

MY SOUTH AFRICAN YEAR

WORKS BY SAME AUTHOR

FRANCE AND THE FRENCH
MAKERS OF NEW FRANCE
JOFFRE AND HIS ARMY
FRANCE AT BAY



W. Smith.

MY SOUTH AFRICAN YEAR

BY
CHARLES DAWBARN

WITH THIRTY ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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DEDICATED TO
MRS. GEORGE PAYNE
OF DURBAN, NATAL
"THE MOTHER OF THE SOLDIERS"

SOUTH AFRICA

O not by Earth's trim garden-lands may
Africa be slighted,
Her roses are a thousand hills by the
Dawn rapture lighted !
Her violets are the purple plains
Where twilight reigns,
Soon to carnations changed, and after
To marigolds who meet the Sun and laugh
In leagues of golden laughter !

VINE HALL.

PRÉFACE

“SO much to do, so little done.” This saying of the dying Rhodes in his little cottage by the sea at Muizenberg, applies to me, in this book. To compass so great a subject demands, at least, much courage. Yet, being conscious of inadequacy, I have this to comfort me, that if I fail I have done so in the best service in the world. To him who loveth much, much is forgiven, and in this spirit I commend my work to those whose work it is to judge.

The faults I find and the holes I pick must be set down to an affectionate use of my time, and a desire to paint the scene as it is—the shadows as well as the high lights.

If I were asked to sum up South Africa in the terms of my experience, I should recount . . . At an “old boys’” dance at Durban, chauffeur and mistress met, and neither was confounded. Politically, I might repeat the story heard in Pretoria Club. A certain local judge was discussing with Mr. Chamberlain the latter’s cool reception in South Africa after the war. Said the Colonial Secretary, aggrieved: “We have given back the watch.” “Yes,” said the other, “but you have kept the chain!” If now we seem to be hastening to restore the chain . . . but that is anticipating the event and the book. Besides, there is Smuts to keep an eye on the Imperial goods.

“This is a wonderful country,” said the General to

me, "not like Canada and Australia, purely white men's countries—but one where the black man does the manual labour and the settler directs it." This is the very essence of economic Africa.

Finally, a little fact illustrates the informality of the land. Mr. G. H. Wilson, the acting editor of the *Cape Times*, wanted to see General Smuts, but he was in one train and the Premier in another. The trains crossed, and the journalist, not to be outdone, "flagged" the engine as it approached. The train stopped. "Hallo, Wilson, is that you?" exclaimed the great man as he saw his pursuer enter his coach. It was the most natural thing in the world that a Pressman should stop a Premier's train—in South Africa.

Thanks are due for courtesy and consideration to Earl Buxton, the late Governor-General and now head of the Commission to fix the future of Rhodesia; to Sir Drummond Chaplin, Administrator of that region; to General Smuts, himself, for much kindness; to Sir Howard Gorges, the late ruler of South-West Africa, and to Sir William Hoy, General Manager of Union Railways. To leading statesmen I owe a sheaf of thanks, notably to Sir Thomas Smartt, and to Minister J. W. Jagger. I thank them all.

Of Durban I shall ever cherish the fondest memories, if only for the dear friends, whose hospitality I sought and found for many weeks. The charming chatelaine of "Overdale," to whom this book is inscribed, must take it as guerdon for a heavy debt. The shadow that fell when we were there, blotting out the sun and stars, was only made supportable by the sweet sympathy of our kith and kin in this far-away South African port.

Nor can I forget the dear enthusiasm and pervasive

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eloquence of my good friend, Dr. C. T. Loram, former Head of Native Education in Natal, and now one of the three Commissioners under the new Act.

For the granting of rights of reproduction, I must acknowledge the courtesy of Sir T. J. Bennett, C.I.E., M.P., proprietor of *The Times of India*, and of the editors of *The Contemporary Review* and the *World's Work*, respectively, in regard to the chapters on the Indian in Natal, on Earl Buxton and Farming in South Africa.

Finally, I must thank Mrs. Jessie Rogers (of Durban) and Miss Mitchell (of Fleet Street) for much inspired reading of rough notes penned in the halt of trains, in motor journeys across the Continent, in the ante-chambers of politicians. For the personal photographs in this work I am indebted to my wife, to Miss Kathleen Payne, to the Misses Sheldon, of Nairobi, to Miss Fiddes-Wilson and to Major Fitzroy, A.D.C. to the late Governor-General.

I could extend the list indefinitely, just to show how many have been good to me in Africa. But the curtain is going up; I must hurry to my place on the O.P. side.

BAYSWATER,
Midsummer, 1921.

