



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Verse*

The Karroo  
Drought  
Dark Folk

*Fiction*

The Shining River  
The Secret Veld

*Editor of*

The Centenary Book  
of South African Verse



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

# THE TREK

A POEM

BY

FRANCIS CAREY SLATER



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

LONDON  
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD  
1938



COPYRIGHT

BIBLIOTHEQUE  
UNIVERSITEIT Fort Hare  
VAN FORT  
*Together in Excellence*

DEWEY No. *A 829.68* .....

REG. No. *28,500* .....

FORT HARE  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
LIBRARY.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

## PREFACE

FOR the historical side of this poem I have relied especially on the recent and admirable researches of my friend, Professor Eric A. Walker. I have also derived valuable historical help from Professor Leo Fouché. My thanks are further due to several other friends for criticism and encouragement while my work was in progress.

Part I of the poem represents an attempt to depict the early background of the Great Trek — the Karroo — and the day-to-day life of the Voortrekkers. The narrative proper begins with Part III. The story is one of national significance for the people of South Africa. I have tried to tell it simply, that it may be brought home to the many as well as to the few. It seems to me apt for such treatment, since its heroes were simple people, although in their courage, endurance, and self-sacrifice they touched the sublime.

# CONTENTS

*(The titles of interspersed lyrics are shown in italics)*

|                                                               | PAGE |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| PREFACE . . . . .                                             | V    |
| PRELUDE . . . . .                                             | 3    |
| <i>" The Tented Wagons "</i> . . . . .                        | 4    |
| <i>" Onward the Wagons Went "</i> . . . . .                   | 5    |
| <i>Vision</i> . . . . .                                       | 7    |
| <i>" Sea-Voortrekkers in Days of Old "</i> . . . . .          | 8    |
| PART I : THRO' THE KARROO . . . . .                           | 13   |
| <i>Graaff-Reinet</i> . . . . .                                | 14   |
| <i>Inspan Song</i> . . . . .                                  | 17   |
| <i>Camp-Fires</i> . . . . .                                   | 20   |
| <i>" Groves of Stone "</i> . . . . .                          | 23   |
| <i>Springboks</i> . . . . .                                   | 26   |
| <i>" No Marble Marks the Memory "</i> . . . . .               | 27   |
| <i>Tina</i> . . . . .                                         | 31   |
| <i>" A Trekker-Boy is Born "</i> . . . . .                    | 34   |
| PART II : ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP . . . . .                   | 39   |
| <i>Wagon Driver's Song</i> . . . . .                          | 43   |
| <i>River Song</i> . . . . .                                   | 46   |
| <i>" Trekking thro' the Grasslands "</i> . . . . .            | 52   |
| <i>" Where ' Blouberg ' and His Burghers Rode "</i> . . . . . | 55   |
| <i>Vegkop</i> . . . . .                                       | 58   |
| PART III : DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL . . . . .          | 71   |
| <i>Retief's Farewell to Albany</i> . . . . .                  | 73   |
| <i>" Let Us Sing a Song "</i> . . . . .                       | 76   |

THE TREK

|                                                   | PAGE       |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Outspan Song</i> . . . . .                     | 81         |
| <i>Riding Horse</i> . . . . .                     | 85         |
| " <i>From Human Tempest</i> " . . . . .           | 90         |
| " <i>In the Highlands</i> " . . . . .             | 92         |
| <i>Zulu Warriors' Chant</i> . . . . .             | 98         |
| <i>Trek-Lullaby</i> . . . . .                     | 103        |
| " <i>Magic Circle</i> " . . . . .                 | 114        |
| <i>Dirge for Retief</i> . . . . .                 | 120        |
| <b>PART IV : WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER</b> . . . . . | <b>125</b> |
| " <i>Weenen</i> " . . . . .                       | 128        |
| " <i>Men Pass</i> " . . . . .                     | 134        |
| <b>EPILOGUE</b> . . . . .                         | <b>151</b> |
| " <i>The Sunshine Land</i> " . . . . .            | <b>154</b> |



