

A COUNTRY CORRUPTED 1900

THEILER HAD a great deal to say. The letters in which he had told some of it were delivered long after his return to Pretoria. During the dreadful days in the Natal hills, he had ridden from laager to laager inspecting the horses and from battery to battery where his Staatsartillerie colleagues bravely but vainly tried to stop the British advance. Joubert, 'in a bad mood', detained him to hear his eye-witness account of one of the fierce actions. With Wolmarans, he had fractionally missed death from flying shrapnel. All the commandants were now known to him – Lucas Meyer, Ben Viljoen, Louis Botha 'friendly and in good spirits as usual'. Among the Free State forces, he had found Otto Henning engaged in similar duties. Much had been discussed between them on the night they spent in Theiler's tent. He was making voluminous notes on sick and wounded horses with the intention of writing an account for the *Schweizer Archiv für Tierheilkunde*.

1 The perpetual noise of gunfire, the crash of bursting shells, the clouds of dust from military movements, the smoke and din of battle had suddenly ceased on Sunday the 26th February. Without the knowledge or consent of their commanders, both sides had agreed on a cease-fire until 6 p.m. 'Boers and British left their trenches and met half-way to speak to each other. On this day, the British buried their numerous dead and should have built stronger entrenchments. An English officer said that Cronje had been captured. Another stated that up till now, they had merely been playing but next week they would fight in earnest. For the whole day, both sides told each other all sorts of stories. On the stroke of 6 in the evening, they began to shoot at each other and for the whole night through, we heard the salvoes of the English . . .' Two days later, Ladysmith had been relieved and the great rout began.

2 From the 13th March to the 7th April, Theiler at home wrote a 60-page letter to his parents describing his experiences in the chaotic flight from Natal when, leaderless and demoralised, the burghers thought only of escaping from Buller's putsch. Louis Botha tried to rally them but only the best of his untrained fighting material and the professional artillery remained firm. The rest pushed and shoved their way along the escape route and through two narrow poorts, Theiler and his wagon with them, until they reached a safe distance from the English onslaught. Horror, bitterness and disillusion were instinct in his factual account; but, as soon as his letter had been taken to Switzerland by his friend Kollmann, remorse and a sense of loyalty overcame him. He cabled his father to suppress its publication or at least amend it. His previous letters had appeared in the Swiss Press and had been reproduced in the larger German newspapers. They had been widely read. A Swiss woman living in Russia wrote him about them. Now he felt he was telling too much and implying that the forces which employed him had fled instead of retreated. In time, Theiler's truthful letters were treated with incredulity in a Europe besotted with emotionalism.

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3 In Pretoria he was immediately preoccupied with his many duties. Routinely, he had to reactivate the Daspoort Laboratory with its Swiss assistants to meet a demand for Lung Sickness and other vaccines. Work at the Artillery Camp was also more demanding than he had expected. At the same time, he clung to the vision of a research institute which Baden-Baden had not only encouraged but his co-delegates made possible by active coöperation. Nocard and Kitt had sent

4 the cultures he required; Zschokke would arrange for Silberschmid in Zurich to supply others; the Bacteriological Institutes at Berne and Lausanne were supplying lymph regularly once a month. 'I am anxious soon to resume my scientific work', he wrote and sent his father a long list of requirements to be despatched 'as soon as Peace is concluded' which he would signalise in a cable with the single word 'Yes'.

5 Nor did he neglect his duties as president of the Schweizerverein Alpina. A fund was inaugurated to help the dependents of the many serving Swiss. The willing Kollmann undertook to be its agent in Europe and to raise all the money he could. (One of the means he took was the sale of postcards showing the Swiss at war in South Africa, duly endorsed by the Alpina Society, which became rare items of Africana.) Perversely Theiler continued to be pestered by the Auditor-General through Schutte for the receipts he could not supply. He needed the money for his family, he wrote as he was 'on commando' and could at any time be ordered into action. Worthily to represent the Republic and Natal at Baden-Baden, he had had to maintain a high standard in clothes, travelling, accommodation and other things for some of which there were no receipts. He began to feel unjustly treated.

7 The illusion of 'Peace' was fast disappearing. Endangered by capture in the Free State (only the exhaustion of the British cavalry horses prevented it), the plucky President and his sjambok-wielding colleague Steyn failed to stimulate general resistance to the British advance on Bloemfontein. Kruger returned baffled to Pretoria and Roberts occupied the Free State capital – at an ecological cost that was to cripple South Africa for years to come. Virtually paralysed, his army could undertake no major operation for at least six weeks and apart from minor suppressive actions (some disastrous), remained quiescent pending recovery and the establishment of transport and supply lines.

