



There was a Man

The Life and Times
of
Sir Arnold Theiler
K.C.M.G.
of Onderstepoort



Thelma Gutsche

The illustrious name of Max Theiler, Nobel laureate in Physiology and Medicine, has tended to overshadow that of his famous father, Sir Arnold Theiler K.C.M.G. who was honoured and respected in scientific circles throughout the world. It is doubtful who did more for the welfare of humanity. This authoritative biography puts the reader in a position to judge.

Emigrating from Switzerland to the Transvaal in 1891 as a qualified veterinary surgeon, Arnold Theiler within weeks completely severed his left hand in a chaff-cutter. His career was apparently ruined but through sheer courage and dogged persistence aided by his wife Emma (who did much of his laboratory work), he became a world-famous veterinary pathologist.

President Paul Kruger gave him his first opportunity and thence onward, Theiler was associated with the outstanding historical, scientific and political personalities of his times – General Louis Botha, Field-Marshal J. C. Smuts, Lord Baden-Powell, the bacteriologists Robert Koch and Sir David Bruce, Lord Milner, Lord Selborne, Viscount Bruce of Melbourne, Viscount Bledisloe and countless others. He was both the beneficiary and the victim of South Africa's ferocious political life and from the Boer War onward, participated in historic events. The world at large prospered from his discoveries and after his death, his Government erected a statue in his honour. Animal husbandry continues to benefit from his work and his dauntless courage and determination continue to inspire his successors.

Drawn from hitherto unavailable sources, this is the first definitive account of his life and reveals the character and achievements of a strange man previously known only vaguely by repute.

Thelma Gutsche, born of South African and English parents, was educated privately and at the University of Cape Town where she majored in Ethics, Logic and Metaphysics, later attaining her Ph.D. in Social History.

Always inclined toward literary expression, she has published a number of biographies (*Old Gold, The Microcosm, A Very Smart Medal, The Bishop's Lady*, etc) and was awarded the C.N.A. Prize for Literature for *No Ordinary Woman* which revealed an unrecorded feature in the history of South Africa.

Her biography of Sir Arnold Theiler spans the world and deals with the scientific contribution of a unique character in the context of contemporary event and the competition of his peers.

DUST JACKET

When Arnold Theiler chopped off his hand, emergent countries rode on the back of draught animals. In that year (1891), 68 oxen were needed to drag a 15-ton boiler along 300 miles of 'roads' (pot-holed tracks wandering about the veld) from Natal to a gold-mine in Johannesburg, then only five years old. There was no transport by railway. Horses, mules, oxen and cattle generally were basic to a country's development. Theiler revolutionised their care and maintenance which attained increasing importance in the Machine and later Space Age.

THERE WAS A MAN

The Life and Times of Sir Arnold Theiler K.C.M.G.
of Onderstepoort

by

Thelma Gutsche

*gladly inscribed for "The Veterinary Faculty Library",
Onderstepoort*

Thelma Gutsche

5.9.84



HOWARD TIMMINS
45 SHORTMARKET STREET CAPE TOWN
1979

© THELMA GUTSCHE

No material in this book, text or pictorial, may be reproduced in any form whatsoever without permission in writing from the Author or her Literary Estate.

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention. No portion may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be made to the Publisher.

ISBN 0 86978 164 2

Printed by Citadel Press, Lansdowne, Cape

*Dedicated by kind permission to
Her Royal Highness
PRINCESS ALICE
Countess of Athlone
whose invaluable reminiscence and
constant encouragement graciously contributed
to the completion of this work*

