

INTO THE WORLD 1898-1899

1 SUCCESS HAD its disadvantages. The Government had openhandedly indulged Theiler - 'I can complain about nothing as everything which I had until now to request, I have obtained and my laboratory could in time become a centre of real research work.' In his dual capacity as civil Veterinary Surgeon and military Horse Doctor, he could also be ordered north to the 'war' being conducted against Magato or east to the threatened military action against the Swazis in both of which the Staatsartillerie were engaged. It was his constant fear until Smallpox assumed overwhelming proportions and nothing could be more important. Theiler's white staff rose to 10 of whom 8 were Swiss. Tens of thousands of tubes of vaccine were produced, 2 packed and despatched. Early in October 1898, he presented the 100,000th tube in a cased silver box to Landdrost Schutte who used the occasion to speak appreciatively of his work. While the winter lasted, the output reached 135,000 tubes delivered widespread but with the onset of warm weather, production sharply dwindled and Theiler could devote himself to his private affairs.

Contrarily, Emma was enceinte again and bending before the blast of three exceptionally lively toddlers. Hans the eldest, aged four, had always been 'like quicksilver' and now Margaret took after him. On Arnold's combined salary of £500 plus £300 with allowances, they could afford a nurse and on the 1st October, a Swiss factotum Mathilda Sprehn was engaged. Her family had immigrated during the Diamond Rush and, later ruined by Rinderpest, had come to Pretoria where Arnold had employed one of her brothers at Daspoort. Mathilda greatly lightened Emma's load.

Affluence and security after years of grinding poverty and an indeterminate future, released other desires. In a move that shocked his father, Arnold bought a building plot for £275 on bare veld near his laboratory at Daspoort and commissioned the building, not of a corrugated iron shanty, but of a solid brick house on stone foundations costing £900. His parents infuriated 3 Emma by considering it culpable extravagance. The strong bond between the Swiss which had saved Theiler from starvation and failure in his first dreadful years in Pretoria, was equally marked in him. No Swiss was ever turned from his door and even in his impoverished days in 4 Johannesburg, there had been 'always a good table and a cool drink' for the many despairing compatriots who gladly called. At the moment when he was himself successful, economic conditions were disastrous and men of every nationality including Transvalers loitered about the streets and bars of Pretoria hoping for work. He did what he could to help his fellows, warmly supported by Emma who had a keen sense of obligation, even to lending them money from his small savings. He had lent £50 to the very man pledged to pay him £250 on Danyz's promissory note and had stood surety for £160 for another Swiss who had failed to make good. By the same token, the building of the house (which would eliminate the journeys between Les Marais and Daspoort by horse or by cart) was enabled by a loan from Tel Sandoz of £700 at 7% repayable 5 in three years. To diminish his indebtedness, Theiler planned to sell his painfully collected library of technical works to the Z.A.R. Government as soon as his bookseller Sauerlander furnished the invoices. They were too long in coming.

The house was not so much a symbol of success as an urgent necessity. Work then being very scarce and much labour available, it was completed in less than three months. The family moved from Les Marais over the New Year in heat and dust at a time excruciating for Emma. Three weeks later, she gave birth to a second son on the 30th January 1899. 'Arnold says he must be 6 called Max', she wrote submissively, having endured the same authoritarianism thrice before.

The household now consisted of seven – parents, four children and the indispensable Mathilda. The baby would rival his father in worldwide renown.

7 It was contrary to Theiler's nature to engage in anything half-heartedly and now, arrivé in a professional (but not a social) sense, he played as hard as he worked. As president of the Schweizerverein Alpina, he organised innumerable occasions – picnics at Sandoz' farm La Solitude at Derdepoort with national dress, sports, wrestling, gymnastics, much beer and music; al fresco sausage feasts; wild paper-chases on horseback; shooting competitions with revolvers and carbines; and the like. He imported the cartridges himself via Lourenço Marques and made a small profit on retailing them. At Les Marais, Theiler had been happy to entertain a young man of superior type – Wilhelm Kollmann, son of the professor of Anatomy at Basle, who, a student of agriculture, was gaining practical experience close at hand on the farm of Frikkie Eloff, son-in-law of Paul Kruger. They proposed collaborating in a book on South African livestock and saw much of each other, sometimes practicing revolver shooting together. Convivial to a degree, Theiler enjoyed company of any kind and his dwelling at all times never lacked visitors, great though the burden on Emma.

8 As Kruger sat on his stoep on the 10th October 1898 receiving congratulations on his 74th birthday from friends and officials (including for the first time the youthful State Attorney J. C. Smuts and his wife Isie), Theiler was supervising the first Swiss Prize Shoot which was so successful as to demand repetition (he won the third prize). He found time to resume relations with his family at Frick – with his beloved sister Marie who had drifted out of his consciousness and was now getting married, and with his brother Alfred, a college student of 17 for whom he continued to feel responsible. He worried about Alfred's health and whether he was learning to play the violin for which he had offered to pay, or needed a bicycle. He even wrote painstakingly in excellent English (for practice) to Alfred, giving brotherly advice on the dangers of compulsory drinking in student societies, the need for exercise to maintain a strong and healthy body, and other wise counsels. He wrote from bitter experience, trying to protect Alfred from his own near-disaster.