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

# I

## THEME

NOT locomotive-engines, snorting dragons  
Belching black smoke, I sing, but tented wagons :  
Wagons that like the battered caravels  
Of Christopher Columbus by their spells  
Wrested the unknown from its secret cells ;  
Wagons that conquered plain and mountain-belt —  
Cradles that rocked the Children of the Veld  
Into a nation stubborn strong and hard,  
Narrow, suspicious, slow to give regard  
To the rights and views of those of other race,  
But, won to friendship, friends of steadfast breed.  
Nor sing I petrol's toys of dizzy pace  
But the slow-trudging ox and ambling steed.

The smoke-flagged factory, industrial town,  
Temples of this machine-enchanted age,  
I leave to budding bards of fame full-blown,  
Or over-blown, and make my pilgrimage,  
At trek-ox pace, thro' plains austere and brown.

Not of mechanics, masons, engineers  
I sing, but of bronzed farmer-pioneers :  
Men who were horsemen as by right of birth,  
Who from their saddles grew, like trees from  
earth,

## THE TREK

With swinging guns for branches, quick to flame  
With deadly flowers ; men who found living tame  
Save on the brink of danger ; men who won  
Strength from the barren veld and burning sun.

## II

### “ THE TENTED WAGONS ”

FILL your cups and fill your flagons,  
Come let us drink to the tented wagons  
That whipped by whirlwinds, stricken by the sun,  
Thro' the hungry wilderness still toiled on ;  
That, lassoed by lightning and thunder-shocked,  
O'er the Dragon Mountain-tops onward rocked,  
Rocked and jolted, brushing thro' the boulders  
And mist that maned those gigantic shoulders.

Fill your cups and fill your flagons,  
Come let us drink to the tented wagons —  
Roofs from the rain and the hailstones' rattle,  
Shields from the snow-storm, ramparts in battle ;  
Couches for the agèd, cradles for the child,  
Roving roof-trees, wigwams in the wild ;  
Shades from the sun, shelters from the wind,  
Lodges in the wilderness for wandering humankind.

Fill your cups and fill your flagons,  
Come let us drink to the tented wagons —  
Cradles that rocked the Afrikander race,  
Keys that unlocked the gates of space ;

## PRELUDE

Schooners that humbled the desert's angry billows,  
Aeroplanes \* that tumbled the Dragon Mountains'  
pillows ;  
Tortoises that won the tremendous race,  
Robots of time and runes of place.†

### III

#### “ ONWARD THE WAGONS WENT ”

STEADILY, steadily, onward and onward,  
Doggedly crept the invincible vanguard :  
On, when — the dawn-star counted out ' —  
The smashing sun was hailed with whistle and shout ;  
On, in the mornings hard and clear  
When distant koppies loomed sharp and near ;  
On, when the noontide's white sun-blaze  
Ricocheted from earth in a swirling haze ;  
On, when the shot sun bled in the West  
And the moon-bird fluttered from her cloud-built  
nest.

Onward labours each caravan,  
Each plodding bullock, each patient man ;

\* This is scarcely an exaggeration considering the incredible things that the Voortrekkers actually accomplished with ox-wagons.

† Afrikaners refer to their farms as ' My Plaas ' (my farm) or " My Plek " (my place). In pioneering days an outspanned wagon on the veld was the first *sign* of occupancy. Beacons, dams and cattle-kraals followed, and finally a house was built.

THE TREK

Trek-chains rattle ; yoke-skeis \* squeak ;  
Wheels wake thunder in each stone-throated creek ;  
Straining oxen gulp and sigh  
Gazing before them with bewildered eye ;  
Koppies cackle to the crack of whip ;  
See-sawing, heavily, tents rise and dip :  
And just-so, ho-ho, steady and slow,  
Onward the wagons go.