C. D.

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INTRODUCTION

“**H**OW do you like South Africa?” This is the question they propound to me in the land of my book. It is the touchstone of the tourist whereby he is judged infallibly. He will stand or fall in estimation just as he satisfies the test. But I proffer, naturally, this question to my readers: “How do you like ‘My South Africa’?” At least I have tried therein to speak the truth that is in me—a courageous, if unprofitable, enterprise. But, habit is strong—and I have that inability so touchingly expressed by the Somali guide, who came to me at Zanzibar, saying, “My name George Washington, me tell no lie.” . . . On the other hand, there is nothing to conceal. Frankly, I *do* like South Africa, and have done my best to say so. I wish the cost of print and paper were less excessive, whereby I could say it to greater length. (And this without consulting my readers, of course).

To tell all the reasons why I love South Africa would take too long, but I may touch upon a few. The romantic youth who makes a sonnet to his lady’s eye-brow suffers from my complaint. Neither of us can conceal his affliction. I think every stranger who has the temperament to feel and the eye to see must be impressed with the country. It is so strange, so unlike anything one has met before—so full of unpremeditated charm, of unrehearsed effects. Even the climate has a way with it that you do not expect—a sort of absent-minded violence that breaks out with disconcerting suddenness. For variety of temperature, South Africa has beaten England hopelessly. There is no meteoro-

logical phase in the old country to compare with the sensation of being frost-bitten in the morning and over-heated at noon. It is the land of surprises, of rapid transformations. And it is the unexpected that charms us in daily life. Africa is always tempting us, always beckoning us on into the unknown where astounding adventure may await us. Even the black man is a surprise. He keeps us guessing. The utter democracy of the sub-continent is as startling as its thunderstorms, which split the sky and show, in one terrifying flash all the jagged beauty of the mountains. Democracy, also—of the Colonial sort—lays bare a man's soul. The millionaire disguises himself out of respect for the poor. His ancestry will not let him "swank." He is of good Puritan stock, and thinks outward show a sin. His plain-looking motor-car gives no inkling of his wealth. "Appearances are deceptive"—a lack of them even more so. And existence is truer and sweeter for this quietude of life, this strict attention to business, this disdain of display, which is the stamp of the Colonial Britisher. The just man makes a fortune. That is the deep belief of strenuous simplicity. Thus, the fathers of America held that failure meant feebleness in morals, and South Africa rather thinks it may be true.

Africa is dear to me because it is the land of perpetual surprise, the land of vivid contrasts, the land where you are sure something is going to happen. And, generally, it does.

"What population do you think the country could hold?" is another of these searching tests that people unfeelingly apply to the unhappy author. Those who have had far more opportunities of judging than I, declare that at least ten millions could be housed in these wide stretching steppes. But it is without doubt useless to dump a man down on the veld and say, "Here is your farm, now work it," when there's nothing to work except the rough, uncleared ground and not a

building in sight. That, however, is rather the airy British way. You must give the man some assurance that he will make a living by his industry—not merely tell him to get on and work without showing him how to get on and how to work. In that sense, of course, South Africa is backward and inhospitable, with the inhospitality of politics. For politics, as I show farther on, close the doors against the new man and his ideas. We want the door opened with plenty of fresh air coming in laden with new ideas. The poor man cannot live in South Africa because he must not do “kaffir’s work.” That is beneath his dignity and would upset all our notions of racial superiority. Whatever we say about the dignity of labour for the good of the black man’s soul, we must admit that we ourselves are loth to try it under the melting sun. And finally, the negro works so much better than we can in his own land. This is essentially a country for the supervisor class. Whether he will or not, the immigrant becomes an aristocrat. He cannot stoop to delve in the red soil: that is not only against the conventions, but against his capacities.

The only remedy for paucity of people is irrigation; such well-considered schemes that large areas of semi-desert are brought under the plough. That is the remedy for the drought which makes continuous inroads, so that large parts of the country are drying up. It is also a remedy for crowded Europe, for its surplus population can go out into the wilds and make two blades of grass grow where none grew before. But for such enterprise not only capital and skill are required, but likewise the right kind of mental poise. I know men and women who would perish five miles from a cinema. That is not the kind that would flourish in the solitudes.

When I saw General Smuts at Pretoria a few weeks after my arrival in South Africa, he said “Keep your mind a sensitive plate. Do not form opinions until you have seen what this country has to show you.”

I have tried to follow this advice : to keep the mind supple and plastic, to receive impressions, to learn from conversations, to study "problems" at close range and study life in its different aspects in this fascinating clime. Few, I dare say, have travelled as much as I in search of material for a book. I hope my readers will not think it is pains to poor purpose. In any case I have "displaced myself," many thousands of miles, that I might look into the heart of things in Rhodesia, take the German temperature in South-West Africa, learn the grievances of the Boers up and down the Union and understand, as well as I could, the underlying as well as the apparent currents running in the great centres of Cape Town, of Johannesburg, Kimberley, Durban, Salisbury and Bulawayo, as well as the humble and far-distant "dorp."