9 There was ample evidence of moral ruin around him. The cancerous effect of the Government's giving aid to the holy afflicted burghers instead of promoting relief schemes or otherwise making them work for it, had become a feature of Pretoria and the Transvaal at large. Loud and clear from the pulpit of the Capital's Dutch Reformed Church on Sunday the 2nd October 1898 came the voice of the much-revered Ds H. S. Bosman, courageously dragging the Republic's skeleton out of its cupboard and dangling it before a shocked public. He spoke of the 300 brothels in Johannesburg and its 1,500 prostitutes, the majority of whom were daughters of Africander parents. 'They arrived at that state through aimlessly parading the streets, reluctant to earn a respectable and honourable living . . . There were many cafés in Pretoria whose counters were a mere farce – an excuse or a "blindfold" for what was perpetrated behind them . . . If you apply for a girl for domestic service', he went on, 'her mother would say "Is my child a kaffir?"'

10 The people were strangers to the maxim that labour was elevating and ennobling and no degradation, Bosman pronounced. The burghers commonly referred to as 'indigent' were in possession of the free use of their limbs – healthy hands and legs – and the awful mistake of continuing to give to them was now apparent. Before the Post Office, the Government Buildings and Landdrost's Court, clusters of the so-called poor whites were daily seen, killing time. Assuming the attitude of millionaires, they bitterly complained of the hardness of the times. 'Our own people give one the impression that they are constantly labouring under severe attacks of rheumatism. They drag themselves along rather than walk. They are neither diligent, manly, willing, nor alert', and, Ds Bosman repeated, foreigners gladly take the jobs which they could have had.

11 In all the sizeable towns of the Transvaal, peripheral 'Burghersdorps' or shanty towns of indigent burghers had appeared. The most their inhabitants would do in conformity with their white dignity was a little transport work with donkey carts. Ds Bosman's advice was that they should go back to the land and work with their hands; but that was 'kaffir work' and no one
12 accepted it. Soon after, the Volksraad again rejected the proposed Department of Agriculture. It was a sobering scene; but as much as it inspired Theiler to deliver a cordial lecture to Alfred, it rejoiced his heart to know himself secure.

13 The confidence of his superiors, particularly Schutte, and the success of his laboratory sent Theiler's ambitions vaulting again into the empyrean. His passion was to keep abreast of scientific developments and to qualify for the title which the newspapers already gave him - 'State
14 Bacteriologist'. Since the days of Danysz and Bordet, the Government had paid for 'certain
15 instruments' for him; but now he needed more sophisticated equipment such as a Blood Corpuscle Counter and other bacteriological aids. Through Watkins-Pitchford with whom he maintained correspondence, he remained in communication with Major David Bruce and his work on Nagana. The Rinderpest, in destroying immeasurable numbers of wild animals, had diminished the menace of tsetse flies which had fed on them and now, lacking a profusion of hosts, they slowly disappeared. Theiler was fascinated by a cattle disease whose causative trypanosome was conveyed by an intervening insect. Tropical diseases of that kind were almost unknown in Europe and Zschokke and his colleagues would be interested. Bruce had sent him specimens and as soon as the Smallpox pressure lessened, he returned to his experiments with
16 Horse Sickness and Nagana.

The destruction of oxen had re-enhanced the importance of the horse, particularly to military authorities throughout Southern Africa. Theiler thought he was tantalisingly near a solution of the Sickness with serum-therapy but always was thwarted. Not so Edington who pursued the same paths with undaunted optimism and chronic impetuosity. On the 8th November 1898, he
17 telegraphed Cape Town - 'I have much pleasure in announcing that as a result of my investigations into Horse Sickness, I have at length been able to produce an attenuated virus which can be preserved and kept for long periods unaltered'. It was, he claimed, effective in all but a few
18 cases and, duly interviewed by the Press, was reported as stating 'it will make Horse Sickness a
19 thing of the past'. His rivals elsewhere were openly sceptical. Pitchford, invoking the name of Theiler who frequently wrote to him and was then dealing with his 269th experimental horse, published his doubts. A thorough experimenter in all diseases (the broken Hutcheon had somehow written in his own hand to advise him where to get cattle completely free from Redwater for
20 his longstanding investigation in which Theiler too was engaged), Pitchford felt that additional talent should be addressed to the problem and applied to the British Army for the services of Surgeon-Major Bruce. With thousands of horses and oxen in its cavalry and transport sections, it was in the Army's interest to second him. Bruce began work with Pitchford at Allerton in December 1898. The Natal Government had voted two sums - £2,000 and £750 - to subsidise their investigations of both diseases.

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It was typical of Theiler that while converting Daspoort from the production of Smallpox lymph to Quarter Evil (Sponsziekte) inoculation and continuing his Redwater, Nagana and Horse Sickness experiments, he should keep an alert eye on scientific journals and the topical Press. He had noted the incidence of Bubonic Plague in Madagascar and Mauritius which maintained a regular traffic with South African ports. It was part of his desire for recognition as 'State

22 Bacteriologist' that on the 5th December 1898, he wrote to the State Secretary suggesting that in view of a possible epidemic, he should be sent at once to the Pasteur Institute in Paris to study the manufacture of a vaccine against Plague. Passing note was taken, Pretoria being preoccupied with the triumphal return of General Joubert and his forces from the Magato war in the north and with looming problems as the political situation moved toward climax. Theiler's request
23 might have been met had not the medical profession intervened and persuaded the Government that it was their affair. There was however some public concern when cases appeared in Portuguese East Africa and the Pretoria Press published an apprehensive leader; but according to
24 subsequent editorial comment, the Government was apparently satisfied that Theiler could deal with anything that might eventuate. His warning had been ignored and his hopes frustrated. Nonetheless he conscientiously studied all scientific literature on the subject and planned to prepare himself for other possible bacteriological invasions.