On and on, to the unmapped spaces,  
Onward, in search of the hidden-places,  
Past lion's lair and leopard's den  
And swarming legions of savage men,  
On to the Land of the Trekker's dream,  
Where milk and honey in splendour stream :  
As an albatross over endless foam  
On — to discover the heart's own home !  
And just-so, ho-ho, steady and slow,  
Onward the wagons go.

Onward by day and by night still went,  
Grimly propelled by stubborn intent,  
Each trekker's wagon with battered tent,  
Frame cracked, paint blistered, sail soiled and rent,  
Wobbling wheels and disselboom † bent,  
Men faint and weary and oxen spent —  
Yet onward each wagon went :  
Yes, just-so, ho-ho, steady and slow,  
Onward the wagons went.

\* Small wooden shafts fitting into yokes.

† Wagon-shaft.

## PRELUDE

### IV

#### VISION

SWIFT days and years have taken toll and gone  
Since in the grim Karroo I'd walk alone,  
While the red fusillade of setting-suns  
Raked the drab koppies like a million guns,  
Making them glow in sudden breathless glory  
Fierce as a rainbow's and as transitory.  
There too by night oft would I muse and roam  
Led by the crystal-gazing sorceress,  
Who cast her spells and witcheries of foam  
On plain and kop transforming starved distress  
Into soft curves and mist-bloomed loveliness.

*University of Port Harcourt  
Together in Excellence*

Once roving thus in rapture and in awe,  
Lapped in a moon-mesmeric trance I saw,  
Or dreamed I saw, pictures of perished days :  
Horsemen approached, reflecting the moon's rays  
From glinting guns ; tall riders, eagle-eyed,  
With bronzed and bearded faces, resolute men  
And tough as tested wire : I saw them ride  
Silent, alert and watchful onward ; then  
Wagon on tented wagon, one by one,  
Drawn by slow-footed oxen, followed on,  
Lumbering like giant skilpads,\* slow and sure,  
In long procession.

\* Tortoises.

Often from some tent  
 Maidens in homely kappies \* peeped and leant,  
 Gazing with smiling faces or demure  
 Up to the silver kranses † in the moon.  
 Onward the rocking wagons went and soon  
 Were merged in the mysterious, dim Karroo,  
 Into its vastness sucked and lost to view.

V

“SEA-VOORTREKKERS IN DAYS OF OLD”

SEA-VOORTREKKERS in days of old —  
 Sturdy Hollanders, stubborn and bold —  
 Caught and tethered the untamed gales  
 And yoked them to their high-swung sails ;  
 Then trekked they thro' their beloved Karroo  
 The crinkled billows of the ocean blue.

Land-voortrekkers would fain eclipse  
 Their sea-going sires of the white-sailed ships,  
 So with wagon-schooners they sailed the veld,  
 Rocked over each stone-studded mountain-belt  
 And with trudging oxen, with horse and gun,  
 They shackled distance and new lands won.

Thoughts from the veld, as of old from the seas,  
 Flew oft to the country of crowded quays,  
 Of gaudy tulip and guelder-rose,  
 Of maidens in kappies \* like mountain-snows,

\* Sunbonnets.

† Craggs.

## PRELUDE

Of homes, curly-gabled, with roofs of red,  
Sluggish canals where rich trees shed  
Their golden cargoes, tall windmills, wells,  
And stately belfries with echoing bells.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

PART I

THRO' THE KARROO

(Gerrit Maritz)



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

I

IN August 1836 at Graaff-Reinet  
 Wagons from farms remote together met,  
 For the great northward trek — that Marathon  
 By many eager souls long dreamt upon.  
 The chosen leader of this sturdy band  
 Was Gerrit Maritz, ready of head and hand :  
 Tall and well-knit, with dark and tawny beard,  
 Clean-shaven upper lip and locks close-sheared ;  
 Pious, an elder of the kirk was he ;  
 But jolly too, he loved a good grappie \*  
 To hear or tell : in dress he was no Dopper †  
 But sported well-cut clothes and a brown bell-topper.  
 Ambitious, masterful and quick to act,  
 Angry at opposition, short of tact,  
 Yet a great leader was Gerrit Maritz.

