

THE QUEEN'S NEW SUBJECTS.

THE rattle of musketry startled the pring-bok and quagga; the Hottentot cowered in his lair to listen, and the "dun hot breath of war" floated away on the African breeze. The Dutchmen fought bravely, but they could not stand before the British infantry, and the battle of Boem Platz was lost. Their leader, Pretorius, became a fugitive and an outlaw; a price was set upon his head; and yet out of that lost battle of 1848 the Transvaal Republic was born.

A few years before, Natal had been annexed; and many of the Dutch settlers, or Boers as they are called, dissatisfied with the change of government, emigrated under the chieftainship of Pretorius. He was only a farmer, but a man of immense courage and energy; such a man as in the olden times would have become a king, a rude hero, "unrefined in speech." He led them over the Drakenberg Mountains, across the Vaal or Yellow River (whence *Transvaal*), into the wild desert, where, with wonderful endurance, they faced the danger from savage men and beasts. In the solitude of the vast African plains they had read and pondered over the Old Testament, till they compared themselves to the Israelites marching to the Promised Land—remembering that Egypt was situated in the same continent—and they justified their treatment of the natives by texts from Joshua. The more fanatical, resenting the annexation of Natal, looked upon the Queen of England as Antichrist. When the lands over the Orange River were attached in 1848, they gave battle as before related. For three years after, Pretorius was an outlaw. In 1852 the Transvaal Republic was formally acknowledged as independent, and Pretorius became the first president. On the 12th of April, 1877, British sovereignty was proclaimed, and the republic came to an end, after a short existence of just a quarter of a century.

The word Boer means a farmer. Griqua—a name now often seen—means a mixed race, descendants of Europeans and natives. The Boers might almost be called white stationary gypsies, their life being such a strange mixture of the nomad and settled. They travelled into the country in wagons, and wherever they found suitable places, encamped, and the wagon was exchanged for a house. But they kept the wagon still at hand, and sometimes made enormous journeys

in it. The house was always built where there was plenty of water, the first necessity of life, and though often substantial, it was a rude erection. One large room—answering to the halls in our manor-houses 300 years ago—is used as a general rendezvous, for sitting, eating, and even work, such as cutting up a sheep. There is often no ceiling—nothing but the thatched roof above. At one end are kept the milk-pails and churn. Not long since this churn was the rudest of utensils; the milk being beaten up with a heavy club, a style of work that would drive our present dainty dairy-maids wild. There is usually a great table and some stools and forms. The housewife, or *vrouw*, sits near the window sipping tea or coffee, and employed making or mending clothes, &c., for the family. Here she will sometimes sit, with the stolidity of the race, the whole day long. The domestic servants are usually natives—Hottentots and Bechuanas, or Bushmen, and though slavery was formally abolished at the time the independence of the republic was acknowledged, yet it was believed to still exist under specious pretences. The food principally relied upon is mutton or dried beef; they do not like the pig. There is plenty of game, and as African game tastes peculiarly dry, they eat it swimming in mutton-fat. They are not drunkards; but when they do take spirits prefer it neat, after the fashion in the Vaterland. In the house will be found the rush baskets made by the Caffre women, which are so closely interwoven that they will hold water, and are used as milking-buckets.

These farms are often miles and miles apart; in fact, the Boers once had a law that houses should not be built within less than three miles of each other. The offices are irregular—not neatly disposed, doubtless having grown up, as it were, from time to time, as occasion required. The threshing-floor is often simply enclosed with a wall of mud, and the grain trodden out by oxen, reminding one of the injunction—"Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." Indeed, there is much in their circumstances and mode of life to justify the parallel which they used to draw between themselves and the ancient Israelites. Near the house is a patch of cultivated ground, but their wealth lies in flocks and herds. During the day these wander over immense tracts of country—at even they return, and are shut up in the enclosures known as *kraals*, formed of the thorny

