PART XII

PEACE MAKING

11 NOVEMBER 1918–29 AUGUST 1919
PEACE MAKING

This period of Smuts’s life is far more closely documented than any other because, while he was in Paris at the Peace Conference, he wrote almost every day, and sometimes twice a day, either to Margaret and Arthur Gillett or to Alice Clark, and as many letters to his wife as the irregular mails to South Africa would allow. He wrote so much because, in watching and taking part in the making of the Treaty of Versailles, he passed through an acute crisis of conscience and faith in which the whole value of his work during the war and his hopes for the future of Europe were involved, and he needed the advice and support of those who best understood him. Thus his papers contain a remarkable record of a crucial event in the history of the West, as reflected in the thought and feeling of one man.

There are four clear phases in this record. In the first phase Smuts was full of hope for a good peace, which would justify the terrible destruction of the war and inaugurate a new system of law and order in the society of nations. This note was struck in his speech at a banquet which he gave to a group of American editors shortly after the Armistice (857). By mid-December he had written his blue print of a League of Nations (868) and its reception, especially its effect on President Wilson, pleased him (883, 887). He was particularly pleased by the acceptance of the mandatory system (898). When he had been in Paris for a month he noted ‘a bad spirit about’ (900, 902) but he remained hopeful until the close of March when, after a severe illness in London, he returned to Paris.

In the second phase, from late March to late April, apprehension prevailed over hope. In collaboration with Keynes he worked increasingly on the reparation problem (923, 925, 926, 943). He addressed his first appeal to Lloyd George for magnanimous treatment of Germany (918). He was ready to undertake a mission to Austria and Hungary (928, 929, 932), but suspected that it was a device for getting him out of the way (920). This visit deepened his conviction that an ‘impossible peace’ was being made in Paris, and when his report was shelved, he seems to have lost all hope of a healing peace.

In the third phase, during the first three weeks of May, Smuts was in despair. The terms were then ready to be given to the Germans and he thought them bad and wrong—‘an abomination’. Although fearing that it was too late to do anything, he sent strongly worded and detailed
memoranda to Lloyd George and Wilson (958, 967). They had no effect and his disillusionment was complete.

In the fourth phase Smuts was faced with an agonizing personal decision—should he sign the Treaty or not. The record of that month (20 May to 28 June) is deeply moving. He continued to fight for revision as long as he could (1001, 1008) but without any hope. Two public statements eased, to some extent, his sense of guilt but not his sense of defeat (1043, 1057). By mid-August he was back in South Africa recovering 'my normal balance of mind' in the enjoyment of home and farm and veld. But before the end of the month Botha was dead, leaving Smuts to take up his task.

853  From G. G. A. Murray

Vol. 20, no. 93

102 Banbury Road
Oxford
11 November 1918

Dear Oom Jannie, I cannot help calling you by the name by which you are always spoken of in this house; and I am writing, in this hour of solemn and almost awful emotion, to tell you of the profound gratitude that I and some millions of other Englishmen owe to you. Of course nothing is one man’s work. If we go right now it will in part be the work of old C.B. But you have not only brought us the help of your political genius; you have forgiven your own wrongs and those of your nation, and thereby given us a lesson which I trust we shall not forget.

We and America stand now at such a dizzy height of power that the future of the world depends on whether or no we possess wisdom and generosity as well. You have both and are helping us to have them.

Don’t trouble to answer. Letters of this sort are embarrass- ing! Yours very sincerely,

Gilbert Murray

854  To G. G. A. Murray

Vol. 20, no. 204

Savoy Hotel
London, W.C.2
12 November 1918

My dear Professor Murray, It is so kind of you to write to me as you have done and I cannot thank you enough for your
words of cheer. Ever since you and I had that talk at 102 Banbury Road on my arrival in March 1917, I felt sure that we were fellow-workers in the deeper things that made for the good of the peoples. It has been heavy work and one has often felt depressed at the apparent futility of one’s efforts. But still it moves. The inert mass is visibly heaving and the leaven is working.

