



PRINSLOO OF PRINSLOOSDORP



A TALE OF TRANSVAAL
OFFICIALDOM



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A Tale of Transvaal Officialdom.

BEING INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A
TRANSVAAL OFFICIAL, AS TOLD BY
HIS SON-IN-LAW,

SAREL ERASMUS,

*Late Public Prosecutor of Prinsloosdorp, Market Master
of Kaalkop, Small-pox Tax Collector of Schoonspruit,
etc., etc.*

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GLOSSARY OF DUTCH WORDS

USED IN THIS WORK.

BILTONG—Strips of meat dried in the sun.

COMMANDO—A party of Boers commanded for fighting or any State service.

COMMANDEER—To command personal service or material for State use.

DRIFT—A shallow ford.

FIELD CORNET—An important official who, in addition to being chief of the fighting force in his district, performs every branch of administrative duty for which no special officer is appointed on the spot. In outlying districts he is a veritable “Pooh Bah,” holding all the offices there are. On proclaimed goldfields he ranks below the Mining Commissioner.

Glossary.

GRONDWET—The Constitutional Law of the State.

I.D.B.—Illicit Diamond Buying.

INDABA—Kaffir name for a serious conversation or conference; largely used in conversation by Afrikanders.

INSPAN—To put horses or oxen to the cart or waggon.

KEREL—A fellow; as “mooi kerel,” a nice fellow.

KWAAI—Strict, particular, sharp.

LANDDROST—A chief stipendiary magistrate.

MINING COMMISSIONER—The chief Government official on a proclaimed goldfield, having control over all matters relating to the soil. Is the Government nominee on every representative body.

NACHTMAAL—The quarterly celebration of religious worship, to which Boer families travel long distances. It is the one universally-observed social gathering, and is made a general holiday, lasting two or three days.

NEEF—Nephew; used by elders in addressing youths familiarly.

OOM—Uncle. Elderly men are generally addressed as “Oom” by juniors.

OPRECHT—Sincere, reliable.

OUTSPAN—To unharness and release horses and oxen.

Glossary.

- PREDIKANT—A minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Predikant is held in great reverence by the Boers, the Doctor ranking next.
- RAAD—The Parliament.
- RAADZAAL—The Parliament House.
- ROOINEK—Red neck ; a contemptuous name for Englishmen.
- ROOIBAATJE—Red jacket ; British soldiers.
- SCHELM—A rogue ; a rascal.
- SCHRICK—A sudden fright.
- SJAMBOK—A switch of rhinoceros hide, always carried by a Boer ; pronounced “shambok.”
- SKOFF—Kaffir word for food.
- SLIM—Cunning, artful, tricky.
- SMOUCHER—A pedlar.
- SOUPIE—A tot of liquor.
- STANDS—Building plots, 50 feet by 50 feet, or 50 feet by 100 feet.
- STERK—Strong.
- STOEP—The raised portion surrounding all South African houses forming a verandah ; the most frequented part of the house.
- TAAL—The Dutch *patois* spoken by the Boers.
- TANTE—Aunt. Elderly women are addressed familiarly as “tante.”

Glossary.

TICKIE—A threepenny piece; the smallest coin circulating in the Transvaal.

TREK—To journey by ox-waggon.

TREK CHAIN—The chain by which the oxen draw the waggon.

TRANSPORT RIDER—One who conveys goods by ox or mule waggon. Transport riding was the main source of income to farmers before the construction of railways.

TRONK—The jail.

VELD—The open country.

VERNEUKERY—Low, petty cheating; knavery.

VRACHTER—Really! Truly! A much-used interjection.

Note.—The “V” in Dutch is always pronounced “F,” the “D” at the end of words is always pronounced “T.” Thus, “Veld” is pronounced *Felt*; and “Vrededorp,” *Freededorp*.



AUTHOR'S NOTE.

