THE STORY OF SIMON VAN DER STEL

Chapter VI

With all this on his mind Van der Stel was as much occupied with the daily round, reconciling as far as possible the interests of the burgers with the claims of the Company.

Proclamations reminded the farmers not to work colts under three years old. Not to make wine of unripe grapes. Not to shoot game without a licence, let alone sneak out over the border at night to do so. Not to barter with the Hottentots. Not to sell slaughter cattle without a permit — not even to one another. Not, anywhere, to barter with the Hottentots for ostrich feathers and ivory, for the Hottentots brought these things to their farms. Not to import tobacco privately, but to get it from the Company's warehouse, and to sell it only with a licence and at the Company's price. Farmers who had held land in the platteland for as long as four years were reminded to plant one hundred trees on their own properties and along the Company's roads.

Licensed bakers were warned not to sell under weight bread, and farmers not to bake more bread than their own families needed. Nor were they allowed to store in their barns more corn than the family needed for a month. (All this so that the Company got the uttermost grain for the fleets.) Innkeepers were warned not to sell drinks during the time of the church service, and not to allow card games and gambling on Sundays. On no day in the week were soldiers and sailors to be entertained in private houses after sundown. Anyone who robbed the Company's garden could look forward to prison in chains for two years.

Most of these proclamations were an old story. As long as the Company controlled the trade of the place Van der Stel was bound to insist upon such rules as the above, but he was free to provide relief which gave pleasure, and more importance to the burgers if it did not rob the Company's pocket. In the town at the Cape he improved the market-place, setting up better buildings which, indeed, the freemen helped to pay for. The Council still fixed the prices of this retail trading. No Government servants were permitted to trade there. Market-day was Saturday.

In 1688 he established a yearly "kermis" much as he had done at Stellenbosch. It lasted from 1 to 14 November. A burger militia parade of infantry and cavalry took place, when they performed up-to-date drill, which had been arranged in Council to meet the dangers of the time, and, of course, competitions in marksmanship.

On Christmas Day he arranged a treat for the schoolchildren, including the slave schoolchildren. They showed off their learning in reading and writing and arithmetic. For prizes the children of the burgers and Company's servants were given a little money, and the slave children *koekies*.

For the boys aged from 9-13 he established a Boys' Brigade. Every Saturday afternoon, like the Cubs and Scouts of today, the boys met to drill under a drillmaster, as he was called. At New Year they paraded and marched under their own flag. It was all preparation, of course, for when, at 16, they joined the Burger Militia. The Cubs and Scouts of today have more fun than these boys did, but in the same way a young man who has been a Scout, and has become old enough for his National Service training, discovers how the discipline and self-control he needed in Scouting helps him to understand what is wanted of him in National Service.

Van der Stel's best known contribution to law and order was the establishment of a force known as veldwagters — Field-cornets. This force was manned by the burgers, and as the years went by became so notable a part of the South African scene. The men were appointed to serve under the landdrost of every district in which the veldwagter himself lived, so that he knew the country and the people. It was an honour to be elected. It was a sign that the man already was well-known and trusted. He received no salary, but was exempt from taxation.

The veldwagters' duties were heavy. They acted as police, and were required to arrest criminals and to report irregularities. They acted as surveyors, measuring grants of land, and seeing that no man trespassed upon another man's land. Every year the count of population was taken to send to the Directors of the Company. The veldwagters in the country did the counting and presented the record to their landdrosts. It was then that they made sure that every boy who had reached his sixteenth birthday joined the burger militia. They were now men, and had the right to a grant of land.

It was no wonder that, as the Cape colony grew and continually expanded its borders, the veldwagters became a very important body of men.

To two other matters Van der Stel gave his special attention. These were the cleanliness of the town, and the ever-present danger of fire. He reproclaimed neglected regulations, and provided against neglect in future. He would not have muck thrown from the houses into the streets. He would not allow waggons to park in the streets, blocking the way and leaving dirt behind them. Waggon drivers were also warned not to polute the source of the water-supply from the foot of Table Mountain to the Castle. All sluits and water-courses at the Cape and in the country villages were to be kept clean. He built a new slaughter-house for stock brought in for the Company, where supervision and cleanliness were the order of the day. A Resolution in Council appointed the superintendent of the Company's garden, Heinrich Oldenland, as street inspector with a salary for this additional work of 100 guilders a year, of which the burgers were to pay 66 guilders and the Company 34.

