



Prinsloo of Prinsloosdorp :

A TALE OF TRANSVAAL OFFICIALDOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE UPBRINGING OF PIET PRINSLOO.

THERE is little need to remind Afrikaners that the family of Prinsloo is one of the best known in South Africa. The original Edict of Nantes served upon Jacobus Piet Prinsloo the Huguenot, compelling him to *trek* to South Africa, exists to this day, preserved in the Bible of the Prinsloos of Assvogelkop, Cape Colony. People learned in the history of the Colony know that wherever there has been action, civil or martial, there was a Prinsloo to be found. Lest, however, some may blame Piet Prinsloo for some of the discreditable acts of those members of the Prinsloo family who betrayed Graaf Reinet to the English in 1680, I

would mention that there are two branches of the family, and that the Graaf Reinet traitors belonged to the other one, as my father-in-law has often explained.

The birth of Piet was attended by circumstances of sadness and depression. He was the thirteenth child by the third wife of that Hans Prinsloo who led the Burghers against the English tax collector whom they justly killed at Oliphant's Kloof. The year of Piet's birth (1835) was the one wickedly chosen by the British Government for the ruin of the Colonials by freeing their slaves. Hans Prinsloo owned many, and according to the rate of compensation awarded, he should have received £600. But the Government, instead of paying in honest gold, did what all Englanders are fond of doing to this day: they gave the owners pieces of paper called "Treasury Bills," payable in London. Now, it was foolishness to expect poor Boers to travel to England, of which they knew nothing, and cash these bills, so they fell victims to the rascally Englanders who went round the country offering to go to London and collect the money. Hans Prinsloo was deceived by one of these *Rooineks*, who told him that the English Government had no more money, which was why they paid in paper. He so frightened him that Hans sold him the bill for £20. Some

years afterwards he heard that the *Rooinek* went to London and got the £600 in good gold, besides large sums more on bills that he had *verneuked* out of other Boers in the same way. Thus it was that when Piet came into the world he found his family so poor that they had to farm with hired Kaffirs, and even had sometimes to work themselves. Little wonder that the name of Englander was hated by him all the days of his life, and that he distrusted all kinds of written papers!

Piet grew up with his brothers and sisters on the farm at the Paarl, and early gave signs of having great courage and love of liberty. He was a bold young *kerel*, and did many things that caused his father loss and sorrow. It was he who, when there was no fresh meat on the farm for many weeks, because it was too dear to buy, would break the leg of an ox in the trek-chain, and tell his father that the beast had struggled and himself caused the break. The ox being no longer any good for pulling he would be killed, and the family had fresh meat.

For a short time Piet was taught at a farm school by an old German teacher whom he hated, because he pressed him to learn cyphering. But the schooling did not last long, for one day Piet finished the master, though no one knew then how it happened. It came about this way. Piet

and the old German were riding to a distant farm when they had to cross a river in flood. The old man could not see well and had to ask Piet which were the bad places in the ford. Piet showed him a place where the current was deep and strong and the teacher was carried away, so there was no more schooling. In the after days Piet often regretted that he had done this thing, for, said he :

“ Had I been able to cypher and read writing as the old teacher wished, I should not have been *verneuked* by so many *Rooineks*.”

He always believed that these visitations came as a punishment for the accident to his teacher, and he taught his children always to treat their school teachers kindly, even if they did not like them. He would often tell them stories of his youth, and strove hard to make them honest, because it was more profitable.

Once when he was a small *kerel* he went with his father to sell forage at a store twenty-four hours distant. While his father bargained the price, young Piet filled his pockets with tins of sardines. But the storeman saw him, and grew so angry because Piet's pa would not chastise him as if he had been a Kaffir, that he would not buy the forage. Hans therefore had to *trek* six hours further, and on the way the lightning struck the

waggon and killed four oxen ; which shows the wickedness and danger of stealing even sardines.

Piet often told this story to his children, with many others of a religious nature, and none of his sons have ever been imprisoned for theft.

Piet remained on the farm until his eighteenth year, when his father and brothers and most of his relations quarrelled with him on grounds perfectly unjust, as he has often assured me ; so he *trekked* with a borrowed waggon and oxen across the Orange River. Being short of Kaffirs to go with him, and having no money, he wrote a letter in the name of his uncle, who was Field Cornet, ordering the jailer to give him four Hottentot prisoners to help get in the mealie crop. The jailer, being able to read only the name, gave up the "boys," and Piet kept them for nearly four years without pay, telling them that if they made trouble he would send them back for breaking out of jail

So great was the moral influence Piet had upon these "boys" that when a month later he was wrongfully imprisoned at Bloemfontein on a charge of stealing the waggon and oxen with which he made the *trek*, they stayed in the town working for wages, which they gave to him. Often, too, they would help him in the difficult and tiring task of working on the roads, for which he volunteered while staying in the jail.

The story of his escape has often been untruly told. The truthful version, which I have had from his own lips, is this :

The jailer was a man who had learned from Englanders to drink French brandy in large quantities, a habit for which Piet frequently rebuked him, as it was not patriotic to use imported drink when Dop brandy, made in the country, could be had. On one of the occasions when he had accompanied Piet to visit a canteen in the town, the jailer, notwithstanding his solemn promises to Piet not to forget himself, but to return early to the *tronk*, got very drunk. Piet tried his hardest to get him back to the jail, but in vain ; so by way of punishing him for his want of moral courage, Piet gave him a thrashing with his own *sjambok*, and refused to take him home. Instead, he gathered his "boys" together and a Scotch cart and four oxen, and *trekked* across the Vaal into the Transvaal. The drunken jailer lay in the *veld* all that night, and was punished by being removed to Boshoff, where he was made Chief of Police.



CHAPTER II.

THE VOORTREKKER.