By the same Author

NO ORDINARY WOMAN
OLD GOLD
THE MICROCOSM
A VERY SMART MEDAL
THE BISHOP'S LADY

published by Howard Timmins, Cape Town

CONTENTS

1. THE FERAL WORLD	1
2. AFRICA SOUTH	9
3. THE THEILER TALE 1867-1891	29
4. VIALS OF EVIL 1891-1893	43
5. SISYPHUS IN THE GOLDEN CITY 1893-1895	58
6. CONTINENTAL CALAMITY 1895-1896	80
7. CRESCENDO 1896-1897	96
8. CRISIS 1897	104
9. OVER THE HILL 1897-1898	116
10. INTO THE WORLD 1898-1899	129
11. HORSE DOCTOR AT WAR 1899-1900	140
12. A COUNTRY CORRUPTED 1900	154
13. SHUTTLECOCK 1900-1901	165
14. THE VANE CHANGES 1901-1902	176
15. DASPOORT AND THE 'RECONSTRUCTION' 1902-1903	188
16. EVOLUTION AND REVELATION 1904-1905	209
17. UPHEAVAL 1905-1907	223
18. RECOGNITION 1907-1909	235
19. UNION . . . AND A SWARM OF GADFLIES 1909-1912	256
20. HERESY AND HEROICS 1912-1918	286
21. 'VENI, VIDI, VICI!' 1918-1920	322
22. AMBASSADOR AT LARGE 1920-1924	345
23. 'THE THEILER INSTITUTE' 1924-1927	368
24. A THRONE BETWEEN TWO STOOLS 1927-1932	386
25. LAURELS, LIONS AND LIMBO 1932-1936	415
POSTSCRIPT	439
APPENDICES	
A. Natal Commission's Report on Pitchford's Rinderpest Claim 1897	451
B. Kruger's Reply to Botha's birthday cable 1904	452
C. Lord Hastings' Speech proposing Theiler for the Royal Agricultural Society's second award of its Gold Medal 1934	452
D. Smuts' Address at Unveiling of Theiler Statue 1939	453
E. Sequence of Theiler's Principal Awards	455
F. Glossaries	457
G. Bibliography and Sources	458
AUTHOR'S NOTE	465
INDEX	469

ILLUSTRATIONS

(*Abbreviations* – A.M.: Africana Museum; I.L.N.: Illustrated London News; O.P.: Onderstepoort Photographic Archives; T.F.A.: Theiler Family Albums.)

Duncan Hutcheon (Cape Archives)	22
Jotello Festiri Soga (H. H. Curson Collection – O.P.)	22
‘Edington’s Laboratory’ (A.M.)	22
Edington in his Laboratory (A.M.)	23
Edington at his Microscope (Dr A. Edington)	23
Botanical Excursion in Switzerland 1880 (Switzerland: Its Scenery and People – pictorially presented)	38
Theiler as Student (Alfred Theiler II)	38
Cape Town in 1891 (A.M.)	39
Sir Lowry’s Pass (South African Public Library)	39
Postcard in Bechuanaland (Humphreys Collection – A.M.)	39
Byre and Forage Loft at Irene (David van der Byl)	39
Church Street, Pretoria (Gros – A.M.)	54
Grand Hotel International, Pretoria (T.F.A. – A.M.)	54
Raadzaal and Government Offices, Pretoria (<i>ibid.</i>)	55
Palace of Justice, Pretoria (<i>ibid.</i>)	55
Sir Drummond Dunbar 7th Bart (Sir D. Dunbar 9th Bart – A.M.)	70
Dr Cecil Schulz (Mrs M. L. Hahn – A.M.)	70
Dr Julius Loevy (S.A. Metallurgical Society – A.M.)	70
The Smallpox Epidemic (I.L.N. – A.M.)	70
Emma Sophie Jegge (Theiler Family Possession)	71
The Theilers’ Johannesburg House (T.F.A. – A.M.)	71
A Horse-drawn Toast-Rack Tram (A.M.)	71
The Theilers’ House at Les Marais (T.F.A. – A.M.)	86
Oxen dead in their traces (<i>ibid.</i>)	86
Dying Oxen (<i>ibid.</i>)	87
Dead Oxen (<i>ibid.</i>)	87
Theilers at Home in Les Marais (T.F.A. – A.M.)	102
Pitchford and Theiler in the Marico Bush (<i>ibid.</i>)	102
Theiler the Hunter (<i>ibid.</i>)	103
Koch and his Entourage (A.M.)	103
Donkey Span (Miss M. Laver – A.M.)	118
Jules Bordet (Professor Paul Bordet)	118
Theiler watching Bordet at Work (T.F.A. – A.M.)	118
Danysz and Dead Horses (<i>ibid.</i>)	119
Theiler and his Belfast Staff (<i>ibid.</i>)	119
Kruger in 1897 (De Boer 1909 – A.M.)	134
Landdrost Schutte visits Daspoort (T.F.A. – A.M.)	134
Roof-Wetting at Daspoort (<i>ibid.</i>)	135
The Theiler House at Daspoort (<i>ibid.</i>)	135

