

Leibbrandt's Visit to Pretoria.

The Rev. H. C. V. Leibbrandt is well and widely known as author of the series "Précis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope." "Liebbrandt's Précis," as they are familiarly called, have been to many a very present help in time of trouble and a quick and easy means of reference. It may not be so widely known that Leibbrandt was the first full-time Archives official to be appointed in South Africa. Theal (the historian), then a Treasury official, was in 1879 charged with the care of the Archives of the Cape Colony in addition to his Treasury duties. In 1881 Leibbrandt succeeded Theal as custodian of the Archives—he was styled "Keeper of the Colonial Archives"—and he was also Librarian of the House of Assembly until 1901. From 1901 until he retired in 1908 Leibbrandt gave his undivided energies to the Archives.

Leibbrandt is so closely identified with the old Cape Colony that it comes rather as a surprise to learn that he once, at least, ventured as far north as Pretoria. Tantalizingly little is known of this visit which took place in the bitter winter of 1874. He was accompanied by three Messrs. van Niekerk, who apparently had travelled north with the object of buying farms in the Transvaal. Leibbrandt himself seems to have come to see President Burgers, an old friend of his from their students' days in Utrecht in the 1850's.

"De Volksstem" of Saturday, the 27th June, 1874, records that he arrived in Pretoria on Tuesday (the 23rd June) "in goeden welstand," and added that he would take the morning service in the Hervormde Kerk on Sunday the 28th (Leibbrandt was at that time predikant at Victoria West). The following Saturday (4th July) "De Volksstem" noted that the Rev. H. C. V. Leibbrandt had preached an excellent sermon on the text "Ik heb het geloof gehouden" to a not very large congregation. The paper ascribed the smallness of the congregation to the bitter cold and to the fact that it was not generally known that Leibbrandt was to preach. In addition to taking a service at the Hervormde Kerk in the morning, Leibbrandt preached that night for the Rev. Weavind "van de Wesleyanen," but "De Volksstem" does not mention either his text or the size of his congregation. It did, however, state that on Sunday morning (5th July) he would again preach in the Hervormde Kerk.

In the same issue of the paper appears an enthusiastic account of a sermon which he had preached at Heidelberg on the 21st (?) June, on the way up. "De Volksstem's" correspondent particularly valued this piece of friendliness toward "de Hervormde Kerk in de Transvaalsche Republiek, zooals men niet, dikwyls gewoon is van predikanten der Hollansche Kerk

in de Kaapkolonie te ondervinden welk bewijs door de leden der gemeente zeer werd gewaardeerd. Algemeen werd de wensch uitgedruk, om zulk een man als predikant in eene gemeente der Hervormde Kerk te mogen bezitten.”

The last reference to Leibbrandt that was traced occurs in “De Volksstem” of Saturday, 11th July, 1874, and is as follows: “Ds. Leibbrandt met zyn gezelschap is Donderdag van hier huiswaarts teruggekeerd na een verblijf van zoo wat veertien dagen, gedurende welken tijd hij gelogeed was ten huize van Z. H. Ed. den Staatspresident. Wij wenschen Z. Eerw. en gezelschap een aangename en voorspoedige reis huiswaarts.”

It is possible to glean a little more information about Leibbrandt's holiday, not, one fears, a very cheerful one, from other items in the paper. To begin with, his friend President Burgers was seriously ill. Professor Engelbrecht in his book “Thomas Francois Burgers” says that the President fell ill during a journey to settle affairs on the South Western border in about March, 1874. The illness was of long duration and at the time of Leibbrandt's visit was still causing anxiety and weekly bulletins regarding the President's health were appearing in “De Volksstem”: Although those covering the period of Leibbrandt's visit were uniformly reassuring, yet he cannot but have been concerned for his friend. The bulletin for the week ending June 27th reads: “Our hopes of the President's ultimate recovery have, we are extremely happy to say, not been disappointed so far. His Honour has steadily improved in health during the past week. Last Sunday (Leibbrandt arrived on the following Tuesday) he went for a drive, from which he derived considerable benefit, and yesterday he rose to something like his old vigour in addressing the newly appointed landdrosts of Lydenburg and Wakkerstroom . . . His medical attendant thinks he will be out of danger in another week” . . . The following week's bulletin reported that the President was “out of all danger. His swelling is daily diminishing, the appetite is good. The last two nights he did not sleep very well, but it was only in consequence of the unfavourable weather.” By the time Leibbrandt left “De Volksstem” was able to report that the President was “in undisturbed progress of recovery” and that his speedy convalescence was expected.

The weather has been noted briefly as having had a deleterious effect on Leibbrandt's congregation and the President's sleep but its very freakishness makes it worthy of special mention. Not only was it bitterly cold but on the Wednesday and Thursday afternoons after Leibbrandt's arrival there was thunder and rain, “wat in dit saizoen heel ongewone verschijnselen in de Transvaal zijn.” The Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week were pleasant, but on the Thursday morning it began to rain and became so cold that a little snow fell. About midday the rain stopped, but the bitter cold continued and on the Friday morning the world was white with frost and standing water was frozen. There was a biting wind too.

That week there were heavy falls of snow between Pretoria and Potchefstroom, and on the Thursday, the passenger wagon was held up for five or six hours at Brandvallei as a fall of snow three to four inches deep had obliterated the road. The gloomy chronicle concludes "Zulk eene vinnige koude is in langen tijd niet in de Transvaal ondervonden." Leibbrandt certainly did not time his visit well! However the weather during the last week of his stay did not figure in the press, and it is to be hoped that it improved.

Leibbrandt himself is even less informative about his visit to Pretoria than "De Volksstem." There is in the Archives a small black-covered notebook in which he kept a record of his trip but, provokingly enough, it deals almost exclusively with his journey home. Leibbrandt's handwriting, as those have consulted the Ms. *Préces* will remember well, is clear but so minute as to make reading difficult. The *Préces* are in ink but the diary is written in pencil, originally faint and made still more so by the passage of nearly eighty years, and is all but illegible. It is written in English and begins "7 July: Left Pretoria for the farms bought by the Niekerks."

Leibbrandt devotes several pages to a description of these farms which adjoined one another, these well planted with fruit trees, had abundant water and good homesteads. (According to "De Volksstem" the Van Niekerks paid £3,100 for the three). Leibbrandt writes that "Rietfontein" was F. (?) van Niekerk's farm, "Rustfontein" G. van Niekerk's and "Leeufontein" Dirk van Niekerk's. "Rietfontein" was nearest Pretoria and before reaching it they had quite an adventure: they "had to cross a piece of country on fire, and it was ticklish work to pass the flames and smoke — fortunately the mules were quiet and we got safely through."

The entry for the following day reads "8th Left Rustfontein for Leeufontein, Dirk's place. About three-quarter hour drive — a fine farm, well planted with a very strong spring. A good substantial new house but rather full of rice ants. All these farms can yield a great deal and be improved no end. Left this and returned to Pretoria, again passing through the fire successfully. Bergsma told us an amusing story about how they once hanged a fellow at Potchefstroom." The next day they left Pretoria about half past eleven for Rustenburg, and on the 30th of July, so the last entry in the diary tells us, "came safe to Richmond — travelled 2 hours and 50 minutes, and outspanned on the neck just where the descent commences towards Victoria."

ANON.

In 1896 het die manlike blanke bevolking van Pretoria 15,700 getel en die vroulike 14,600.