THE STORY OF RYK TULBAGH

III

Country life had been slowly developing. The Company's restrictions upon private trading and independent investment had, as we have seen, caused the burghers to resist the idea of adding to their numbers by immigration. They wanted no more competition in the market they had, and there was no opening for European labour on the farms. Slaves repaid their purchase price in the long run, and in security of labour, or slavery would not have flourished, and its abolition have been so bitterly resented not only at the Cape, but elsewhere in the world. Hottentots, by this time largely detribalised, were good stockmen, and cost no more to employ than their food, and a beast or two a year to add to their own little flocks and herds.

There was no hope of better things from the Company with its fortunes already on the down grade, and destined to be extinguished before the end of the century. Country men and women varied, of course, among themselves. The least successful who were still leading a stable existance did so as *bywoners* (squatters) on another man's property, paying rental in kind. The irresponsible lived as nomads in their waggons and temporary shelters, in time to develop into an inbred community described as "Poor Whites", mentally deficient and tubercular, a national dead loss. There were also the licensed hunters, men who owned a *pied á terre*, but spent most of their time ranging abroad, working under the game laws, which they were apt to evade, judging by continually renewed proclamations, which warned them of game protected and bags limited. They brought in elephant tusks, skins for the long waggon whips and the rhinoceros sjamboks, and the softer pelts for certain clothing and for veldschoens, doubtless, if we are to believe Mentzel, originally copied from a German model. They also brought back food for the pot. Licence to hunt was not exclusively the privilege of men who devoted most of their time to it.

The majority of farmers were leading the humdrum lives of the ordinary run of farmers everywhere, the more industrious and intelligent gradually emerging from the rut, able to afford slaves, and to attain security and comfort. At the top were outstanding men, founding families whose names were to become household words, and their homesteads architecturally historic. The burgher uprising early in the century against grants of farm-land to senior Company's servants did the farmer of the time no appreciable good, but it cleared the air. By the time we reach the day of Mentzel's comments we hear: "Many an African Boer would think twice about changing places with a German nobleman." (We cannot always take Mentzel *au pied de la lettre*, though extremely entertaining.)

Though prosperous freehold farms had increased, especially in the hands of viticulturalists and the produce of grains, the system of land tenure established by the Commissioner Baron van Imhoff had also

borne fruit, and by far the greatest number of farms were held under his tenure of 'Loan Freehold'. It had stimulated the occupants to make the most of their property for themselves and their heirs.

More than one visitor to the Cape in Tulbagh's time records his calling upon Martin Melck, whom we may take as an example of the most prosperous type of farmer. He was the owner of the old property *Elsenburg*, Stellenbosch district, originally granted to Willem Adriaan van der Stel's Secunde, Samuel Elsevier, who built the house. Melck came into the property by marrying the well-to-do widow of the previous owner, Johann Giebeler, whose knegt he had been for two years before he was granted his paper as a free burgher in 1750 — not an unusual event in the history of knegts, who not seldom seized the opportunity to court widows and daughters who founded their fortunes.

Melck enlarged the farm-house, and provided it with the gable which bears the date 1761. He was a sound en very able man who progressed rapidly. He became a lessee of Cape vine, and in 1760 bought the farm *Paarde Vlei* in Hottentots Holland as an additional property to *Elsenburg*. In July 1764 the Governor-in-Council at his request granted him a plot of land in Cape Town, upon which to build a warehouse for storing his wine. It was in the area set apart for private property on the other side of the burgher graveyard. Melck's property lay in what is now Strand Street. He became a burgher councillor, and a whole village" friend of the Governor. Captain Stavorinus visited him at Elsenburg in 1774 and describes the place for us: "It looked like a whole village" — barns, brick-kiln, workshops, smithy, manned by skilled slave mechanics with no more than one knegt in charge. Stavorinus and he talked about trade, and he confided to Stavorinus that in one year alone he held the wine licence, and the French fleet came to anchor, he made 100 000 (Cape) gilders. (Approximately R20 000).

Melck left a lasting memorial to himself in the Lutheran church and parsonage in Strand Street. (Now national monuments.) He was of German extraction and a Lutheran. There were many of his race and creed among the burghers and in the garrison, and over the years they had petitioned the Seventeen more than once for permission to build their own church. This was granted in 1780, and Melck gave his warehouse to be converted into a church, and also built the parsonage for the Lutheran parson appointed in December 1780.