With Gerrit's party went the Erasmus Smits :  
 Short, stout and ruddy, with close-clipped grey beard,  
 Was Father Smit : in Holland was he reared,  
 His birthplace Amsterdam. There had he seen  
 Pichegru's ragged soldiers, gaunt and lean,  
 March past (impaled upon their bayonets keen  
 Their rations of raw meat and mouldy bread).  
 Good Smit at fifty-nine had travelled and read ;

\* Joke.

† Member of one of the Dissenting Dutch Reformed Churches.

## THE TREK

A learned man was he, a Mission-teacher,  
And oftentimes he acted as a preacher  
Tho' not ordained ; therefore, howe'er inclined,  
The happy nuptial knot he might not bind  
Nor might he babes baptize. Snags such as these  
Tripped-up the passage of slow-footed fees  
To Smit's sore-straitened purse, and were to tease  
The good man more in days to come. His wife —  
Spur, solace, help and worry of his life —  
Susanna (Gerrit's sister) was a dame  
Comely as her own namesake, who put to shame  
The naughty elders in the days of yore.  
With Gerrit and the Smits went many more  
Resolute souls, on great adventure set,  
In August thirty-six from Graaff-Reinet.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## II

### GRAAFF-REINET

AND now beset with bleak regret  
The trekkers trek from Graaff-Reinet :  
From Graaff-Reinet, that dappled gem  
On the desert's dusty hem ;  
Graaff-Reinet — green oasis —  
Round which Sunday's waters hiss  
In a yellow coil, when rain  
Rouses them from stagnant pain.

Spandau's Peak that sunsets burn  
And the dove-clouds dally on,

## THRO' THE KARROO

Fashioned like the haughty stern  
Of a Spanish galleon,  
Rock-browed Spandau gazes down  
On a chess-board featured town,  
Where in clean-cut squares are seen  
Houses white and gardens green.

Hard by, Desolation's Vale  
Yawns to greet the screaming gale :  
There gigantic pillars rise  
Shoring-up the sagging skies,  
Rude, fantastic, piled-up stones,  
Like monstrous dragons' mouldering bones,  
Ruins, where some eye might see  
Relics of lost Nineveh.

— So, beset with bleak regret,  
The trekkers trek from Graaff-Reinet :  
They look their last on Spandau's Peak ;  
Tandjesberg their sad eyes seek ;  
Vineyards, gardens, houses white  
Fade before their failing sight,  
As with sore hearts and eyelids wet  
The trekkers trek from Graaff-Reinet.

### III

AND so Maritz's sky-blue wagon took  
The lead of that long caravan which shook  
The streets of Graaff-Reinet, and rolling forth  
With jolt and rattle, lumbered slowly North.

## THE TREK

The town, with gardens green and houses white,  
Cut off by a callous hill was shut from sight :  
Thus from some sufferer will a surgeon hew  
A cherished limb to give him life anew.

Friends, who had come to cheer them on their way,  
Now left the band : no longer might they stay,  
So, sadly from the glamorous trek they turned,  
Waving forlorn farewells ; and high hearts burned  
'Mongst those who remained and those who went  
away —

Some fearing to venture forth, yet loth to stay ;  
Some pining to stay and yet resolved to go ;  
So, torn by contending hopes, desires and fears,  
The trekkers turned from their friends and wiped  
their tears,  
Facing their fate. But onward, steady and slow,  
Wagons jolted and rumbled ; the oxen's feet  
Rang on the sunbaked road with rhythmic beat ;  
Kranses \* and koppies mimicked the cracking whips  
And onward heavily laboured the stout veld-ships.

