THEY PLANTED THE CAPE

I

When Jan van Riebeeck, commanding a party of a hundred and twenty-six people, first set foot upon the shores of Table Bay in April 1652, the Directorate of the Dutch East India Company had already been assured that the soil of the place was as good as anywhere in the world, and that every product necessary to the refreshment of the Company's fleets, and the support of a garrison, would grow.

Their assurance derived from the experiences of the crew of the "Niewe Haerlem", one of the Company's return ships from its residency in Batavia (Java) of the year 1647, which in March of that year was blown ashore near the mouth of the Salt River in Table Bay. The commander of a sister ship left sixty of the "Haerlem's" crew, under the command of the junior merchant Leendert Janz, to salve the cargo, and to await the return fleet of the following year to pick them up and the salvage with them.

Fortunately, vegetable seeds and gardening tools made part of the emergency equipment carried by ships in the early days of sail. Fortunately, too, it was the autumn season of the year at the Cape, and possible to plant a certain amount. The return fleet of 1648 sailed into Table Bay in the middle of March. It numbered twelve ships, and remained at anchor for eighteen days. In the fleet travelled the Company's "merchant" Jan van Riebeeck, homeward-bound from the Company's station at Tonkin, from which he had been recalled. He made good use of his time and observation.

In July 1649 the Directorate of the Company was discussing seriously the project of establishing a refreshment station at the Cape, and Leendert Janz was required to report his views on the subject. His report was in every way encouraging. Enough supplies, he wrote, to refresh the annual outward-bound and return fleets, and to heal scurvy-stricken sailors, could be produced at the Cape without difficulty. Three or four Dutch gardeners, aided by soldiers of the garrison to "dig and delve" would keep a kitchen-garden going and lay out orchards. Chinese, who were well-versed in gardening, might be imported from Batavia. There were plenty of them in chains there. (Any number of Chinese emigrated to the Malay Peninsula and to the islands of the Pacific at this period.)

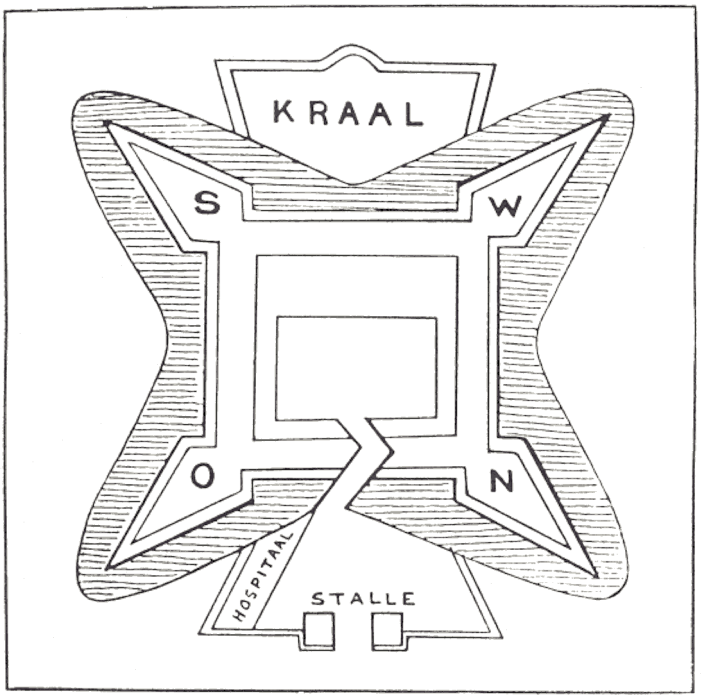
A comrade of Janz's, Nicholas Proot, signed the report with him. Janz, himself, however, was not willing to return to the Cape, or so it would seem, nor was Proot, for whatever reason, appointed to command an expedition to the Cape. It is Van Riebeeck who reappears. In June 1651 he is invited to comment upon Janz's report. He does so very fully, and begs to be appointed to command the expedition and to set the scheme going. In the following December the die is cast, and Van Riebeeck appointed.

The Directorate (or the "Lords Seventeen" as its members were familiarly called), did not send out with Van Riebeeck the several competent gardeners and stockmen whom Janz had in mind — men, supposedly, or at least the master gardener among them — of some education and superior knowledge of husbandry, especially of plants in their reaction to soil and climate, which would reduce unsuccessful experiment to a minimum. They sent out Hendrik Boom, an oldish family man, illiterate, industrious, more or less rough and ready. Lack of skilled labour was to prove a long hindrance to Van Riebeeck. He himself had no particular knowledge of agriculture. He was a barber-surgeon by training, and of choice a Company's merchant, as being a more remunerative occupation. All was to be learned: what was the best time to plant this and that; what would survive the chill and floods of the rainy season; what must await the Spring; how to drain; how to irrigate; and above all how to protect his vegetation from the Cape gales. How much Boom contributed to the solution of these problems it would be difficult to say. Though he became a favourite of Van Riebeeck's we do not find him mentioned in the records as having contributed one bright idea. It is Van Riebeeck himself, who with inexhaustible diligence, will go to the forest to search for young trees suitable to transplant as wind-breaks; he who will examine the terrain, collect seed with his own hand, and note the reaction of the seed planted.