8 'The wreck of an army lies scattered in and about Bloemfontein. I say the wreck of an army for what is an army without horses and draught animals?', wrote the correspondent of the London *Times*. The British cavalry had ridden their mounts to death, the commissariat had flogged their oxen into uselessness and the carnage was completed by wounds, diseases, the biting cold of winter and the seasonal firing of the veld into blackened wastes. 'The reckless waste of animal life and disregard of suffering was quite unimaginable', it was stated; but many war correspondents and observers tried to convey the enormity of the scene.

10 The Kimberley-Bloemfontein road was lined with the stinking carcasses of horses and oxen which clouds of vultures failed to demolish. 'More pathetic than the sight of the dead horses' wrote Charles E. Hands of the *Daily Mail* 'was the sight of the living ones. There were horses that had been hit, horses that had been broken down with over-work and under-feeding; horses with hideous saddle-sores hidden by clustering mounds of flies; horses abandoned for every conceivable defect; some horses for whom death had loosened their rider's control, big English horses, unshod Boer ponies, most of them with hip-bones that projected so far as to suggest dislocation; and all along by the side of the Modder River where they found grazing and water, they were wandering about, helpless, forlorn, abandoned creatures who looked at you dubiously as though they feared you were bringing them more of glorious warfare . . .'

12 'Nothing in my experience', wrote the American correspondent Julian Ralph, 'compares with the sight of the hundreds upon hundreds of dead and dying horses on this 100 miles of war's promenade. To see them tattered by shell and then ripped open by vultures, often before they were cold in death, was enough to distress the most impassive. For some reason, hundreds had dragged themselves to the main road and then had died in the track of waggons or by its side. But the worst horror was the last battlefield, only 24 hours after the fight at Driefontein. Not nearly all the horses were yet dead and as I came up beside the prostrate body of a beautiful steed, it would slowly and painfully lift its head and turn upon me a pair of the most

pleading, woe-stricken eyes full of hunger to know what I could do for it . . .' He could do nothing and went on, passing the stumbling wrecks which fell from weakness as the vultures watched.

13 In the action at Driefontein, the cavalry horses – each carrying the weight of two men in rider and equipment – had managed only a slow trot and then come to a standstill from weakness. 'On the 13th March, Bloemfontein formally surrendered. The condition of the cavalry horses was now piteous. They swayed in the ranks from sheer muscular weakness and exhaustion and, apart from considerations of forage, it was evident they had reached the limit of their resistance and that the Army would have to be remounted. In a month, the Cavalry Division had ceased to exist.' Frederick Smith who witnessed the scene, continued: 'They were living skeletons covered with a tightly-drawn skin through which projected all the unshrinkable parts of the frame . . . When tied up in batches, they leant against each other and the centres collapsed under the pressure. There were hundreds of such cases . . . The majority were past all chance of recovery within a reasonable time, if ever. Food appeared to do them little good. Corn did harm for it could not be digested. Scores died daily. A cold or wet night settled for ever the fate of the weakest . . . These wrecks of war, this flotsam and jetsam of human passions and strife, these helpless victims of a policy of the grossest cruelty and gravest injustice were dying by hundreds, anywhere and everywhere. In camps, in the streets of the town, in any water supply, and bodies could be found in every donga. The air was poisoned by their decomposition . . .' Water supplies were contaminated, diseases were disseminated, an era of toxication and infection afflicted the whole country. Wherever the forces went, human and animal health grievously suffered. The land itself grew rank and barren.

14 Opportunist commandos in the Free State caught detachments of the English at a disadvantage and from Thaba Nchu, Reddersburg, Dewetsdorp and other actions, hundreds of prisoners arrived in Pretoria. At 11 o'clock on the night of the 27th March 1900, the church bells tolled for the sudden death of General Joubert, a feeble Commandant-General but a revered national figure. The captive British officers at Waterval sent an address of condolence to his widow and a wreath to his State funeral. Theiler reflected on the obstinate old man whom he had often officially encountered – 'it was not easy to communicate scientific veterinary views to him who had all his life farmed cattle and horses and who considered his opinion to rate equally with that of a diplomaed Swiss veterinary surgeon!' Soon after, Louis Botha was formally appointed Acting Commandant-General and charged with organising the defence of the Transvaal. Vast swarms of locusts were devouring the only country that had not yet felt the scourge of war.