## IV

LURED by the beckoning beauty of Far-Away,  
Steadily onward, throughout that first great day,  
Journeyed the resolute trekkers upon their way.  
The sky was as clean and sweet as a new-born  
flower ;

\* Craggs.

## THRO' THE KARROO

The sun shone crisply upon them hour by hour,  
Till, tired of its trek, it passed in a flame of glory  
Flushing a closing page of time's long serial story.

Then, as the sun-ball sank and vanished from sight,  
The trekkers calling a halt made ready for night :  
Oxen were freed from the yoke to wander and graze ;  
Fires were kindled and soon, with flickering blaze,  
Shone on the darkening veld like fallen stars —  
Strange new planets that glowed more redly than  
Mars.

Kettles were boiled and strong black coffee was brewed ;  
Supper was eaten, peppered with comments shrewd,  
Or sad, on the past day's doings. The leisured meal  
Over ; each elder — ere drowsy slumber should steal  
Sudden upon him — with love and with reverence took  
And read, by the light of the fire, God's comforting  
book

Aloud to his family circle around him there.  
And then, after singing a psalm, the worshippers knelt  
Round the dying fires in simple and soul-felt prayer  
Ere they sank to sleep on the breast of the brooding  
veld.

## V


### INSPAN SONG

“ ROUSE ye, rouse ye, men of mettle !  
Kindle fires and cook \* each kettle.

\* Afrikanderism for 'boil.'

## THE TREK

Bring out the beakers that clank and clink,  
Splash in the coffee and let us drink.  
Pack away the beakers that clink and rattle,  
Now must we inspan and up-saddle,  
Saddle-up, inspan and travel afar,  
For aloft in the East is the morning-star !  
He has inspanned before us —  
Let us hail him in a chorus —  
Yes, inspanned and begun his trek,  
So inspan, saddle-up and all cry, ' Yek ! '



“ Saddle-up, inspan and travel afar,  
Making tracks where no tracks are,  
Over the plains of the brown Karroo  
Ringed with mountains of burning blue ;  
Thro' the gravelled gullies where mimosa-thorns  
Are sharp and white as the new moon's horns ;  
Skirting spectral valleys of piled-up stones,  
Earth's disintegrating bones ;  
On and on 'neath the lashing sun,  
Seeking for fountains beyond the mountains,  
And the comfortable sheen of grass-waves green  
Beyond the desert harsh and lean.”

## VI

AT the dewy death of unrecording night,  
So loth to pass, when in the blue-grey sky  
The dawn-star, like a milky butterfly  
Among plumbago blossoms, twinkled bright,

## THRO' THE KARROO

The trekkers started on the second day  
Of their long trek. As they forged on their way,  
Koppies that had been merged in marble night,  
Carved from that formless bulk by cunning light,  
Took shape around them. Soon the sinewed sun,  
Like a set runner at the starter's gun,  
Leapt from the horizon-mark his race to run  
Against the long-shanked shadows, whose far start  
Might have dismayed an athlete of less heart.

Onward the trekkers went, cheered by the song  
Of wagon-wheels, until a four-hours-long  
Trek had been made; and then each trekker began  
With careful kindness to unyoke his span  
Of tired oxen. These, when freed from toil,  
Turned to the veld — even as a wanderer,  
After long years of travel in lands afar,  
Way-worn and weary, seeks once more the soil  
Where he was born and reared. Having released  
From bondage of the yoke each dust-stained beast,  
The trekkers kindled fires and ate their food  
Under the tent of heaven and found it good.


Then rested they for several sun-filled hours.  
Under the wagons, maids — like drooping flowers —  
Bent over sewing-ploys and crochet-graces;  
Whilst basking in the sun, hats o'er their faces,  
Man lay on the sun-warmed earth in slumber bound.  
Some with their guns set out to hunt around  
For hidden game; and others smoked and spun  
Tall hunting yarns while squatting in the sun.

