

THE STORY OF JOHANNESBURG IN THE EARLY DAYS.

IN the early days! There are still a few men with us who can speak of those early days, when Kimberley was not yet marked on the maps of South Africa; men who have followed on the trail of wealth, which is now a broad highway planted with great cities. Four or five generations ago the bleak range upon which now stands the golden city belonged to Nature. It was a place where

“ Things that own not man’s dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne’er or rarely been.”

Less than a hundred year’s ago lions were seeking their prey from

“ The wild flock that never needs a fold,”
which ranged over the pasture where now stands Commissioner Street.

Those of us who remember 1887 and its hachis hallucinations—those of us who recollect the ox-wagon migrating through the mud of Commissioner Street, also the jerry-built structures of canvas and boards that did duty for houses, the treeless trails called streets; who remember the whole town in all its grimy gruesomeness, its population grubbing for greasy sovereigns, what a marvel of change does he find! Even those of us who have grown up with the town can never acquire that *blasé* familiarity that breeds contempt of the wonders that have been accomplished. Miles of smoothly-paved streets, handsome homes, palatial public palaces, immense institutions of learning, costly churches, wealthy wholesale houses, and last, but by no means least, a limpid but unfailing supply of pure, unadulterated, wholesome water, the greatest of God’s gifts to man.

But to write of a century in connection with the site of Johannesburg is to peer into hoary antiquity—into the days

of prehistoric man. Johannesburg is not yet twenty years old. The men who carved it out of the veldt, who planned the lines of the city and laid its foundation stones, are with us to-day, and they are young men still. A few have disappeared in the direction of Park Lane, but for the most part they still cling to the old camp. Less than twenty years ago the rising hope of South Africa was Barberton, or rather the rugged peaks and fever-stricken valleys amid which the rise and fall of Barberton have been accomplished. In 1886—in the early days of the Rand—there was talk in Barberton of the prospecting camp which had quietly and unostentatiously established itself on the bleak range known as the Witwatersrand. Seven years earlier—in 1879—young Aubrey Woolls-Sampson was the Native Commissioner in the Waterberg, and, as an official who was understood to know something of gold mining, he was ordered to report on an alleged discovery of a goldfield. The British Government of that day had offered a reward of £10,000 to the discoverer of any goldfield within the Transvaal which should be capable of supporting a population of 10,000 persons. An Australian digger claimed the reward, and Mr. Woolls-Sampson was on his way to inspect and report upon the discovery. The camp to which he was bound was situated somewhere in the neighbourhood where the 300 stamps of the Simmer and Jack are now pounding out gold at the rate of so many ounces a minute. But before he could reach his destination the message of war reached his ears, and Mr. Woolls-Sampson hastened to Pretoria, where the siege held him. The Australian digger was heard of no more, and, true pioneer as he was of the wealth of the Rand, he lives now only as an interesting reminiscence in the life of that gallant and distinguished soldier, Sir Aubrey Woolls-Sampson.



JOHANNESBURG, 1887: FIRST CAMP.



JOHANNESBURG, 1887: FIRST OUTSPAN.

A Bird's Eye View, 1886 to 1904.

The history of Johannesburg is, of course, the history of the Rand Goldfields. No divorce between the two is possible until the last ounce of gold has been extracted. Four well-defined periods in the development of the town are but the corresponding reflections of the four great periods in the development of the Mining Industry. It was in 1884 that the Struben Brothers started quartz mining on the farm Weltevreden, on the western end of the Rand, and there started a five-stamp mill. In 1885, the Sheba Mine was discovered, and Barberton was founded. In the same year the first gold was panned from the conglomerate beds of the Witwatersrand, and in 1886 the great event occurred—Johannesburg, the Golden City, was founded by the proclamation of the township on September 20th, 1886. It was a mining camp, pure and simple, and, as will be seen later, the first flight of prospectors spent many months in their search for the golden key which was to throw open an unrivalled future for one of the leading cities of the world. Almost every known series of reefs was operated upon before the treasures of the Main Reef were disclosed. When the great discovery was at length made, the transition from the temporary mining camp to the permanent city was begun. In 1887, the first stamp mill was started on banket ore, and in the same year coal was discovered at Boksburg. During this first period—1886 to 1889—the dim outlines of the city of Johannesburg make themselves perceptible, while, from a mining point of view, the same period may be said to have closed with the first boom of 1888-9 and with the foundation in 1889 of the Chamber of Mines. The second period includes the years from 1889 to 1895, and may be compendiously described as the Cyanide and Deep Level Era. One of the earliest and gravest obstacles of the expansion of the mining industry was the unsatisfactory extraction of gold from the ore. At first, not more than 50 to 60 per cent. of the gold contents was obtained by the amalgamation