After previous visits ashore, he landed with his wife and baby son, Lambertus, on April 24th. The carpenters were busy ashore erecting shacks and storehouses, and putting together huts which had been brought out in section. He thought they needed his presence to hasten the work. There were too few workmen, and there was sickness amongst them. They knocked together for him and his family a shelter of planks, and into this he moved to make the best of it until his quarters in the fort, the foundations of which were being laid, should be ready for his occupation. The fort itself would be constructed of plank and sod, so that its completion could not be a matter of a great length of time. Meantime, the weather was fine, which was a blessing. There was some excitement, too, for the men had killed a hippotamus, which they ate.

On the following Saturday, and on Sunday after the catechist (or sick comforter, as he was called), had read the service (no ordained minister accompanied the settlers), Van Riebeeck set out to explore the countryside. He was accompanied by the captains of the three ships of the expedition, and a bodyguard of soldiers. They tramped towards what are now the southern suburbs of Cape Town, and round Signal Hill to Green Point. As it was the end of the Cape summer everything looked very dry. However, on the 29th of April he got Boom going, turned the first sod, and had ground prepared round about the fort for planting the several barrels of seed which he had brought from Holland; among them one of wheat seed, and some barley intended for the fowls, and "some grains of oats", so he says, „picked out of the wheat and barley".

In May he wrote enthusiastically to the Company's Council at Batavia: "If there were thousands of Chinese or other tillers they could not take up or cultivate a tenth part of this land. It is hardly dug up when it is found to be the most suitable garden and seed soil in the world". He made the suggestion thus early that freemen should be encouraged "to come hither" as farmers under the Company's jurisdiction. He asked to be supplied with every imaginable kind of seed, shoots, and young trees. His optimism is boundless. He includes all sorts of tropical fruits — mangoes, bananas, sugar-cane or its seed, cocoanuts . . . Someone had pressed a dozen cocoanuts upon him and he had already planted them . . .



PLAN VAN FORT

Oranges and lemons and vines he wanted. He was sure — and in this how right he was — that "vines would thrive on our slopes as in France and Spain". Guavas and pomegranates were another good guess. He wants bamboo seeds or plants, destined for building garden sheds. (They came next year.)

Above all, he wanted labour. Chinese, a hundred Chineseé or other industrious labourers. "It is cold, now," he adds, "there has been a long drought. The crops are not coming up well. A lot of Fatherland seed arrived damaged."

The weather in May was only a warning. June brought heavy storms. People were falling ill. His wife was ill. Boom was ill. Dysentery was taking its toll, and men were dying of it. The few greens already above the ground were kept for the sick, and a little wine. Men, digging, had found wild asparagus and sorrel.

In the middle of all this the sick comforter's wife had a baby. It was necessary to rescue her from the cold and leaking shelter she was in, and a dry and covered corner of the unfinished fort was found for her. The child was a son — the first European. He was born on the 6th June towards evening.

Before the end of the month we hear that "present crops are daily beaten to bits by hail and strong winds, and completely destroyed". Undaunted, Van Riebeeck set about extending his garden plot. Despite the rain, it took a pick-axe to deal with it. He got his men planting wheat and barley on the 3rd July "to see if they will grow". Ten days later shoots were already appearing above ground. On the 20th he planted more wheat and barley, and some marrow-peas and pot-herbs. "It is a joy," he wrote, "to see how beautifully the green peas, large beans, radish, beetroot, and other vegetables are shooting up."