mimosa, through which nothing can penetrate. This precaution is rendered necessary by the wild beasts of prey. They have a saying that the lion, if he can have his choice, will fix on an ox, or a horse; if he cannot get either, he prefers sheep; and, thirdly, men; and of men, a Hottentot or native before a white. The *kraal* is so important an adjunct of the farm as to be used in speaking to denominate a settlement: they call a place So-and-so's *kraal*. This practice of driving cattle into a kind of stockade was once followed in our own country by our ancestors, the Britons, the relics of whose *kraals* are still detected by archæologists in some of the earthworks or "camps" scattered over the kingdom. The Boer counts his herds with great care as they are driven in, and will attend to nothing till he has finished. Some have as many as 6,000 sheep, and 500 or 600 cattle, besides horses. Even in very recent times all business was carried on by barter, with the ox and sheep as the unit of exchange.

Servants—we will not say slaves—were hired out at the price of so many sheep, for a given period. Girls were dowered at their marriage with so many sheep, say 500, and a proportionate number of oxen and horses: calling up reminiscences of Rachel and Leah, and the flocks Jacob carried away from the avaricious Laban with his wives. The cattle are very good: so long ago as 1832 the Boers were sharp enough to import some of the Devon breed to improve the native strain, and also some of the fine black Holland beasts.

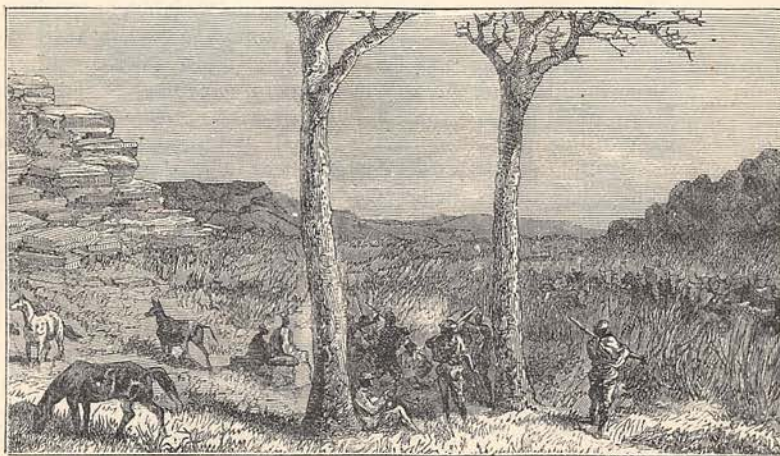
and redder—ruddier—than the hue of a European who has just come over; this is supposed to be the effect of the fierce sun upon the processes of the skin. The women would be good-looking were it not that corpulency is the fashion, and it is increased by perpetually sitting still. The general manners are said to strike a stranger as somewhat cold and reserved—it is the custom to merely *touch*, not shake hands in the cordial English fashion; but they improve greatly upon acquaintance. A traveller is sure of a hospitable reception; but, on the other hand, this is no more than is usual in semi-civilised countries, as in Australia, for instance, where every farmer has a room always ready for passing guests. Perhaps visitors of English blood have not felt all the Dutch warmth of heart, on account of the latent feud between the two races. Towards their own people they are said to be most kind.

The men used to carry the most extraordinary guns in their sporting expeditions—huge things like little cannons. They set no value on a gun unless they could put more than three fingers—three big fingers, too—into the muzzle. The gun was called a *roer*, and must have made a roar when discharged. They only fired at big game. Of course rifles have now penetrated into this wild country, and have doubtless superseded the original old blunderbusses. The men have the character of great industry.

So far we have seen the Boer in his settled state, but that is only half, as it were, of his life; the other



FARMING IN THE TRANSVAAL.



RETURN FROM TRADING.

