

BOER COMPANY FOR A 75-MILLIMETER GUN.

## THE STRENGTH OF THE BOERS.

The fear that in the event of war breaking out in the Transvaal the Boers would bombard Johannesburg is founded on the knowledge that the batteries which command the town are armed with a class of guns evidently intended to be used for such a purpose.

The Transvaal Government some time back purchased three of the most powerful guns in existence. These three guns are all made by the French firm of Schneider-Canet, and are two of 9in. in calibre and one of 12in. The latter weighs 66 tons, and fires a shell of half-a-ton through four feet of steel. It is precisely similar to the guns mounted in three of the Japanese ironclads at the Yalu. The two 9in. guns are of shorter and lighter type; they fire a shell weighing three hundred-weight. Where are these guns? What is their use? The obvious explanation would be that they were intended for the famous forts at Johannesburg, and that they have been smuggled up to that place in the guise of mining machinery.

Heavy stamps, steam-engines, and parts of engines are constantly being sent by rail from Delagoa Bay to that place. How simple to disguise the 66 and 20-ton guns, and to forward them as "machinery with care," by the sympathetic Netherlands Railway Company.

But this explanation is not the correct one. After all, in the Johannesburg forts guns of this size would be absurdly misplaced. You do not use a steam-hammer to crack nuts, and to place a 12in. gun in a position where the worst attack it will ever have to face will be that of the 12 or 25-pounder would be absurd. It is just as likely to be put out of action by a chance shot of its little opponent as to put its enemy out of action.

There can be not the slightest doubt that these three guns were ordered for quite another purpose, and bought with quite another object. They were intended to defend Delagoa Bay against the battle-ships and cruisers of Her Majesty's navy. There they would be in place, and would have work suited to their immense size.

What has become of these huge guns no one knows; it is even uncertain whether they have left the makers' works. But it may be suspected that they have been quietly moved up to the forts, and that there they are held in readiness to bombard the town of Johannesburg with their gigantic shells, charged with high explosives.

Terrible though this sounds, these huge guns are not really much to be feared. Each big shell would, no doubt, knock a house to pieces; but then a 12-pounder shell will do the same, though it will not produce quite so much havoc. Guns of this size are not suited for use in land warfare; they are too ponderous, too slowly loaded, too awkward for quick aiming. It is possible that all these guns have not yet reached Johannesburg, but some of them are certainly there.

The Schneider-Canet gun fires a 13-pound shell. In practice against targets composed of six wooden frames, each with an area of 45 square feet, six of these guns fired each six rounds, getting them off on an average in 46

seconds, and making very numerous hits.

An ordinary field gun in the same time would have fired only one, or, at the most, two rounds. Then Mr Kruger's weapons fire three to six times as fast as the ordinary gun, with which most batteries of our British artillery are armed.

This rapidity of fire is obtained by anchoring the gun in the earth. A spade is fitted to the trail of the gun, which is driven into the ground at the first shot, and which holds the gun-

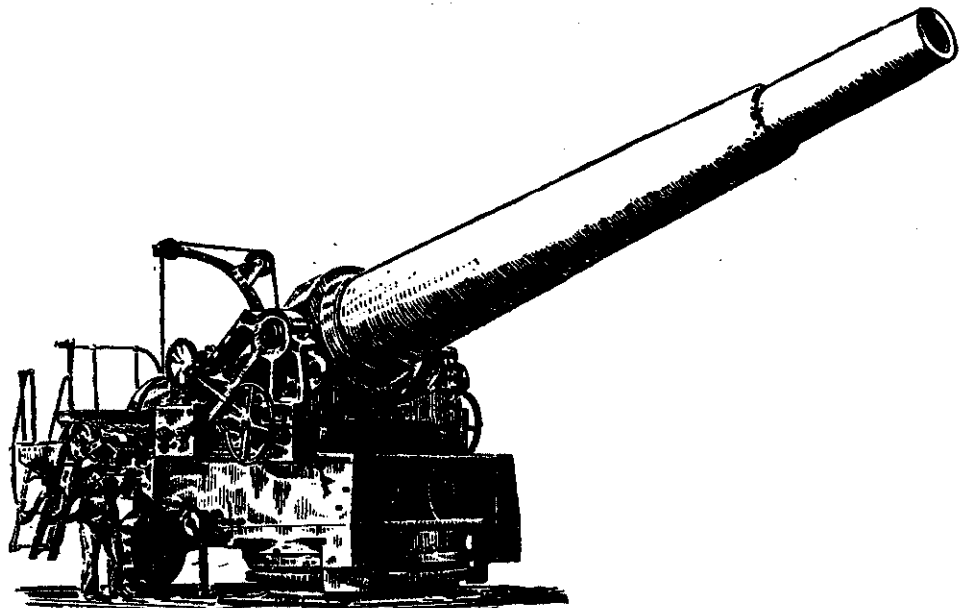
carriage fairly firm where the ground is favourable. On rocky ground or very soft ground the spade would be almost useless, and the gun no better than the ordinary one.