What had done much for the country burgher was the increasing responsibility which had fallen upon him. Simon van de Stel's establishing the burgher office of Field-Cornet gave the man in each district the first position under the Company's Landdrost (Magistrate). Members of the Burgher Council (Heemraad) were a distinguished number of men. There was indeed no end to the service which such men could render to their district. Again, the Burgher Militia was indispenable, its officers carefully selected to serve their own districts, and man and boy from sixteen to sixty, not only controlling in their own districts Hottentot and Bushman disorders, but bound to supplement the Cape Garrison in times

of danger from the outside world. The latter duty fell heavily upon them. The service was unpaid. Militiamen had to provide their own uniforms, arms and ammunition, and horses in the cavalry. Among Tulbagh's proclamations of 1759 we find the elaborate list of signal stations formed through the years to summon the country militia to the Castle. The first alarm went off from the Castle with twelve cannon-shot, then cannon and the hoisting of the flag of the Prince of Orange from the farm Platte Kloof on the Tygerberg, then from a farm on the slopes of Devil's Peak, from the Simon's Berg, and so on into the country northward and north westward, and eastward to Hottentots Holland and over the kloof . . . Cannon roared, and the smoke of signal fires from post to post rose high in the air. Every man was held responsible for making sure that his neighbours as well as himself were aware of the signal. Countrymen rode in from all these long distances, leaving behind their farms and families in the hands of old men and the slaves. Graham Botha tells us that it was not unknown for a man to return home to find his house in ashes, and his family murdered.

Militiamen also had to ride to the Cape twice a year for three days in April and in October to take part in the general muster and military exercises. In October 1752 Militia officers requested that the Militia should be relieved of the second muster, and that only one should take place. The Governor referred this request to the Seventeen, and in March 1753 he was able to proclaim their consent to a yearly muster for six days in October. The proclamation in its course declared that "the exercise of arms is one of the most important concerns to maintain for the welfare of the country."

Tulbagh, like other men in office before him, drummed into the burghers their duty to the Motherland, and the penalties for shirking militia duty were heavy. After the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in December 1751, which rounded off the War of the Austrian Succession 1740-1748, the burghers were not even released from paying the war-tax levied to meet the Netherlands' national debt. During the Seven Years War, when there was danger that French or English warships might attack the Cape, the militiamen were ordered "to sacrifice life and property in the service of the Company". They were even ordered to bring to the Castle with them on service there any of their slaves and Hottentot farms servants "who could handle a gun", although there had been a statute for generations that slaves might not be armed.

We cannot leave the countrymen without recording the influence of his church. *Nachtmaal*, the Calvinist Holy Communion, was the great meeting-place, where relatives and friends came together, from all over the countryside, every quarter when it was held. Some of them were too far away to come even every three months. When they came they brought produce for the market, and presents for the minister. The square outside the church became en encampment for the waggons. There would be babies and older children to be baptised, and teenagers preparing for Confirmation if they could read and write. That would

depend upon whether one or both parents could do so, or whether on their own farm or a neighbour's not too far away a 'tutor' kept school, a knegt, sometimes hardly literate himself, hired from the garrison. However, he could manage a primary class. In the villages blessed with a church the *voorleser* (parish clerk) kept school. Every farm with a literate master followed the rule of family prayers, and the minister paid his round of calls upon farms within reasonable distance.

Another occasion which brought people together was the annual *opgaaf*, when the cencus was taken, and for the purpose of taxation, every farmer required to make returns on oath of his extent of property, number of livestock, of the grain he had sown and had harvested, and of other produce. On grain he paid a tithe or one tenth. (Later on, this tithe was paid only upon grain which passed through the barrier on delivery at the Cape.) The Landdrost was empowered to increase the figure of a man's returns if he was not satisfied that his returns were honest. (An item on the list of burghers' grievances!)

It was the Field Cornet's duty to enumerate the people, and to report to the Landdrost. He was also engaged to guard against inaccurate returns, illegal sale of produce, and barter with the Hottentots. Included in the census was the number of knegts a man employed, his slaves and his Hottentot labourers.

The burgher councillors of each district were also very much on duty at this time.

Chapter IV

Three times during Tulbagh's term of office calamity struck the colony: drought, and two epidemics of smallpox. Smallpox struck first from June to October 1755. Not since 1713 had smallpox made its appearance. In the official journal of May 1713 we find the record: "The Hottentots almost exterminated by the smallpox." It was not quite as bad as that, but they suffered very heavily. Slaves and Europeans in proportion to their numbers were also disastrously attacked. Infection had been brought ashore with infected laundry form a ship. Again in June 1755 this was the source of infection, brought ashore from Ceylon in one of the Company's homeward-bound ships. Tulbagh acted promptly with a proclamation ordering measures controlling infection. The dead were to be buried at one, and in the place where they died, and without removing the clothing in which they died. Houses, whether or not containing a patient, were to be kept scrupulously clean and well-aired.

A temporary hospital was set up in a house to which on payment of 16 stuivers a day, (about the equivalent in cents), burghers could send infected slaves. However, nearly five hundred European lives were lost in the colony, and rather more slaves and free blacks.