The immediate future is very fateful. The old, immobile world is once more fluid, and the creator can once more mould it to better ends. But the danger of things going wrong is as great as ever. What will emerge? I adapt Browning’s line: Europe is lapsing to

‘That sad obscure anarchic state  
Where God unmakes but to remake the world  
He else made first in vain; which must not be.’

Ever yours in good comradeship,

J. C. Smuts

To M. C. Gillett

Vol. 20, no. 255

London

12 November 1918

Yours to hand. I am genuinely sorry that prospects of your coming are not bright and still more because of the cause. But I still hope you will come on Friday night and so accompany me back on Saturday. My coming on Friday is out of the question. I have so much to do, and even of Saturday you could only be certain by actually coming to fetch me! It is nice to think of you and Arthur with me next week. It will do all of us much good. And my time is drawing near.

Wilson has made a very good speech and anticipated much that I wanted to say at the Banquet where I entertain a number of American editors tomorrow night. However, I shall have my say in my own way, however poor it is.

I had such a nice little note from Gilbert Murray of thanks

1 ‘That sad obscure sequestered state  
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul  
He else made first in vain; which must not be.’

The Ring and the Book, bk. x, l. 2128.
PEACE MAKING

and gratitude for all I had done. And I have done so little and always am haunted by the fear that I have done just nothing at all. But God knows my heart is in the great causes.

I hope the children will soon be all right and the danger is that you may soon be down.

856 To S. M. Smuts

Vol. 20, no. 205

Savoy Hotel
London, W.C.2

14 November 1918

Liefste Mamma, Ik zond dezen brief per Professor Alfred Clark, een neef van Margaret, die naar de Kaapstad Universiteit gaat. Ik geloof niet dat er een mail gaat daar het een Japaneesche schip is. Maar ik wil graag aan jou schrijven daar deze de eerste gelegenheid is sedert den vrede—want de wapensstilstand is zeker vrede. De vrede is zeer schielijk gekomen, meer plotseling dan iemand verwacht had. En daarop is de revolutie in Duitschland gevolgd en niemand weet werkelijk wat er aan gebeuren is. En het zal niet met Duitschland eindigen. De wereld is gaande; Holland vernemen wij is ook rijk voor revolutie. Overal heeft de Honger haar werk gedaan. Ik spreek van avond een banket van Amerikaners toe en zal nadruk leggen op den deerniswaardigen toestand van de oude wereld als een gevolg van deze vreeselijke oorlog. Met al ons gejuich slaken wij menige zucht der bezorgdheid. Maar al is er geen vrede in de breede zin, goddank de oorlog ten minste is voorbij. Wij maken nu klaar voor de Vredesconferentie. Ik ben druk bezig met onze geheele zaak voor de Conferentie in order te maken, ik ben met dit werk door het Cabinet belast. Dan neem ik ook een leidend aandeel in al het demobilisatie werk, dus kan jij zien dat mijn handen vol zijn. Generaal Botha zal voor Kerstmis hier zijn om de Conferentie bij te wonen, en misschien is het mogelijk voor mij een tijdje na zijne aankomst onze Zuid-Afrikaansche zaak in zijne handen te laten en voor mij dan om terug te keeren zodat ik met de volgende parlements zitting aan de Kaap kan zijn. Zal het niet heerlijk zijn indien ik terug kan en wij zalig met mekaar kunnen zijn! Ik zal 3 jare afwezig geweest zijn, Januari 1916–19, en wat heb ik niet in al die tijd gedaan! Maar er zal nog niet
rust zijn. De wereld is vol moeilijkheid en Zuid-Afrika heeft altijd haar deel van alle kwaad, en ik zal misschien voor een tijdje nog noodig zijn. Maar zoo spoedig de halter mij van de nek gehaald wordt, zegge met de aanstaande electie!, zal ik een heerlijk rustje gaan genieten op onze plaatsen en zullen wij opmaken voor al deze langdurige afwezigheid. Nyssie is er behouden uitgekomen hoewel hij zeer erg onder de gas is geweest. Frank Theron is ook all right. Maar omtrent 12,000 Zuid-Afrikaners zijn gesneuveld, dus tweemaal zooveel als onze totale Boeren verliezen in onze oorlog. De oorlog heeft tusschen 15 en 20 miljoen levens gekost.

