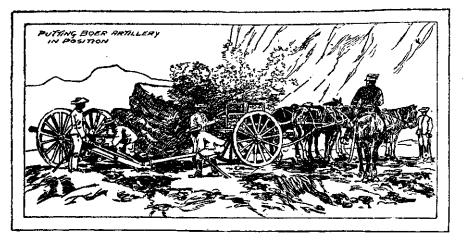
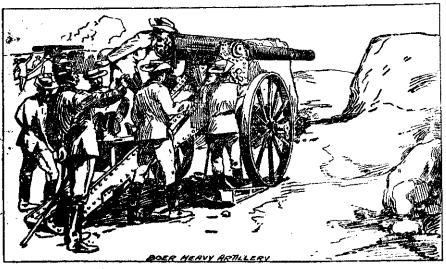


A SORTIE COLUMN CLEARING THEIR WAY BACK TO LADYSMITH.





Hans Smit-Boer.

A SHORT COMPLETE STORY OF THE TRANSVAAL

I first mode the acquaintance of old Hans Smit is a common name in the Transvaal, and Hans was a fair specimen of the family. He is—or rather was, for Hans has recently joined his forefathers—a typical stolid, bleareyed, narrow-minded septuagenarian of the Dopper brund of Dutchman; highly religious, parsimonious, and the very man to keep a keen eye on over a deal in stock, mealies, or forage. I had to make a journey up into the northern districts on preparatory business in connection with an important engineering scheme, and it was during this trip I first struck the old farmer. During a severe thunderstorm I was forced to seek shelter at a farm I spired just off the main track, not from choice, but from sher necessity, as the nearest store was ten miles ahead. It chancell to be the homstead of Hans Smit, He eyed me suspiciously from his sheltered seat on the stoep as I rode up and craved permission for a temporary shelter for myself and beast. As soon as I had opened my mouth and displayed a lamentable ignorance of the tail (the Dopper vernacular), and some hesitation in expressing myself, he commenced to curse volubly in his language (it's a way most religion. Dutchmen have), and swore that never a rooinek should cross his threshold, and ostentatiously called for his rifle. Then two of his sons appeared from within, and in broken English—so I might understand a little of what was meant, I presume—joined in the tirade. I waited until they were seemingly exhausted, and then politely and diplomatically referred to my hapless, soaked condition, and mentioned something about being connected with a railway which might benefit the form should it be found practicable to construct in the locality. I also had a flask of gin, plenty of tobacco, and would pay handsomely for necommodation. They wavered for just a minute, and after a whispered consultation between the trio, I was graciously allowed to descend, and a Kaffir called to attend the horse. The outcome of it all was, they eventually made a big hole in my tobacco,

room and a stuffy loft above, reached from the outside by means of a rickety ladder.

His two sones wives and their eight lantern-jawed, pale-faced daughters, of ages ranging from six to twenty, occupied the lower apartment, depositing themselves on the single bedstead of the establishment, and when that was replete, about the floor on skins and sacks. I had the pleasure of sharing the upper storey with old Hansand his sons and their male progeny. Hans had sort of half-apologised for the limited accommodation at his disposal, for his family circle was temporarily extended. The prevalence of rinderpest and Government restriction of ox transport had rendered them unable to proceed as usual to Pretoria for nechtmaal (a national religious festival celebrated periodically), and therefore they had gashered together at the furm that Saturiay night to worship the following day on their own account. And they did it. Shortly after three I was aroused from a fifful shunber by someone below picking out the notes of a hymn tune with painful musical effect on a wheezy concertim; the shrill voices of the children and women folk joining in questionable time and melody. Then Jan, one of the sons, rose from his couch alongside me, and informed me that the festival had commenced, and that we should descend. It had to be suffered, I told myself; but the sight was one I am glad now I was enabled to witness. The cutive family gathered together in the grey, chilly dawn, with atern-set faces (odi illiterate Hans in the centre, with a grensy-tunnbed family Bible upon his knees—open only for the sake of appearances and usoless for reference—giv-