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*J. C. Smuts A Study
in Arrogance*

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INTRODUCTION

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To the ancients Africa beyond and below the equator was an old land, but unknown: so immeasurably old that, wrinkled and shrivelled like some witch, it had never been young: unknown like the gods themselves and veiled in mysterious twilight; and in that twilight moved horrors and monstrous primeval things.

The Arabs had tales of vast hordes of elephants; of caverns full of ivory; of gold worked by the Chinese; and mines that produced the fabulous wealth of Ophir and of the Queen of Sheba.

The Phœnicians went exploring, but their ships did not return until one, long given up as lost, came sailing in past Gibraltar, and the crew told how they had set out southwards from Aden down a barren coast, how they had been driven before great storms of angry seas until they came to the end of all land, where the sky was full of strange stars, or the old stars inverted, and the sun circled from their right to their left. Rounding a great cape they had sailed northwards, until once more, after three long years, they had come to the Pillars of Hercules and sailed into the Mediterranean. But this story was treated as a sailor's tale.

The Greeks and the Romans and the Byzantines knew little of South Africa. Even in the fifteenth century after Christ, geographers held that beyond the equator was the Sea of Darkness, which was the running together of many seas and which lay in a steep inclined plane, so that any

ships that ventured on to it would slide down into a bottomless abyss.

In Central Asia there had been fierce drought. All across Asia from the Great Wall of China and the Gobi Desert the tribes had been on the move, marching westwards looking for pasture for their starving flocks; among them were the Tartars and the Turks. As they came they had conquered all the lands from the Caucasus to Egypt, and from the Black Sea down the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean to Cairo, and by the fifteenth century they had blocked all the old trade routes to the East.

With the trade routes blocked, the maritime nations of Europe were being ruined, and they sent out expedition on expedition to look for some new road to the Indies. First came the Portuguese. In their frail wooden galleys they crept cautiously down the Atlantic coast of Africa until they found the Cape of Good Hope, and, making it a station for call and to revictual, they went on to India; but they treated the Cape as of small value. It was for them a liability only and they quickly evacuated it, leaving little trace of their occupation.

Next came the Dutch, and the Government of Holland took over the Cape and turned it into a half-way house to their empire in the Indies, and finally into a colony, built a fort to protect it, settled Dutch colonists, sent out a Governor from Holland, and imported black slaves.

In France a Catholic king was persecuting his Protestant subjects, the Huguenots, and these took ship and came to the Cape to look for a new home. The Dutch welcomed them and quickly absorbed them.

And then came the English, just beginning to build up their Empire. First they conquered the Cape of Good Hope by force of arms, but handed it back to the Government of Holland; and then bought it again for six million pounds in gold.

PART I

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GREY STEEL

CHAPTER I

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When the Dutch, and after them the English, came to the Cape of Good Hope, they found it and the country round it good and fruitful, and they settled, calling the place Cape Town.

The Dutch built themselves—and the English copied them—white, sturdy houses with open, wide verandahs, which they called *stoeps*, and with roofs of deep thatch supported by heavy black beams of stinkwood and oak. They constructed pointed gables as in Holland, windows framed in dark wood, shady rooms tiled with red brick and panelled to the ceilings, and walls so solid that they held out the heat and the cold alike and could be used as forts for defence.

They laid out open streets and gardens and vineyards, and planted trees until Cape Town became a little city and the country round rich and pleasant—a blest land smiling in its soft air, with abundant rain, beautiful with many green hills and a luxuriant, kindly sun, and along its coasts warm seas.

Beyond the Cape the country climbed from the coast plains up to a plateau that, vast and treeless and fierce-sunned, the immense *veld*, stretched barren or covered with a little sparse pasturage away a thousand miles and more to the north, to the Limpopo and the Zambesi rivers.

At first, few of the settlers pushed out far into the hinterland, for the savage tribes, the Bushmen and Hottentots, lived there and attacked all strangers; but thirty

miles to the north of Cape Town they built the village of Malmesbury, and nine miles to the north again, on a mountain, they constructed a fort to form an outpost. On the lower slopes of the mountain grew up a *dorp*, a hamlet, which they called Riebeek West.

Little by little they pushed back the natives, hunting out the Bushmen, as if they were wild animals, and conquering the Hottentots, until the whole district became safe and Riebeek West settled down into a quiet hamlet of houses standing each in its own garden, and with roads of red gravel flanked with tall trees. All round were cornfields and vineyards, and to Riebeek West the farmers came riding in from their scattered farms to see their friends and relations, or on their way to market in Malmesbury. A pleasant, sleepy, placid life of easy-going people.