Indien Andries longifolias kan krijgen bij de Nursery hoop ik dat hij een goed getal deze zomer op de koppies zal planten. Ik verlang baing om die ou plaats te zien. Zend mij s.v.p. jou twee beste schilderijen van Transvaal landschappen (zonder raam). Een is voor Margaret Gillett en een voor Alice Clark. Met duizend zoentjes,

Pappa

TRANSLATION

Savoy Hotel
London, W.C.2
14 November 1918

Dearest Mamma, I send this letter by Professor Alfred Clark, a cousin of Margaret’s, who is going to the University of Cape Town. I do not think a mail is going as it is a Japanese ship. But I want very much to write to you as this is the first opportunity since the peace—for the armistice is probably peace. The peace has come very suddenly, more suddenly than anyone expected. And the revolution in Germany has followed it and no one really knows what is happening. And it will not end with Germany. The world is astir; we hear that Holland, too, is ripe for revolution. Hunger has done its work everywhere. I am speaking at a banquet for Americans this evening and shall emphasize the pitiable condition of the old world as a result of this terrible war. With all our rejoicing we heave many a sigh of anxiety. But, even if there is no peace in the broad sense, thank God the war at least is over. Now we are preparing for the Peace Conference. I am very busy putting our whole case in order for the Conference; I have
been charged with this work by the Cabinet. I am also taking a leading share in all the demobilization work, so you can see that my hands are full. General Botha will be here before Christmas to attend the Conference, and perhaps it will be possible for me to leave our South African case in his hands shortly after his arrival, and for me to return, so that I can be at the Cape for the next parliamentary Session. Won’t it be lovely if I am back and we can be blessedly together? I shall have been away for three years—January 1916–19, and what have I not done in that time! But there will be no rest yet. The world is full of trouble and South Africa always has her share of all evil, and I shall perhaps be needed for a little while yet. But as soon as the halter is taken off my neck, say at the next election!, I shall go and enjoy a lovely little rest on our farms and we shall make up for all this long absence.

Nyssie has come safely out of it although he has been badly gassed. Frank Theron is also all right. But about 12,000 South Africans have been killed, twice as many as our total Boer losses in our war. The war has cost between fifteen and twenty million lives.

If Andries can get longifolias at the Nursery, I hope he will plant a good number on the kopjes this summer. I long very much to see the old farm. Please send me your two best paintings of Transvaal landscapes (unframed). One is for Margaret Gillett and one for Alice Clark. With a thousand kisses,

Pappa

857 Speech (1918) Box H, no. 27

Smuts’s speech at a banquet on 14 November 1918 at which he entertained a number of American newspaper editors.

It is a great pleasure and privilege to me to welcome our American guests to this festive table tonight. Their presence in Europe, their presence with us here tonight symbolizes what to my mind is the greatest, most fruitful fact of this great world crisis: the coming together of Europe and America. The old Europe, the old world is dead; what was left of it by the French Revolution has been or will be swept away in this greatest of all revolutions through which we have been, and
are still, passing. A new world is slowly emerging and in the building up of that world the co-operation of America is essential. As the coming in of America has been the great turning point of this war, so the collaboration of America in the future peaceful order will be a factor of the greatest significance. It is for the good both of America and the old world that she should henceforth take an active share in the councils of Europe, that she should henceforth bear her fair share in the great burden of world politics, and that she should become jointly responsible with Europe for the new order which will arise from the ruins and demolitions of this war. We citizens and members of the British Empire specially welcome your great and auspicious entry into world politics because we know that you are not only with us but of us; that America and the British Empire are bound together by a common inheritance of great peaceful ideals, and by the same principles of political freedom and the same regard for the sacred rights of the human personality; and that our close co-operation henceforth will form the best guarantee for the future peaceful development of civilization. In saying these words I am not conveying mere empty compliments, but I am speaking from the bottom of my heart and from sincere intellectual conviction, and I am sure the vast majority of the people of this great British Commonwealth of Nations profoundly share and re-echo my feelings and convictions.