WHEN Piet Prinsloo first came to the Transvaal it was very different to what it is to-day. The Republics of Potchefstroom, Utrecht and Lydenburg were quarrelling with each other for independence or mastery of the entire country. They wanted much to fight, but cartridges cost three and four shillings a dozen, and there was no money in the land, so that £25 would make any Republic victor. Piet, being *slim*, would not join any party till he knew which would win.

Soon after he arrived he married Katrina Petronella Charlotte Erasmus, eleventh daughter of old Niklaas Erasmus, who brought him a three-thousand morgen farm at Potchefstroom, £200 in gold and English banknotes, a fine set of china plates and cups, and her own coffin. Piet had

found a lot of stray oxen on his *trek* from Bloemfontein, so that, with his waggon, he was very well off, and soon became a man of importance, for there were not many Boers in those parts who had two hundred sovereigns, and he was pointed out as the right man to be Field Cornet, which lighted the *veld* of his desire.

Katrina, too, desired much that her man should be Field Cornet, for young Nick Keet, who should have married her when she was fourteen years old, had been made one, and she wanted much to spite the girl he had married instead. So she gave her man no rest, but day and night talked of how great a thing it was for a man to be Field Cornet, which was more true in those days than now, when a Mining Commissioner is the greatest man. Then the pay was small for all officials, and often they had to wait many months for something on account. But Katrina said :

“What matters it if the pay is small and uncertain? Is it not a great thing to be able to call out on *commando* men who have not been friendly to you, and compel them to fight Kaffirs when they are afraid? And does not the Field Cornet take charge of the goods of people who die strangers in the land until their friends can come for them, which is generally never? And is not a Field Cornet a man that all desire to be friendly

with lest he should make them obey the law? And does he not receive presents from those whom he excuses from serving?"

This was how Katrina talked day and night, till Piet grew angry.

"How can I," said he, "be Field Cornet while Oom Jaantje is yet living, and there is no empty place?"

But it availed naught, for *vrouws* will not listen to words of reason when their hearts are set on things. At last Katrina saw the wisdom of what her man said, and she asked all her relations (of which she had hundreds) if they knew of a Field Cornet who was old or likely to die.

After much inquiring she heard that her uncle, Jan Coetzee, Field Cornet of Rustenburg, was not only old, but had learned the vices of the Englishers, and drank too much French brandy and whisky. So she made a plan.

"Piet," said she, "you shall go to Rustenburg and stay with my uncle, and take cases of brandy and make him drink heavily."

They waited till a transport rider was going to Port Elizabeth, and gave him ten sovereigns to buy as much French brandy as the money would get. In six months Piet got the brandy and *inspanned* his oxen into his best waggon and *trekked* to Rustenburg.

Oom Jan was pleased with the present, and sat up late that night with Piet drinking, so that he had no prayers for the first time for many months. Now *Oom* had married for his third wife Kaatje Liebenburg, who was but young, being only sixteen, and without experience, so that she could not master her man like an older *vrouw*. At first she would have broken the bottles, but she was in fear of Oom Jan, so she went to bed and thought out plans.

“Why,” thought she, “does my nephew come with dear French brandy if it is not that he wants to get favours from my man while he is drunk?” And she made a good plan to talk with Piet and find out from his own mouth what he was doing.

Next night she made no trouble because the two sat long drinking, but stayed with them and pretended to drink too, though it was from a bottle she had well weakened with water. Jan got drunk very soon that night, and while he lay sleeping on the floor, Kaatje worked her plan upon Piet. She was very pleasant to look upon, and had a way of making all the young *kerels* do her will, even though they had *vrouws*. She made Piet drink yet more brandy and then helped him to talk about himself, which was not hard, for Piet’s tongue was always in harness

ready for the *trek*, which caused him much trouble in life. This night he must have told Kaatje all his plan to be Field Cornet, though he says he did not; but when men are full of *dop* and young *vrouws* full of curiosity, it is always the women who win.

Next day Kaatje kept Piet hard at the bottle till he took sick. Then Kaatje secretly sent a messenger for the Predikant.

Now it happened that this minister was what in English they call "teetotal," and used to saying hard things of all who drank, even if they did not have to sleep after it. While the messenger was riding Kaatje came to Piet.

"*Neef,*" said she, "I have heard that the Predikant is coming to beg your brandy to give to the sick. He is a great hypocrite, and drinks it all himself, and makes as if he does not know the taste. I want you to make him ashamed, and talk to him as if all the Boers in the Transvaal know of his drunkenness, for we dare not talk as we would wish, for he is our Predikant; but you are not in his district and need not fear."

So Piet said he would say all that she wished and more. And Kaatje kissed him and gave him a big *soupie* of brandy and then another, and waited for the Predikant.

When the minister came Piet was like a *Rooinek* for noise and drunkenness. Before the Predikant could say "*Hou gaat it?*" Piet began. He called him a jackal in the *kraal*, who could not stand because he was so full of brandy, and made the room smell of it.

"We know of you and your brandy-drinking, even in Potchefstroom," said Piet.

What he said in all is not fully known, but never was a Predikant so foully traduced.

"Is he often like this?" he asked of Kaatje.

"Always, Predikant; at least he has been so all the time he is here."

And the Predikant went away; and so did Piet's chance of ever being Field Cornet of Rustenburg, for the Predikant is a strong man, and no one dare vote for a Field Cornet whom he said was not fit to belong to the Church.

When Piet grew sober next day Kaatje told her man all that Piet had said to the Predikant, and how that he had come to spy the nakedness of the land and be Field Cornet. So Oom Jan said hard things to Piet, who *inspanned* and *trekked* back to Potchefstroom, thinking hard how he should make himself clear with Katrina, for he had lost the brandy and his chance, and Katrina was a *kwaai vrouw*, and Piet found it not easy to make her believe what was not true. That was a

bad and sorrowful *trek*, but it made Piet think out a fresh plan, of which I shall now tell.