It was a difficult time for him. To help convert his vaccine factory into a research institute, he had only lay assistants, all Swiss, some with a little knowledge of experimental techniques gained at Waterval and Belfast. In the time intervening on his qualifying at Zurich, these techniques had been widely and finely developed. He had himself to master them and the concomitant apparatus before he could train his staff reliably to operate them and faithfully record results. At the end of the year with Emma about to give birth, they were moving into the new house which had no water supply beyond rain-water tanks. Daspoort itself stood in a bog and was highly unhygienic until the Government laid a pipeline, with a sideline to the house, which enabled the stables and postmortem room at least to be sluiced.

Theiler (playing enthusiastically on holidays and weekends with the members of the Schweizerverein) worked long hours – from 7 in the morning until 1 p.m. when he went home for lunch, and from 2 in the afternoon until 6. At night, he generally went back to the laboratory after supper to assure himself that everything was in order. It angered Emma that his parents,
25 sublimely unknowing, criticised him as an irresponsible playboy. She herself marvelled that he maintained his courage and energy. He was entirely alone in his efforts in matters beyond the support of Schutte and a distant benevolent Government. He envied Pitchford, now assisted by the brilliant Bruce operating the latest techniques in investigating Horse Sickness – observing periods of incubation, postmortem appearances, qualitative blood counts, specific gravities and general microscopic work. Pitchford had written him of his distinguished colleague's remarkable exactness of method and powers of trained observation; but it was Theiler who had the experience – over many years privately and finally with Bordet at Belfast. Pitchford asked if they might
26 consult him and in the paradoxical camaraderie of bellicose times, both Governments agreed. Significantly, neither investigator wished recourse to the politically-congenial Edington.

27 On the 17th January 1899, Bruce and Pitchford arrived in Pretoria and called on Theiler at Daspoort. For the first time, Theiler met the man whom he had learnt to revere – a typical English military officer in A.V.S. major's uniform, thick-set, jowly and direct in approach and manner. Theiler admired Bruce's methods and his work on Malta Fever and Nagana. Bruce, looking at what he had done with Horse Sickness, was impressed. As scientists, they took to each other
28 warmly. Pitchford, standing on the sidelines, recorded the *rencontrement* – 'Mr Theiler received us with great kindness and interest and placed before us without reserve the bulky records of the work already done in this disease by himself and his colleagues. These records – the temperature charts alone, when joined, being over a mile in length – showed the great and indefatigable efforts which had been made by these scientists, the results of whose work, while exciting our admiration and praise, filled us with the gravest apprehension for our own success in the same field. The amount of work undertaken was enormous but the deductions almost *nil*.'

The results of Pitchford's own work on Horse Sickness had been destroyed in the Town Hall

29 fire; but with Bruce's help, he hoped to make a new attack and greater progress. Hardly had they returned to Pietermaritzburg after three days at Daspoort than Bruce was reclaimed by the Army in ominous circumstances.

30 In the sphere of Science, all was amity. At that moment with the Black Death menacing the whole of Southern Africa, the Z.A.R. convened an Inter-State Conference of medical officers. The Cape sent its Colonial Secretary Dr T. N. te Water and (in the absence of Dr George Turner M.O.H.) Dr A. J. Gregory; Natal was represented by Dr J. Hyslop; the Free State by Dr A. E. W. Ramsbottom; Portuguese East Africa by Dr Maartens; and the Transvaal by Pretoria's M.O.H. Dr Gordon Messum. They conferred happily and went their ways. But in the sphere of Inter-State political relations, matters were fast moving toward crisis and every English military man was ordered to action stations. Bruce and his lady were lost to research and concerned only with coming conflict. In the stress of event, the Z.A.R. Secretariat for Foreign Affairs paid no attention when the Imperial German Consul in Pretoria on the 23rd January 1899 formally advised the staging of the 7th International Veterinary Conference in Baden-Baden in August and enquired whether a delegate would be sent. Theiler was concerned with the arrival of Max and making abject apologies to Schutte for incurring unauthorised expenditure on his laboratory.

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33 Routinely at work on Monday the 13th February, a message reached him to come at once to Pretoria to see the State Secretary. Reitz received him personally in his office in the great Government Building and told him that the District Surgeon at Middelburg on the Delagoa Bay line had reported two suspected cases of Bubonic Plaque in 'koolies' (Indian labourers). He was to go immediately to investigate them and to report as soon as possible. Apart from the danger of a general epidemic, Reitz had his eye on the gold mining industry, now struggling out of its long depression with high output and a boom in its shares. The empty coffers of the Republic would be replenished and prosperity return to the land; but all would be lost if Plague interfered with native mine labour.

34 Theiler left by train the following day and was met at Middelburg by the District Surgeon, Dr Pittet who had been a fellow student for the short time he had been at Berne. They had resumed acquaintance in Johannesburg in 1895 when Theiler was elected president of the Schweizerverein Helvetia. Together with many Swiss immigrants, Pittet - 'a really charming man', Theiler had written - had come to the Transvaal in search of employment. Now they rejoiced together and combined their professional skills. One of the koolies had died and after his post-mortem, Pittet had made cultures in agar-agar which revealed a bacterium he was unable to identify. Despite his studies of scientific literature, Theiler was not prepared to pronounce either one way or another so they injected the suspected virus into rats and guinea pigs. While it did its work, Theiler went to the nearby Kaapmuiden to examine another koolie supposed to be suffering from Plague. On his return to Middelburg, the rats and guinea pigs showed no symptoms and he and Pittet agreed that the koolies had not died from Bubonic Plague. Meanwhile a 'scare' had become widespread and numerous quasi-experts with experience of Plague in the East had made weighty pronouncements.