Let me congratulate you on your good fortune in being in this country on this supreme occasion. I am glad that I have been privileged to be in this country at the coming of peace and to see the temper and behaviour of this great people at such a time. Remember that this people has borne unexampled burdens for nearly four and a half years. They have striven and fought and laboured in a war effort which has no parallel in history. They have suffered in body and soul. The iron has gone into their soul. And today you see them rejoicing in the same great spirit in which they have laboured and suffered. Not a tinge of bitterness or vindictiveness mars their rejoicings. In this solemn hour of joy and gratitude all the bitterness of the past has died out of their hearts. No hymns of hate, no trampling on a prostrate foe. It is not merely their sportsmanlike spirit, which has seen them through the darkest hours of this war,
but it is more especially that depth and breadth and sanity of human nature which shines through their history as it shines through the plays of Shakespeare. I have had my little differences with the British people as you have had yours; but let us freely and frankly admit that they are a great people, and that their sanity and freedom from petty vindictiveness are not the least of their great qualities.

What an awful doom has come over Germany! The terribleness and fearfulness of her tragedy is enough to purge our souls of all petty and selfish feelings. What a price she has paid for her ambitions and her crimes! World power or downfall; it has indeed been downfall, but what a fall was there! It is the most awful lesson of history. May its warning beacon-light blaze into the most distant future of the world. This is what we have fought for—that the fate of Prussian militarism might be the most awful and solemn judgment of history. And now that that task is done, let our thoughts turn away from destruction and punishment to the great creative tasks ahead of us.

It all depends on the spirit in which we approach the great work ahead of us. The English people and their partners in the British Empire entered into this war in a spirit of exalted moral idealism. To defend the small and weak, to champion the public law of Europe, to establish freedom; such were the avowed objects with which we went to war in August 1914. And when the great American Republic joined us in the struggle, it was not only with material weapons but with all that moral reinforcement which came from the splendid vision and moral enthusiasm of President Wilson speaking on behalf of the people of the United States.¹ His was the great vision of a League of Nations and of world organization against reaction and militarism in future. The world had to be made safe for democracy in a great organization which would be strong enough to guarantee the future peace and freedom of the world. It is this moral idealism and this vision of a better world which has up-borne us through the dark night of this war. Through all its ups and downs, its awful setbacks, its harrowing alternations of hope and fear, we drew strength and

¹ In his War Address to Congress on 2 April 1917.
courage from the cause for which we were fighting and the
great hope for the future. And now that the victory has been
won, it is alike our duty and our interest to remain faithful to
that cause and that hope; to see that our victory does not merely end with the downfall of Prussian militarism, but that
the organization be established which will secure us against a
reocurrence of such disasters in future. We entered this struggle
and persevered to the end because we were profoundly con-
vinced that the fate of Europe and the future of the world
were at stake, and the same conviction brought America into
the war in spite of her Monroe doctrine, and the most cherished
historical traditions. And for the present and the future, just as
much as in the past, our main concern and preoccupation must
be the saving of Europe for the future of the world.

Her position and condition today is tragic in the extreme.
The exhaustion and suffering of the war have reduced her to
a state which cannot but cause the gravest concern to all
thoughtful people. I fear Germany has bulked too largely with
us. Do not let us fix our gaze too exclusively on Germany at
the present time. The dimensions of this great tragedy go far
beyond Germany. In this solemn hour let us think rather of
Europe, of broken and bleeding Europe, the mother of our
common civilization. The organism of civilization can only
bear a certain strain, and I sometimes fear the strain which has
been put on it by this war has brought it perilously near the
snapping point. The loss in life and property, the mental and
physical agony, the accumulated effect of years of underfeeding
or downright hunger—all these and more have combined to
produce a state of affairs closely bordering on the dissolution
of corporate state organization. The indescribable conditions
of Russia are rapidly spreading to Austria; in Germany, too,
the danger signals are up, while in some of the small neutral
neighbouring states the situation is causing grave concern. It
is not merely that thrones and empires are falling and ancient
institutions suddenly collapsing. A whole world order is
visibly passing away before our eyes. And the danger is that
things may go too far and a setback be given to Europe from
which she does not recover for generations. The evils bred by
hunger threaten not merely old institutions but civilization as
such. In this hour of victory which was given us for great