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17 Pretoria was in an uneasy state of equanimity and tension. Much reduced in population, there were still pedestrians and traffic in the streets – stopped in their tracks by the sight and sound of
18 Dr de Coninck's new automobile. There was much Government and military activity. The
19 competent and intrepid Major Wolmarans had been given command of the artillery in the forces that Botha was assembling to counter Roberts' forthcoming move toward the Transvaal. Every-
20 one knew that high event was planned for the Queen's birthday on the 24th May and that
21 aggression could soon be expected. Theiler found time to visit the railway workshops where the Republic's 'secret weapon' was being prepared. It was a 15.5 cm Creusot gun (Long Tom) mounted on a truck. He watched its first firing tests. The heavy recoil threw the gun back as much as a metre so that the gun would have to be relaid at every shot. By jamming iron wedges under the truck's wheels and locking a heavy munitions truck behind it, the difficulty was overcome.

A further false confidence came from increasing support from overseas. Men from all over the world (largely undisciplined adventurers) had joined the various commandos, including a man of military experience and stature, the Comte de Villebois-Mareuil who, after service in Natal

and the Free State, commanded his own force of Uitlanders in defence of the Transvaal. (He was killed on reconnaissance at Boshof on the 5th April.) Soon after his return to Pretoria, Theiler had welcomed an impressive Swiss Red Cross unit which added to the large number of Swiss already in the field. He took its three doctors – Jacques de Montmollin, René Koenig and P. A. Suter (of the Swiss Artillery) – to the State Secretary F. W. Reitz and devoted himself to helping them. At that time of confusion, they could not be posted to any particular field or even to the local hospitals owing to a plethora of doctors. They kicked their heels in an hotel until the influx of prisoners from the Free State rendered their services acceptable at Waterval where, visiting them on the 1st April, Theiler noted the primitive conditions endured by sufferers from typhoid, dysentery and malaria. The Government had in mind that de Montmollin and Koenig should run the Johannesburg General Hospital and Suter take an ambulance to the Villebois-Mareuil commando. Theiler went to elaborate trouble to help them. All their unwanted equipment was stored in his laboratory and when Suter's unit consisting of an ambulance wagon, trolley, tents, provisions and 10 mules, left for the Free State, Theiler detailed Otto Meyer (fluent in Hoch- and Schwizerdutch which Suter spoke, Dutch, English and 'Kaffir') to accompany him.

Theiler himself was heavily occupied. Wolmarans had implied that he would not be required in the desultory engagements in the Free State and he applied himself to exceptional duties as 'horse doctor'. Many wounded animals had arrived from the various fronts and the Horse Death was raging as well as Lung Sickness and other diseases. The laboratory was still producing, with difficulty, Smallpox vaccine. He was also constantly pestered by private individuals. There could be no thought of research in such circumstances except to continue his 'literary work' on 'The Horse in War'. His duties took him on the 24th April to Johannesburg where, standing in the street talking to his unpopular colleague J. F. Scott, he was deafened by the explosion that largely destroyed the Begbie Foundry where several Swiss worked to produce munitions. Rushing to the site of the disaster, presumed to be the work of British saboteurs (all the British were then expelled from Johannesburg), Theiler later wrote a graphic eye-witness account. He was due to dine at Park Station with Drs de Montmollin and Koenig, then in charge of the Johannesburg Hospital, but they were fully occupied with the heavy casualties.

It was no secret that Roberts had completed his preparations for the invasion of the Transvaal. Troops had massed at Bloemfontein; thousands of oxen had been bought for transport (Melton Prior's conveyance for the campaign was a tented horse-wagon drawn by four oxen); food, fodder, ammunition and medical supplies had been accumulated; and careful measures taken to keep the mounted troops in the saddle. At the beginning of May, Roberts' strategies began to develop. Theiler was told by Wolmarans to re-assemble his unit in readiness for service on the western front where the English were thought to be intent on relieving Mafeking. By the 3rd May, von Bergen and his orderly D. T. Botha had retrieved his wagon and mules and he began to re-stock it. It was now bitterly cold and Emma made him a canvas sleeping-bag lined with a woollen blanket and a rolled-up mattress. They discussed whether she should leave with the children and escape to Switzerland. Emma was against it. Their main asset, the house, would have to be abandoned and she could not leave Arnold to combat future difficulties alone. He would need her more than ever.