After he had made peace with Katrina, which took many days, he told her what he had thought on the road from Rustenburg.

I have said that Piet had sat quiet while the rival parties in the country fought for the mastery in the Transvaal. On the way back he learned that the Potchefstroomers were making the most headway, so after talking it over with his wife, as all good Boers do, he threw in his lot with them by lending the Government £25 to pay for the transport of cartridges they had bought in Natal, but could not get through for want of money. Later on, Piet did more: he lent them £60 to pay off arrears of salaries to the Field Cornets and the State Secretary, which saved the Republic, for if these officials had not been paid they would have gone over to the Lydenburgers, and as they had over 600 cartridges among them this would have given the victory to that Republic.

In the fighting that now broke out Piet did not take a part, but secretly lent money in small sums to all parties, so that whichever won would be indebted to him and would have to give him some office, so that he might get back his loans and something over. Piet's aid at this time was very valuable, for cartridges had gone up to fourpence

apiece, which made war very expensive and a thing not to be lightly undertaken. Still, matters moved very slowly, because, having few cartridges, the Boers had to talk more than fight, which filled the time very slowly, and made it that Piet was obliged to ride transport to earn money, for all he had was now lent to the Governments.

Piet was very sore at this, but the end showed that it was good that he was not paid, for when the diamond fields were found he made more money than he could have done, even if he had been Field Cornet. It was the illicit trade that first brought big money to him, as it did to many men now great and rich on the Rand, but not by fraud and wickedness, as in their cases.

Piet had been riding transport to Kimberley two years, and one morning he was on the market with his waggon when two men—English *Rooineks*—came and said :

“Piet, do you want to make £15?”

“Ja,” said Piet, for he now loved to make money.

“Then,” said they, “if you will take us to Bloemfontein in your waggon we will give you that,” to which Piet quickly agreed, for it was good money for going so short a distance out of his road. Being quite honest he did not think it strange that men should wish to pay the same

money to travel by slow waggon as they would be charged for a quick Cape cart. Nor did he even think it still stranger that the men should want him to pick them up two hours out on the road. It is true that he spoke about it in the canteen, but not because he thought it strange, but to boast of his good bargain.

As it happened, this was the one time in his life that Piet let his tongue slip to his own profit, for a man who heard him boast asked him what the men were like, and Piet told him. Then said the man :

“I am a detective, and these men are carrying out a parcel of stones. You must be *slim* and hold your tongue and do all they wish, and see everything. When we catch them we shall pay you more than the £15 they will give you.”

Next morning at sun-up Piet began his *trek*, and, when he came to a kloof he knew well, the two men came out and got on the waggon, and lay under the tilt. An hour later Piet heard horses coming fast behind, and looking back, saw four policemen, but he said *nix*, though his heart came into his mouth, for he saw that his passengers carried revolvers, and he feared there might be shooting, which he did not love.

Presently the men heard the horses too, and looked very scared, but only whispered together.

Still Piet made no sign, but sat quiet. Then his heart gave a great jump, for he felt a hand go into his side pocket, and he knew that the parcel of diamonds had been passed to him. At first he would have cried out, but, when he thought, he knew no harm could come to him as the police did not suspect him.

When the detectives came up they ordered the waggon to stop, and while two of them made the two "I.D.B.'s" strip off every bit of their clothing, the others searched the waggon, even under the iron tyres and the nut bolts. Meanwhile the two men stood and laughed, and asked the police if they had searched the horns of the oxen and other impossible places, which made the police very angry, especially when they could find nothing. The chief detective took Piet aside and asked him in Dutch if he had seen the parcel.

"Nay," said Piet, as he truthfully could, for he had not seen, but only felt, the parcel, when the man slipped it in, and when he himself secretly put it in his tobacco pouch.

Then the police rode away amid the jeers of the two men, never having searched Piet, whom they thought was as good as one of themselves.

When the detectives had been gone half an hour one of the men put his hand into Piet's pocket, saying :

“You have earned your fifteen quid,” and then gave a big cry.

“Where is my parcel?” he asked.

“What parcel?” asked Piet, with a very grave face.

The man told how, on hearing the police coming, and knowing the waggon could not get into safe ground over the Free State border before they came up, he had passed the parcel into Piet’s pocket.

“*Alamachtig!*” answered Piet, “that explains why that police *kerel* felt in my pocket and hastened behind the waggon. He has your diamonds and would not say so to his officer.”

The men began to bluster and make a great noise, but Piet was ready for them.

“You *schelms*,” said he, “you tried to get me into trouble by putting the diamonds on me and now you quarrel with me. Get off my waggon, for I will not travel with such as you.”

Piet was not afraid, for the police had taken away the men’s pistols, and they were too small to fight with their fists like common *Rooineks*. So Piet took up a *yokeski* and beat them off the waggon and saw them with pleasure start to walk back to Kimberley.

When they had gone well away Piet got under the tilt and unfastened the parcel. He nearly

fainted when he saw over one hundred beautiful large stones, which he knew were worth many hundreds of pounds, for he had seen many such in Kimberley, and had often wondered that such small things should be so highly valued. He could not eat nor sleep for thinking how he should turn them into money without being himself *verneuked*, for he was no match for the Jew diamond buyers.

At last he thought of a plan. He knew that Dirk Hartogh, who kept a wayside store on the Kimberley Road, was said to deal in stones, so he buried all but two in an ant-hill in the *veld*, which he marked so that he might find it again, and went on to Dirk's store, carrying the two stones in his mouth, meaning to swallow them if the police should change their minds and come back. But nothing happened, for he was now out of their jurisdiction, and he got to Dirk's place.

When he got word in private, he said :

“Dirk, if you found two diamonds on the market at Kimberley, what would you do with them ?”

Dirk laughed as he said,

“I should go to Dirk Hartogh and ask him what he would give me for them.”