Close outside the *dorp* was the farm of Bovenplatz, where lived Jacobus Abraham Smuts and his wife; and there in May of 1870 was born to them a boy, the second in the family, whom they christened in the Dutch Reformed Church with the names Jan Christiaan.

Jacobus Abraham Smuts was a well-to-do yeoman farmer, great-handed, ruddy-faced, solid yet jovial, and active-witted with the rude, powerful health of one who lived in the open and dealt with primitive things, but large girthed, for among the Dutch it was still a tradition, as it was in Holland, that an ample paunch was a proof of standing and prosperity; and Jacobus Smuts was both a man of standing and prosperous. His farm was wide and well-conducted. In Riebeek West and in all the farms round were

his relations, and in this area there were no poor: all were well-to-do and self-supporting. Many came to him for advice, for he was steady, sober and religious, and wise in judgment: a typical conservative Dutch farmer of the Cape.

When he had been a boy there had been much ill-feeling between the Dutch and the English. The Dutch were a dour people made even more dour and uncompromising by their intermarriage with the Huguenots. They held no allegiance to Holland or to anyone else. They were not even a people, but a holding together of individuals, each intensely proud, each refusing to accept any man as his superior and searching at any price for complete individual freedom.

The English Government was the legal ruler, but had little interest in the country except as a port of call to India, and to see that no other nation should have it. The local English had the urge to control and direct. The Dutch refused to be ruled by them and the English sturdily refused to be absorbed by the Dutch.

It was a quarrel as of relations who had different temperaments but so much in common that their likenesses increased the friction between them, and their quarrel was sharpened by a hundred little disagreements. A quarrel over the slaves: from England came missionaries who interfered and persuaded the English Government to release all slaves for compensation. The Dutch grew angry, for the slaves were their private property and they were cheated even over the compensation. A quarrel over schools, over the official language, and over religious teaching: Calvinist pastors sent from Scotland increased the ill-feeling. The English Government claimed political supremacy. The Dutch,

awkward, obstinate, refused to compromise: the English officials were tactless and brusque. These quarrels had increased until at last many of the Dutch of the Cape had taken their cattle and their goods and set out northwards, and they had gone not in a spirit of adventure, but in a spirit of resentment and, as the Jews went out of Egypt to escape the tyranny of the Pharaohs, so they went to escape the interference of the English officials. Some had crossed the Orange River and founded the Orange Free State—the Free State. Others had gone farther across the Vaal River and made the Transvaal Republic. Still others had turned into Natal, but found the English there before them.

As they went the English officials came pressing up behind them, and from the north, out of Central Africa, came pressing down in hundreds of thousands the Black Men, the Bechuana, the People of the Crocodile, and the Bantu tribes on their way southwards.

The Dutchmen fought the Black Men. They fought the English. And not satisfied with that they quarrelled continuously amongst themselves, split up into parties, and each party founded a new republic of its own and then split again and made other republics, so that by the year 1870 South Africa was all but in ruins. Away to the north the two republics of the Free State and the Transvaal, though established, were bankrupt. The Black Men had been overrunning all and destroying as they came. The Transvaal was split with civil war and threatened by the Zulus. The Free State was swamped with Basutos. In Natal, an English colony, the colonists were fighting against the Zulus, for their existence. The Cape, an English colony also, was alone

prosperous, but growing poor, for the Suez Canal had been opened and the shipping to the East was going that way instead of by the Cape, and its prosperous wine trade was being killed by a treaty between England and France. The English and the Dutch were even more bitter in their quarrelling. All South Africa was sour with distress.

And Jacobus Smuts had not understood the anger nor the bitterness of the Dutch against the English. He bore the English no ill-will. He was a Dutchman first, but the English were fellow countrymen with whom he wished to live at peace. For him the country beyond the Cape was vast and inhospitable and barren, and the men who had gone there had become not farmers, but poor shepherds. They had grown, they and their *vrouens*, their wives, into unkempt, difficult people, uneducated *takhara*, shaggy-heads, dour and sullen and rancorous and sullen-browed from their life on the harsh veld. He found them completely unlike his neighbours, the placid and prosperous farmers of the Cape.

The boy, Jan Christiaan—very soon Christiaan became plain Christian, and he was called Jan or Jannie—puked and puled his way slowly into life, for he was a weak, sickly child and only with difficulty did his mother wean him and teach him to walk, and she never believed that he would live long.