The men are a fine strong race, tall and large-made, and it speaks well for the climate of South Africa that, although they are the descendants of the Dutch who settled at the Cape 200 years ago, they are, if anything, physically improved. Their complexions are darker

part resembles that of a gipsy, or of the Tartar races, who wander over the steppes of Asia in rude wagons. The Boer has always had a hankering for *trekking*, as he calls it, in search of fresh lands. He brings out his wagon, which perhaps to the civilised mind might

better be called a van, since it is covered, and which is built in a peculiar manner to withstand the jolting over wide plains without roads, and through rivers and streams. To this he harnesses a dozen strong, patient oxen, and loads it with all necessities, such as mutton, beef, and bread—very often carried in a box under the driving-seat. His *wrouw* gets up with her children—the Hottentot servants run beside or ride, as occasion dictates. Across the top of the wagon reposes a huge whip, sometimes thirty feet or more in length, with whose sharp thong he can dexterously touch up the leading pair, and make them struggle out of any slough of despond. There is also a shorter one of hippopotamus-hide. Having made these arrangements, he lights his pipe, and drives steadily forward day after day. At night, they “outspan,” or bivouac, with a good fire; and, of course, the provisions are often supplemented with game. The greatest danger to be guarded against is that of lions seizing the draught oxen. In this way they will accomplish journeys of several hundred miles; and it was thus that, gun in hand, they fought their route up the country from the original Cape settlement, despite savages, wild beasts, and privation. It is an open-air life, not without a powerful charm for a resolute man.

The climate is said to be better than at the Cape; and there was a theory that the weather repeated itself in a cycle of eleven years—a theory that has recently been worked out afresh with regard to the Indian famines. Among the anomalies that strike a new-comer are winds that blow and bring up no clouds, flowers that bloom and give no scent, and birds that cannot sing.

The language is curious in one respect—*i.e.*, the simplicity of the compounds; a little animal of the weasel kind, for instance, is called a “muis-hound”—a mouse-hound.

But the Boers are not the only new subjects added to the British Empire; there are the natives, the Hottentots, and Bechuanas, or Bushmen, inhabiting these territories—the strangest, perhaps, of all the races of men. Not but what there were Hottentots enough previously under English rule. With every desire to give our new friends credit for their virtues, their courage, and industry, the fact cannot be hidden that their treatment of the natives has been the reverse of humane; and, indeed, it has been this unfortunate

trait of their character which time after time has compelled the British advance. The present annexation was brought about to avoid another great native war, which might endanger our other provinces. The story of the shooting of native women, only a few months ago, will be fresh in the memory of readers; and, unhappily, it is not the first of the kind. There is a terrible account of the shooting of two native women and three men on the Modder River, when thirty prisoners were taken for slaves. Longer ago still, before the Transvaal was thought of, it is recorded that Boers have boasted of shooting 300 wretched defenceless creatures. In one of these forays it is stated that 30,000 cattle were stolen and distributed amongst the plunderers. They could not understand the English law, which made no difference between the white man and the savage; they left the English territories and *trekked* over the border, founding Natal, and afterwards the Transvaal, in order to continue the institution of slavery. Native children were seized when very young, so as to forget their parents as they grew up, and thus make better slaves. Even after slavery was abolished, they would go to a native village and order two or three dozen of the women to come and work in their gardens, which they did, knowing resistance was useless. They are even accused of cowardice in their battles with the savages; avoiding the warlike Zulus, and only attacking the spiritless Bechuanas, and even then forcing a friendly tribe to stand in front as a shield, and firing over their heads. This is extraordinary, since they are admitted to have fought white men bravely; and since, too, they were Christian-like among themselves, and are the descendants of the Protestant families in the Netherlands, who held their faith so firmly against persecution. They were determined to shut up the interior, and fined a writer \$500 once for transmitting intelligence; and their bitter opposition to Livingstone, who was resolved to open up the country and abolish slavery, is not a pleasant chapter to read. Time, no doubt, has softened matters since then, but probably the native races will rejoice at the sight of the English flag. The Bushmen, whose chiefs are hereditary, never could understand the succession of presidents in the Transvaal; when they were told that the English were so desirous of being ruled by the royal blood, that they even crowned a woman queen, they considered it a great proof of our superior sense.