Then Piet showed the sample stones to Dirk, who was very pleased and offered £30 apiece. He

brought out the money and put it into Piet's hand, for Dirk was often honest when he bought stones, knowing that if he were not he would earn a bad name, and have no more customers.

But being himself a Boer, like Dirk, Piet knew the ways of those who had been spoiled by the *Rooineks*, and it was a long time before his faith in Dirk grew strong.

At last he told Dirk that there were over a hundred better stones in a place known only to himself, but he would not tell where it was until Dirk brought out a bag with one thousand sovereigns, and told Piet they were his if he produced the stones.

Piet had never seen so much gold before, and he agreed to take Dirk to the ant heap; which he did. Dirk took the stones he found there, and handed over the money on the spot, and Piet went to his farm very happy and glad that there was "I.D.B.," although before he had said hard things about it, not having made profit out of it. Still, being honest by nature, he was sorry that he had not given the fifteen pounds back to the men who had brought him such fortune. Katrina, however, did not agree, for, said she :

"They were great rogues and would have got you trapped."

When Piet counted the money paid by Dirk he found it £20 short, and he was no longer sorry that he had not returned the men their passage money.

Piet now sat down quietly; for why should a man work who has a thousand pounds? He still took no part in the quarrels, not even in fighting the Kaffirs, for, said he :

“There are many burghers who have done nothing for the country, while I have lent money, which I have never had back.”

Often he was called out on *commando*, but each time he was excused from serving on grounds provided for in the “Grondwet,” and because of the financial aid he had given to the country.

The way he escaped under the shadow of the law shows how useful it is to be able to read. Although he could not read writing, Piet could read printed papers and some books if not in too High Dutch, though not so well as his neighbours believed; but as none of them could read at all they did not know that he was deceiving them.

When the Field Cornet ordered him on *commando* Piet would bring out a big copy of the “Grondwet” and show an article in it.

“Read it,” says Piet, “and you will know that burghers who have lent money to the State cannot be called out.”

And old Hans Scholman, the Field Cornet, who hated Piet, would take the book and look hard at it, and make as if he were reading it, moving his lips and looking as a Landdrost does when he reads the law-book handed him by an attorney. Then, when he thought he had looked long enough, he would say :

“You are right, *neef*, I had forgotten that; we must obey the law.” And Piet would be excused.

This caused his enemies to be jealous and spiteful, and to make false charges that Piet escaped service in the field by unworthy tricks, which was foolishness, for he did not understand the working of them until those who imputed them to him showed how they were planned. This slandering of his good name grieved him much at the time, but when in the afterdays Piet himself became Field Cornet, he was glad that these false charges had been made, for he then knew all the wiles of the burgher who would escape serving the State on *commando*, for they had themselves taught him, and they were sorry, for he made all serve according to law, or pay heavily to be excused.

It has been often thrown at Piet Prinsloo that he never fought for his country. Such critics do not seem to understand that a man may help his

country in other ways than by bleeding, as, for instance, as Piet did, by lending it money. It is true, that during the Zulu war he was in the service of the English, against whom we then had no quarrel, so there could be no reproach. Even then he inflicted injury upon them. He had a contract to supply oxen, and often has he told how he brought cattle in by day, got paid for them, and then "stampeded" them at night, only to catch and sell them again next day. Thus he spoiled the Egyptians, who were so soon to be our greatest enemies.

Much has also been made of Piet's absence from Laing's Nek and Majuba, as if every Boer in the State could have been there! It happened that Piet had volunteered for that *commando*. He was at Paardekraal at the Declaration of Independence, and made a stirring and great speech. His assurance of his resolve to shed his blood for the independence of the Transvaal had a great and encouraging effect upon those Boers who were lukewarm and anxious about their farms and their *vrouws*, and who thought they had done their share by placing a stone on the heap that to-day forms the famous monument at Krugersdorp. No one was more ready to fight than Piet, although he was afraid the English would win. But the night before Nick Smit's *commando* started for the

Natal border, Piet had a dream that his mother was sick. To his last hour Piet was always a religious man, and he could not disregard such a plain warning and fight happily. He, therefore, offered to stay and mind the farm and the womenfolk at Jan Botha's place, while Jan went to fight. Jan wanted a new saddle, which Piet bought him and gave him five sovereigns beside, and waited till Farnie Duplooy, the transport rider, should come in from Kimberley. Piet knew that Farnie would have met *kevels* from the Colony at Kimberley, who would know if the *vrouw* Prinsloo was dead or sick.

Besides, there was yet another reason. The money Piet had lent was still owing, and he would not fight for a dishonest Government that might be beaten; but he did not say this to everyone. He rejoiced very much when the independence of the Transvaal was established, and from that day was a good and loyal *oprecht* burgher of the State.





CHAPTER III.

LANDDROST OF VREDEDORP.

A YEAR later, Piet gained the great ambition of himself and his *vrouw* Katrina. He hit on a plan that was great, though Katrina always said it was her thought and not his. However, he went to Pretoria when he knew the Government had no money to spare and made a great outcry for his long overdue loan.

“If you have no money to pay me, make me a Field Cornet,” said Piet.

“But how can we make you a Field Cornet if there is no vacancy?” said the State Secretary.

“Easy,” answered Piet. “You must ask any Field Cornet to give an account of the money he has not paid to the State, and if he cannot do so, discharge him.”

“Would you not rather be a Landdrost?” asked the State Secretary, “for it is much easier to find out a Landdrost than a Field Cornet.”

Piet knew that this was said because the Government could not afford to quarrel with men who can command votes as Field Cornets can, and he was more than ever resolved to hold out for a Field Cornetcy. But the State Secretary had a glib tongue, and pressed the Landdrostship so hard that Piet began to grow weak, and said he would ask his *wrouw*. So he went back to the farm and talked to Katrina.

“Piet,” said she, “you are a great fool. Is not a Landdrost higher than a Field Cornet? And look at the fines you handle.”