She was a capable, clever woman of strong character, come of an old French Huguenot family, very religious and tenacious of her beliefs, but lighter handed and more buoyant than the usual Dutch housewives, the solid, immense-hipped, and full-uddered *vrouens*, with their hair brushed severely back from their foreheads and their shrewd eyes set in wide faces. She was more cultured, also,

for she had been to school in Cape Town and had learned music and to read and write French, and these were accomplishments in those isolated farms when thirty miles in a carriage or on a horse was a long journey. She brought up her children strictly and religiously as a good mother.

The Bovenplatz was a family farm, and, as an elder brother wanted it, Jacobus Smuts found himself another, some miles to the north, known as Stone Fountain, and moved.

Bovenplatz had consisted of vineyards as well as wheat, but the farm at Stone Fountain was all corn-land with a little pasturage, for it lay well out in the *Zwartland*, the Black Land, and the Zwartland consisted of hills rolling in long, smooth, bare curves like an ocean heaving in long swell after a storm, broken here and there with outcrops of jagged rock: in the summer dusty and hot; in the winter cold with sweeping winds; but at the first rains covered with emerald-green grass and myriads of tiny, sweet-scented flowers which died and turned grey quickly under the thirsty sun. The soil was rich: close at hand red to look at but at a distance black; and it was the best land in all South Africa for wheat.

The farm stood on a hill-side, the farmhouse—a low building, thatched and whitewashed and with wooden shutters to the windows—painted red. Though Jacobus Smuts was well-to-do and lived baronially with large-handed hospitality, yet the house and its arrangements were primitive and crude, without conveniences, baths, or lavatories, and the life very rough and ready and haphazard.

On one side was a square, with cattle sheds round it and a few smooth-trunked eucalyptus trees to give a little shade, and on the other, a *kraal*, a yard with a mud wall; and the crops grew close up to the walls of the buildings.

Behind the farm the hills climbed up towards the mountain above Riebeek West, which showed as a range of bare dark rock, except when the wind blew out of the south-east, when it was covered with white clouds which piled on to it and spilled down over it like the curve of a breaking wave.

Below the farm the hills, broken here and there with abrupt gorges torn out of them by the winter rains, ran down to the plain of the Great Berg River. The plain flat, yellow with corn in the harvest or grey-fallow in the winter, with here and there a dark patch of trees, the white gleam of a distant farmhouse, and the scar of a track leading up to it from where in the sunset rose columns of dust as the cattle came home, stretched mile after mile into the soft distance, away to the foot of the Drakenstein mountains. The mountains heaved themselves up sheer out of the farther edge of the plain, steep slopes into precipices and precipices into crags to peak after peak far up into the sky, peaks purple with distance, up till they reached the crest of the Winterhof, which like a cathedral spire stood out against the clear steel-blue sky, and from which at times a cloud would stream, blown out like a grey banner, from its summit.

There was in this Zwartland a great sense of freedom. Holland had been crowded, a bee-hive life. From this these Dutchmen had migrated, for they had resented its restraints

and restrictions, the cheek-by-jowl crowded existence of minute farms and miniature gardens, joined like the pattern in a close-woven cloth. Here they found in the Zwartland great space, immense distance, freedom, and also the loneliness which they sought.

Bovenplatz had been close to the village, but Stone Fountain was isolated. The roads to it were tracks, deep dust in the summer, quagmires in winter. The only means of travel was by horses or by two-horsed buggy. Transport was by ponderous wooden wagons on wooden wheels with eight or more yoke of oxen to heave them laboriously along. The only contacts with the outside were a journey to the nearest church for service when the *predikant*, the Calvinist pastor, came visiting; four times a year a general gathering in the dorp for the *nagmaal*, the Holy Communion, to which all came; a formal visit to another farm; now and again a trip into Riebeek West or a pilgrimage into Malmesbury.

The whole life was that of the farm and the seasons: the ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and the threshing of the corn; the cattle; the lambing and sheep-shearing; the poultry and the pigs which rooted and fed and quarrelled noisily and sunned themselves in the kraal, close in against the house, in the porch or on the stoep, and even in the living-rooms.

It was the boy's work to look after these: at first the geese and the pigs and to herd the sheep. He helped the farm labourers, who were a black man or two, but the rest half-castes, *coloured people* they were called, the offspring of Hottentots and Bushmen who had mated with Malay immigrants and black slaves from the Guinea coast and

some white blood from the early settlers mixed in. Most of his time he spent with Old Adam, the shepherd, an ancient, shrivelled Hottentot, who was full of the weird tales and the strange lore of the native people. When he grew older he helped to drive the cattle to pasture and round them up as it grew to dusk, and to lead the farm wagons down to the fields.