His proclamations dealing with fire were very thorough. He ordered that the thorn hedges which surrounded people's property were to be

destroyed. The houses themselves, about a hundred of them at this time round the Castle, were mostly built of wattle and daub, with reed-thatched roofs, the eaves of which were hardly man-high from the ground. We can imagine a fire raging through the hedges and leaping onto the thatched roofs in no time at all. He ordered that the walls of houses should be built of stone twenty feet high from the ground, and the thatched roofs lined with clay. Attics were not to be used to store fuel, nor were great piles of it to be heaped up near the hearths. Chimneys were to be swept twice a year. (An English parson, the Rev. John Ovington, visiting the Cape in 1693, described the houses as "strong and neatly built with stone walls and pretty apartments".) Indeed, senior Company's servants and the more prosperous burgers had begun building their homes above the Company's garden, an area to become fashionably populous later on.

Another precaution which Van der Stel reproclaimed was to forbid people to set fire to the veld, or to the slopes of the mountain, without a permit, because too often the fire was allowed to get out of control, not only destroying bush and timber, but also dwellings.

He did not leave precautions against fire just in proclaiming rules. He established what was called a Rattle Watch — three burger night-watchmen who patrolled the streets of the town every half hour after 6 p.m. At every corner the watchman rattled his rattle. Burgers paid a monthly tax of what is now 12 cents towards the upkeep of the Watch. The Company's hospital was patrolled at night after 9 o'clock by eight soldiers. Slaves, soldiers and sailors had to be off the streets when the curfew rang at that hour.

Another convenience, the lengthening and equipment of the jetty, earned for him the thanks of all the crews that called at the Cape. The Rev. John Ovington describes it for us. The ship in which he was a passenger anchored in the Bay in company with ten of the Company's return ships. Six ships, he tells us, had already sailed for home, and there were still three or four more to catch up from the East. That made about twenty ships in all, a not unusual number. "The watering of the ships," he wrote, "is contrived with such convenience that it is scarce equalled anywhere in the world." What Van der Stel had done was to conduct stream-water from the foot of Table Mountain in leaden pipes to forty feet beyond the water's edge, and raised so high above the level of the water that the ships' long-boats could row underneath the pipes, and the sailors could easily fill their casks.

Mr. Ovington was full of admiration for Van der Stel. "A very kind and knowing person," he wrote of him, "who laboured much in improvements for the inhabitants and sailors, and to make the place valuable to the Company." He described the Company's garden as being "beautiful and pleasant as the garden of a Prince, and kept so neat that there was hardly a leaf on the ground in the winter".

Superintendant Oldenland had taken his degrees in botany and medicine at the University of Leyden in Holland. He was German, but like many Germans had entered the Company's service, and had been sent out to the garrison with a recommendation that a suitable job should be found for him. With every encouragement from Van der Stel he helped to spread the fame of the garden abroad, and of the wonderful wild flowers and bushes and trees which he discovered at the Cape and when he travelled with expeditions from the Castle long distances into the country.

Mr. Ovington also describes Van der Stel's hospitality at the Castle, and how bountiful and grand it was. Everything which land and water could provide was served to his guests, and wines not only of the Cape but also from Europe, and liquors from the East. To complete the magnificence "all the dishes and plates", he tells us, "are made of massive silver".

By this time, we remember, Van der Stel had been promoted to the rank of Governor. The news reached him in June 1691. That was the year when he built his manor-house on his property *Constantia.* He had made up his mind that when he retired he would not return to Holland, but would live out his life in this beautiful place.