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His unit entrained on the 13th May, his staff consisting of his orderly D. T. Botha, Favre and an unattached Swiss Braunschweiler who, if not as gay as the frivolous Deschler, brought his guitar and a gift for song. Theiler noted everything for another lengthy letter. He thought now that

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there was nothing he did not know about the Boers (as he proclaimed all his life without ever fathoming their inscrutable character) and would best be able to explain their behaviour and actions to the disbelieving Swiss. Leaving his laboratory and the hard but rewarding work of tending artillery horses had cost him dearly; but in his sometimes sanctimonious manner, he affirmed that 'a sense of duty which I acquired as a Swiss soldier does not allow me to withdraw even from the great danger in which we always are'. A republican by birth and upbringing, he never wavered from his belief that the cause of the Z.A.R. was just. Its citizens were another matter.

In one of the most famous marches in military history, the British Army was already far advanced on the 300-mile trek from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, Its strategies completely outwitted the commandos assembled by Botha to defend the railway. Wherever they took their stand, the central force confronted them while cavalry wings on either side forced their retreat by threatening to cut off their rear. The bridges they blew up were repaired 'with wonderful speed', Theiler noted, and the British were again upon them. Moving south, he saw at Vereeniging on the Vaal River which marked the Republic's border, the first fighting men fleeing from the defeat at Kroonstad, being urged back to the front by Schalk Burger, Hendrik Schoeman and other leaders. Botha intended making a stand on the Rhenoster River. The burghers continued abandoning their commandos and riding hard for home.

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Like the Long Tom, Theiler's wagon remained on its truck when the train reached Kopjes in the Free State, site of Botha's proposed stand. His tents were pitched alongside and he rode with Wolmarans along one line of positions that would harass the British if they approached the railway. The scouts reported that they had not moved from Kroonstad. Then they were stated to be on the march and action might be expected on the 18th or 20th May. On the morning of Monday the 20th, Theiler lay in his tent with a feverish cold when the order came to return to Vereeniging without a shot being fired. 'At first I did not believe the message but was soon convinced of its truth as already the horse commandos were retreating everywhere. I sent the wagon and the mules back with my orderly. We loaded our horses on to the awaiting train and soon we all went, in the company of Generals Schalk Burger and Botha, back to the Vaal. On the right and left of the railway line, the commandos rode closely packed in thick clouds of dust. We spoke only of retiring.'

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The British had temporarily ignored the railway and made an enveloping advance on all sides. During all this time, Roberts in the field was in close communication with Milner in Cape Town on how the conquered territories should be administered and who should control the Transvaal from Pretoria which would shortly be entered. They had reached easy unanimity on the proposed civil and military staff.

As the retreat from Kopjes began, Theiler's heart lifted at the sight of the Swiss flag on Suter's ambulance, also in flight to the Vaal. Suter was with the Wakkerstroom Commando which, arriving in Vereeniging, was posted home to Natal for further duty. A year later, Oberleutnant Dr.med. P. A. Suter, Artz der Schweizerischen Feldbatterie 29 and field doctor under General de la Rey and Assistant-Commandant-General Christian Botha (elder brother of Louis) published a copiously detailed and illustrated book 'Unter dem Schweizerischen Roten Kreuz in Burenkriege'. By then, Theiler had fallen out with the assertive Swiss whom he had sent on his way.

Botha now took his stand on the Vaal River and deployed his remaining resources including the Long Tom accordingly. All the Staatsartillerie batteries were concentrated at Vereeniging and Theiler rode among them, checking their horses. He noticed that of the mass of horses of the burghers on commando, half or even more were used as pack animals. There was little if any wagon transport. War Councils were held every day. 'It was decided to die on the banks of the

Vaal rather than let one Englishman set foot on Transvaal soil.' On the 19th May, Botha and all the Vecht-kommandante rode off on reconnaissance to locate the positions of the commandos awaiting the English – far in the rear, it was thought, after the headlong retreat of the Boers.

With Wolmarans, Theiler went to the telegraph post connected with the Artillery Camp in Pretoria and exchanged messages with Mike du Toit who asked about the English. They replied that they were nowhere in sight. They returned to their tents to find a report that 'the English were on the opposite bank of the Vaal River and at the same moment, their cannon thundered from a westerly direction. We packed up, inspanned, mounted our horses and watched how the iron railway bridge over the Vaal was blown up. A violent detonation and the iron structure lifted in the air and plunged with an enormous crash into the depths. We again went to the telegraph post to inform General Botha that the enemy was coming. Rifle fire could then be clearly heard.' The English were not confronting them across the river. They were over it and on all sides, even behind them.