process. Later on, concentration and chlorination of concentrates improved matters, but it was not until the chemical treatment of all the sands and slimes by the cyanide process was introduced that satisfactory results were obtained. By the help of the chemist it was thenceforward possible to extract from 85 to 90 per cent. of the gold contents of the ore. The year 1890 witnessed the installation of the first Cyanide Test Works and the start of the Robinson Cyanide Works. Simultaneously the geologist affirmed his belief in the permanent character of the conglomerate beds in the depth. As a result, the year 1892 witnessed the formation of innumerable deep-level companies. In August of the same year, the railway reached Johannesburg from the Free State and joined the mines to the ocean. The road was open for a population on a grand scale, and the newcomers flocked into a town now all too small. In 1893 the Rand Victoria borehole found the reef at a depth of 2,343 feet, and in 1895 the reef was again located at a depth of 3,127 feet in the Bezuidenville borehole. Small wonder that with these accumulating proofs of the unlimited extent of the ore deposit, and of its regularity and payability, this second period of advance should culminate in the boom of 1895, and in a tremendous heave forward of the city regarded as a mere agglomeration of inhabitants and buildings. The third period from 1895 to 1902, may be described as the Political Period. The digger of 1886 had realised by this time that while he had come into the country as a visitor he now desired and intended to stay. With his new ideas as a progressive industrial worker on the mines and in the town, he came into inevitable conflict with the Boer on the farms. The political struggle was inevitable, and while it was in progress there was disclosed the existence of grave economic problems, the solution of which must depend upon the solution of the political difficulty. The chief events of this period, beginning with the Jameson Raid in December 1895, were the introduction of slime plants on

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an extensive scale in 1896; the Industrial Commission of Inquiry of 1897; the sinking of the Catlin Shaft to a depth of 3,700 feet in 1899; the declaration of war in October of the same year; the resumption of milling by three companies in May 1901; the completion of the Turf Club bore-hole, cutting the South Reef at 4,804 feet, in 1901, and the declaration of peace in May 1902. Thenceforward begins the fourth period of the history of the goldfields and of the town, the most notable event having thus far been the settlement of the labour question by the decision to permit the importation of the Chinese coolies. The mining camp of 1886 has thus grown into the city of 1905, with a six-mile radius for its municipal boundaries, a property valuation of thirty-six millions sterling, and a population of 120,000 souls. The Johannesburg of to-day is compounded of the labour of the prospector, the chemist, the geologist, the engineer, the soldier, and the capitalist.

In the beginning.

In 1886 Kimberley had made its pile out of diamonds; Barberton was in the hey-day of its glory as the first thing in creation as a goldfield. As the news of the gold discoveries on the Rand found its way to both places Barberton sent its prospectors, and Kimberley its engineers and capitalists to the scene. The history of the search must be told separately, but here it is convenient to follow for a space the doings of the prospector with his pan and the capitalist with his purse in their common task of laying the foundations of the city "nobly planned." In May 1886, Captain Maynard and Colonel Ferreira, C.M.G., crossed over from the Bushveld with their wagon, to what was then the Rass property, two or three miles south of the main reef. In the same month John Charlton, with some Natalians and Jan Meyer, also prospected the district, while the Struben Brothers were persevering in their long and patient effort—extending over the previous eighteen years—to discover a paying goldfield. Nothing much was done until the men of Kimberley brought their purse along with them. These were Mr. J. B. Robinson and Mr. William Knight. Mr. Robinson was actually on his way to Barberton, but he alighted from the coach in order to examine the new find on the Rand. Many were the would-be pioneers who failed, unfortunately, to copy this excellent example, and