From a sickly baby he had grown up into a thin, rickety child, silent and reserved, listless and white-faced, with pale-blue, staring eyes. He mooned about, taking little interest in anything, dirty, untidy and unwashed, dressed in ragged clothes, a blanket round his shoulders, either going barefoot or wearing *velskoene*, shoes made of hide.

When he was ten his father decided that he must learn his letters and that he should go to a school in Riebeek West; and as it was too far to go and come daily, he should board in a house known as Die Ark, which the headmaster kept for a few boarding scholars.

Jannie went to school reluctantly. The idea terrified him. He was shy with a shyness that terrorised him. When he saw people coming his way, people very often whom he knew well, he would hide rather than meet them. If spoken to by a grown-up he would, without reason, blush a bright scarlet from his neck to his temples, so that almost at once he began to close in on himself and instinctively developed a reserved manner to avoid any chance of being hurt, as a crab develops a hard shell to protect its sensitive body.

He found school worse than he had dreaded. The discipline, the restraints, the fixed hours, the wearing of

clothes, irked him after the casual life of the farm, where he could moon without interference, and the happy-go-lucky ways of the coloured labourers. He resented the discipline and, as his master said in a report, he was like “a wild bird newly caught beating its wings against the bars of its cage.” At the end of the first term he had made no progress.

In his second term he began to give in. In his third term, like an inrush of water into an empty dyke, almost like a madness, there rushed in on him a desire for knowledge, and knowledge out of books. He could already read a little and was studying English—at the farm they talked only Dutch—and he began to read books, to devour books with an amazing greed, books of every sort and description and on any subject. Not on any plan or particular subject, but books, any books he could lay his hands on. As a boarder in Die Ark he did not have to go home and work on the farm each evening as did the other scholars, and he had the run of the headmaster’s library. He read all there was there, early in the morning before the classes and late at night until the hour for bed. He never went out if he could avoid it, nor did he play with the other scholars. He made no friends. He kept rigidly to himself, and the others looked on him as a stuck-up little swot.

The school was a mixed one and he was put in a class with two girls and another boy, the children of neighbouring farmers who had all been already three years in the school. He caught them up and passed them. He had a firm memory, which was like a plain sheet of paper, so that whatever he read was imprinted on it in clear capital letters without crosslines or corrections or blurred portions.

Hitherto the headmaster had looked on him as an abnormal and difficult scholar and no more, but one day he set a geography paper to the whole school and he was amazed to find Jannie Smuts far away at the top. He began to take an interest in him, and finding him above the average, he moved him up several classes in one move, and into his own special scholarship class.

The weedy, puny boy went on reading continually. He did not appear to have any particular interests nor any object or ambition except to collect facts and more facts, facts from books, facts that he saw in words on printed paper. He was solemn far beyond his age. A visitor wanted some information about Riebeek West. Jannie Smuts sent her a long and learned essay on "The Advantages of living in Riebeek West," with a wealth of local facts and dates.

When he went home for the holidays he took books with him and he read. His father grew annoyed with him. The eldest son had died of typhoid and he wanted Jannie to take over the farm after him, but the lad was useless. If he was sent with a wagon he took a book, and hours later he would be found sitting on the shafts, having forgotten all about the animals or his business. At meal times he sat silent or dreaming or was surly, would eat his food without a word, or would get up and walk out abruptly on to the stoep, where he would sit reading or walk up and down talking to himself.

To solid old Jacobus Smuts, wise in men and from his experience in practical things, this son which he had produced was a freak. Letters and figures were useful things to be learned and for practical use. Books too were good, but this was too much of a good thing. He talked with his

wife and they agreed. The boy was staid and religious. If he wanted to live on books he had best be a predikant, a pastor. The pastors lived on books.

