which she relayed to the President or to Europe through the help of her sister in Cape Town.⁴¹ Renata van Reenan had the spirit of the Boer girl which would not bow to the might of the English victor. On the day the English arrived she cycled to Pretoria's main street wearing a hat trimmed with the "vierkleur ribbon flying like a flag behind her."⁴²

Hearing of those English who buried the flag in a coffin when the Transvaal was regained by the Boers, Mrs. van Reenan tells a young English officer,

"I did not know the story,...but it has given me an idea. We too will bury our flags, and like the Lord our Savior, one day they will rise again."⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 339.

⁴² Ibid., 339.

⁴¹ Ibid., 347.

⁴³ Ibid., 355.

Though the Boers had little hope left, they still had much fight:

...they would fight on! Ja, before God, they would fight till they were all dead, the lot of them, if they must.⁴⁴

They attacked English supply wagons and "not only deprived the British of their needs, but also supplied their own."⁴⁵

De la Rey said toward the end of the war, "The cause is not yet lost, and since nothing worse than this can befall us, it is worth while to fight on."⁴⁶

Like the old trees which Boetie saw, trees that stood as ancient monuments "since before Jesus Christ was born," the Boers would stand in South Africa.⁴⁷

At the final phase of the war we are given a verbal description of the fighting Boers.

This was the pick of the Boer Army. They were dressed in sacking, in the remains of English uniforms, in hides and rags, in the shreds of patched-up clothes. Their equipment was mended with riempies and bits of leather. They were starving. Many were covered with veld sores, owing to lack of vegetables and salt. These were unbeaten men. But as a force, the Boers were broken.

.....
These are no longer men. They are fighting scarecrows with nothing left in them but

⁴⁴ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 372.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 549.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 577.

their courage. The rest had been whittled away, day by day, by almost three years of war. Their eyes burned in the sunken sockets of their brown wood faces. Their mouths were hidden by hair.⁴⁸

General Jan Smut's words to Boetie and the men is a final statement of the undefeatable spirit of the Afrikaner.

"Go back, and begin to build our land again. Ja,...as the phoenix rose from the ashes, so will we rise again.

Boy,...we have been beaten, but not defeated, and we have made history.⁴⁹

The Boers..."had never been beaten, had not been brought to their knees."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., 595-6.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 598.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 602.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine from the South African writings of Stuart Cloete those characteristics of the Boer or Afrikaner which serve to set him apart as unique to Africa. Cloete's own South African experience and heritage qualify him to speak for the Afrikaner. Since the Afrikaner is nearly the last remaining attempt of the white man to exist in Africa, it was felt that a study of this nature might indicate what qualities are necessary to transplant a group of white men in Southern Africa.

Though the Boer was not a religious pilgrim, undoubtedly his religious faith had a great deal of influence in his life and his ability to succeed in Africa. His first concern was to do God's will. God's Word indicated to the Boer what that will was. The Bible was the most important book of the Boer because it served as a guide to his daily life. Scripture reading and prayer offered comfort and assurance. Reading the Bible gave the Boer God's commandments, which became his daily laws. There was no need for any other law beyond the Biblical code. There could be no other authority other than that of God.

The Bible was important to the Boer because it contained the foundation of all life. The Bible told the Afrikaner that he was one of a chosen people, and that the blacks were the children of Ham--a subject people destined to be drawers of water and hewers of wood forever. As the Boers were the Israelites, so the English were the Egyptians, the Philistines. The Bible was a textbook containing all the knowledge one needed about astronomy, history, natural science, and law. The law taught that there was no other God than Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament--an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth God to be feared and respected.

God was all-powerful, omnipresent, jealous, and savage. He gave rewards and punishments. He was a giver of signs, and the signs must be followed correctly. All events were in God's hands. Sickness, death, insects, rain, drought, were all a result of God's will. Success depended on the Boer knowing God's will for him.

The Kaffir was seen as little more than an animal. God had given his chosen people jurisdiction over his creation, and animal life was part of that creation. The cruelties of the savages proved themselves little more than animal. When the Boers retaliated with cruelties of their own, they were following God's injunction to "Smite the Philistines."

Through the Boer's belief in the infallibility of the Bible came his conviction that man was not to change

anything of God's creation. Man was to be principally a tiller of the soil and a herder of livestock. He was to live as the patriarchs of the Old Testament--to grow and multiply and replenish the earth.

The Boer's love for his land was also inextricably tied to his understanding that he was a chosen son. His lands, therefore, were also given him by God. He has paid for them through his labors. He has stumped them, ploughed them, planted them, harvested them. The sacred soil is a trust from God. The Boer himself is a part of this creation. God made him from dust, and his fathers have become one with the soil. His body and his blood will be a part of it, too. His livelihood comes from the soil.

As the patriarch owned as far as they could see, so has the Boer the love of space. He feels enclosed if he can see the smoke of his neighbor's fire. To be enclosed takes away from his independence. He likes the isolation of his family unit and he feels secure following this pattern.

On the veld one grew up faster. Boys became men at age sixteen, when they were expected to marry and take a responsible place as a burgher. They learned to shoot as soon as they could hold a gun. Giving a boy only one bullet taught him good marksmanship. In the wilds he learned from nature, watching the flight of birds, indicating the movement

of animals and game. He learned to handle animals, especially horses and oxen. He valued his animals as part of his wealth. He learned not to take needless risks by being whipped with a sjambok when he failed to heed this rule.

The Boer's understanding of himself inevitably led to difficulties with the outsiders who encroached on his lands. Enraged by a government which he neither chose to be a part of nor recognized, disheartened by what he saw happening around him, he was forced to outfit his wagons and seek out another home in the wilderness where he could return to his old ways. He longed for the opportunity to express his individualism. He despised any authority which attempted to change the routine of his life.

Having learned to be patient and live with many difficulties throughout all his life, the Boer felt willing to face any obstacles regardless of the cost provided in the end he was free. By going to the Orange Free State, Natal and the Transvaal, he had temporary relief. However, where he went, the Uitlander followed, and the problem continued. Pushed beyond human limitation into the arms of hostile savages on the one hand, or surrender to the ways of the English, the Afrikaner chose the former, terrible as it was. Then, when the Uitlander still followed, and with no more land in which to carve out a life, the Afrikaner showed the face

he had previously reserved for the savages. In 1880, the Boer was the victor, but he could not compete with the numbers which were used against him in the later more devastating Boer War.

In the end he was beaten by circumstances, but his spirit was not defeated. His knee has never bowed to the English victor, and the greatness of the nation today reminds one of the "phoenix rising from the ashes."

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