who pressed with eagerness on to Barberton Bonanza to the neglect of the Golconda, which beckoned to them *en route* in vain. When Mr. Robinson had shown his confidence in the new field by the purchase of Langlaagte, other capitalists, such as Messrs. H. S. Caldicott, Cecil Rhodes and Rudd, hastened to follow in his footsteps, visiting the fields and acquiring property. As a natural result, the price of farms in the district steadily mounted from hundreds into thousands. Meanwhile Colonel Ferreira reported the discovery of gold to the Government, which signified its intention of aiding the new venture and of proclaiming the new district if it should prove worthy of proclamation. The Colonel was asked to report on the new fields. He did so, and took the precaution of securing a considerable portion of property for himself at the same time. The line of reef was steadily followed up, the prospecting parties increased in number and importance, and claims were allotted by the owners of various farms, their action being recognised by the Government. News of the discoveries brought up large numbers of people from all parts of South Africa, and the tide soon began to ebb from Barberton. A mining camp sprang into existence, with wagons, tents, and reed and mud huts. The prospector's pan speedily made known the important fact that Ferreira's Camp—as the embryo township was called—had been pitched right on the pay reef, on the site, indeed, of what is now worked as the rich Ferreira mine. There was a prompt move northwards, buildings were abandoned, business erections and dwelling-houses were dismantled and transported a few hundred yards towards the present Market Square and the central portion of Commissioner Street, and the "suburbs" of Marshall's and Ferreira townships began their existence. On September 20th, 1886, the Government proclaimed the township of Johannesburg on the farm Randyeslaagte. They advertised the town, gave the town its name, and appointed Captain von Brandis as Mining Commissioner. The first sale of building sites took place on December 8th, and realised £13,000, the prices ranging from a few shillings to £200 per stand of 50 by 100 feet. The results were considered so satisfactory that the Executive Council decided to hold another sale of stands in January 1887. As a great number of people were now flocking daily to the new town, it is not surprising that the second



MARKET SQUARE, JOHANNESBURG, 1887.



PRITCHARD STREET, JOHANNESBURG, 1889.

sale realised £19,921. In April 1887, there took place another sale, at which again nearly £20,000 was realised, to the great content of the Government. The impetus thus given to speculation or investment in real property made itself felt in other directions, and, as a result, other townships were laid out as "suburbs," and thenceforward became known as Jeppe's, Doornfontein, Booysen's, Ferreira's, Marshall's, Boksburg, Krugersdorp, Elsburg, and Langlaagte. By March 1887, needless to say, mining finance was in full swing, and hundreds of syndicates were in existence as the natural consequence of prospecting which was being actively pursued in every direction. But it was not until the beginning of June 1887, that Witwatersrand shares began to be quoted in the market. Among the earliest may be noted City and Suburban at 25s., Jubilee at 40s., Salisbury at 20s., Stanhope at 15s., and May's at 6s. Companies were formed with small capitals, and with still smaller working capitals. The May, for instance, had a capital of £22,000, and the Salisbury could not boast of more than £16,000. In the month of July an appreciable difference was to be observed in the share market. A few more companies were added to the list, and City and Suburbans were then quoted at £3 10s., and Weemmers at £8 10s. From this date it may be said that the Rand fields began to attract the attention, not merely of the South African, but also of the European investor.

Back to 1887.