A great advantage which this weapon has is that it does not tire the men. The work of running a gun weighing half a ton or more back after each recoil is most exhausting. With the quick-firer of whatever pattern, this labour is dispensed with. Now, tired men never shoot well; so, beside the advantage of very great

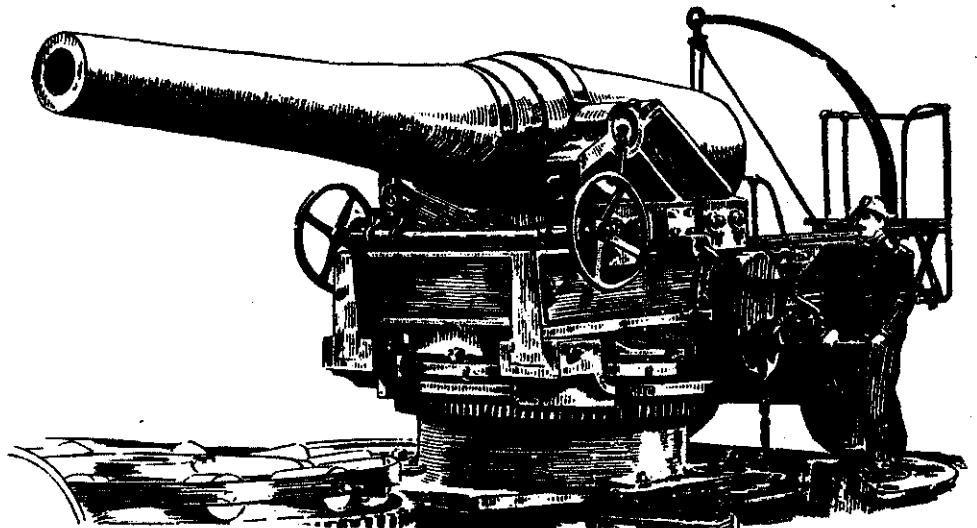
rapidity of action, the quick-firer has in its favour better shooting.

Against this formidable array of Boer artillery England had last month in Natal 3 field batteries, the 13th, 67th, and 69th, and one mountain battery, the 10th. These total between them 22 weapons in the field batteries. Besides these, three more batteries are to be despatched shortly—as "reliefs," we are told. These will certainly be equipped with quick-firers, so that at an early date England will be able to count upon 36 quick-firing guns. They were at a very recent date slow-firers; but there is reason to believe that quick-firing guns either have been recently sent, or are to be sent, to replace the eighteen field pieces and four mountain guns. For the latter the weight of the quick-firing carriage renders its adoption impossible. Mountain guns must be light, else they cannot be used for the work for which they are designed.

The Boers, it is true, have before now stood up to artillery without the support of any guns on their side. At Ingogo they encountered two guns and about 300 British troops, and owing to bad tactics on our part had things very much their own way. Picked marksmen in very scattered order delivered a deadly fire at the men working our guns. The officer in command of the guns was quickly killed; the gunners dropped one after the other; the guns grew white with the lead splashes of the Boer bullets. Riflemen had to be called in to handle the guns. "Some of the artillery teams," says General Butler, "lay dead in their harness, in the order in which they had stood when alive."



A TWELVE-INCH RIFLE BOUGHT BY THE BOERS.



A BOER ARTILLERYMAN WITH A NINE-INCH RIFLE.