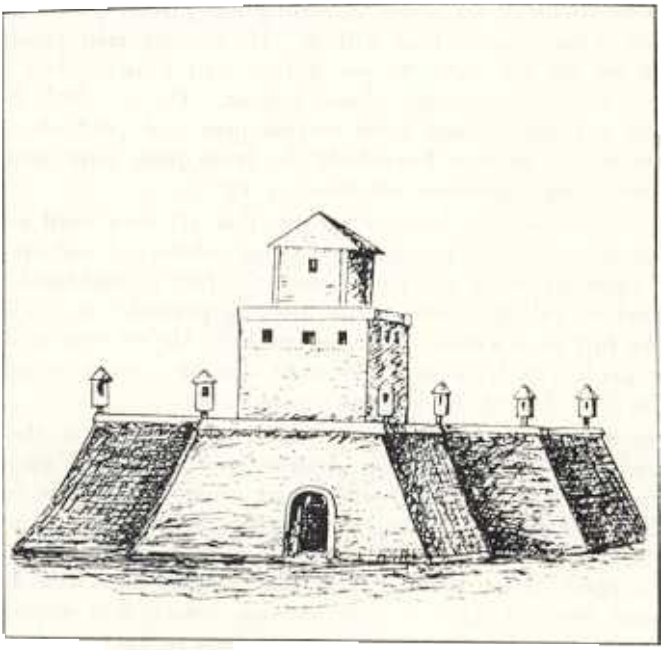
Alas, only three days later he records that all their hard work in the new garden is completely flooded; the crops submerged and spoilt. Half a foot of water stands in the pack-house; the fort is inundated in places, and the kitchen wall has collapsed. "God be praised," he exclaims, "the walls of the fort have withstood the onslaught." He set men to dig ditches round the garden to drain it. July went out on a more serious note of tragedy, for they buried the surgeon's wife.

On the 3rd August he was able to take up his abode in the fort. He was cheered by the sight of his drowned seeds coming up elsewhere. Cabbages and peas, carrots and wheat had swum in company to odd and fertile refuges. Onions and chervil unhappily succumbed, as well as the wild mustard seed, which he had collected with his own hands; and the blossom dropped off the beans, but by the 19th the peas were flourishing. So he sowed more of them — and aniseed, fennel, and wormwood, and some pips of quinces, apples and oranges, which he had brought with him from home. He determines "to plant every month to find out the exact season for each plant". Every now and then a man would lean on his spade to watch the whales disporting themselves in the bay. There are so many of them that they make "a great noise near the shore at night".

On September 4th they picked the first peas and ate carrots "the size of a little finger". Winter is over, though the Cape Spring has surprises in store. We are relieved to think how beautiful it will presently become, but the overworked and under-fed men of the garrison are not cheered. Not much fish has come into the nets of late, and although Hottentots from inland, richer in cattle than the little Cape clans, are making some appearance, not much stock can be got out of them, and the bulk of what is obtained has to be saved to provision the ships. The

station yacht brings over from Robben Island about hundred duikers, some penguins and three thousand penguin eggs, and this provision is distributed to the garrison. The skipper of the yacht brought with him a live seal. He said there were not many on the island, but its appearance excited Van Riebeeck's curiosity, and he sailed over with a party a day or two later, and brought back six seals and a few more birds and eggs. He found the island covered with sweet-smelling herbs and flowers.

How long the provisions would last which the fleet had brought with the settlers was becoming an acute anxiety. "Not a hundredth part of the seed they had planted came to perfection." Only enough provisions for two months remained. Meat and bacon would not last out until the outward-



FRONT VAN FORT

bound fleet arrived from the Fatherland. Presently, the bread ration would have to be reduced. Pitiful thefts of carrots and turnips out of the garden took place. Four men deserted and set out on a wild dash for home over the mountains, heading for Mozambique where they planned to pick up a vessel for the Netherlands. A week later they crawled back starved and defeated. Followed a horrible programme of keel-hauling and dropping from the yard-arm, and the savage thrashing of the period which left permanent injury. Three days later, on October 13th, Van Riebeeck recorded a triumph of hospitality. "Farewell dinner," he wrote

exultantly in the official journal, "to the officers of the yacht. Everything on the table of Cape produce: fowls, peas, spinach, chervil, asparagus, and a cabbage weighing 1½ lbs." He was able to forget for a few hours how few could share such a meal. Presently, Hottentots from Saldanha bartered some stock, quite a lot in fact, but it had to be saved for the ships.

On December 17th a comet appeared with a tail sweeping northward across the sky, lying along the knees of Orion. For a week the stupendous sight blazed in the firmament before it began to fade. To the lonely little group of hard-pressed men in what was then so distant and desolate a corner of the Earth, it appeared peculiarly awe-inspiring. They gazed at it as a potent of something. "Only God," wrote Van Riebeeck in the journal, "knows what it means."

The south-easter swept over Table Mountain and beat the ear out of the grain, and flung the pea-blossom into the air, and swept the guard on the ramparts off his feet. "In the whole world it cannot blow as hard as the south-east does here," Van Riebeeck sighed into the journal, "it often surpasses the West Indian hurricanes and Japanese typhoons."