On March 11th, Tulbagh was able to proclaim a day of thanksgiving for the passing of infection. (The census figures for 1754 of colonists, old and young, were approximately 5 510, and in 1756 only 5 123). In 1755 a new graveyard for the burghers was opened below the Lions Rump, (now Somerset Road). The second epidemic, infection brought

ashore with dirty linen from a Danish ship in May 1767, raged for six months, and lingered here and there until April 1769. The death-rate was less: 179 Europeans, 145 free blacks, and 251 slaves. Only one man resorted to inoculation (as distinct from vaccination, over seventy years away). It is interesting to hear by proclamation that the burgher surgeon Honoratus Maijnier was appointed to the supervision of infected people, and that every case had to be notified.

The years of drought were 1755, 1756, 1763, 1764 and 1771. Farmers and their families did not die of hunger. They ate their starved beasts, and with the little water they had managed to grow enough round their homesteads to help with meals. What compensated the situation in the long run were the good years, and the visits of the French and English fleets, when they outbid one another for what they wanted. We remember, too, the circumnavigators who dropped anchor in the 'sixties. In 1767 Lord Clive homeward-bound from India anchored from 22nd April until 4th May. We remember he called outward-bound two years before. This time he did not accept Government hospitality, but stayed with Pieter Johannes de Witt in Zee (Strand) Street, an old burgher councillor, doubtless son of Jacobus de Witt whose widow boarded the astronomer Caillé. (Pieter was the first man to export aloes from the Cape. They were used as a drug which he prepared on his farm. Its export came to be forbidden.)

In 1766 Tulbagh fell ill, and in health was never the same man again. He was, however, able to carry on. In 1755 he had been raised to the rank of Councillar Extraordinary of Netherlands India, which, of ranks serving abroad, left only two men senior to him. At the end of this year, Joachim van Plettenberg arrived at the Cape, transferred from the High Court at Batavia, to take office as Fiscal. He was destined to become Secunde in 1770, and to succeed Tulbagh as Governor in the following year.

With foreign ships in the bay, proclamations as usual poured out, warning farmers not to smuggle things into them. Not enough stuff was brought to the Castle, and there was danger of there not being enough produce to supply the Dutch East India fleets when they arrived. Nor were farmers to break the rules controlling their export of grain and wine. (Export of these commodities by Tulbagh's time had become an important matter). Farmers were forbidden to supply foreign ships with flour and biscuits. Only the licensed baker might supply daily bread. Salt meat and fresh meat would be bought by the Company from the man or men who bid the lowest price for the Company to pay, and no one might sell to the ships direct. There was an old complaint about the burghers' use of the Company's mill.

In July 1767, after some concern over a long period about the temperamental qualities of oriental slaves, apt to "run amok" if disturbed, becoming dangerously violent, their introduction to the Cape was at last prohibited. They had come to be known collectively as Malays, because the majority of them came from the Malat Peninsula and that area of

the Pacific. Some of them had arrived at the hands of ships' officers and privately sold. They were a superior class of slave, many of them skilled mechanics.

As we have seen, Asiatics at the Cape were not all of slave origin. The Company used the Cape as a place of banishment for political as well as for criminal exiles from the East. The most famous political exile was the Mohammedan Sheik Joseph (Yussuf), a relative of the King of Goa, a renowned and beloved priest, but a distrubing element in the Company's affairs. For a time he was kept in captivity in Ceylon, and then, in 1794, was packed off with his family and returned to the Cape, with instructions to Simon van der Stel that he was to be treated as a State prisoner. The property of Zandvliet in the Stellenbosch district was placed at his disosal and he was free to exercise his influence among his co-religionists. Mohammedans became a respected and creative congregation, residentially exclusive by Tulbagh's time in the little lanes above the town, which in our own time has found architectural fame as the 'Malay Quarter'. Their whole story has been delightfully told and illustrated in I. D. du Plessis' book *The Cape Malays.*

In 1769 Tulbagh in Council passed a resolution which was to benefit responsible burghers, and he hoped it would prove a deterrant to nomad burghers, deserters from the garrison and runaway slaves. The landdrosts of Stellenbosch and Swellendam were bidden to organise an expedition to examine what was going on at the eastern extremities of their districts, and to define officially the boundary between the districts of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein. They were to be accompanied by representative burgher councillors from each district. The Governor-in-Council met to consider their report on the 13th February 1770. In the result the Swartbergen remained the northern boundary of the Swellendam district, and the south-eastern boundary of the overlarge district of Stellenbosch, not to be modified until the formation of the Graaff-Reinet district in 1785. The report described the track into Kaffirland from Swellendam (which Beutler had reported in 1752), and expressed the conviction that widespread illicit barter was taking place with the Kosa Africans over the Great Fish River. Burghers were grazing large herds of stock between the Gamtoos and Fish rivers without permission to do so, and paying no rent. In both districts there were farmers who were paying rent for a certain amount of land, but who were wandering about pasturing their cattle elsewhere as well.