The fearful flight began again. The burghers everywhere fired the long tinder-dry yellow grass and dense clouds of smoke obscured the invaders and the pursued. Theiler told his orderly to take the wagon ahead while he rode among the burghers, listening to their vituperation against their generals. At night, he and his men found the wagon at Meyerton station in freezing cold and comforted themselves with a round of grog and Braunschweiler's singing in hellish circumstances. 'The whole area as far as the eye could see was a lake of fire, leaping and darting flames on all sides, the horizon edged with glowing light, the zenith a purple lustre. It was a beautiful sight! Tired as we were, we held ourselves upright in the saddle with bad jokes and singing.' At 2 in the morning, they reached Klipriviersberg station and rolled themselves in their blankets.

Swiss in heart and mind, Theiler had given himself to the Z.A.R. and its cause. On the following day (Sunday), he faced the ultimate disillusion. 'Rumours swirled through the air that there would be a War Council. Then we saw the whole company of Generals and Commandants sitting in the grass and – this was evidently the most important – a photograph was being taken. Truly, they allowed themselves to be photographed! It would have been laughable were it not the tragic truth!' The plan then made was to stand and fight; but the English were gone ahead and there was nothing at which Long Tom could fire. On the coldest night of the war, the frost was finger-thick on Theiler's blankets. In the morning, it was again retreat. No one thought of the English Tommies, many without great-coats and on route-march rations, who in arctic conditions had out-marched, out-ridden and out-maneuvred them.

Theiler and his unit were ordered to follow General Botha's wagon with Wolmarans and his valiant artillerymen skirmishing on the flank. They arrived in the afternoon at the Rietfontein Mine beyond Elandsfontein (Germiston) a few miles outside Johannesburg on the junction railway line to Pretoria, where the Long Tom stood in its truck at a siding. For the first time, Theiler heard that his orders were to follow Botha to Pretoria. They were confirmed by Wolmarans' adjutant; but, rebelliously and for his own reasons, Theiler decided to ride in the darkness to Johannesburg and find Wolmarans. Braunschweiler would go with the wagon to Pretoria.

The British were already on the outskirts of the eerily empty town with its boarded-up shops and business premises. Panic had infected the few remaining inhabitants and there was general lawlessness and thievery, particularly of horses. In the chaos and gloom, his small party rode through the dark streets and Theiler's veld-trained pony, unaccustomed to asphalt, came down heavily on its knees. Somehow he found his way to Swiss acquaintances who were ready at a price to house him, Favre and the orderly and to stable their horses. The British were expected on the following day. Preparing to leave early in the morning, Theiler found his horse completely lame. He sent Botha back to Rietfontein to fetch a horse from the entrained wagon but the British were already in possession. There was no alternative but to spend the whole of Tuesday

the 29th May in Johannesburg, tending his pony. Toward evening, Wolmarans and his battery rode through the town in retreat. That night, with gunfire all around them, Theiler and his compatriots celebrated their einigheit with song and drink, swore to stick together in tragic times and to amalgamate the Helvetia Society in Johannesburg with the Alpina Schweizerverein in Pretoria. As aliens on a foreign but attractive soil, it was, he said, most moving.

35 Alone in Pretoria, Emma knew the worst. Wolmarans and his 3rd Battery, she had heard, had returned to Pretoria on the same day. Any moment she expected Arnold to arrive on the train with his wagon. 'The Boers do not wish to be trapped in Pretoria – they will defend the town as long as maybe from the forts outside and then withdraw, leaving Pretoria to the enemy', she wrote his parents on the night that he drank with his friends 36 miles away. She was quite calm. The last stalwarts were leaving Pretoria, Kruger with them on his way to Machadodorp. A Committee of Citizens was formed to prepare for surrender.

36 The pony recovered sufficiently for Botha, lighter than Theiler, to mount it and they rode precariously northward along the old Pretoria road on the 30th May. There was artillery action as they passed the Geldenhuis Estate and sundry burghers firing from the small kopjes. Theiler asked the commandant what the 'plan' now was but he merely shrugged his shoulders. His men had captured an English officer and a 'lord'. As the commando mounted and moved off, Theiler sidled up on his horse alongside 'the son of an English duke' and fluently engaged in lively discussion. He did not then know that it was Lord Cecil Manners, son of the Duke of Rutland and uncle of Diana Manners (who became Lady Duff Cooper and later Viscountess Norwich) who was representing the *Morning Post*. 'All will be over soon', Theiler reported him as saying, 'All will soon be forgotten as England will adapt her politics accordingly.'