TO South Africans generally, and Uitlanders particularly, no explanation of the following pages is necessary, but for the guidance of readers only slightly acquainted with the Transvaal and the conditions of life therein, it has been thought desirable to give some idea of the scope and character of the book which would help them to a proper understanding of it. For this purpose I think I cannot do better than quote the following from a notice of the coming volume which appeared some time ago in a Transvaal newspaper :—

“It has long been a matter for surprise that the official side of the Transvaal has never yet been laid under contribution for a literary work of more than transient interest. Considering the rich store of virgin material to hand and the vast clientele interested, directly and indirectly, in the country, the market is assured and sufficient to tempt any

publisher. The difficulty, so far, has been the want of a man capable of handling the subject. No newcomer, whatever his literary gifts, can be trusted to describe the Transvaal Boer in his many aspects. To know him, one must have lived with him, speak his language, and have at once a broad sympathy for his limitations, and a sense of humour to present them in an attractive form. The task has at length been undertaken by one eminently qualified, and we have been favoured with a perusal of the MS. of his work, which, under the title of 'Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp,' will shortly be published by Dunbar Bros., of London and Johannesburg. It is absolutely the first attempt on the part of a qualified writer to depict the Transvaaler as he is under the new dispensation. Globe trotters by the score have given more or less inaccurate pictures of the Boer on the farm and the *veld** of Cape Colony, but no one has shown him in the town and in the official ring—the Boer that is destined for a long time to loom large in the public eye at home; the *slim*, narrow, yet interesting, Boer who is our lord and master and the incubus on the progress of the Transvaal.

“The book takes the form of a biography of Piet Prinsloo, a *voortrekker* from Cape Colony, who

* See Glossary for meaning of Dutch words.

goes through the mill of Transvaal officialdom from Field Cornet to Mining Commissioner, is the fortunate vendor of a gold farm and the founder of the *dorp* that bears his name. The author, who knows the *dorp*, Pretoria, and the Rand equally well, gives us a delightfully vivid and humorous picture of the ways that are dark and the tricks that are not always vain of *slim* Piet and his congeners, and, altogether, has produced the truest and best Transvaal sketch we have yet seen. The biography is supposed to be written by the son-in-law of the defunct Piet, and his avowed object is to vindicate the memory of his much-maligned relative. The author has admirably caught and illustrated that artlessness and delightful inconsequence of reasoning and judgment that is so characteristic of the unsophisticated Boer official, exemplified in such verdicts as that given by the Boer jury the other day who acquitted the defaulting Florida postmaster on the ground that he only stole £400 out of a possible £2,000, and the never-to-be-forgotten apology of President Kruger in the wire scandal: 'My officials are not too well paid, therefore there is no harm in their speculating with public money.' Never before has the 'civilised' Boer and his ways been so effectively and faithfully portrayed."

THE AUTHOR.



FOREWORDS.

The removal of my father-in-law, Piet Prinsloo, to a better world by dropsy, and of myself to Rhodesia by the machinations of the Hollander clique in Pretoria, have given me occasion and leisure to write and publish in safety much that is necessary for the vindication of the character of a father of his country and founder of the *dorp* that bears his name. At the same time I take the opportunity to show how the presence of the Hollander and Uitlander in the Transvaal has ruined the character of the Afrikaner. Of the wicked conspiracy by which I was forced to resign my positions of Public Prosecutor, Market Master, and Small-pox Tax Collector I shall have something to say in a later chapter; for the respect which we Afrikaners bear for our seniors compels me to set aside my own

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grievances in favour of the greater ones of my dead relative. I am particularly anxious to do this without delay, because the Uitlander Press of the Rand and many reptile journals in Cape Colony and the Free State have repeated, under the guise of an obituary notice, many of those calumnies which Piet Prinsloo was too magnanimous and proud to deny or avenge when living.

And here it is proper to state that the true reason which induced *Oom* Piet to remove from the Transvaal to Rhodesia was not, as wickedly suggested by the *Land and Volk* newspaper, to obliterate himself and shirk the action he brought against that paper, but rather that he might, by residing out of the country, the more easily resist the temptation to have his traducers dealt with by a court of justice. Those who know the strained state of feeling existing in the Transvaal at the time referred to need not be told that, had *Oom* Piet gone on with his prosecution of the editor the punishment awarded would have been so severe, and would have aroused such bitter feelings among the Uitlanders, that trouble would have resulted. It was to save his beloved country from reproach that Piet Prinsloo, as a true patriot and member of the New Reformed Church, generously forgave his enemies and refused to take shelter behind the new Press Law.