Not all was spoilt. On the 8th January of the new year they picked the first two red cabbages. Behind Table Mountain locusts were "falling from the sky like snowflakes," and a week later were everywhere. None the less, on February 2nd the first white cabbage was rescued from them (or don't locusts like cabbages?)

II

The first anniversary of Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape, 6th April, passed without rejoicing or holiday. The date in his official journal records only that another man died of dysentery during the night, and that a thunderstorm ended the day. Sickness and hunger were a continued anxiety. Since the beginning of the year thirty to forty men had gone down and many more were exhausted by "hard work and scanty food". On the 13th of January they started to thresh what wheat had survived the wind, "the very first wheat grown here at the Cape", as Van Riebeeck hopefully describes it, but it was a meagre harvest; enough only to provide seed. We hear nothing of Cape-made bread. The return fleet came to the rescue with bread. Save for the wind, he thought, there was a prospect of more success, if only the soil were better manured. Manure was difficult to come by. The men had to tramp several miles to the local Hottentots' grazing land to supplement what could be had from the cattle kraal near the fort.

Van Riebeeck's anxieties had not been diminished by the arrival on January 18th of the galiot *Zwarte Vos* from Texel with a despatch announcing the outbreak of war between the Netherlands and Cromwellian England. The skipper had called at Pernambuco, and had not been too preoccupied with the news he carried to bring Van Riebeeck sweet potatoes, pumpkin and melon seeds, which he had planted at once and were pros-

pering now. In future we are to hear a good deal of the triumphant delivery to the ships of "melons and water-melons" among the carrots, and turnips, and cabbages. There was no luck with legumes. "Too many hair-roots in the soil," we are told, which strangled them, and indicates that the soil was not properly trenched and cleaned.

Gerard Demmer, governor of Amboina, as senior official was commander of the return fleet in 1653, and anchord with the five ships of the fleet during the first week of April. Van Riebeeck discussed with him the future of agriculture and the possibility of creating freemen agriculturalists, but Demmer did not encourage the idea. He emphasised the "inconvenience of the place", nor would he consent to Van Riebeeck's request that he should order two hundred men ashore from the fleet to finish building the fort. Garrison men were exhausted. The ships were not due to sail for a fortnight, and two hundred ships' people could manage that in a fortnight. Not a man would volunteer. Truth to tell, and for long after this, sailors and soldiers resented being hauled ashore to do chores for Van Riebeeck. There was never any enthusiasm for Proot's suggestion that ships' people should help "dig and delve". After a long passage few felt their best, and none came into port wiwth the idea of working harder than ever. For instance, the ship "Muijden", outward-bound from Texel, anchored in the bay on the 19th April (two days after Demmer sailed), and after a passage of 112 days the crew is described as "fairly well, only six or seven deaths". She sailed a week later, leaving on Van Riebeeck's hands over a score of sick men, presently to be shipped back to Holland or on to Batavia, "because supplies were running low, and we did not know how to feed them, and most of them hardly worth their salt".

Three further return ships anchored the same day as the outward-bound "Muijden", under the command of the senior official Andries Frisius. He brought rice and some beans, "with which," notes Van Riebeeck, "we hope to get on with for a long while". Two of these laggard ships had sailed from Batavia in company with a well-laden English ship, none of them knowing that war had broken out. Van Riebeeck expressed the pious hope that "the Almighty would grant" she would come to anchor in the bay for refreshment "that we may seize her for the Company, to comfort it for the expenses incurred here". It was one of those prayers which the Almighty did not see fit to grant.

While the return ships were at anchor Van Riebeeck prepared his despatches for the Seventeen. "This year," he wrote, "has been one of making experiments." Everything progresses, he assures them, although everything except root crops suffers from the south-east gales. No doubt that in course of time the place will be overflowing with refreshments. He has even the prospect of supplying Batavia with seed, which, indeed, soon came to pass. Contrary to his earlier and optimistic prognostications, he has now to confess that on closer examination the land round the fort is too poor and sandy for anything except pumpkins. He is preparing new land towards the mountain. He has discovered that acclimatised seed

fares best, and that the end of September and the whole of October is the best time for planting.

He complains that it is difficult to get provisions from the ships of the fleets "without a good deal of wrangling", and begs to be directly supplied by goods addressed to him. He is not yet able to produce sufficient supplies both for the fleets and the residency. He does not labour this point in writing to the Seventeen, but in writing to Batavia orders twenty lasts of rice annually (a Batavian last was about 3,000 lbs.). Rice, he says, can be better preserved than bread, for which he has no suitable casks as containers.

He does, however, urge the Seventeen to order that the fleet commanders shall anchor at the Cape, and not pass it by, so that he may depend upon receiving provisions. One reason, he reminds the Seventeen, that the ships pass by, is that the Company offers a premium for swift passages. He was successful in this plea.