“But,” said Piet, “I cannot read writing, neither can I write more than my name, and a Landdrost has much writing to do.”

“Nay,” said Katrina, “you can have a clerk and get part of his wages.”

This decided Piet, and within six months the Government asked the Landdrost of Vrededorp to show his books, which they knew he could not do. So he was sent away and Piet had his office and his house.

For a long time Piet was sore that he had listened to the advice of Katrina, for the office was well-nigh worthless, except for the salary,

which was sometimes not paid for months. And the burghers turned good on purpose to spite Piet, whom they disliked for getting their old Landdrost sent away, and they would not prosecute their Kaffirs, but flogged them themselves. Piet read up all the local laws that the burghers had forgotten or did not know of; but even this brought in very little. If he fined a Boer for shooting game on a Sunday, the man never had any money to pay, so all Piet could do was to take an ox or some eggs. If he did this the Boer was sure to come in a day or two and borrow the ox for ploughing or transport riding, so that Piet lost count of the fines, which were scattered all over the country.

Then there was another great drawback. There was no jail at Vrededorp, and if there had been there was no money to pay a jailer. Piet turned a stable into a jail, but it was only wattle and daub, and when drunken Kaffirs were inside, they fell against the walls and tumbled outside, so that there was much repairing, and the guard had to keep his rifle and hammer going all the time.

Of course, the papers made great fun of this, which made Piet very angry, until a good thing came along. It was a wind-storm, which one night carried the jail away and lost fifteen Kaffirs, who were worth two sovereigns each for fines.

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At the same time the great cattle stealer, "Scotty" Smith, was in the weak *tronk*. He came to Piet and made a great stir because he had been hurt by the falling walls, and said he would bring a law action against Piet.

This same "Scotty" was the cause of great laughter against Piet, and this was the way of it, though I would say there was no shame to any-one in being *verneuked* by a clever man like "Scotty."

He drove up to Piet's farm in a smart spider, with four fine horses, and a lame gelding tied to the back board. It was sundown, and "Scotty" asked if he might *outspan*. "Ja," said Piet, for he saw that the *Rooinek* could pay for all he might have. So "Scotty" *outspanned* and came in to supper, and asked such a beautiful blessing in the *Taal* that Piet was greatly pleased, and brought out the fresh beef which he had at first denied having.

So pleased and innocent was he that when his Kaffir, Sixpence, called him out and said, "Baas, that is the great 'Scotty' Smith, the horse thief—I know him well," Piet was very angry, for he thought that a thief like "Scotty" could not ask a blessing before meat. So he tied Sixpence up and gave him a dozen with a *sjambok*, and made him unsay his slander, which the boy frankly did.

Piet was not suspicious until next morning, when Jan Fourie, the Field Cornet, rode on to the farm, and told Piet to keep a close look out on his horses, as the great "Scotty" was in the district.

"Shall you know him by sight?" asked Piet.

"Ja," said Jan, "there he is by the *kraal*; he is looking which he shall steal, the blue *schimmel* or the roan. I know him well, and shall go and find some *kerels* to catch him while you make him drunk, for there is £50 reward for him."

"Nay," said Piet, "you shall stay and make him drunk while I ride, for I am Landdrost."

"Then must you stay and keep him prisoner while I ride and *commandeer* a guard," said Jan, "for I am Field Cornet." And he rode away.

Then it was that Piet wished still more that he were Field Cornet, for "Scotty" was a *sterk kerel*, and had no fear of Landdrosts, but preferred to steal their horses above everybody's.

Piet called "Scotty" and asked him to drink some *dop*, but he would not unless Piet drank also. So Piet weakly agreed, forgetting how brandy had once been his undoing. They sat on the *stoep* and drank much until Piet grew sleepy. He did not then know that "Scotty," being from Scotland, where they drink only whisky, was hard. Piet lay down in his *kaross* and slept heavily.

When he awoke it was near sundown and he

felt very sick. Katrina was away at Potchefstroom, or it would not have happened. He called the Kaffirs, but none came ; so he went out and saw that the *Rooniek's* spider was gone, and instead of there being his own three horses in the stable, there was only "Scotty's" lame gelding and three boys tied up to the manger, for this was "Scotty's" way of leaving.

Piet waited long for Jan to come back, but he did not, for he was in great terror of "Scotty." At sundown who should ride up on Piet's own blue *schimmel* but "Scotty" himself. He came up to the *stoep* as if nothing had happened.

"So you are awake," said he. "I'm glad, for I want some money, and could not find it while you were drunk. Come and show me where it is."

Piet had a bad *schrick*, but he thought out a plan.

"Scotty," said he, "I know that it would be foolishness to say I have none, for you would do to me as you did to the postmaster at Dutoits, make me crawl into my own oven. The money is in here."

He led the way to the *tronk*. "Scotty," thinking it was a stable, and knowing that Boers always hide their money in strange places, went in. Then Piet ran out quickly and shut the door,

calling to the Kaffirs, who put a Scotch cart against it. "Scotty" just fired a shot through the door and broke the arm of Sixpence.

Piet put a boy on the blue *schimmel* and told him to ride fast to Jan Fourie's place, while he got his rifle and fired shots into the *tronk* from the corner of the *stoep*. "Scotty" did not reply, but lay still, and Piet watched in front while the two Kaffirs, with the elephant gun, kept guard behind.

Then it was the great storm came, and the darkness. For six hours they watched and waited for Jan Fourie, who never came, saying it was too dark to find the road at midnight. The *tronk* was blown over, and the Kaffirs ran away, while "Scotty," with his revolver pointed at Piet, abused him terribly; then made him find the two hundred sovereigns he had hidden, and give up his four guns and all his cartridges.

After he had made Piet get him coffee, he tied him to the stall of the stable, which still stood, and handcuffed him, and at sun-up he rode away. It was three days before they could get the handcuffs off Piet, for "Scotty" had taken away the keys, and no file could cut the hard steel. Piet always thought that "Scotty" had taken his guns also, for they were not to be seen.