So numerous are the base inventions of his enemies that I feel at a loss how to begin to deal with them; and were it not for the literary reputation I gained as the Prinsloosdorp correspondent of the *Volksstem* and a frequent contributor to *Ons Volk*, I should not hesitate to place the task in other hands. But I fear that were I to do that the enemies of my late father-in-law would say that I was afraid to speak out on matters of which I best knew the inside. After great consideration I have decided to tell all the chief events in the life of Piet Prinsloo, leaving the story to refute the many wicked and libellous sayings that cling to his name, and to put to shame his detractors by telling the truth as far as in me lies.

I am aware that in telling the story as I purpose I shall lay myself open to be much misunderstood; indeed, I shall not be surprised if I be accused of doing the very thing that I have complained of in others—namely, revealing secrets of the career of my father-in-law best left untold. But if I should so err, it will the more surely assist me in my great object, which is to show how the character of the Transvaal Afrikander has been influenced for evil by the combined wickedness of the English Uitlander and Hollander—particularly the latter. I think that the fair-minded, *oprecht* man will be bound to confess that if Piet Prinsloo had

faults—and although I married his daughter and taught him law, I admit he had many—yet they were not part of his nature, but came from the seed of bad example, from temptation to which he had not been used, and the smallness of the salaries paid by the Transvaal Government.

It is always hard to persuade those who judge us Afrikanders by the spoiled samples on the Rand that we are by nature honest, upright and hospitable, and always addicted to making no charge for forage or food when we know that the traveller who outspans at our farms has no money to pay. Indeed, in the early days of our innocence there was very little money in the country, and a stranger who showed that he carried gold was oftentimes wrongly suspected of being an English spy. Thus it came that we were hospitable and made no charges, for we had not learned the use of money, but took cattle, sheep, and produce in payment for our services or our kindnesses freely bestowed.

Since I have lived amongst the Uitlanders and learned to know them I have thought that our people made a great mistake in being kind to them in those early days, for they have given us Boers a bad name, saying we are foolish and unlearned, which encouraged freshcomers to rob us, a custom they have maintained even to this day.

How often do we read stories told in derision of the Boer which should only be told in his honour? There is, for example, the story about Piet's uncle, Gert Ferreraï. He once sold a horse to a *Rooinek* whom he knew, who paid him not in money, but with a writing called a "promissory note." Gert carried it in his pocket for six years, till it became worn out and dirty. So he found out where the *Rooinek* was living and got the *Predikant* to write him a letter, asking him to give him a new writing, because the old one was getting torn. They printed this story in some book, and for a long time *Rooineks* used to try to pay in such notes instead of gold, which caused grave trouble and losses.

Despite the hard things said of him, I know that Piet Prinsloo was as good a Colonial Boer as any man could desire to be related to by marriage. If his faults were many it was because so much was made of them by his enemies. I shall tell at length and truly the many instances in which he suffered at the hands of the Uitlander, for they will explain the very strong feelings he held against them to the day of his death, and make clear the few actions by which he paid them back, "in their own coin," to use an English saying.

I do not wish it to be thought that I approve of all the conduct of Piet Prinsloo after he had

attained to wealth, for I hold with those who say there is no excuse for a full man to steal his neighbour's *biltong*. I cannot forget that a great Englishman named Lord Bacon did what Piet Prinsloo was accused of doing—he took money to give judgment in favour of the briber. Lord Bacon was a Chancellor, which is even higher than a Landdrost, and much better paid, yet he was not so severely abused in the papers as Piet Prinsloo has been. These spiteful criticisms and exposures caused Piet great sorrow, not that he cared what people said or thought about himself; what most angered him was to know that these exposures caused the Uitlanders to think evil of the Transvaal, and write untrue things of other officials. This is why he worked so hard to get the new Press Law made, though I am thankful that he has not lived to see the great failure of that necessary law against the taking away of men's characters.