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36 Returning to Pretoria on the 24th February, Theiler made a careful report to Reitz stating that although the bacilli in the blood of the deceased Indian to some extent resembled the bubo bacillus, as far as his opinion gained in reading up the subject went, they were not identical. It had forcibly been impressed on him that if he were indeed to be 'the State Bacteriologist' as the newspapers freely called him, he should have a collection of cultures of various disease-bacilli both for reference and for manufacturing vaccines. He had already bought some directly from the Pasteur Institute in Paris but now he asked his father, for the sake of speed in delivery, to order a long list of others including Bubonic Plaque. This last, he said, could be 'dead' to

avoid the danger of infection as he wished only to see how it looked; but the others must be living so that he could cultivate and work with them.

38 The same idea simultaneously struck the visionary 'Corner House' mining magnates in Johannesburg. Relieved at their escape from Plague (for which they had specially arranged the importation of an expert, Dr Honebrook who arrived too late to pronounce on it), they remained fearful of future assaults on their labour. In a curious scheme, they approached their colleagues with a proposal to found a Bacteriological Institute.

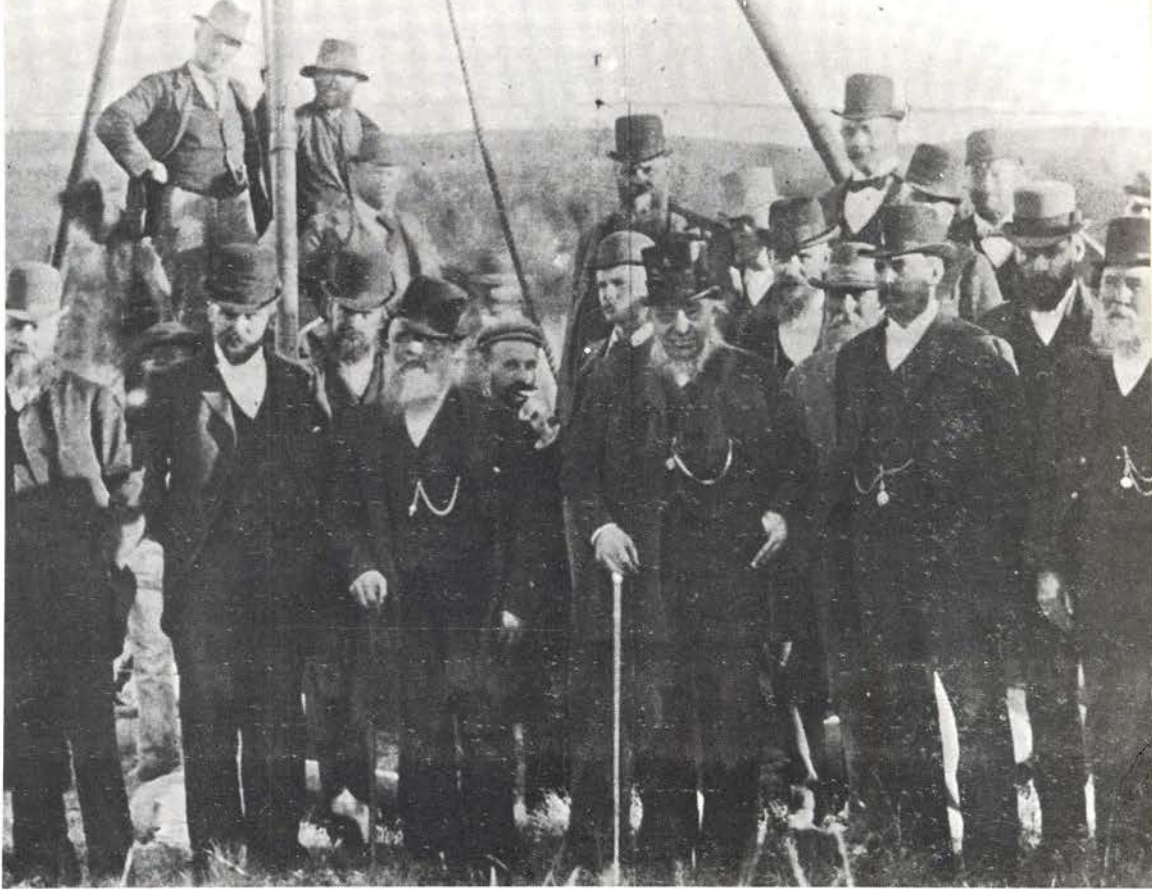
39 The proponents of the MacArthur-Forrest process by which the mining industry had been saved in 1893 through improved extraction of gold, brought suit against it in 1895/96 for infringement of patent. The Chamber of Mines called on its constituent members to defray the cost of its successful defence at what came to be called 'the Cyanide Case'. At its end, a considerable sum remained which, invested at $4\frac{3}{4}\%$, amounted to £16,400 in 1899. Its sole trustee was Percy Fitzpatrick, a partner of H. Eckstein & Co. (the Corner House) who conceived the idea of founding a Bacteriological Institute. He caused letters to be written on the 4th March 1899 to the contributing companies, asking their consent to the sum being devoted to that end (most of them had long since written off their donations). The case he presented was cogent - the threat of Bubonic Plague had been very near; Pneumonia, Typhoid and Dysentery were chronic and fatal; Malaria was endemic in certain areas; Smallpox had been spread throughout the mines by vaccination with defective lymph; and in livestock, severe losses were suffered through Horse Sickness, Lung Sickness, Redwater, Nagana and many other diseases. The Corner House proposed that 'a first-class European bacteriologist' be imported to combat these diseases in an institution whose work would benefit South Africa as a whole. It was duly reported in the Press.

