Preface

The great hearse, decorated by the artist Anton van Wouw, moved from the Suzanna Hall in Pretoria where the body had lain in State, and made for Church Square. Ahead walked Generals Louis Botha, De la Rey, De Wet and Burger, followed by dignitaries in rows of four. Thousands of people packed the route to the square where a decorated dais had been improvised at the church which was in the process of demolition. There the first speeches were made since the Dutch ship, *Batavier VI*, had delivered the body at Cape Town. It had travelled slowly by train to the north, escorted by General Botha, stopping at all stations and sidings where silent crowds paid their homage.

The service at Church Square was conducted by the ministers of the three Dutch churches, and when the ceremony had ended the cortège moved along Church Street West, led by a mounted but unarmed commando under General Beyers. Followed by the generals and many Boer dignitaries, British militia and the Governor’s representative in red jacket, the plumed hearse and horses, they passed the house with the white lions, and went on to the cemetery. There were so many wreaths that they were laden on mule wagons. Some twenty thousand people attended. As the coffin was lowered, all the bells of Pretoria began to peal and the guns of the British artillery boomed in the distance. It was the funeral of Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, President of the one-time South African Republic, on 16 December 1904.

The Kruger story is a long one, lasting from 1825 to 1904, and, one can say, from 1904 until the present day. I have read about Kruger since childhood, have read more about his contemporaries than I can remember and have studied unpublished material covering a very wide field. My pursuit then was of other persons, but I knew that one day I would be involved with him, for he is the central figure of the period that has interested me most in South African history - 1831-1935. The main problem was to keep the biography to a reasonable length, and above all to extract the man as a personality from a veritable bog of hostility and sentiment, prejudice and deification.

Paul Kruger was one of the most extraordinary men ever produced by South Africa, and the story of his life proves it. He was a professionally lonely man and a dreamer of dreams, a devoted husband and parent, a giant in the physical and mental sense, and in the end just a weary old man with an invincible faith in the will of God, waiting for what was to be revealed in His own good time. What Kruger was to become in the minds of men, of a nation, is beyond the scope of biography though it must inevitably be kept in mind. He was born about forty miles from where I live at Molteno and, having died in exile nearly eighty years later, he was buried by his own people with all the pomp, ceremony and evocation due to the greatest Boer in history. Two years later the Transvaal was given
full Responsible Government, and the machinery was set in motion for the Union of South Africa, of
which Louis Botha became the first Premier, with the home of Cecil Rhodes as his official residence
at the Cape. Instead of fading into history, Kruger lived on as a vital force in South African politics and
Afrikaner culture.

More nonsense has been written about him than anybody I know of. The reason for the distortion of
the Kruger figure was firstly to justify an imperial policy and secondly to vindicate a war which should
never have been. Further distortion came with the awakening of Afrikaner nationalism, swinging to
the opposite extreme. I do not go into the rights and wrongs of the anti- and pro-Kruger campaigns at
any lengths. I am primarily concerned with a personality and must accordingly see developments
more from his viewpoint than from that of his detractors, but not with blind acceptance. Hundreds of
writers have found that it is so easy to ridicule Kruger that they have become more concerned how to
do it in a fresh rather than a just way, and in so doing have lost track of the human being.

The two guiding lights for the Kruger biographer are, of the older school J. F. van Oordt (he died in
1918), and of contemporaries, Prof. Dr D. W. Kruger. Their labours have been supplemented by
scores of others who have dealt with every conceivable aspect of the life, times, thoughts and
meaning of Paul Kruger. As his birth on 10 October 1825 is still commemorated annually, Kruger
material has never ceased to flow and research continues on a subject which seems nigh
inexhaustible when one might have thought that there remained little to add. All this however has little
bearing on biography as an art, and I have made a considerable departure from my predecessors in
structure and composition, in elimination and selection, in narrative, presentation and impartiality.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help given me by the State Archives, the National Film Board, the
Cultural and Kruger Museums of Pretoria, the Africana Museum and Library of Johannesburg, the
Cape Archives and Central Reference Library of Cape Town, and the Regional Library of
Grahamstown. Then there are the many private individuals, some no longer living, who have helped
me in various ways, sometimes without even knowing it, to chart my course in retrieving living history
while this was still possible, those who remembered and those who came after them with unclouded
vision.

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Grootzeekoegat, Molteno
1974