Daspoort Disinfection Station 1898 (O.P.)	150
Theiler and Favre 1899 (<i>ibid.</i>)	150
The Swazi King Bunu (A.M.)	151
Theiler's Secret Snapshot of Bunu (T.F.A. – A.M.)	151
Staatsartillerie Barracks, Pretoria (S.A. Railways)	166
Theiler with Staatsartillerie Colleagues (T.F.A. – A.M.)	166
Theiler in Conference Attire 1899 (<i>ibid.</i>)	166
Bulwana Hill, Natal (A.M.)	167
Bursting Shells (I.L.N. – A.M.)	167
A Creusot 'Long Tom' (A.M.)	167
Colonel David and Mrs Bruce (Theiler Family Possession)	182
Butchering Horses at Ladysmith (I.L.N. – A.M.)	182
Casualties at Spionkop (A.M.)	183
Slaughter of Cavalry Horses (Cape Archives)	183
Fund-Raising Postcard (T.F.A. – A.M.)	183
Theiler's Military Pass (Theiler Family Possession)	198
Colonel Frederick Smith (O.P.)	198
Arnold Theiler during the Boer War (O.P.)	198
Dr George Turner (H. H. Curson Collection – O.P.)	198
Concentration Camp (Miss M. Laver – A.M.)	199
Dipping Horses (H. H. Curson Collection – O.P.)	199
Bleeding a Horse (O.P.)	199
The Daspoort Scene (O.P.)	214
Theiler's Staff (<i>ibid.</i>)	214
Matilda and Theiler children (T.F.A. – A.M.)	215
Theiler Family in 1904 (T.F.A.– A.M.)	215
Experimental Record of a Horse (O.P.)	230
Stewart Stockman (O.P.)	231
Theiler in a Cape Cart (O.P. – A.M.)	231
Onderste Poort Farm (1908 Souvenir Publication)	246
Lord Selborne and Colleagues (A.M.)	247
Selborne at Standerton in 1907 (A.M.)	247
Selborne at Middelburg in 1907 (Miss M. Laver – A.M.)	262
General Botha and the Smuts Family (State Archives)	263
Relics of Daspoort (author)	263
Main Building, Onderstepoort (O.P.)	278
Botha, Smith and Theiler (O.P.)	278
The Gladstones at Onderstepoort (O.P.)	279
Injecting an Ox (O.P.)	279
Theiler as Guide to the Duke and Duchess of Connaught (O.P. – A.M.)	294
The Effect of Snake Venom (O.P.)	294
Pica: Cattle Chewing Bones (O.P.)	295
Feeding Experiments with Muzzled Cattle (O.P.)	295
Charles ('Battling') Butler (Mrs G. Irons – A.M.)	310
Theiler's Demonstration in Vryburg in 1911 (Mrs G. Irons – A.M.)	310
Theiler and Staff in 1913 (O.P.)	311
Animal Turntable (O.P.)	311
Approaching Retirement – Theiler leaves his office for lunch (A. Bothner – A.M.)	326

With Emma in the garden of his home (<i>ibid.</i>)	326
Cattle approaching a prophylactic Dip at Armoedsvlakte (G. Theiler – O.P.)	327
Taking the Plunge (G. Theiler – O.P.)	327
The Cattle Queue (G. Theiler – O.P.)	342
Bonemeal Administration (Mrs G. Irons – A.M.)	342
The Climactic Moment (<i>ibid.</i>)	343
Memorial Stone Platform and Plinth at Armoedsvlakte (author)	358
Theiler with M. Henrici and H. H. Green (G. Theiler – O.P.)	359
Theiler with I. B. Pole Evans (Miss M. Gunn)	359
Theiler in the Twenties (O.P.)	374
‘Saved to be Slaughtered’ (<i>Rand Daily Mail</i> – A.M.)	374
With P. J. du Toit and H. H. Green at Onderstepoort (O.P.)	375
Dosage with Bonemeal continues (Mrs G. Irons – A.M.)	375
Lady Theiler 1934 (T.F.A. – A.M.)	390
Sir Arnold Theiler (O.P.)	390
Coert Steynberg modelling bust (C. L. Steynberg – A.M.)	391
The Completed Bust (<i>ibid.</i>)	391
Smuts presenting gold medal to Theiler (<i>The Star</i> , Argus Group)	406
Historic Photograph – Three Directors (O.P.)	407
Steynberg finds a Granite Boulder (C. L. Steynberg – A.M.)	422
The Site of the Statue (O.P.)	423
The model in clay (C. L. Steynberg – A.M.)	423
Smuts unveiling Statue (T.F.A. – A.M.)	438
Steynberg with his work (C. L. Steynberg)	438
Viscount Bledisloe lays a wreath (T.F.A. – A.M.)	439
Hans Theiler (Theiler Family Possession)	454
Margaret Theiler (<i>ibid.</i>)	454
Gertrud Theiler (O.P.)	454
Max Theiler (Pack Bros., New York)	455

MAPS

1. Southern Africa (1877) – Tsetse Fly Belt	14
2. Southern Africa before 1902	86
3. Pretoria and Environs circa 1900	136
4. Siege of Ladysmith 1899–1900	149