

JOHANNESBURG'S STATION

STAR. — 23-11-32.

A stranger using the railway station last night would hardly have known that he was seeing Johannesburg take possession of an asset of the first importance, for which it had waited for over 35 years. Indeed there were many residents of the city who, going to the railway in the ordinary course, were only reminded of the occasion by finding the new main entrance open, and the way indicated to an interior vivid with colour and light, with a band playing sprightly airs and the soft sound of twin fountains and the hum of many voices filling in the intervals. The effects of the spacious halls, with their brilliant pictures, the tearooms with their historical tiles and the archaic Dutch couplets (to whose great interest attention was called in the pages of *The Star* when the new structure was commenced and there was a danger of their being lost), and the maze of galleries and subways had, perhaps, a greater effect because of the rather modest promise of the exterior of the new main building. In fact, if there can be any complaint or regret concerning the latter, it is that with so much expense and care lavished on the interior, it should have been found necessary to save on the few really bold and distinctive features which were originally designed as outward and more generally visible signs of the elaboration within.

The act by which the public took possession was so simple, so free of any ceremony, that it may easily be forgotten that the station has a very interesting history and that the new one was not secured without a great deal of hard work on the part of numbers of people determined on progress for Johannesburg. As has been intimated, the story of the new station goes back over 35 years, to the time when plans were prepared on behalf of the old Netherlands Railway Company for a building to replace the rather curious fabric, partly made up of teak buildings which had done duty at an exhibition in Holland, which served as "Park Station" until gradually replaced during the past two or three years. It is fortunate that the 1896 design, a long, low building with a central feature surrounded by rather repulsive peaks and turrets, was never carried out. Though it would have proved quite inadequate and out of keeping with the architecture of the city, its presence, had it been built, might have made it impossible to carry on to success the long-continued movement for a new station in which the City Council, the Chamber of Commerce and other public bodies were assisted by the Witwatersrand members of Parliament. The "big push" which eventually secured results took place in the early part of 1926, the initial suggestion being made by the writer of a letter to *The Star* (Mr. J. W. McMaster). It was made at an opportune moment when the year's estimates were being dealt with at Capetown, and took the form of a united movement in which every effort of the citizens and civic organisations was put forward in order to get something better than the disreputable premises and trying conditions then found at the travel depot of the largest town in South Africa. There were promises, difficulties—some of them looking almost insuperable—and differences about sites and plans. But in June, 1927, the vote was passed in the House of Assembly, and in due course work was commenced on an undertaking

which, if its internal magnificence may seem incongruous with the times, has not only met a pressing practical need and given Johannesburg a new dignity, but has supplied work for large numbers of people when it was most needed, and will act as a valuable stimulus to travel, commerce and employment in the future.