The Council's deliberations were proclaimed in April 1770, which defined the Gamtoos River as the eastern boundary. Landdrost and postholders were to be vigilant in running offenders to earth. Swellengrebel's proclamation of December 1739 on this same matter was recalled, when men convicted of bartering with Kaffirs and Hottentots were threatened not only with the confiscation of their goods and cattle, but with thrashing, even with death. This reminded every burgher that the edict of 1739 still held good.

All to no purpose. There was always to be one more river to cross.

In the following year, Tulbagh himself granted to an elephant-hunter, Willem Prinsloo, a farm in the Bruintjes Hoogte foothills, and presently land to others in the Camdeboo country below the Sneeuwbergen, watered by the upper reaches and tributaries of the SundaysRiver. Little more than a year later, Prinsloo was reported to be out of bounds, with the result that under the aegis of Tulbagh's successor, the Fish River became the new boundary.

In December 1769, we have a break from disorders and threats in the benevolent proclamation announcing directions for the restoration of the drowned, in which pipe-smoke makes an unconvincing appearance, but mouth to mouth breathing one more familiar. But Tulbagh's parting reminders in February and June 1771 recalled the proclamation of September 1742, ordering people to bury dead animals — horses, oxen, and other beasts that died by the wayside, and were left there to rot. June 1771 turned again upon the old offence of dirty streets and byways of the town. The proclamation announced that Lieutenant and engineer Carel David Wentzel had been appointed as supervisor and surveyor, to take in hand the improvement of roadways, and that burghers would henceforth pay for the cleansing and upkeep of the road frontage of their properties.

A more serious anxiety during 1770-1771, and its remedy borne by country militia, were murderous attacks of Busman cattle-lifters. It took place in the Karroo, south of the Nieuwveld range, and north of this range and south of the Sneeuwbergen. Bushmen murdered no less than six knegts on the farms. In each year commandoes went out and took vengeance upon them, which for a while kept them at a distance.

The census of the whole colony, despatched in March 1771 to the Company's Directorate, numbered: 2 136 European men, 1 517 women, 2 256 sons, 2 179 daughters, 89 knegts. Slaves: 5 660 men, 1 569 women, 510 boys, 481 girls.

Valé

The proclamation of June 1771 was issued from Tulbagh's bedside. His health had failed him completely during the last week of May. When in March, he entertained a French visitor, St. Pierre Bernadin — the future man of letters, his best-seller *Paul et Virginie* — homeward-bound from office in Mauritius — he recorded that the Governor "gives no public entertainment". In the same month Tulbagh was able to offer James Cook some hospitality when he lay anchor 15 March — 14 April.

For nearly three months he lay dying. He was released from suffering August 13th in his 73rd year. His funeral was postponed until the 17th in order to give country people time to reach the Cape and attend it, for everybody mourned him. No Commander or Governor in the Dutch East India Company's service at the Cape had been so loved as he was. As a widower and childless, worldly goods meant little to him personally, even if his sense of honour had not preserved him from dubious practices common to Company's servants in all its stations,

which, indeed, contrbuted to its financial disaster. His private generosity had, as a matter of course, kept his widowed mother until she died in 1757, and had provided his brother (and heir), an officer in the Netherlands army, with the private income which a commission at the period in any European army necessitated.

Two men who knew him personally, the tutor O. F. Mentzel from 1735-1741, and Johan Splinter Stavorinus, whose last glimpse of him was in January 1771 when, promoted to Commodore, he brought the Company's return fleet to anchor, wrote for us his epitaph — Mentzel in his biography of his employer Lieutenant and later Captain of the garrison, Rudolf Alleman, published in 1784, and Stavorinus in the last volume of his voyages 1798. He wrote: ". . . the father of this country, the worthy promoter of the welfare of this African colony, the governor Tulbagh, who, by a residence of upwards of fifty years in the spot, was fully acquainted with the true interests of the colonists, and the nature of the country; and who attached every heart to him by his mild administration, and his paternal attention to the welfare of all: although death has for many years deprived the colony and the Company of the benefit of his services, he still lives in the grateful memory of the inhabitants; and the remembrance of his truly paternal administration will never be extinguished among them, and never will they forget the thousand times blessed name of TULBAGH."

And Mentzel: "He was upright and modest; indeed if one were seeking for a pattern for honour, one could not do better than take him as one's model."

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