37 (Manners was taken to the officers' prisoner-of-war camp at Daspoort but, as a non-combatant newspaper correspondent, was quickly released on parole. He joined at the Grand Hotel in Pretoria another titled colleague James Fraser H. St Clair Erskine, Earl of Rosslyn representing the *Daily Mail* and *The Sphere* and similarly paroled after capture in the Free State early in April. Rosslyn, like Emma and other alert persons in the town, had learned that Pretoria would be only perfunctorily defended and that the British prisoners would therefore soon be released. Through Lourenço Marques on the 30th May, he managed twice to cable accordingly to the *Daily Mail* a week before the British Army appeared, thus achieving an unparalleled journalistic coup. Manners, dealing less gloriously with his assignment, later in life developed a spy complex and, finding life unendurable at the age of 80, threw himself under a train.)

38 The retiring commando was also making for Pretoria, intent on dispersal; but Theiler, Favre and Botha broke away at a trot and reached the Capital before darkness fell at 5 in the afternoon of the same day. To the south east of the town, firing could already be heard from guns at Zuurfontein (Modderfontein) as the British advanced along the line from Elandsfontein. They rode through the confused and tumultuous streets to Daspoort and cries of joy and relief from Emma and Mathilda. Theiler had been away for only 16 days and their world had collapsed. Braunschweiler awaited him with the news that the entrained wagon, packed with veterinary supplies, had got as far as Irene when disaffected burghers, announcing that 'it had to do with Uitlanders' had wrecked it and strewn its contents over the veld. He had somehow got their baggage on to another truck and safely brought it home.

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39 Exhausted and dispirited, Theiler had the foundering horses stabled and tended at the laboratory before finding his own first night's rest. The next morning he rode at once to the Artillery Camp and reported the loss of his wagon to Wolmarans, requesting his further orders. He was told:

'Be ready to set out at the first signal'. A Horse Doctor in the field without supplies would be pointless; but there was no hope of his re-equipping his unit. Anarchy ruled and every man held a revolver in his hand. The Government was gone, leaving worthless promissory notes; the Citizens' Committee was preparing for surrender; General Botha, fighting all the way, had not yet asserted himself; hundreds of fleeing, looting burghers passed through the streets.

40 On the final day of May prior to the Easter weekend, the last vestiges of order vanished. Theiler watched and recorded - 'Pretoria was by all tokens completely lawless. The English could come at any hour. Everything was on the brink. Early in the morning, people stormed the Government Warehouse and helped themselves to the remaining provisions. It was a moment to make psychological studies! Whoever knew that they could plunder came and plundered. Nobody bothered any more about class distinctions. Those who had the most and biggest wagons, took the most away. Flour, Sugar, Coffee, Soap, Candles, Meat Products and much else. The poor people of course came off worst. They could only take as much as they could carry. It was infectious! All who had hands took, went, came again and took again! Men, women, children, Kaffirs, Hottentots, Ladies, Gentlemen, everybody went to the Warehouse and helped themselves. Women became like hyenas. The image of the predatory animal stared out of their eyes and the conventions of civilised humanity were lost. When the Government Warehouse was empty, the mob went to private warehouses. Toward one o'clock, the panic reached its height. Suddenly there was noised through the bye-ways 'The English are here!' The weapon-carrying burghers took to their heels. The waves of people in the crowd hurried away. But the Kaffirs, Hottentots and Bastards hurried to the place where the Khakis would come in.' (It was a false alarm.)

Theiler left the town and stood guard over his laboratory at Daspoort. He carried a revolver at all times. Looting was the order of the day and no horse was safe. At first, receipts were given to the owners of appropriated animals but soon they were simply taken and the owners sjambokked for demurring. Certain that they would be seized, Theiler's orderly made off with two of his commando horses. Those that remained were his own - 'my private possession for which I had had to pay hard cash.' One of his assistants ran to his house to tell him that von Bergen guarding the stables was being kicked and beaten by three burghers, one purporting to be a Veldcornet. Theiler ran to the laboratory where a Mauser-bearing friend had disconcerted the raiders. One of them shot at a member of his staff. Infuriated, Theiler charged at him, drew his revolver and fired, forgetting the safety-catch; but the raiders fled. 'My sympathy for "the noble pious Boers" has now reached zero', he said. The next day, Favre was beaten up by a desperate Boer needing a horse. Others followed and finally Theiler obtained written confirmation from Louis Botha's adjutant that his horses were not to be commandeered. Then two 'generals' came and put him under arrest for 'saving horses for the British' but Theiler talked them out of it. 'Give me an order that I need not go on commando and you can have my horses', he said. With Botha now rallying the burghers to resist the advancing British, they did not dare.