He encloses in his despatch a long list of seeds and plants that he wants: everything known to the kitchen garden, including the bush fruits — gooseberries, and currants, for blackberries grow wild at the Cape, and surely the rest would do so? As a matter of fact, they were to prove reluctant, and the so-called Cape gooseberry was to come from Peru. He wants his seed "kept cool on board in flasks or in jars". Use pitchers, too, he urged, for the place is in need of them for other uses. He wants 5 lbs. of ash tree seed, and the ripe pips of apple, pear and quince, and kegs of cherry and apricot stones.

We gather from his extensive indent for tools his need of every kind of garden tool and under what difficulties he laboured.

Yet, we have to remember that agriculture was only a part of his labours. The Seventeen expected him to find sources of income — sealing and whaling, even metals and precious stones, besides supervising the means of defence, and housing for people not accommodated in the little fort.

For himself, in this despatch, as in many a subsequent despatch, he humbly begs for his promotion and removal to better and more "estimable" employment. The Seventeen address him as "Commander", and he desires that this rank, and the pay appertaining to it, may be bestowed upon him in actual fact. The rank was presently granted to him, and a rise in pay, but not the full commander's pay he had hoped for.

In July we find him preparing for the outward-bound fleet of next year by converting the old kraal below the fort into another garden. It is already impregnated with manure, and surrounded by ditches which had been dug to protect the stock from wild beasts, and these would serve to drain it. He sowed wheat and oats again, although it was a vain hope that grain would be successful. Yet, the successful growing of grain was essential to the plans of the Seventeen. They intended that in the not far future the Cape should depend entirely upon itself for bread, and for

rice, too, if she wanted it. For years Van Riebeeck would attempt to grow rice, with, of course, complete failure.

In July, too, he was out behind Table Mountain, and down to Hout Bay (which he named), looking for accessible timber. "Fine forests scattered all about the mountain sides," he records, "but no road to them." Neither had he draught animals for this job, nor the necessary sawyers' tools. It would be cheaper to import deals from home, and presently we find him indenting for planks and other fashioned timber. (Not until towards the end of the century, and the early years of the next, was the timber problem taken in hand — under the Van der Stels, father and son.)

In October he was planting industriously. His garden now covered an area of two morgen. Unfortunately, what he described as "worms in the ground" destroyed his herbs, and attacked root crops and the young cabbages. "Time will show," he remarks patiently, "whether this will be an annual nuisance," and declares, with an optimism which hardly appears justified, that if he is sent enough seed "we hope to feed ourselves in two years' time. The men are daily supplied with vegetables". The men, however, were still unhappy. Four more of them had recently absconded.

October brought him further anxiety on account of a clan of local Hottentots under the headman Herry. (The original records spell his name with an *e*, but this was a corruption of Harry, the name bestowed upon him by the crew of an English ship in which he was taken to Bantam and brought back again.) Van Riebeeck used him as an interpreter, but he was a thorn in Van Riebeeck's flesh, and he blamed Herry this month for a raid on the Company's stock, grazing on the Lion's Rump, when in the struggle the wretched herd was killed. However, October brought with it substantial joy. During the night of the 18th the second European South African was born: Van Riebeeck's son Abraham. He grew up to become Governer General of the Netherlands East Indies. Perhaps he brought better luck to the vegetables, for by the end of November they are reported to be "growing splendidly". On the 16th the gardener brought in the first Cape grown cauliflower.

The year 1653 ended in a drought. Rain did not fall until the February following. Van Riebeeck had to send to Robben Island and the islands of Saldanha Bay for more salted penguins and fish for the men, "who," he wrote in the journal, "are already beginning to starve". Even the penguins had to be rationed that they might not be exterminated. A proclamation threatened the men with two years in irons if they entered the Company's garden.

On the 18th April 1654 the galiot "Tulp", harbinger of the outward-bound fleet, brought the shattering tidings that the return fleet, upon which Van Riebeeck depended for rice, had been ordered owing to the exigencies of war to pass the Cape and refresh at St. Helena. "Tulp" herself had sailed north of Scotland (between the Faroe and Shetland Isles), in order to avoid the English Channel. The fleet following her would do the same.

We must explain here that St. Helena had no residency. The Dutch who succeeded the Portuguese in occupation vacated the island in 1651. Refreshment was derived from stock and vegetation imported by the Portuguese, and doubtless by the Dutch during the few years they occupied the place, which still flourished in a wild state. The English East India Company were to establish a garrison there in 1658, and confirm British possession in 1661.