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A ship anchored in Table Bay in April of this year, 1691, carrying an interesting visitor — William Dampier, buccaneer, pirate, a fine navigator and to become famous as such. He had sailed from Sumatra where, after other adventures (including a visit to the Southland), he had worked as a gunner at the English fort on Cumberland Bay. It was twelve years since he had seen England, and having persuaded Captain Heath of the vessel *Defence,* homeward-bound with three other ships, to give him a passage, he "craftily", as he put it, slipped away from his job into the ship, and away they sailed.

By the time they reached the Cape waters both ship and crew were in such a bad way that as his ship approached the anchorage Heath fired off the usual signal of distress — a cannon-shot every hour. A port official sailed out to see what was the matter. Both Dampier and Heath were ill, and Heath had been obliged to bribe the sick crew with a month's wages to get the scurvy-stricken men to crawl about and keep the ship afloat. Her rigging was out of repair, and they were too weak to trim sails. The port official sent back for a hundred hands to bring the ship to anchor.

Dampier and Heath and a number of men came ashore where the Company's doctors, the fine air and good food and drink soon pulled them together. Even so, there were not enough of the crew left alive to sail the ship, and Dampier asked Van der Stel to spare him some men. This, Van der Stel was obliged to refuse as he had none to spare, but he thought that possibly when the return fleet anchored some men might be found. Meantime he agreed to sell them provisions, as the English at this time were friends and allies.

Dampier and Heath were not prepared to wait for the chance of getting men from the return fleet. It had got about that they wanted men, and about forty soldiers and sailors and colonists came to them on the quiet to be engaged. Neither Dampier nor Heath had any scruples about welcoming them, and Dampier records that the men "waited at night at the appointed places, and the ship's boats fetched three or four at a time and hid them".

He also records unashamed, even after the hospitality he had received, that he bought wine from a man who had no licence to sell it, and who "would have been ruined had it been known". Liquor was dear, he wrote, because of the Company's high tax upon it, and it was only to be legally bought at the tavern, and at two other licensed houses, one for wine and the other for beer.

He found time to get about the country of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein where he came upon the largest pomegranates he had ever seen, but discovered that vineyards bore the principle fruit. The sheep were "large and fat", and the mutton better than the beef. He met with an ostrich egg, "a plentiful meal for two people", and "a beautiful, striped wild ass" — a zebra, of course.

Defence sailed for England on 23 May. It was not the first nor the last time that Dampier visited the Cape. He was to become known as the finest navigator of his time, with three voyages round the world to his credit, in the course of which he had his share in the story of the Scotsman Alexander Selkirk who quarrelled with his captain, and was marooned on the island Juan Fernandez, and became the hero of Daniel Defoe's story of Robinson Crusoe.

Pirates were a very real menace in these days. Van der Stel had no little anxiety about them, and actually got into trouble with the Directors for arresting the skipper of a little vessel called *Amy* which sailed into Saldanha Bay. English captains anchored in Table Bay declared that she was a pirate. Van der Stel kept the ship to serve on the Cape station, and packed off the skipper to England in the return fleet. He was able to prove that he was not a pirate, and the Dutch East India Company had to pay a large sum in compensation for the ship and for the false accusation.

Like Cumberland Bay in Sumatra and the island of Juan Fernandez, pirates had other ports of call special to them. Van der Stel knew all about the pirate bays in Madagascar, where the pirate William Kidd might be found at home, and a number of others. The Cape station vessels used the bays when out to purchase Madagascan slaves for the Cape. Kidd had been commissioned by the British Government to round up the pirates there, but instead of this he was persuaded that piracy was more likely to make his fortune than a job in Government pay, so he joined the pirates' company.

The Cape heard all about this, because just as Kidd arrived in Antongil Bay the Cape yacht *Tamboer* was at anchorage there, sent by Van der Stel to seek news of the *Ridderschap* in which one of his sons, Cornelis, had sailed for India in 1694, and which was believed to have been captured by pirates or wrecked. This story was told by two slaves brought from Madagascar in 1701. The ship was wrecked, they said, near a pirate stronghold, and the Heer Cornelis had been sold to one of the 'Kings' in Madagascar, and was still alive. Further search failed.

M. Whiting Spilhaus.

(To be continued)