Still the boy worked, absorbed in absorbing knowledge, his nose always in a book. He had no boyhood. He was born old and serious. There was nothing of the boy about him, no high spirits, no playing, no misdeeds, no practical joking or laughter, only dogged, persistent grey work—reading. But he was the headmaster's prize pupil and he was to sit for the entrance examination for Victoria College, the Dutch college in the town of Stellenbosch. He increased his hours of work, cutting short his sleep, working with complete and, for a boy, abnormal concentration. The strain began to affect his health. He became even more skinny, lean, and rickety. He grew queer in his manner, his pale-blue eyes often set in a wide distant stare, and when spoken to he did not seem to hear. The doctor was afraid that his mind was being affected. He was forbidden to read, but he persisted. To keep him under his own eye, the headmaster moved him out of the general dormitory into his own side of the house, made up a bed for him in his sitting-room, and locked away his books. Still the boy persisted. He persuaded the headmaster's son to get him books from his father's library and smuggle them in to him, hiding them under his pillow, reading them when no one was about; until he was caught and finally forced to stop, for a month. But he fretted and wandered aimlessly about, lost without books or work, having no hobbies or outside interests to fill his time, until he was allowed to study again.

He passed the examination and was accepted for Victoria College.

CHAPTER II

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Going to Stellenbosch filled Jan Smuts with some of the same fears as when he went to school in Riebeek West; and he prepared himself methodically. He took himself with an immense and portentous seriousness. Life was a grave and serious affair, and he must not lose or misuse a minute of it. He wrote to a professor at the college, asking his advice and his help.... "I trust you will," the letter ran, "favour me by keeping your eye on me...." for he considered Stellenbosch "as a place where a large and puerile element exists," and so "affords scope for moral, and, what is more important, religious temptation, which if yielded to will eclipse alike the expectation of my parents and the intentions of myself.... For of what use will a mind, enlarged and refined in all possible ways, be to me if my religion be a deserted pilot, and morality a wreck?"

Stellenbosch, this sink of possible iniquity as the boy thought of it, was a quiet old town centred round the College. It lay in a valley full of vineyards and gardens of flowers. In the centre was a square where the ox-wagons on trek down to Cape Town outspanned, and from which the streets branched off, each bordered with giant oaks which arched and met so that the streets, even in the hot midsummer days, were always in deep shadow, and down each, in the gutters, ran, from the hills above, rivulets of water which gurgled and laughed their way through the town on their way to a river beyond. It was a cloistered,

peaceful old place of picturesque thatched houses and professors and scholars and schools and religious missions, and it slumbered placidly in the drowsy, languid shade under its great trees. Jan Smuts found it very different from the bare, treeless sweeps of the Zwartland, but he refused to allow it to make him relax or to become lazy.

He worked as he had worked at school, poring always over books, absorbing knowledge and retaining it, for his memory had become photographic in its exactness, in its power of retention and of reproduction. There were no regulated games and no compulsory communal life. The professors were nearly all Scotsmen who encouraged work, and work to the exclusion of all else, so that he could work without interruption. For his degree he took Literature and Science. He studied the English poets, especially Shelley and Keats, and Walt Whitman the American, and, though he did not appreciate the beauty of the words or of the metres, he sought out their ideas. He learned German and studied the German poets, especially Schiller, in the same way. And he learned High Dutch, the Dutch of Holland, fluently and exactly.

He wrote articles for the college magazine and even for the local papers, articles on subjects such as Slavery, Scenery, the Rights of the Individual—dull articles without originality; and some doggerel poetry, such as all youths write some time or other.

He was, however, still painfully shy and nervous. His physical weakness and his spindly body gave him a sense of inferiority; but he refused to be crushed down by it and he determined to overcome it. To cover his shyness he

continued to develop an artificial manner which became abrupt and gauche, and the other students, not realising that he was shy, looked on him as conceited. He, in turn, avoided them, took no part in their social lives or their amusements. When asked to a dance he refused because he was too self-conscious and he was afraid of making an exhibition of himself, and his manner of refusing the invitation caused offence. But if anyone became flippant or tried to rag him or to waste his time with frivolities, his shyness disappeared; he was on his dignity at once and became indignant, short-tempered, and ill-natured.

For recreation he walked over the hills, usually alone, thinking, and often talking to himself. On Sundays he held a Bible class for coloured men and solemnly propounded to them the Word of God; and with the same immense seriousness he joined the volunteers.

So much did he shut himself away from the life of the college that he would not live in a general boarding house with the other students, but lodged in a private house, that of Mr. Ackermann, because, as he explained to a professor, he wished “to avoid temptation and to make the proper use of my precious time ... which in addition will accord with my retired and reserved nature.”

With one person, however, he could relax and be natural—with a girl, a Miss Sibylla Margaretha Krige, known for short as Isie Krige, who was a fellow student, for at Victoria College co-education was encouraged.