The papers made great ridicule of Piet, but

Jan Fourie got applause, for he lied greatly, saying he was chasing "Scotty" all night, when the truth was that he took his best horses and hid them in a *kloof* four hours off, lest "Scotty" should come for them.

But good came out of evil, for the Government built a strong *tronk*, and paid a couple of white guards.

About a year afterwards a young German doctor *outspanned* at Piet's place. He was a learned young man, and was looking for gold and other things in the earth, and selling physic for lung sickness in cattle. When he had drunk some water he was very much excited, and put powders into it and looked hard and long.

"Meneer Prinsloo," said he, "show me where this water is got, for there shall I find iron and coal, and you are a rich man."

So Piet showed him the well. The doctor took a bucketful and put part of it in a bottle and carried it away to be seen by the people in Johannesburg who understand such things.

When he had gone, Piet sent a Kaffir down the well, thinking he might find the coal and iron for himself. Instead, they found the rifles and hand-cuffs and keys which Piet thought had been carried away by "Scotty."

This is why Piet had no belief in the learned

men who came to prospect for gold on his farm, in later years. "They are frauds," he would say, "and do not know rust from coal."

It is only when one knows how often and how cruelly Piet was robbed by the Uitlander that one can understand the great bitterness he always felt towards that greedy nation. The silliness of that German doctor embittered him against scientific men, so that he refused to let his farm be prospected for six years.

When a gold reef was at last found on it, and he sold the farm, he was again *verneuked* by science. A Johannesburg syndicate had offered him £25,000 for the property, and he was going to ride into the Rand and get the money, when the great John Brown, who is now what is called a millionaire, came to the farm.

"Piet," said he, "I will give you £100,000 for the farm; not in pieces of paper like those swindling Johannesburg Uitlanders, but in golden sovereigns, Kruger's and Queen Victoria's," and Brown showed him a bag full of more gold than he had ever seen. Next he showed Piet a long writing, which, being in the *Taal*, he could almost understand, for it was not like the Uitlanders' agreement, which was in English, and full of strange words. So Piet signed it without consulting Katrina.

Brown counted out the money. First he counted one hundred sovereigns, and Piet, who could not write arithmetic, laid them out in rows on the table, like spans of oxen, sixteen in a span, for he knew that six spans made one hundred, less four. Next Brown counted out one thousand, which took Piet a very long time to check, for one thousand is sixty-two spans.

“There,” said Brown, “goes one hundred; there goes a thousand—one hundred thousand.”

Piet did not quite understand, for he thought one hundred thousand was more than that, but Brown counted twenty-five thousand in the same wicked way, to show how much greater his offer was, and confused Piet till he could see only the glitter of the gold, and, growing greedy, he took it, and signed the receipt, which Brown had cunningly made out for £100,000.

If Piet had not boasted to Jan Fourie that he had sold his farm for £100,000, it would have been well; but again his free tongue brought him trouble. When Katrina came home she counted the money, and told Piet he had been *verneuked*; but he would not believe it till the Predikant came and counted also. Then Piet saw what had been done.

The Predikant wrote to Brown and asked him to bring the rest of the money, but Brown's

lawyer replied that Piet was a thief and was trying to swindle Brown, and that he could bring lots of witnesses who could swear that Piet had told them he had received £100,000; besides which they had Piet's own receipt for that amount, all of which Piet knew was true, and he was sorry that he had boasted so loudly. But he resolved that all his children should learn arithmetic, and he was more than ever sorry that his school teacher had been drowned.

Piet was not the only Boer who was foolish in money matters because he did not know arithmetic. There was Jacobus Bantjies, who had the farm Bantjiesdrift. When the Uitlander came to him and asked for how much he would sell his farm, he did not know what to ask, for he had only heard of big money, but had never seen any.

"There is lots of gold there," said he, though he did not know if there was or not.

"Ja," said the Uitlander, "there may be and there may not be. What do you want?"

"Two millions," said Coos.

"Ja," said the Uitlander, "but the Gold Law says that two millions must be paid in paper and shares. Will you not rather have this knapsack full of sovereigns?"

"I shall ask Sonnie," said he, and called in his *vrouw*, to whom the Uitlander showed the knap-

sack. Then he wrote some figures on a piece of paper.

“That is two millions,” said he, “which will you take?”

“Take the knapsack, Coos,” said Sonnie, “it is the most;” and they did, and found there were only five hundred sovereigns.

A Boer cannot close his eyes when the gold shines. Were it not so, our people would not have given away their rich gold farms for knapsacks of sovereigns, but would have held on for millions. It is a punishment for their greed.

Piet was caught by the same fever as soon as the gold he got for his farm was put away. Katrina wanted it put in a chest and buried under the kitchen floor; but Piet was wiser, for he knew that if he gave it to the Netherlands Bank people it would grow. He had a hard task to make Katrina come to his way of thinking, for, said she:

“Why should these people pay you for taking care of your money? Truly, Piet, you grow foolish, and will not get wisdom.”

Piet got the Predikant to make it clear to Katrina, and she agreed, though at first she would have Piet bring the money back every Saturday, lest robbers should break in on Sunday, when the bank people were at *Kerk*. The Predikant told

her that Piet would lose by this, so she yielded, though she gave Piet great trouble, making him go often to the bank to hear if the money was still there, till he grew tired, and one day brought all the money back and gave it to Katrina to hide, when she was happy, though Piet was not, for he knew he was losing his interest.

“Why do you want interest,” said Katrina, “when you can go to Pretoria and get the money you have lent to the Government?”

And she gave her man no rest until he went after the money, which was one hundred and twenty pounds.

The State was now rich and could pay Piet, but the years had gone by and no money had come, so he travelled to Pretoria. *Slim* Frickkie Keiser was in the Treasury then, so Piet told him what he had come for.