40 In turbulent times, the Corner House stoutly persisted with its plan, even persuading President Kruger to obtain a contribution from the new Pretoria Town Board which would match a grant promised by the Johannesburg Town Board. By then, his Gouvernements Veearts was not available for consultation. Kruger would certainly have been attracted by the £16,400 offered by the Mines without charge on the State. Events overtook a visionary proposal; but the Corner House never lost its enthusiasm for the investigation of human diseases and in time was instrumental in founding the South African Institute of Medical Research.

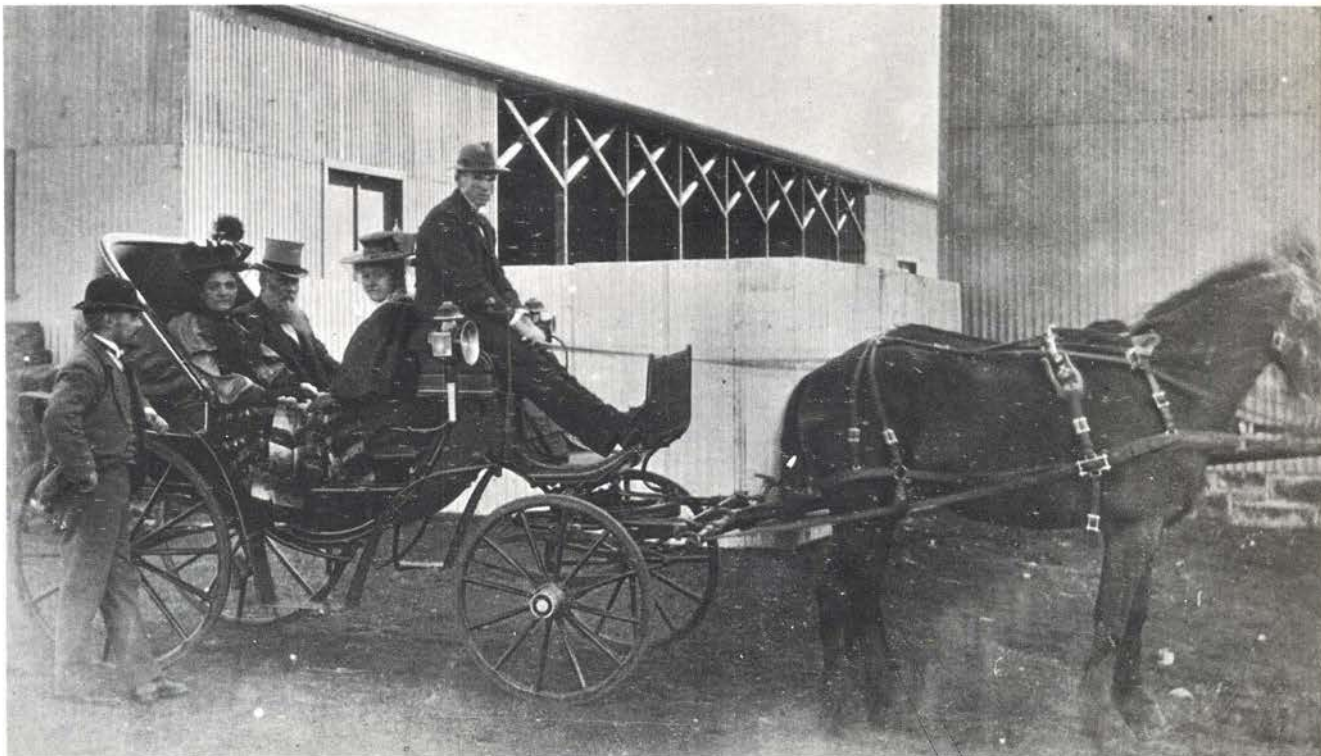
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Kruger had developed a considerable respect for the wonders of 'Science' and if he were unable to convey it to his burghers in the Volksraad who regularly defeated the motion for the establishment of an Agricultural Department, he had learnt to make good use of his Gouvernements Veearts. After the Plague scare, he referred a peculiar problem to Theiler. The winter would again bring the locusts to ravage an already stricken land. For years, enthusiastic reports had been coming from the Southern African States as far as Rhodesia about a method of destroying them. Theiler had read at length about it in the local Agricultural Journals and departmental reports.

42 Early in 1896, Mr Arnold Cooper J. P., F.R.M.S. of Theddon near the rural hamlet of Richmond in Natal whom Edington recognised as 'taking a most lively interest in all branches of microscopy', had received some dead locusts sent by a neighbouring farmer. Cooper 'made some investigations which proved that the fungus disease from which they had died was infectious and that gave me hope that it might be artificially cultivated.' He immediately repaired to 'that true friend of Science', Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of Natal, at Pietermaritzburg who arranged with the Prime Minister that he be sent to Cape Town to consult



President Kruger at the height of the Rinderpest (May 1897) with Louis Botha on his left and Lucas Meyer behind (between them) when manifesting his interest in science and technology by attending a demonstration of breaking rock with diamond drills.



Landdrost Schutte with his wife and daughter visit the Daspoort Laboratory which was in his charge (Theiler on left) in 1899.



Theiler (centre) Celebrating the roof-wetting of his first house in 1898.