The Kriges were an old family which had come from Cape Town and lived in Stellenbosch. Some of them had trekked

away to the north. Many of them were politicians. All of them—in contrast to old Jacobus Smuts—were opponents, and bitter opponents, of the English and English ways. In this tradition Isie Krige was brought up.

She was a little, quiet girl with a round white face, who dressed simply and brushed her hair severely back from her forehead. She was very solemn, passed all her examinations, was steady and plodding without brilliance or attracting much attention—in every way a satisfactory student: and she was very prim and proper.

Jan Smuts fell in love with her in his own stilted way and they “walked out” together. The Kriges lived at the bottom of Dorp Street, on the corner where the road turned east to the sea, and they farmed some land that ran along the river-side below the town. Mr. Ackermann’s house, where Smuts had his lodging, was half-way up the same street, where the oak trees were thickest. Every morning Jan Smuts waited at his door until the girl came by and then joined her, and each evening he saw her to her home. A queer couple they made, the little prim girl with the white round face and the lanky, spindly youth with the unsmiling cadaverous jowl, sedately side by side, their books tucked under their arms, silent or in solemn discussion, walking in the shade under the avenue of oaks up to the college gate. They found Life a very serious concern.

They were young to walk out—he was seventeen and she was sixteen—but they were not exceptional, as it was customary amongst the Dutch to marry early. Smuts made love to her in his dry way—as a fellow scholar. He did not lack sex and virility, but he repressed these as he repressed

enthusiasm and any other natural youthful inclination. Being egocentric he talked of what interested him primarily—his work. He taught her the things that interested him: Greek, which he had learned out of a textbook: German, in which they read the poets together: Botany, and especially grasses, for that was his hobby.

And the girl adored him. She hero-worshipped. She worked for him. When he translated some Schiller, she wrote it out in copy-hand. But she gave him far more than that; he knew he was unpopular: he wanted to be liked, but he could not unbend, be normal and natural; but with her he could be natural. He was at heart a schoolmaster with the itch to teach and direct the lives of others: she was a ready and willing pupil. He needed applause: she gave him applause and with it self-respect.

Jacobus Smuts, however, was not so satisfied. The jovial, good-natured old man with his practical knowledge saw that he had, in some strange way, produced a son who was just all grey brain and little else. He wanted him on the farm, but Jannie was incompetent with his hands; he had no practical abilities or farm sense. He was a book-worm, and that was all there was to it. The old man accepted the fact: Jannie must be a pastor.

But Jan Smuts' outlook had changed. He was not so solidly religious as he used to be. His studies, especially of Shelley and Walt Whitman, and his new experiences had altered his outlook and he was doubtful whether he had the call to the ministry. At last he decided that he wished to read not theology, but the law and to complete his studies

in England, and at Cambridge. His tutors encouraged him, for he had shown himself to be one of the cleverest students at the college. He had passed his matriculation and his first intermediary examinations with success and he was second on the passing-out list for the local degree of Bachelor of Arts.

To go he needed money, and, though he was never actually poor, he had not enough for this and his father was by no means inclined to help him in this new venture; but he won a scholarship, the Ebdon, which was worth a hundred pounds a year and a number of small bursaries. Then, in 1891, taking his local degree, he collected all the spare cash he could lay his hands on, borrowed some from a tutor, shut down his Bible class, said good-bye to Isie Krige and took ship for England.

CHAPTER III

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The England to which Jan Smuts came was the England of the early nineties of the nineteenth century—rich, imperially expanding, haughty and powerful, but it was also England at its most florid and turgid; overfat with money and self-satisfaction; a land of dowager duchesses; of top-hats and high collars; the working classes, servants, and such like kept out of sight and out of mind; the upper classes very exclusive, nose-in-air and select. It had little interest in or welcome for a colonial, and especially for a poor and unknown colonial. For Jan Smuts, with no ability at making friends, it was a very inhospitable place, but in his own lonely way he ferreted round and learned much.

At Cambridge he went to Christ's College, but he got little out of university life; he did not like it or the undergraduates. He did not understand them. He was older than the average and had another viewpoint. He came to work with a specific object. They, with their lackadaisical drawling ways, appeared to him to have come just to pass time. He did not understand that no man in England of their class should be openly serious or show that he was making an effort: he must succeed without apparent effort or there was no virtue in his success; the undergraduate who worked openly was a "nasty little swot"; he might work as hard as he liked, but he must not be caught working. To Smuts, not knowing these things, these languid young men seemed to be only frivolous time-wasters, wasters of "my precious