“You have no need of gold,” said the Treasurer, “for you are a rich man, and should be ashamed to trouble the Government for so small a sum. If you are wise you will give me a receipt for that money, else the Government may want to see your books and know all about the fine money.”

Then Piet was very scared, for he had not kept good account of all the money he had received for fines. So he gave Keiser a receipt in full for the hundred and twenty pounds which he had

never had, but Keiser collected it from the Treasury and kept it. Nay, worse, for when he was candidate for the First Raad he told the burghers that he had paid the debts of the Government, and showed them Piet's receipt. This gained him many votes, for burghers are foolish, and believe all that is told to them if the lie be but in the *Taal*.

There was another thing that made Piet hate Englanders. One day two of them *outspanned* at his farm on their way to Magato's country, where they were after mineral concessions. Now it happened that Piet was very good friends with that great chief, Magato, and he told the Englanders this; also that a word from him would help them much, as a bad word would spoil them, for he meant that the *Rooineks* should pay him for his good word. He also told them that he had a concession from the chief to bring boys to the Rand mines, getting £1 premium for each Kaffir he brought, which was true, but foolish to say, for a Landdrost may not do this —if he be found out. But Piet loved to make himself to be rich and great before *Rooineks*. So in the end the men paid him £10 for his good word, which they themselves wrote and Piet signed, though he knew well that it would be of small account, for Magato was a strong chief and

disliked the Boers, and would never listen to their advice, for he feared a trap to steal his country, and set light value on their good words.

Piet asked the *Rooineks* to tell Magato that the small-pox sickness was on the roads that the boys would travel to the mines, which was true. These rascally Englishers made a plan when they heard this, and gave out to Magato that they were doctors who could "vaccinate," which is salting for the small-pox. Magato, being foolish, and having had one great visitation of the disease, believed them, for he knew that the white men salted for small-pox. He gave them ten sovereigns and twenty oxen to vaccinate all the young men in the *kraal* and all his wives, which the scoundrels did, but they did not use the right stuff, but condensed milk.

Those Englishmen passed through the country vaccinating Kaffirs for half-a-crown and Boers for five shillings each, and never before was there so much money in a tin of milk. And to this day there are those who say that Piet was a party to the fraud, because he gave the *Rooineks* a letter to Magato. Such people do not know that the villains came back to Piet's farm and vaccinated him and all his family in payment of their forage bill. But worse came when Magato learned the truth from the German missionary. He was very

mad, and sent an *induna* to Piet to bring back the £10 and the twenty oxen paid to the *Rooineks*. Piet paid them, for he feared he should lose his contract for boys if he did not. And what he feared came true, for Magato took away the contract and gave it to the German missionary, whereby Piet lost over £200 per month.





CHAPTER IV.

THE JEALOUSY OF NICK GROBLER.

PIET PRINSLOO had enjoyed his ambition four years when I married his third daughter, Sannie, and was made Public Prosecutor of Vrededorp in the place of Franz Grobler, who was son of Nick Grobler, Landdrost of Schoonspruit, and stole postage stamps.

It was Nick Grobler who was the great boulder in the road of my father-in-law's happiness. Jealous, vindictive and greedy by habit, he was like an Englander and Hollander in one, and he hated Piet Prinsloo as much as Piet despised the nations whose vices Nick possessed in his big, vain body. I am persuaded that Nick Grobler was in the pay of the enemies of the Transvaal, for no true patriot would so often and so wickedly expose the weakness and mistakes of an

Afrikander as he did those of my father-in-law, in addition to speaking English, even in court, instead of the *Taal*. Though I cannot prove it, there is no doubt that he inspired all the malicious articles about Piet Prinsloo which often appeared in the *Critic* and the *Patriot*. I am sure of this, because Nick wrote a very much better hand than my father-in-law, though I know that when he was first made Landdrost he used to sit up at night to practise writing, which was why at first he always sentenced Kaffirs, whatever the offence, to three months, two pounds or ten lashes, because he had not yet learned how to write other sentences. But in the end he wrote very well, as I must confess, for the State Attorney told me he could often read nearly the whole of the evidence taken in cases by Nick, which was not so with my father-in-law until I became his son-in-law and Public Prosecutor. Then it was agreed that I should make my writing very much like his, and write out all his judgments—a long and weary work, for Piet had a loose tongue and filled many long pages.

As soon as Piet Prinsloo was made Landdrost of Vrededorp, Nick Grobler started to show his wicked nature against him, and continued so to do until Piet left the Transvaal. His first spitefulness was to publish in the Transvaal *Patriot* a letter

asking if it were true that a certain Landdrost had been in the Bloemfontein *tronk* for cattle theft, or had been refused membership of the *Gerevormede Kerk*.

Piet, very foolishly, made me write a letter to the editor, saying that the libel could not apply to him, and that he wondered who could be meant. He also made grave charges against Nick Grobler. The editor of the *Patriot* did not print the letter, but showed it to Nick, who went to a law agent, and the agent wrote Piet a letter of demand for payment of £100 and an apology in a lot of papers.

“What shall I do?” asked Piet of me, after he had blamed me for writing the letter and causing all the trouble.

“You must refuse to pay or apologise,” said I, “and prove that he took money from the wives of Kaffirs to let them off floggings, and does not pay into the Government all the money he gets for fines. You must tell me the dates when he did all this, and the names of the Kaffirs who have paid him.”

This made Piet very angry, and he spoke foolishness, as he always would when he let his tongue run fast.

“I don’t know the exact days,” said he, “nor can I remember the names of the Kaffirs, but I

know that he has done this, for am I not myself a Landdrost?"