The completed Theiler house at Daspoort early in 1899 before the trees and garden were planted. Emma who had shortly before given birth to Max, stands on the stoep with Gertrud, Hans and Margaret.



scientific works not available in Natal. The Cape Government sent him to Graham's Town to explore the possibility of cultivating the fungus. Edington who had investigated disease-producing fungi in salmon and trout for the British Fishery Board, was familiar with the situation and instructed his medical assistant, Dr Sinclair Black, to pursue the matter during his own short absence. Cooper also had the assistance of the renowned botanist/mycologist Dr Selmar Schonland, director of the Albany Museum in Graham's Town. After a fortnight's work during which Edington returned, they found they could easily cultivate the fungus in various cultures and the Bacteriological Institute then commenced supplying the spores in vast quantities, at first locally and then throughout the world. Later Watkins-Pitchford did likewise at Allerton in Natal.

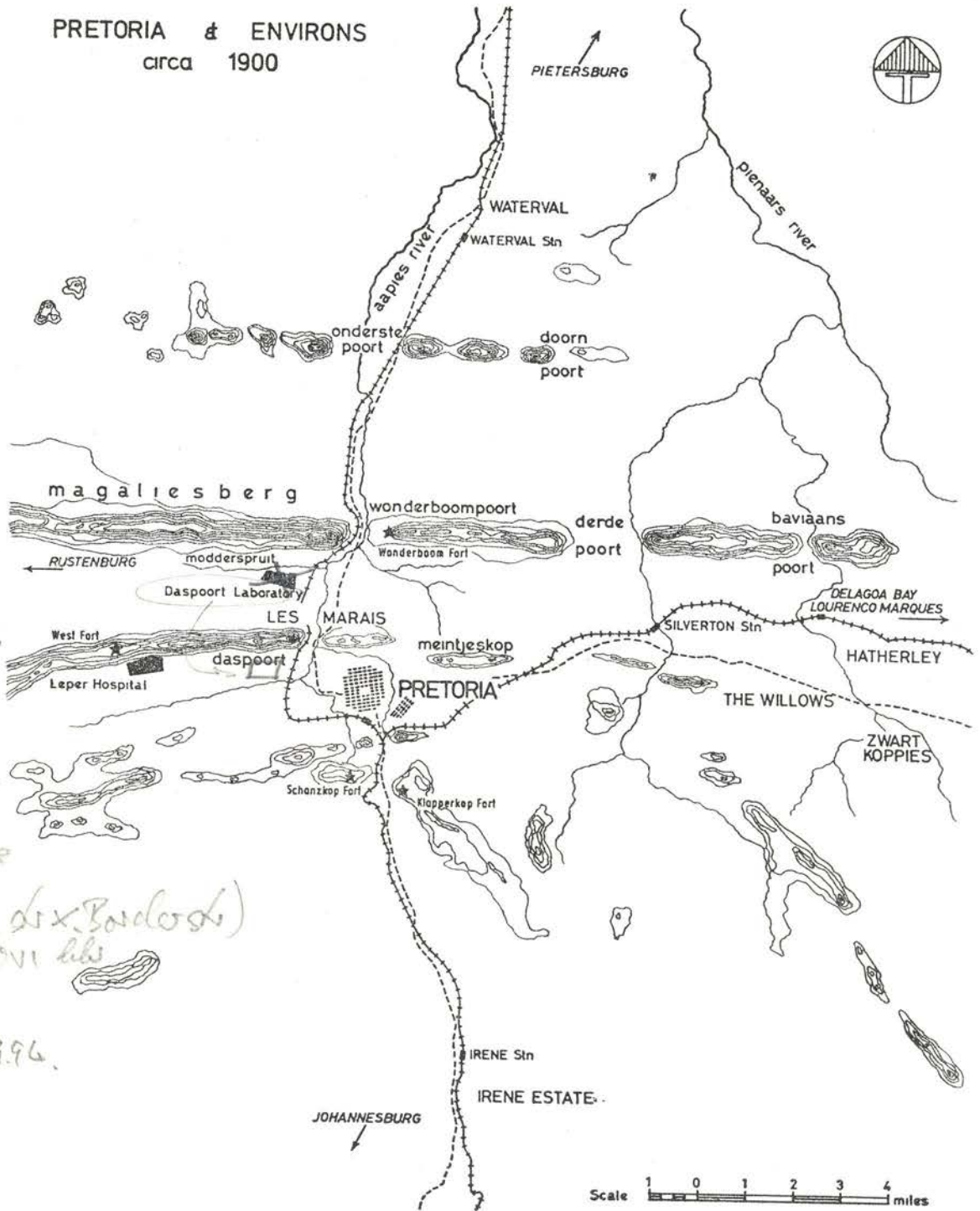
Great division of opinion arose over its efficacy. It transpired that unless the air were damp or misty, the spores failed to incubate and to infect swarms. On the other hand, favourable conditions produced wholesale destruction. Some scoffers ascribed the masses of dead locusts adhering to bushes to being in reality the discarded skins of crysales; but, waving such a bush at farmers' meetings, Edington could disprove it and extol the success of the fungus locally and abroad. Soga's medical-missionary brother, Dr William Anderson Soga used it successfully in the Transkei though the natives themselves had difficulty in learning the proper procedures. The Cape Entomologist, Charles Lounsbury, guardedly believed that it affected only the red-winged locust and not the brown; but in the absence of any other weapon against the eighth plague, it continued enthusiastically to be used. In 1899, the Resident Commissioner in Basutoland, Godfrey Lagden, testified to its eliminating swarms and in that year, Edington alone supplied 19,043 tubes of 'locust fungus'.