On Easter Monday the 4th June, with cannon fire clearly audible, Theiler early rode to town and renewed his offer of service to Major Wolmarans at the Artillery Camp. No one there could explain the noise of firing. Wolmarans intended finding a wagon which he should again equip and join the commandos. 'Come tomorrow', he said. 'I went home', Theiler wrote, 'had my horse saddled and held myself ready to leave if the order came. I received no order and so it happened that I stayed at home. Neither did the Government leave me, as Government Veterinary Surgeon, any instructions nor did I receive orders from my military superiors as to what I should do in all eventuality and therefore I decided to await the development of events in Pretoria and to hand over the Laboratory entrusted to me to the English if they came.' Even more powerful in his mind was the thought that the burgher command and his Staatsartillerie col-

leagues had removed their families to safety (Kruger's wife Tant' Gezina and Louis Botha's English-speaking wife remained in Pretoria) whereas his family in their isolated house would be exposed to the greatest danger from looting lawless combatants. He must stay to guard them.

There was for him now no shred of security. Kruger and his Government had abandoned the Capital on the 29th May, taking the gold that sustained the Republic's credit. Salary cheques had been issued but the banks refused to cash them. Theiler suffered along with the infuriated body of civil servants. On the same fateful Easter Monday that he reaffirmed his availability to Wolmarans, worse befell them all. The State Attorney J. C. Smuts invaded the preserve of Jules Perrin and caused to be removed from the Mint all the uncoined gold which was carried away to an unknown destination. With it went Theiler's last hope of recovering the £200 which the State owed him for overseas expenses. He and his family faced destitution.

They stood outside the house at Daspoort on that day, watching the noisy war – to the huge delight of the children. A British balloon which maintained surveillance over the area, rose again above the hills to check all movement. Botha had disposed his dwindling forces along the low hills south of Pretoria where the Schanzkop and Klapperkop forts should have commanded approaches; but their guns had been dismantled and borne off for future action elsewhere. The Theilers could trace the British bombardment from the little spurts made by shrapnel and the dust clouds raised by shells. They could clearly hear in the crisp cold winter air every shot that was fired – all morning and into the afternoon. At 4 p.m. the commandos had begun their rapid withdrawal, galloping furiously through Daspoort past the laboratory. Theiler had never seen them go so fast. This time, they were by no means a spent force. The British varied their cannonade, always avoiding the town; but the watching family was never in danger – the nearest shell fell a kilometre away. Night suddenly came in complete and ghostly silence.

When he lost his hand, Theiler might well have become a newspaper correspondent. His devotion to Science robbed the world of an exceptionally accurate observer and a vivid writer with all the instincts of a true journalist. He used his talents now. On the morning of the 5th June, the first 'Khakis' (probably from Hutton's Mounted Infantry which had seized Fort Daspoortrand without opposition) appeared at his door and asked the way to Pretoria. The British had occupied it at midnight. Theiler saddled up to see what was toward. Masses of Roberts' encircling troops were now pouring into the town, among them from the north the remaining British prisoners from Waterval (hundreds of whom had been treacherously removed by train by the retreating commandos and condemned to an even more rigorous restraint). Theiler rode gloomily into the town. He knew that at 2 p.m., Roberts would formally possess it in the name of the Queen and, as both Swiss and burgher, he was sick at heart. 'In the whole war where I endured a hundred dangers, nothing has affected me more than the events of the last few days . . . They were sad sad times and I am glad that they are at last over, dark though my personal future now is.'

He told of the ceremony in the huge square before the Government Building where he had conversed with Kruger, waited on the Executive Council and taken his instructions from the State Secretaries Dr J. W. Leyds, C. van Boeschoten and F. W. Reitz. It was full of Khakis now and the square was lined with them – thousands of tired troops who, through sheer weight of numbers, superior organisation and equipment and, let it be admitted, courage and endurance, had seized the Capital of the South African Republic. Theiler and the Pretoria Swiss grouped themselves together among the few listless townfolk and watched the military ceremony. Lord Roberts with Kitchener on his left and followed by his general staff, trotted on to the square, drums and fifes played a march, and to the hurrahs of the troops, Lady Roberts' tiny silk Union Jack (only three by two feet) fluttered almost invisibly up the massive façade of the huge build-

ing. The soldiers waved their helmets, the released English officers congregated in a corner exulted and the townsfolk made no sign. 'God save the Queen' was movingly sung.

'We were a few Swiss together', Theiler wrote, 'who found it very very humbling and for a moment, we completely forgot that it was the Boer flag that had gone. We simply thought that here and now, a Republic had been borne to the grave. That was to us all very sad. Is it now really the Republic that has gone down or is it only Kruger's oligarchy? Time will tell.' In their hearts, all of them feared for Switzerland and Theiler hoped that his truthful letters describing corrupt organisation and undisciplined armed forces would be marked and noted through publication in the Swiss Press.

