

\$1.50 Per Year in Advance.

The Secret Of the Well

How a Boer Boy Proved to His Grandfather That He Was No Coward.

A STORY OF THE TRANSVAAL.

By P. Y. Black.

LITTLE PAUL REUTER was busy with his herd of wild horned oxen—far more busy than usual. The cattle wondered why on earth he did not let them wander afar, as usual, among the richer, fatter grasses.

Paul could not see the cattle had to be fed to lose value, but also the house had to be watched closely lest he were needed there, so the perplexed oxen were remorselessly kept to the shorter grass near the farm buildings.

As Paul now came to an obstreperous cow and again looked back at the quiet, deserted farm, he suddenly started to his feet, and with an alarmed, excited cry from inside the farmhouse: "Kunje!—verdranter! Come back! Thief! Robber! Paul!"

Paul left the oxen to their own slow devices and dashed to the house, whence came the angry yells, his bare, freckled legs leaping across thorns and pebbles and marks with a reckless haste of a lifelong disregard for shoe wear.

He sprang into the main room, and there in a great, old fashioned chair sat a tall, white bearded old man, whose pale face was distorted now with rage and dismay. It was evident he was very ill, and it was noticeable that he moved his head very stiffly and his hands still more stiffly, while his eyes, which rested on another chair, seemed quite unable to move at all.

"What is it?" cried Paul, running to him. "What is it, grandfather?" "The ungrateful dog! The jackall! Kunje—robber!" the old Oom Hendrick spluttered, quite unable to explain by reason of his huge indignation.

"What is it? What has Kunje done? Where is he?" "Shoot him! He came in just now and grinned and said he was going back to his kraal—did not want to fight the English! Shoot him quick! I taught you to shoot!"

"Shoot Kunje—the last servant to stay with us!" "A poor piece of work, whoever told him," the officer growled. "Let the rascal go. Boy, there's your rifle and watch, just as you said. We took them from him. Now, let's see your grandfather's shot at the cattle."

Oom Hendrick was sternly polite to the English soldiers, whom thirty odd years ago he had fought and for whom he had taken a bitter grudge.

Young Paul grabbed a rifle from the wall and ran out. Certainly, 400 yards away, there was the recalcitrant Kaffer servant, a big black Swazi man, walking off with his master's hunting coat on his back and his master's rifle over his shoulder—walking off very serenely, because he knew that behind him were only an old paralyzed Boer farmer and a young Boer boy. So indignant was Paul at the sight that he rested his rifle—already loaded—on the stone wall, and took aim straight at the English soldier, who was still, like all Boers, a marksman and able to shoot straight; would next instant have dropped the Kaffer when his heart failed him. He had shot at beasts, but a man, even a thieving Kaffer man, was something very different. Paul raised his voice and shouted:

"Kunje! Wait ein beetje! Come back, or my father will lay his sjambok on your back! Come, and I'll speak for you!"

Kunje looked back, saw the rifle and, like a springlock, took to his heels and in a moment was beyond Paul's shooting skill.

"Did you shoot?" cried the old man. "No, grandfather," said Paul, putting away the rifle. "I was afraid to kill a man."

At that the old Boer, who in battle had killed many men, black and white, nearly choked with wrath and so railed at Paul that the boy was dazed and frightened.

"Coward!" cried Oom Hendrick. "Coward! You are a pretty boy to call yourself a Boer! You to defend your country, you to be so scared, of which you have blustered so much. When was your age, already I had fought the Zulus and shot them down! Wait till your father gets back from Pretoria, and he will thrash you—when I tell him you are no Boer, but a coward, who lets his home be robbed!"

Paul went back to his stolid oxen without (for he had been brought up to reverence age) a word of reply. But he was heartbroken. In his ears the insects buzzed the word "Coward!" and the loving kine boomed "Coward!" and the birds flying above him sang "Coward!" so that by the banks of the stream he lay down and wept, for now he, who had wished to be a great soldier and a good marksman like his grandfather and father, able to fight back the warlike Kaffer tribes and the invading English, was a "coward, coward, coward," who had let his own home be robbed.

At that time all South Africa was in a hurry. The Zulu war with the English was over, but English soldiers were everywhere, especially on the Natal frontier, where bands of irregular volunteer cavalry were constantly patrolling the Transvaal close to Natal.