I hope I have not neglected the picturesque. No country could be more beautiful in the grandeur of its wildness, in the expanse of its quivering prairies, in the flower-bedecked beauty of Table Mountain, and its glimpses of the sea ; in the sylvan glories of the Knysna ; the melancholy grandeur of the Matoppos, the unapproachable splendour of Victoria Falls, the haunting mystery and wonder of the Zimbabwe Ruins.

Leaning over her tea-table at Pretoria, a charming lady questioned, "Are you really writing about us, after so short a while?" Between mouthfuls of delectable bread and butter, I confessed I was. It seemed to shock her greatly—what temerity!—after one year. I admit it. A year is short measure for a volume—*currente calamo*—on the endless variety of South Africa. I have no hope of having done justice to my subject. I must content myself with having rendered homage to its infinite charm.

If I have given here the semblance of the things seen and felt and heard in the way of travel, then my efforts are not wholly vain. To set down what one has seen.

is not, according to Ruskin, the meanest work in the world.

I should apologize for the solemn note that pervades some chapters of this book. And yet in dealing with such questions as "Boer and Briton" and "Black and White," it is worse than foolish to take a flippant view. The negro has long outlived the "blasted nigger" stage. If he has not yet reached the dignity of "a gentleman of colour," he is, at least, a man insistent, if you only knew it, upon his rights. Imagination must lend us eyes to see the movement of his lips, and ears to hear the fluttered beating of his heart. I have tried to tell what he feels about his own progress and situation *vis-à-vis* to ourselves. He has both reason and unreason in his grievance. He does not appreciate how much the whites have paid for their progress, for their privilege of being "superior." He reckons not the centuries spent in harsh and grinding effort to raise the worker of our race to his present "place in the sun." The black inhabitant of South Africa would seize at once the heritage of those who have gained it by their incessant struggles and unbending wills. The negro has not struggled; his "character" is weak. And he does not know it. That is the tragi-comedy of his case, yet he has sensibility and a capacity to rise that few suspect, perhaps. The distance between him and his masters is lessening daily. They must bend and take him by the hand. The fact that Prince Arthur of Connaught has shown consideration to the native means much to him who has received it.

But I would not have you suppose that all is bright and beautiful, flawlessly perfect, in South Africa. It would be grievously monotonous if it were so. Even goodness needs a few defects to make it human. Like all young communities, South Africa suffers for want of graces of the mind, which enable a man to divine what he cannot see and what he cannot touch with physical

hands. In the sturdy Colonial type, which I find so excellent and durable, is some lack of imagination, of that nice appreciation of the other man's position which is so precious in the mortal called to govern a subject people. Problems in a new country are apt to be too real, daily tasks too imperative, time too short to indulge in day-dreaming and in that sort of inspired reflection which is the seed-bed of the arts. It is not sufficient to have beautiful sunsets to produce a race of poets. You must have leisure to contemplate the scene, the mind to read into it its spiritual beauties, and to grasp its hidden significance. Mere squatting on the veld, with the sunset to keep you company, is not sufficient to inspire a poem; there must be the poetic impulse stirred by daily contact with similarly refined souls. There must be the promptings of a brain warmed and purified, strengthened and ennobled by what is beautiful in nature, in literature and the arts.

South Africans have everything but this one element. They have a spacious and promising country so fruitful that one has only to scratch the soil and Nature responds with a smile. They have a plenitude of labour which, rightly handled and utilized, will lead them to great prosperity. They have magnificent coalfields so easy of access and so productive that the working-costs are far smaller than they are in Britain. They have diamonds; they have gold in such quantities that it supplies the world—and the country with a handsome revenue. They have forests of wattle suitable for tanning, great semi-deserts which can support multitudes of cattle and small stock, and great stretches of veld calling aloud for cultivation, for the enthusiasm and science of the farmer. Added to that is a climate which, with all the drawbacks of sudden waterspouts and extremes of heat and cold, is still conducive to an open, free and healthful existence. Considered fiscally, South Africa is the country of the blest, calling to every

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endeavour with a real prospect of profitable return and, yet, lacking this one thing.

South Africa has peculiar problems calling for the most sensitive analysis, for the greatest subtleties of the psychologist. There is the native problem upon which I insist for many pages in this book; there is the Indian problem obsessing Natal, and there is the ever-green problem of the Dutch and British. Each requires insight, the nicest sense of justice, of good faith between man and man, the loftiest sentiment of duty towards one's fellow-being. And there is need for loving comprehension as well as for that austere armour of the soul which forces a man to offer "the square deal" in every circumstance, even the most adverse or offering easy opportunities for over-reaching. Black and brown South Africa want the square deal—just as they, on their part, must understand the white man's difficulties. Water is needed, men and money are needed, wisdom is needed, and there is much of it in the policy of the Prime Minister. But, above all, is needed that divine understanding of peoples, that vivifying touch that puts nation into line with nation, and forbids injustice in the name of the injunction: "Love thy neighbour as thyself."