They stayed for the three-hour Parade of Troops which incredibly had been organised within a few hours of the entry into Pretoria. 'It was after all not to be expected', Theiler wrote, 'that these troops who had come the distance of 400 English miles from the Orange River here on foot, who had always slept in the field and perhaps been unable to wash their bodies, should be dressed for the drawing room. Further, they had been for days long before in battle and had had no opportunity for cleaning up. One could see that they were extraordinarily tired but nonetheless they marched smartly. Soldierliness from any quarter pleasantly impresses us Swiss who from home onward, are used to a soldier's life.' And he went on to describe each unit as it passed, noting particularly 'the Grenadier Guards who made an outstandingly good impression, almost unexceptionally of tall strong stature', 'the great long naval guns on wooden carriages drawn by 36 oxen', the various regiments, the kilted Highlanders with their bagpipes, the long baggage train and finally, 'the enormous mass of ambulances'. He felt that Lord Roberts had succeeded in his purpose of impressing the populace – though the Parade was only part of the British Army.

41 On that same day (6th June), Roberts issued a proclamation ordering the surrender of arms, guaranteeing security of person and property with penalties for looting and vandalism, and offering an Oath of Neutrality to the remaining population. No troops were quartered in town. They were encamped on the periphery and only administrative officers occupied the Government Building. Day after day, Theiler called there on the Provost Marshal (Major Poore, a famous Hampshire bat who soon inaugurated cricket matches), carrying a *carte d'entrée* which 42 someone finally endorsed 'has been waiting many days to take the oath of neutrality'. Day after day, he and his Swiss friends tried to establish that the weapons they dutifully surrendered (Theiler his revolver and Swiss carbine, the *Schweizerverein Alpina* all their rifles – 'it was one of the hardest things we ever did and it was for us almost as sad to our spirits as a funeral') were for their private protection and should be returned. The documents they hopefully tendered were bandied from pillar to post without reaching the appropriate official.

43 Milner remained in Cape Town but the careful plans made jointly with Lord Roberts and confirmed while the advance on Pretoria was being made, now came into operation. In the Government Building there now sat Sir John Maxwell as Military Governor of Pretoria and the Transvaal. Roberts himself, while continuing to command the campaign was assisted by George Fiddes as political adviser, Johannes W. Wessels as legal adviser and Emrys Evans as financial adviser. Within days, a *Transvaal Government Gazette* was published advising innumerable regulations – Martial Law, curfew, censorship, the opening of the Town Market and other information. With all their genius for organisation, the British could not prevent initial chaos and confusion, steep increases in the price of foodstuffs, and proliferation of disease in man and beast. The war, close at hand, was by no means over.

In all the hubbub of activity, Theiler had no part. His career was ruined and no portent illumined the future. His most valuable scientific property – the fruits of his European visit – had probably been destroyed in their cases at Cape Town. The Daspoort Laboratory came to a

standstill. There was no one to pay his Swiss assistants and they must find their livelihood elsewhere. While Emma's savings and the provisions hidden under the floor lasted, they could survive but not for long.

44 Soon after the occupation, General French's forces, active in the north to prevent destruction of the Pietersburg railway line, entered Pretoria along the Daspoort road, taking three hours to pass the Theiler house. The English soldiers frequently called, politely asking to buy bread, flour and eggs (then being sold at 5s. a dozen). Theiler's seven experimental sheep were commandeered without compensation. Everything was in military hands. On the level ground at Daspoort, a chaotic Military Veterinary Hospital had been opened on the 9th June under the command of Lieutenant Shore (previously a prisoner) of the Army Veterinary Department. Theiler's empty stables were used to quarter horses. Botha was still fighting valorously only 15 miles away at Donker Hoek (Diamond Hill) but without hope. Everything remained unsettled.

45 There was little Theiler could do except watch over his laboratory and write a long letter to his parents recounting recent events. His Swiss medical colleagues, Drs de Montmollin and Koenig who were leaving Johannesburg for Cape Town to travel via Delagoa Bay to rejoin the Boers, would post it somewhere. Nothing was coming to Pretoria - no letters, no newspapers (*De Volksstem* had ceased publication on the 4th June), no sign of the outside world. 'Despite personal freedom not being particularly restricted, one feels like a bird in a cage', he wrote. At least, he and his family were not molested. It was being a very bad time but they were well. With military censorship, he would not be able to write openly again.