As already more war was talked of between the Boers and the English, Reuter, Paul's father, was in an awkward position—between two fires, as it might prove. His Kaffer servants, and all of Kunje, had left him from sheer fear of being drawn into the fight, and Reuter had gone to Pretoria, the capital, to get the real facts and be advised what to do. His wife was dead, and Oom Hendrick, his grandfather, was still more and more of a Boer now hopeless, so on little Paul devolved great responsibility, which his father, always proud of him, had yielded him with a smile.

"You are head of the family now, Paul," said he, riding away, "and, remember, you are in charge—even of the well."

And his father would come back from Pretoria to find his son was not fit to trust. For a long time Paul wept by the stream.

He was roused from his misery by a great trampling of feet of horses in the distance and hoarse, loud voices and that peculiar jingle jangle of steel contrabands, which, like the cattle of

to drive his cattle as far away as he could or run to the troop to warn his grandfather—the troop came in sight at the foot from round a corner of the wood. The captain, riding ahead, saw Paul with a quick, all scanning eye. With a wave backward of his gauntleted hand he fell to a walk, and at once the men behind him did the same, and then at the word "Halt!" the company remained still and mute, and the officer beckoned Paul to his horse's side. Paul went with great awe and trepidation, for there is something terrifying to even a grown peasant at the unfamiliar sight of many sabered soldiers of strange dress and manner and speech.

"Whose cattle are these, my boy?" said the officer. "I must have some." Paul's face brightened as he saw the officer laughed and reached down and patted his head.

"Don't be frightened, lad," said he. "I want two fat steers, but you will get a fair price for them and cash down at that. Are they your father's?" "Yes, sir," Paul answered, somewhat reassured, "but he is not at home. My grandfather is, but he's sick. That's our house."

"Take me to see your grandfather then." He told a sergeant to have the men dismounted, and he himself dismounted to follow Paul. The boy watched the eight men about the order as if touched by one spring, and then suddenly Paul saw something which made him cry out shrilly.

"It's Kunje!" he shouted, for now the men were off their horses, he could see at the back of the column the big black Swazi bound with a rope in chains, a soldier.

"Hello, my boy! Do you know that Kaffer?" the officer asked in surprise. "It is Kunje, my servant, who ran off this morning and stole a rifle and watch and other things!"

"Oh, was that it?" the soldier laughed. "It was the gun that got him into trouble. We don't approve of armed natives in these times who can't give an account of themselves. So he's a tiler, is he? I don't know but that shooting would be the best thing for him. Bring that fellow here, corporal."

The corporal moved forward to obey, when with such sudden quickness that the soldiers had no time to see what was intended Kunje gave a jugglelike twist of his almost naked body, the rope fell from him, and he dashed away among the trees and the cattle and into the brush by the stream.

"Shoot!" yelled the officer. "Mount and after him!" "One or two men fired wildly at the fleetly flying form, and two men followed at a gallop, but soon came back. It was impossible, even on horseback, to catch that agile, low running swag, soon lost in the bush.

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"Chav!" cried the soldier. "This is a den of a place. How much is there?" "About £500," said Paul, shaking. And a late duck on the pond suddenly cackled, "Coward, coward, coward!"

"Get a lantern," said one of the men, and Paul got a lantern, and then at their command he showed them how to go down by ladders and cracks in the old stone walls. He showed them how to leave a crevice big enough for a big bag of money. He went down himself and explained that he was not tall enough to reach the stone. He behaved like an arrant sneak and coward indeed, but what could be expected from a little boy of 13 with a pistol at his head? They all slipped together, apparently satisfied with Paul's story, and one of them said: "You are a rank, blooming sneak to give away your own father, but I believe you're telling the truth, you're so scared. Anyhow, as we've both got to go down, I'll have to bind you. There's two munny guns about the house." So they bound his arms and legs, and in a belt, and then Paul shied and inquired to let him run back to the house to his grandfather, but they bound him with their belts and laid him down by the well, which they at once began to descend.

All alone in the dark, never did a boy wriggle so fiercely to get free, never was so unable to do so, but he had not thought after telling them the secret that the soldiers would be mean enough to bind him. At last, at last, he got one hand loose and then another, and he did not mind his legs. He crawled to the edge and by the faint light could just make out one soldier standing in the water with the other on his shoulders, struggling and pushing and pulling and the coping of the well until he cheered and laughed and yelled until Oom Hendrick wondered what on earth had happened at the well, and the ducks woke up and quacked, "Bravo, bravo, bravo!"

"Wow!" cried Paul. "You fools, the real stone is still far above your heads, and if you try to climb up I'll drop this stone, heavy enough to crush you both to death!"