Imagine yourself a visitor to the Rand in the middle of 1887. It is only eighteen years ago, but who shall chronicle the changes or depict the difference between then and now! It may be that you came from Kimberley, of course by coach, *viâ* Klerksdorp, which was already prominently before the public as a gold mining centre; Petchefstroom, then as now, a thriving agricultural town;

Randfontein, which was merely the site of the Randfontein Gold Mining, and, more particularly, of Dixon's Hotel, universally praised by tired and hungry travellers; and so, by way of the embryo suburb of Booysen's, on to Johannesburg. Or it may be you approached from Pretoria, whence you had the choice of half-a-dozen comfortable, and even gorgeous, coaches. By both roads the journey is as comfortable as good cattle, good going, and good fare can make it, though from Pretoria there is no need of refreshment *en route*, since the trip is over in five or six hours. Of course, you are put down and manage to get "put up" at the Central—the main hostelry in the unique mining camp of which you find yourself an inhabitant. A year earlier, and you would have had no choice of hostelry. You would have your wagon, your tent, and your solitary meal, and if you demanded company, you could have sought it only in the public grog-tent or in the marquee which served as post office and every other kind of public bureau. Now, however, in these good days of 1887 you may take your pleasure at your inn, fare well at richly-appointed tables in ambitious looking hotels, and from the windows observe the bustling, eager life of a strenuous and energetic community. Johannesburg of 1887 is a great and startling reality. The mining camp in act is to pass away; the city is in its birth throes.

Johannesburg as a town is scarcely nine months old. Six months ago Ferreira's Camp was a long street full of busy traffic. Now it is a ruin full of crumbling green bricks. The auriferous ore is being taken out of the trenches which mark the course of the outcropping reef, and the only record of the habitations is the shanties of those engaged on the reef works, who are chiefly the employés of the Ferreira and Wemmer Companies. The town of Johannesburg, which has sprung up to the north of the old camp, is planned, like all South African

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towns, in regular broad streets and into blocks of stands, each 50 by 100 feet, except at the corners, where the size of a stand is a square of 50 feet. Three large public squares have been laid out. The main space, known as the Market Square, is the largest in South Africa, being 1,300 feet in length and 300 feet broad. These open spaces, and the want of elevation in the buildings—which are single-storied with rare exceptions—give a sprawling appearance to the town, and threaten the municipal authority, when it shall come into existence, with incredible responsibility and expense in the work of keeping the public roads in due order. Side-paths are being formed in the leading thoroughfares, but in the main the streets must be described as a series of well-worn and very dusty walks across the veldt, the work of metalling the roads not having been attempted, since the “nominated councillors” of 1902 have not yet arrived on the scene of their great labours. The size of the town may be gauged from the fact that there are considerably over a thousand stands sold off in the town proper, and about the same number in the various townships round about, while a thousand stands for residential purposes have also been sold by the Government.

The Real Property Market.

The Natal Camp, where some of the best properties are situated, is half-an-hour's walk from town. The stands in the town were sold by auction in the early part of February 1887, and the majority of them realised less than £10 each. Since then, however, the real estate market has advanced rapidly. Many of the stands have changed hands at high figures, some for business purposes and others for speculative operations. Several have been sold for £750 each. A favourite portion of the town, from the point of view of the “knowing division,” is the neighbourhood of the Central Hotel. Some of the stands in

Commissioner Street, near the Hotel and adjoining the Market Square, have been in great demand at extraordinary prices. Small pieces of ground with a frontage of, say, 12 feet have been realising as much as £12 a month for ground rent alone. One fortunate lady who is the owner of a small corner canteen, the site of which originally cost less than £20, and the building on which may be valued at £150, was offered a few months ago—that is in the early months of 1887—not less than £1,500 cash for the property and a rental of £100 per month for eighteen months, three months' rent to be paid in advance. She was also offered—this fortunate lady pioneer—a rental of £15 a month for a piece of ground 18 by 20 feet, adjoining the whiskey bottle property. This was luck indeed, one might be inclined to think; but the lady had evidently decided and advanced notions as to the value of the deep levels, for she refused both offers. In recalling the original price of stands it must not be forgotten that a monthly quitrent of 10/- is payable to the Government. This was thought of no account by the eager buyer, and the anxiety which the newcomers displayed to possess themselves of land speedily brought out a succession of purveyors of townships. Thus Ferreira's township was formed on the west, and 274 stands were sold off at good prices. The Government, however, tried to make this rivalry impossible by finding some cause or impediment why licences for various callings and trades should not be granted to applicants who had purchased stands in the new private township. Thus discouraged, the proprietors were soon found willing to sell to the Government on its own terms. But the passion for land purchase was not to be stayed by the ingenuity of the Pretoria Government, and the compulsory absorption of Ferreira's did not deter other private owners of large blocks of land from offering stands in new townships north, south, east and west of the original Randjeslaagte. Marshall's, on the south, was split up into