For a long time I strove with him to show him that such a case would be given against him, even by the judges in Pretoria, and at last he saw reason, so I drew up an apology, which was the same one I kept in my desk to write out for Boers who slander their neighbours. I always charged £2 for writing it out, and the editors of the papers where it was printed paid me half what they got for publishing it, which was very profitable for me. The apology was the usual one that is always in the Dutch papers every week, and said:

"I, Piet Prinsloo, Landdrost of Vrededorp, declare that when I said Nicklaas Grobler had stolen money from the Government and had taken bribes from Kaffir women, I spoke what I knew was not true, for Nicklaas Grobler does not take bribes, and I confess, with shame, that I am a great liar, and cannot speak what is true about people who are honest like Nicklaas Grobler.

(Signed) "PIET PRINSLOO."

Witness.

There was at first a little trouble about the £100, but it was arranged by Hans Breda, who saw Nick, and told him that Piet had written to the Government to ask for Nick's books to be examined, but that the letter would not be taken

to Pretoria if Nick gave a receipt in full for the £100, which he did, being guilty and afraid of an examination of his accounts.

Piet often had to sign this apology, for, as I have said, he had a slipping tongue and said many untrue things about people who made him angry. But, like all Boers, he was always ready to apologise when found in the wrong, as the papers in the *Taal* can testify, for they have many such apologies, which is a good practice, making men and women pause before they say slanderous things.

Piet was himself a great believer in this way of settling quarrels until his daughter married Sacke Keet, the law agent. Then he no longer encouraged it, but advised the disputants to consult a lawyer, unless he knew they would go to the Attorney Beyers, who was son-in-law to Nick Grobler, and a much cleverer man than Sacke, and would have got much more practice in our court if Piet had not always given judgment in favour of Sacke's clients when he could, and advised Beyer's clients to compromise or apologise, which habit, I must say, he carried too far, for it gave the *Critic* something to write about him nearly every week, and often caused his cases to be upset on appeal, which is very annoying to a Landdrost. The editors of the *Critic*

and the *Patriot* never let pass a chance of having a shot at Piet for any errors he made. It is true that while Landdrost he made some mistakes through his want of knowledge of the law, as who does not, even the judges of the High Court at Pretoria? Piet would, for instance, never listen to cases quoted from law books.

“It is only a trap for me,” he would say to me; “they want to show me up.”

So when a case was quoted by a young attorney who did not know Piet’s custom, my father-in-law would ask:

“Who said that?”

When he was told he would answer:

“That might do for his court, but I’m Landdrost here, not the man you are quoting,” and then he would give judgment as he pleased.

That was how young Keet got into favour with him. He would never quote cases unless they agreed with the opinion of the Landdrost, and Piet said he was the smartest lawyer in the district, though he was not.

There was another mistake he made which caused him and me to be much laughed at once. He would put too great faith in Jim, the native interpreter of the court. Jim was a *slim* Kaffir, and though he was thought to know most Kaffir tongues I think he only knew one or two; and the

prisoners used to say afterwards that Jim made them plead guilty when they had done the opposite, just to save time, for he was very lazy, and got angry if the court sat after twelve. Jim was one of the boys Piet brought with him from the Colony, and was now getting old, and for that reason Piet let him take liberties, which shows that it is a mistake to treat Kaffirs with kindness. Besides this great annoyance that he brought upon us, many Kaffirs were flogged and imprisoned who would not have been convicted if Jim had spoken the truth. I tried my best to get Piet to have Jim lashed, if only to make him careful, but he would not, and had to suffer, as all people do who let Kaffirs be master.

The story of our mishap was this. Four Kaffirs were brought up for robbing and beating four others. Jim was very lazy that day, and took no trouble, so that the four prosecutors were put in the prisoner's box and the four prisoners made witnesses.

Jim saw that he had blundered as soon as the first prisoner was called to give evidence, but fearing that I would get him lashed if the mistake were found out, he said nothing, but told the Landdrost that all four said they were guilty. So they got six months and twenty lashes each, while the

real culprits were let go—the most astonished and pleased Kaffirs ever seen !

We did not find it out till the four had been flogged, and even then Piet would not have Jim punished, but said the innocent Kaffirs deserved it, for he had no doubt they had lied about the robbery and would have deserved flogging some day. However, Piet let them off after they had worked for a month on his farm.

The *Critic* and *Patriot* got hold of the story, but there was no Government inquiry, for the Executive never took notice of what the *Critic* might say about officials, which was just, for why should a Landdrost be punished for the stupidity of a Kaffir ?

Nick Grobler made great delight out of that mishap, and used to make people laugh in his own court by asking his own interpreter if his name were Jim, when he began to interpret Kaffir evidence. But it is always dangerous to rejoice over an enemy before he is dead, and Nick Grobler found it true a few months after, when he was made the laughing stock of the whole world. It came about in this wise :

Nick is a big and strong man and very vain of his strength, so that a lawyer has but to say nice things about his powerfulness to make him his friend. Of course all the lawyers who practised

in his court knew this, and he had been so much flattered that he vainly believed he was the strongest man on earth, which was his undoing, as pride always is.

There was a white man charged with stealing a big calf from a locked up *kraal*. Now it was clear that, the *kraal* being locked, the thief must have lifted the calf over the wall, which would have been a feat of great strength indeed. The prisoner was defended by Paul van Diggelen, who was very *slim*, and saw a good plan for throwing dust in the eyes of Landdrost Nick.

“Landdrost,” said he, “that calf weighs 500 pounds. Is there any man who could lift a live animal of that weight unaided over a six-foot wall? I only know one man who could do it, and that is yourself. Just look at the prisoner, Landdrost—a poor, miserable ‘mannikin’ that you could eat for breakfast. Will you allow the Public Prosecutor to scoff at you by saying that a *Rooinek* like that can do what you can? Landdrost, it is an insult to the court, as well as to you.”

When Van Diggelen had got thus far the Public Prosecutor saw that a great point had been made against him, for the Landdrost winked at Van Diggelen, as he always did at the attorney he had made up his mind to favour.