Having delivered her despatch to the Cape, "Tulp" was ordered to overtake the return fleet at St. Helena with the Directorate's sailing orders. Van Riebeeck took the opportunity of sending a despatch to the commander of the fleet begging for provisions which should have been his had the fleet called at the Cape, and also of sending one of his more able gardeners to bring back saplings of fruit trees.

"Had the fleet called," he wrote some months later, "it would have been abundantly supplied with root crops and other vegetables." He also recorded in the journal of the 4th April, the day after "Tulp" sailed for St. Helena, that the men had found a dead baboon on the mountain, and "forced by hunger" ate it. "Greens," he added, "do not nourish them." On the 27th April he decided in council to send "Roode Vos", a galiot recovering at the Cape after "a painfully long passage", to Mauritius to get provisions "lest we be reduced to complete starvation". She sailed on the 8th of May.

In his despatch to the Seventeen sent by "Tulp" to hand over to the return fleet's commander, he reports Robben Island to be "a firstrate sheep-walk". He expects to breed so many sheep there that the lack of beef will not be felt. The island is no good for growing wheat. Seed has failed again. He assures them that he will need no more seed from home, except some "fine" kinds of seed — the right season for planting these he has not yet discovered — and a cask each of barley, millet, oats and buckwheat. He has made more particular experiments with grain, and thinks that it may be possible to reap before the south-east monsoon. Peas and beans have not yet succeeded. (Legumes were to give him a lot of bother). A sheep-run, he thought could be established on Dassen Island, which might be made "a splendid granary". The south-east wind blew less harshly there than in the Table valley.

He suggests that the Cape Peninsula might be transformed into an island, barricading off by a canal the troublesome Hottentots. He thinks he has found a silver mine on the slopes of the mountain. Hottentots might be made to work it, or else slaves from Madagascar. (Alas, it proved not to exist.) He resents the Hottentots' disinclination to barter away their stock, and in extremity, their aptitude to steal back something of what they do barter. He asks for orders to deal forcibly with them.

He requisitions five or six pumps to irrigate the Company's garden; wagons to fetch wood from the forest; some steel "to make ploughs, harrows, shovels, spades . . . " He wants asses, and guns, and a yacht or two to trade with Madagascar and Sofala; and four whale boats. He

has built (in a week) a little redoubt of poles and plaited branches at the mouth of the Salt River as protection for the bay.

All of which again reminds us of the multiplicity of concerns he has on his hands.

III

During the month of May 1654 we find Van Riebeeck making his way inland to collect wild sorrel and mustard for the men, which the winter rains, he is sure, must have brought on. They might be used instead of garden produce for making potage morning and evening. His root crops are getting scarce, and little left for passing ships. He looks forward to a quantity of garden produce "in three or four months' time", and is busy sowing and planting out. The gardens are now fully four morgen in extent, and he is preparing more land for the seeds and plants he hopes the outward-bound fleet next year will bring him. A good half morgen is devoted to the little treasure of wheat seed, which he has managed to garner from last year's harvest. He made another trial, after all, at growing wheat on Robben Island. May 1st was a "sunny day", and he launched the first little boat to be built at the Cape. He describes it as a *sampan*, a Chinese type of craft. It was 32 feet long and 8 feet wide. It was used for carrying salt, wood, cow-manure and other oddments from the Salt River to the fort.

"Tulp" arrived back from St. Helena on 11th June, not with much food, but very pleased with herself at having made the passage in three weeks. She brought from the return fleet enough rice to last for five or six weeks, a couple of boxes of sugar, some spices, and two small bales of wheat. Frederick Verburgh, the young bookkeeper who had been sent in charge of her, reported that the fleet was well refreshed there; plenty of pigs running about; apples and lemons were ripe; vegetables to be had, and a good water supply. The gardener, Willem Gerrits, brought his young fruit trees in tubs, and they were planted out in the following Spring.

On the 21st June the men came down to the last ration of bread. Mrs. van Riebeeck's larder was broken into, and butter, eggs, cheese, ham and wine disappeared. Men were also found stealing the fowl's food for the sake of the grains of barley in it. Amongst themselves they had been muttering threats against Van Riebeeck's life. He decided in council not to wait for the return of "Roode Vos" from Madagascar — "she might have met with an accident" — and to send "Tulp" after her in Verburgh's charge for a cargo of rice and some slaves. On her way she was to take time to examine the east coast of Africa. She sailed on the 3rd of July with a crew of twenty-five, provisioned for five months. The crew included the gardener who was again prepared to ship fruit-tree saplings.