CROWN STREET, BARBERTON : EARLY DAYS.



WITWATERSRAND MAIN REEF WORKINGS, SHOWING BASKET FORMATION.

553 stands, exclusive of two squares, on one of which auction sales of merchandise were held every Saturday morning, after the manner of those which are customary in almost every town in South Africa. Doornfontein, to the east, came into the running with a claim, such as might nowadays be preferred by Parktown, to be regarded as the fashionable quarter of the town with its 604 stands offering at fair prices for the consumption and habitation of the *élite*. Meyer & Charlton's ground to the east of Doornfontein was surveyed into 533 stands, which were eagerly snapped up. In addition are to be remembered the properties of the City & Suburban Co. on the south-east, Jeppe's township to the east, Fordsburg to the west, Braamfontein, Booyesen's Estate, and yet other properties, cut up, surveyed, and sold off as fast as people of a speculative turn could be induced to buy. The movement which in 1902 and 1903 has taken the wide range of covering with townships a radius of twelve or fifteen miles from the Market Square was in 1887 confined to a radius of half a mile or rather more, but the earlier demonstration of the speculator in real estate was no less eager, determined, and optimistic than the more recent. In the case of some of the suburban stands offered in 1887, the knock-down prices were nominal, but the payment of the ground-rent constituted a very safe and lucrative form of income for the fortunate vendors. A very large proportion of the purchases were undoubtedly speculative, and the speculator of that day, burdened also with the stand licence, had perhaps less staying-power than had his successor of to-day in the same line of business. If no one came to relieve him of his purchase within a reasonable time he abandoned his hope of profit together with his liability of the ground-rent, while the original seller consoled himself for the temporary loss of ground-rent with the assurance that he had a chance of selling the same stand a second time at a higher price. Looking a little forward from the date of our imaginary visit to

the Rand, it is estimated that, up to the middle of 1888, about 7,000 stands had actually been sold; that the proprietors of that date had given for these stands not less than £200,000; that the actual cost of the buildings erected was certainly not less than £1,250,000; that there were at this time about 3,000 separate tenements; and that if property were returning no more than 10 per cent. instead of an actual average of at least 25 per cent., the population would be paying a rent of £125,000 per annum, or £10,000 a month. As a matter of fact, the rents paid were in the aggregate a great deal more than £10,000 a month, and even at the "fabulous" prices which obtained, stores, offices, and dwelling-houses were exceedingly difficult to obtain. Some idea of the rapid growth of the population may be gathered from the fact that in September 1886 there was not even a post office in existence; a month or two later, a Government tent did service in that capacity, and thenceforward the revenue of the Postal Department for successive quarters mounted up as follows:—£167, £337, £666, £1,055, £1,731, £4,612, £7,797, and, in the third quarter of 1888 showed a slight reduction to £7,588. In June 1888 the extent of the town was about three miles from east to west and a mile and a half from north to south, and the number of souls, permanently or temporarily resident within this area, may be estimated at from 15,000 to 18,000.