Kruger knew of these reports and under pressure from the Transvaal Agricultural Union (which at its quarterly meeting in December 1898 had urged the Government to take action), contemplated using the fungus in the Transvaal. He wished however to assure himself that the releasing of such a lethal means would not also poison animals and birds. With the 'voetgangers' or flightless infant locusts already infesting the purlieu of Pretoria, he referred the question to Theiler early in March 1899. The Gouvernements Vecarts and his staff were then to be seen capering about the veld around Daspoort catching 'hoppers' and carefully placing them in labelled boxes. Theiler then infected them with the fungus and hopefully awaited their death so that he could feed them to animals and birds.

It put him in mind of his father's hives of bees and the destruction of swarms by a similar fungus or 'Faulbrut'. Agile as ever, he thought of the white ants which could level a house in the Transvaal and were indeed manacing his own abode. 'In many places', he wrote, 'they make building almost impossible. I remember the "Faulbrut" of bees at home. If I recollect correctly, it is a bacterial disease, perhaps also a disease due to fungus. In either case, one could cultivate it artificially and I could make experiments. As White Ants in any case make honeycomb nests, it might be possible to infiltrate the young grubs with the fungus and exterminate them. With this aim, Father must find me in whatever circumstances some "Faulbrut". The best would be to dry some at room temperature and send it to me in a bottle. I would then try to get a pure culture.'

His ideas and activities were illimitable but his Government fell out of step. His constant appointment of additional temporary assistants without authority was questioned and even Schutte could not save him. The utmost penury faced the Transvaal whose resources had largely been spent on armaments and defence. Fort Daspoortrand on a spur commanding the Pretoria-Rustenburg road (delivered by the contractors to the Government on the 11th November 1898) now glowered above the Leper Asylum. The political situation in Johannesburg was extremely ugly and, Theiler reported, 'people complain always about the bad times and many Swiss plan to leave shortly owing to unemployment'. The Government bought farms to re-settle the 'poor

PRETORIA & ENVIRONS
circa 1900



a series of
articles in
the "Botanica"
1952-1960
puts in at
the site where
presumably the
first Boronia
was set.
(see Willoughby & x. Boudier's)
see Ref. in OVI file
St. Vogel
OVI 26 496.

burghers' and get them out of the towns and more money went on other relief schemes. Every penny was watched; but Theiler, showing signs of the obduracy that in later life hardened into downright defiance of bureaucracy, fought for his laboratory and the men to staff it. Without 56 assistants, he said, he could not deal with the charges laid on him by the Government in respect of investigations into Bubonic Plague and locust fungus, the making of vaccine for Sponsziekte and, owing to a recrudescence of the disease, the production of lymph for Smallpox.

As if in the form of a circus, there now intruded on the distressed scene the visit of Bunu, King Ngwane V of the Swazis whose regiments had assisted the Republic in the war against Magato. He had formally been fined £500 for his murders and was now brought to the Transvaal with an entourage of naked savages as a gesture of goodwill by his protecting power (which no doubt desired to secure his allegiance in impending trouble after having been given asylum by 57 the British during his own). The dipsomaniac Bunu, attired as a Colonial gentleman in a smart knickerbocker suit, arrived early in April with his bear-leader Commandant Matthys Grobler and 40 traditionally ungarbed indunas. The party, dashing about the Capital in hansom cabs and spending money lavishly on whisky and gewgaws, provided the citizens with daily excitement. Bunu refused to be photographed but Theiler, officially present as Paardenarts when the Staatsartillerie staged an impressive show of force, covertly snapped him. Ten heavy Maxims and two Creusot siege guns were fired with massive destructive effect for his benefit; but the sole impression they made on him was the desire himself to fire one of the cannon which he was allowed to do. It was later revealed that one of his indunas who had been to England, had told him that the whole affair could be put in a corner of Woolwich Arsenal. Bunu departed amidst alcoholic fumes and was dead within eight months at the age of 23.

During this noisy nine-days wonder, the representations of the Imperial German Consul which had remained unattended for three months, finally reached the Executive Council chaired 58 by the progressive General Schalk Burger. On the 11th April 1899, the Council resolved to send the Gouvernements Veearts, Mr A. Theiler, as its representative to the Baden-Baden International Veterinary Conference in August with all expenses paid on submission of receipts. Caught completely unawares, Theiler was astounded to receive the official letter on the 13th 59 April - 'I have it in black and white!' he exclaimed, still incredulous, and pored over the contents. It was signed by the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, a typical product of nepotism, 60 Pieter Gert Wessel Grobler, grand-nephew of Paul Kruger, who had begun his civil service career as a clerk and in 1898, received his high appointment at the age of 26. A man of versatile talents, eagerness to learn and pronounced linguistic ability, Grobler was to have much to do with the dapper thickset Swiss who soon confronted him.

The letter contained two documents handwritten in German detailing the agenda of the Congress and the scientists in charge of the various sections. Its work would be almost entirely confined to European domestic animals; but the magic names of Bang of Copenhagen, Hutyra of Budapesth, Leblanc of Paris, Stubbe of Brussels, Ostertag of Berlin and many others with whom he was familiar from his tireless study of scientific journals, captivated Theiler's imagination with excited anticipation. The most must be made of the opportunity. He must discuss it with Emma. Should she come with him and show their brood of four children including the three-month old Max to his aging parents? Who would run the laboratory in his absence? Should he go to the Congress only and come back as soon as possible or should he try to persuade the Government to send him earlier to extend his studies at various institutions?