And the soldiers cursed all night, and little Paul laughed all night, until his father rode home in the morning and made both of the robbers prisoners.

Old Oom Hendrick took a long time to understand that his grandson had actually had the cleverness and courage of a heavy soldier of his country's enemies, English or Kaffer, when he did he called the household together and he called with great gravity and a long speech solemnly presented Paul with an ancient silver watch which weighs about two pounds Troy.

A binder in the Kansas wheat fields will cut fifteen acres a day, and the cost of running it is forty cents an acre. Therefore, a man who is running fifteen binders is at a considerable expense—about \$100 every day. The cost of harvesting a crop of wheat, from the sowing to thrashing, is figured as follows: Sowing and drilling, \$1.50; cutting, \$1.25; total, \$2.75; hauling, \$1.50 a day, and is expected to work from sun up to dusk, with double pay for nights or Sundays.

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"Chav!" cried the soldier. "This is a den of a place. How much is there?" "About £500," said Paul, shaking. And a late duck on the pond suddenly cackled, "Coward, coward, coward!"

"Get a lantern," said one of the men, and Paul got a lantern, and then at their command he showed them how to go down by ladders and cracks in the old stone walls. He showed them how to leave a crevice big enough for a big bag of money. He went down himself and explained that he was not tall enough to reach the stone. He behaved like an arrant sneak and coward indeed, but what could be expected from a little boy of 13 with a pistol at his head? They all slipped together, apparently satisfied with Paul's story, and one of them said: "You are a rank, blooming sneak to give away your own father, but I believe you're telling the truth, you're so scared. Anyhow, as we've both got to go down, I'll have to bind you. There's two munny guns about the house." So they bound his arms and legs, and in a belt, and then Paul shied and inquired to let him run back to the house to his grandfather, but they bound him with their belts and laid him down by the well, which they at once began to descend.

All alone in the dark, never did a boy wriggle so fiercely to get free, never was so unable to do so, but he had not thought after telling them the secret that the soldiers would be mean enough to bind him. At last, at last, he got one hand loose and then another, and he did not mind his legs. He crawled to the edge and by the faint light could just make out one soldier standing in the water with the other on his shoulders, struggling and pushing and pulling and the coping of the well until he cheered and laughed and yelled until Oom Hendrick wondered what on earth had happened at the well, and the ducks woke up and quacked, "Bravo, bravo, bravo!"

"Wow!" cried Paul. "You fools, the real stone is still far above your heads, and if you try to climb up I'll drop this stone, heavy enough to crush you both to death!"

And the soldiers cursed all night, and little Paul laughed all night, until his father rode home in the morning and made both of the robbers prisoners.

Old Oom Hendrick took a long time to understand that his grandson had actually had the cleverness and courage of a heavy soldier of his country's enemies, English or Kaffer, when he did he called the household together and he called with great gravity and a long speech solemnly presented Paul with an ancient silver watch which weighs about two pounds Troy.

A binder in the Kansas wheat fields will cut fifteen acres a day, and the cost of running it is forty cents an acre. Therefore, a man who is running fifteen binders is at a considerable expense—about \$100 every day. The cost of harvesting a crop of wheat, from the sowing to thrashing, is figured as follows: Sowing and drilling, \$1.50; cutting, \$1.25; total, \$2.75; hauling, \$1.50 a day, and is expected to work from sun up to dusk, with double pay for nights or Sundays.

It is said that Mrs. Vira Winkler, of Kokomo, Ind., has the greatest number of living descendants on record. At a family reunion on her 91st birthday last week, 211 of her descendants were present, they being 9 children, 80 grandchildren, 101 great-grandchildren

threateningly. "Mind you, my blooming little nipper, that's the way to try in trouble, so don't you go for to try on me. Now, hurry up and see to the ancient one in his chair at the door." Paul could not move, for the man's foot was at his neck, but he could look, and his quick eye at once noticed that the boots of the men and their trousers were the same as those of the soldiers who had bought the cattle, but their faces were black! Paul was astonished more than at first frightened, because the kindness of the officer and some other of the soldiers who had spoken to him had made him feel almost grateful to them. Grandfather Reuter sat in his chair glaring, and the other man stepped up to him, drew a pistol, presented it full at the old Boer's face and barked harshly:

"If you want to see tomorrow morning, old cock, tell me and your mate where that wealth of yours is stowed and tell it quick!"

Oom Hendrick gasped and choked, and his eyes burned, but he said nothing.

"Bring the nipper here,