But to return to our imaginary visit in 1887. There are still traces to be seen of the canvas houses which mark the camp period, but they are fast disappearing. Green and even burnt brick buildings are gradually superseding the flimsy temporary structures in which the earliest arrivals took undisguised pride and pleasure. But while the brick structure is emerging, the general character of the town is made known by the prevalence of wood and iron. Johannesburg is no longer merely a mining camp; it is a town, but a tin town. There are improvements, of

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course, to be seen; the incorrigible optimist is already at work, and the "solid" men of the community are already backing their faith by substantial erections, even of stone. Of course there are public buildings in Johannesburg in this year of grace 1887. The size of the Post Office may be gathered from the fact, which any old Randite will recollect with pain, that the crowds round the window had frequently to wait half a day only to be told there were no letters for them. The offices of the Landdrost and Mining Commissioner, near the Market Square, tell the same tale of restricted space and an almost unlimited demand upon the resources of that space. The Court House would make even a convict weep, for if two prisoners should, by any misfortune, be called for trial for the same offence at one and the same time, one of them assuredly would have to stand outside. But the Government was beginning to realise its responsibilities, and Government buildings, it was made known, were soon to be erected on the north side of the Market Square. The contract price was £8,000, and it was intended to provide "palatial" accommodation for the telegraph and postal departments; offices for the Landdrost, with a Court House 25 by 35 feet; rooms for the Tax Collector and Claim Inspector; and five rooms for the Mining Commissioners' office, in one of which rooms it was proposed that the Diggers' Committee—parent of the Chamber of Mines—should be graciously permitted to hold their sittings. The whole building was to present a frontage of 200 feet by 70 feet in depth. A much-needed gaol was in course of erection, and it was arranged that this building should be surrounded by a wall, the necessity for which costly addition was beginning already to make itself felt to the Dutch guardians of the peace.

From that time to the present quite a number of newspapers came and went. The Church established itself, and the Marist Brothers were already preparing to deal with their splendid task of the educational care of the young.

The picture which has been drawn of Johannesburg in 1887 will serve with some few changes in the perspective for the three succeeding years. The whole difference in aspect is summed up in the progress of the gold-mining industry. In November 1887 there were no less than 68 gold mining companies, with a nominal capital of £3,063,000. In January 1890 there were in existence 450 gold mining companies, with a nominal capital of about £11,000,000, the Stock Exchange having on its list not less than 300 companies. The progress of the town in solidity of structure, in expanding area, and an expansion of population was in a direct ratio with this substantial increase in mining development. The Boer population, large as the accessions from the veldt were, became lost in the overwhelming tide of new nationalities. Men of all races, creeds, and colour arrived daily to augment the foreign population, and the Uitlander problem began to show its various defined economic, social, and political issues. The Boer began dimly to realise that his days as the sole ruling power must be numbered. Of the newcomers, many brought money for investment in the Eldorado, others had money at their disposal if they should desire to use it, but of them all, the great majority were men in search of work. They wandered from mine to mine, and store to store, and all too often without success, for after the building mania and share boom of 1889, the Rand entered upon a fresh period of preparatory work, new discoveries, new methods, and the formulation of new programmes before the tide of inflowing capital was again felt on the strength of the ascertained values of the deep levels. Few companies in 1890 had any vacancies for overseers or white employes; the importance of cheap, unskilled labour had made itself insistently felt, and the black man was prepared to walk hundreds of miles to satisfy the demand for this particular class of labour. Meanwhile the riches and opportunities of the goldfields had attracted men of influence, wealth, and



THE EXCHANGE, BARBERTON: EARLY DAYS.



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capacity from all parts of South Africa. Barristers, solicitors, surveyors, members of the Cape Legislature and even of the Cape Government came to swell the ranks of the educated classes, and, in anticipation of Mr. Leonard's proud and just boast, to justify the statement that Johannesburg owns more brains to the square mile than any other community in the world. Of the Jewish fraternity there were from the beginning many representatives. The "new chum" from home was conspicuous in gaiters,

Norfolk jacket and eyeglass. But the greater part of the population consisted of colonials from the Cape and Natal, and by their numbers secured the great advantage of compelling the town and community to advance along lines which, while naturally coloured with British influence of the best kind, maintained that influence in the Colonial form which was best adapted to the unhampered and free growth of a free, progressive, and enterprising community.



VALLEY OF DESOLATION, NEAR GRAAFF REINET.