On the day she sailed Van Riebeeck recorded in the journal that "all garden produce is so completely consumed that hardly any more can be scraped together". Relief arrived on the 17th when the yacht "De Haes"

anchored from Batavia. She brought about 130 bags of rice and other handsome supplies which solved the immediate food problem. She also brought 500 bundles of paddy, so that Van Riebeeck might have another shot at planting it; also five bales of Japanese wheat. Unfortunately, the wheat, as Van Riebeeck described it, was "totally eaten by insects, and thus unfit for sowing, but very good to make bread of".

Two other galiots, laggards of the outward-bound fleet, anchored in July bringing kitchen-garden fruits and a quantity of Dutch seed. One of them sent sixty scorbutics ashore to be looked after. With the seed Van Riebeeck sowed three morgen of ground, and made ready two more. "De Haes" carried Van Riebeeck's despatch to the Governor in Council at Batavia. He begged for 30-40 lasts of rice, and 4,000 lbs. of bread annually. His men were "threadbare, and famished for want of proper food". "Rice," he wrote, "is both bread and boiled food." Yet, of provisions for the fleets he declared: "In future the return fleet will find everything plentiful here, and so good that crews will believe themselves to be in Holland. The gardens are so full of young plants that when grown to perfection they will be able to supply twenty-five ships abundantly every day for a whole month. If we are helped with rice and arack we shall not be obliged to eat the vegetables ourselves instead of their being used for the necessary refreshment of the passing ships. We therefore humbly beg for rice." In November the Governor in Council wrote in reply: "We were glad to hear of the arrival of 'De Haes' with its seasonable supplies . . . We shall take care that henceforth you shall not suffer want."

The Walvis point of the sod fort distracted some attention from agriculture, for during the rains it collapsed, and had to be propped up with branches until it could be set up again, this time with the new bricks which Van Riebeeck had got the men to make.

In October we find him confiding to the journal — a South Easter raging outside: "We are gradually discovering that neither grain nor rice (which does not even come up) can be grown here, but only things which grow under or close to the ground."

He pursues his idea of cultivating Dassen Island. Sheep are running there now, and a train-oil burning establishment has been set up as part of the sealhunting industry, upon which he sets great store as a means of meeting Cape expenses. He sent up the foreman, Jan Woutersen, who reported within a week that he had already prepared a garden, and had sown radishes, peas, chillies, watermelon, fennel, and Mauritius oranges. He said the wind was less boisterous than at the Cape, as Van Riebeeck supposed, and in consequence some wheat seed went up to him, but presently we hear that it came to nothing.

At the Cape Van Riebeeck was waxing lyrical over the water-melons, cucumbers and "other Indian fruits", which he was cultivating in the Company's garden. Some of the lettuces weighed up to 1½ lbs. "with heads

as firm as cabbages", and the cauliflower "is a joy to see". Artichokes, too, "are coming on".

During this month of October a ship arrived with over a hundred men sick of scurvy, having taken nearly five months on the passage. Van Riebeeck got root crops and greens aboard with instructions to send the sick to hospital ashore. That sounds more comforting than it was likely to be. We presently hear what the "hospital" was like, because a leopard, not for the first time, got into the fowl-house. The fowl-houses and the stable and the hospital, with the sick-comforter and the stableman in charge, were all under one roof, the allotted space divided by screens of rushes. The building was a ramshackle affair anyhow, for it was put together from the timbers of the discarded ready-made huts brought out by the fleet in 1652. The leopard had already killed two of the five geese which the commissioner Van Goens had presented to Van Riebeeck to breed with, when the sick-comforter, a bold man but a bad shot, rushed into the fowl-house to the rescue followed by the stableman. The leopard unfortunately aimed better than the sick-comforter, and both he and the stableman got hurt. The bellowing cattle of the kraal outside had formed their traditional defence, horns lowered in a semi-circle round the door, and the leopard, now as terrified as anyone else, barely got by.

The fire-arms of the period, of course, lacked something of precision. In January of the following year men gathering salt at the pan, some miles from the fort, tried to shoot a rhinoceros, and the story reminds us of Belloc's rhyme:

"I shoot the hippopotamus with bullets made of platinum,

Because if I used leaden ones his hide would sure to flatten 'em."

The men's shots only succeeded in causing the beast to subside into the mud, and a messenger to the fort brought Van Riebeeck to the scene. He takes up the tale: "It took more than a hundred shots before he was killed. Many of the bullets bounded off his body . . . so that we hewed out a piece of his side with axes, and then shot between the ribs and the entrails, and killed him." He concludes: "Our folk heaped up a good quantity of salt, which we hope to bring in one of these days when it blows so hard that we can do nothing else."