61 Some of the problems were quickly solved. Emma decided that the children were too young to travel overseas and, fully cognisant of the troubled times, elected to stay with Mathilda in the house at Daspoort. It was a wrenching decision - they had longed to take their family to Switzerland where now it was spring. Schutte would continue to supervise the laboratory and Schroeder

would run it along the lines he knew. In anything untoward, there was a fully-qualified man available in the person of James Francis Scott whose M.R.C.V.S. certificate, dated the 23rd May 1895, had been signed by some of the luminaries of the College – A. E. Mettam who had taught him Anatomy; Stewart Stockman, a bright young professor of Pathology; and Fred Smith, one of many Fellows serving as examiners. In the middle of 1898, Scott had applied to the State Secretary for a licence 'to practise as a veterinary surgeon and act as deputy or assistant to Dr Theiler'. His application had been referred to Theiler who had approved it and Scott, duly licenced, began practice in Johannesburg where they occasionally met. He would be suitable as a technical adviser in matters beyond the scope of Schutte and he could also serve as Paardenarts to the Staatsartillerie.

In his careful manner, Theiler took the weekend to consider the implications of Grobler's letter and on Monday the 17th April, sent his reply by hand. He gracefully thanked for the honour which he gladly accepted, offering to discharge it to the best of his knowledge and ability. Then he referred to his letter of the 5th December 1898, remarking the danger of Bubonic Plague and asking to be sent to the Pasteur Institute to learn to prepare serum against it. The danger, he said, was still urgent and 'we have seen that there are no experts in the Z.A.R. to combat it unless I am sent to Europe'. Further, he could use the opportunity to bring himself up-to-date as Bacteriologist, a position which he alone fulfilled, and in all new discoveries in the making of different sera offered by the various bacteriological institutes. Bearing in mind that the universities would be closed from July to October for the summer vacation, he asked to be allowed to leave in the middle of May for two months' study before the Congress. He promised to undertake the work in the cheapest manner and asked for the soonest possible decision in principle as advanced booking was essential on the packed ships. He signed his name with a huge and exultant flourish.

The Government did not keep him waiting. With Kruger himself in the chair, the Executive Council on the very next day (18th April) took his request 'into serious consideration in consultation with the Under-Secretary (Grobler)' and gave the necessary authority with all expenses paid for an absence of not more than four months. Theiler was officially advised on the 22nd April and a frenzy of correspondence and arrangement ensued. He planned to leave on the mail-ship *Briton* on the 17th May and asked for an advance of £250 which was immediately given him. Complicated financial arrangements would have to be made to provide for Emma and the family during his four-month absence. In one letter after another on the 24th April, he asked the State Secretary for letters of credence and of introduction to the various institutes he proposed visiting such as the Institut Pasteur in Paris and the Institut Vaccinale at Lancy. He formally advised that the administrative work at Daspoort would be done by his secretary Schroeder and the technical by his assistant Charles Favre. He confirmed the arrangement by which J. F. Scott M.R.C.V.S. of Johannesburg would attend the Staatsartillerie horses and keep an eye on Daspoort. He wrote ecstatically to his family, asking his father to meet him at Basle, accompanied by the gay adventurer Deschler, now returned to Switzerland after travelling round the world, who had helped him on his way in difficult days at Les Marais.

Cruelly, with little more than a fortnight for a thousand preparations (including the tailoring of dress suits and other expensive appurtenances appropriate to an international conference), the Z.A.R. Government sent him to Natal to coöperate with the Plague expert, Dr Honebrook imported by the Chamber of Mines. Natal was deep in preparations for war and Watkins-Pitchford, divided between his veterinary and beloved Army duties (he founded a Voluntary Veterinary Corps) was no candidate to represent it at Baden-Baden. On the 5th May, the Natal Colonial Secretary ingenuously telegraphed the Z.A.R. State Secretary asking that Theiler be allowed to represent the Colony. Grobler the next day replied that his Government 'gladly complied' and

72 awaited a letter of credential. It was immediately sent under date 8th May and with proper diplo-
73 matic courtesy, the Z.A.R. informed the German Consul accordingly. The Imperial German
74 Government in Berlin was thereupon informed of the fact and its Foreign Office requested to
afford Dr Theiler assistance in his study of bacteriology and animal diseases.

75 Theiler's own Government gave him a letter of introduction, beautifully beribboned with the
Vierkleur (the four colours of the national flag) to the Imperial German Department of Health as
well as the requested letters to the chairman of the Organising Committee of the Congress and
76 the director of the Institut Pasteur. The French Consul, Aubert and the British Agent, Conyng-
ham Greene (whose wife Lady Lily Greene, served as his secretary) also provided him with
commendation.

Theiler was tremendously proud of representing Natal and went to Reitz' office to inspect the
correspondence. 'I have found confidence in South Africa, haven't I?' he quizzed his parents
77 meaningfully in his last letter before sailing. He left Pretoria by train for Cape Town on the night
of Saturday the 13th May 1899 and embarked on the mailship *Briton* on the 17th. Preceding him
78 by two weeks was a letter to his parents from their daughter-in-law, written in haste while Arnold
was in Natal:

'The purpose of my letter is to beg Father to tell the family, relatives and friends about
Arnold's accident 8 years ago so as to spare him many vexatious questions which would be
painful to him and remind him of the saddest time of his life. It would be a pity thus to ruin a
short well-earned holiday which should give him the courage and drive for further work. I know
what I am asking Father is not easy but the joy of the reunion soon should help toward it.'