Verbergh returned from Madagascar on December 12th. A calm day, and he paddled himself ashore in a Madagascan dug-out canoe. He reported that his vessel was too small to examine the east coast of Africa on his way, as Van Riebeeck had ordered him to do, except for putting into Mossel Bay on the way up. In Antongil Bay, on the north east coast of Madagascar, the king had received him hospitably, and had promised to save slaves and rice for him against a future visit. The king was filled with gratitude because the galiot's barber-surgeon had managed to cure him of an attack which sounds like ptomaine poisoning. Verburgh was able to load two lasts of rice and three of paddy, and some apple and orange saplings. He also brought a slave or two.

The natives in Antongil Bay still talked of Adrian van der Stel (father and grandfather of future governors of the Cape), who had been commander at Mauritius from 1639-1645, and from there had founded in 1642 a Dutch factory or trading station on the Bay of Antongil.

On the 1st December of this year 1654 Van Riebeeck was relieved of the anxiety of war. A ship from the Amsterdam Chamber of the Company brought news that peace had been declared between the Netherlands and England. He set to, gathering in the harvest with a lighter heart, only to discover that "mostly all the ears were empty". When an English ship anchored on the 18th the occasion went off pleasantly enough. Her captain brought an open letter of introduction from the Lords Seventeen, announcing the cessation of hostilities — the English were now to be "treated as good friends". Van Riebeeck entertained the officers to dinner: "We exchanged compliments," he reported, "and they returned on board in the evening very satisfied and merry."

Peace, no doubt, prompted the Lords Seventeen to consider more fully the suggestion of Van Riebeeck and others that agriculture at the Cape might be taken over by freemen. Shortage of labour, as we have seen, hindered Van Riebeeck from the outset, and the cost of the Cape station had as certainly caused the Seventeen concern. The garrison could now be reduced. They consulted one of their skippers who had taken some note of conditions at the Cape, and who had examined the lands in Van Riebeeck's company. They came to the tentative conclusion that a few farmer families might be sent out as colonists, or that garrison men, as well as Company's servants in the secretariat, might be given the opportunity to take their release from service in order to become freemen. They wrote to Van Riebeeck to this effect, and required him to report upon the project.

His reply would be carried by the return fleet of 1655, and he would have the opportunity to discuss the plan with the commanders of both fleets. Pieter Sterthenius commanded the outward-bound fleet, and was at anchor from the 3rd to the 15th of April. We shall hear of him again, dealing with Cape affairs. The commander of the return fleet, at anchor from 21st April to the 9th May, was Rijkloff van Goens, destined to inaugurate two years later the settlement of freemen on the land. He carried home Van Riebeeck's despatch dated 28th April. It formed the basis of the contracts subsequently made with the freemen.

Grain, he wrote, did not succeed in the Table valley, but he believed that it would grow behind the mountain. There was "enough room for a thousand households", but he believed that none would come out to the Cape "except poor and needy people of little repute". Unless the Company could find means to ensure support "nobody would expose himself to such a wild and savage country". Great abundance could be secured if the right families were introduced, and made up their minds to stay, and not to rush home again as happened in the Indies as soon as their pockets were filled. To circumvent this impulse he suggested

that freemen should be contracted to remain in the country for ten years, and their wives and children for twenty. (The latter a Machiavellian touch which would also bind paterfamilias.) The Company would have to refrain from agriculture, except, perhaps, for a small garden to serve the garrison, or farmers would have produce left on their hands. They should be constrained to sell their produce only to the Company, and at the Company's price. It would be necessary that freemen should assist in the defence of the place, and be united in an armed burgher corps, as the Portuguese do in their colonies."

Oddly enough, at this time there was no finality in the Directorate mind about occupying the Cape station at all. In the same despatch which considered the colonisation scheme the Seventeen ordered Van Riebeeck, when he had a vessel to spare, to send an expedition to Tristan da Cunha to examine its possibilities as a substitute refreshment station for the Cape; and before Van Riebeeck left the Cape the search began for an elusive island, St. Helena Nova, with the same end in view.

For himself, Van Riebeeck had two requests to make in his despatch to the Seventeen of the 28th April. He wanted to be supplied with a large number of pewter dishes and plates and basins, and cutlery of all kinds. There is no inn — he wished there were an inn. He has to entertain all the officers and their wives and children who come ashore to be fed by the Company. "Everyone," he complained, "carries away what he can in napkins and dishes, thinking that these are the property of the Company." His other request is an almost passionate reminder that by the time he can get a reply to this despatch he will have spent "in this miserable place" the whole five years of his contract to serve the Company. However, he offers "for the love of the Company" to complete at the Cape the five years of his contract. The Seventeen were to take every advantage of this offer.

M. Whiting Spilhaus.