## THE TREK

Then wagon-whips were cracked whose echoing call  
Summoned to camp the herds and hunters all.  
Oxen were rounded-up from the veld and soon  
Were yoked ; and so, thro' the mellow afternoon  
The caravan went on its leisurely way  
Until the ending of that second day.

## VII

### CAMP-FIRES



DRAINED are the kettles,  
The evening meal is over ;  
Round about the red-haired fires  
Weary trekkers rest ;  
Brown bats quiver  
As the locks of dusk they scissor,  
And the last yellow sun-bloom  
Withers from the west.

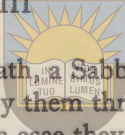
Mournful come the cries  
Of the agitated plover,  
That sweeps around to save a nest  
From eyes that pry :  
Fires flame and stutter ;  
Smoke's blue banners flutter ;  
And a jackal saws the stillness  
With his eerie cry.

Slowly creeps the moon  
From behind the sombre koppies,

## THRO' THE KARROO

Pelting the darkness  
With diamond and pearl :  
Like a lake, wind-rippled,  
The sky with stars is stippled  
And through the aromatic scrub  
Breezes sigh and swirl.

VIII



THEN came the Sabbath, a Sabbath day of rest  
To weary trekkers and by them thrice blest.  
Upon this day in careless ease they eat  
Their morning meal; and then the people meet  
For worship. After hymns and prayers they sit  
Around upon the earth while Father Smit  
Discourses on the tale, so nobly told  
In God's great book, how in the days of old  
The tribes of Israel trekked from Egypt's Land  
Thro' the Red Sea and toiled across the sand  
Of foodless wastes, where they from heaven were  
fed ;  
How thro' each day those wanderers were led  
By cloud-built pillars ; how each night a flame  
Of fire beckoned them until they came  
At last to the Promised Land of their desire.  
And thus, with fervent eloquence and fire  
Of deep devotion, the good Father Smit  
Discourses to the groups that round him sit,

## THE TREK

Whilst warm sweat trickles from his homely face  
And husky grows his voice in its vain race  
To cram a three-hour sermon into two hours' space.

## IX

STEADY and slow beneath the sun's white blaze  
The trekkers journeyed on thro' glittering days :  
Each crystal day as like unto his brother  
As pearls upon a string look one like t'other.  
Soon their rough road became a beaten track,  
Stony and rude, but never looking back  
They travelled on along those dubious ways  
With fortitude. Then, after toilful days,  
They saw the lessening track fade out and melt  
Into the vastness of the virgin veld.

But with unblunted courage on and on  
They toiled and pressed, the trusty, cheerful sun  
Their clock and compass. Oft the caravan wound,  
Like a snake 'mongst spiky scrub, about and round  
Fantastic pillars and koppies of piled-up stone —  
Intruding giants in armour rusty and brown —  
Haunt of lizard and snake where n'er is seen  
A jaunty flower or patch of jocund green.  
And on the flats those stone-staired hills between,  
The ground was strewn with stones as numberless  
As rust-hued swarms of locusts that distress  
The patient farmers in our sunburnt land.

X

“ GROVES OF STONE ”

IN these desert groves of stone  
Serpents coil and lizards cling ;  
But no bird's caressing wing  
And time-untroubled carolling  
Gladden boughs that know not Spring,  
In these desert groves of stone.

Lifeless are all flowers that can  
Flame, in these stark groves of stone :  
Drier than the sun-bleached bone,  
Left by some lost caravan  
For Saharan sands to hone,  
Are these leafless groves of stone.

Lifeless, ay, but beautiful  
Blooms no mortal hand may cull  
Flower from these groves of stone  
When the sleepless pilgrim-sun  
At dawn and dusk, in orison,  
Touches them as beads each one :

Yet shall heaven's white-veiled nun  
Conjure from these groves of stone  
Blossoms, lovelier than are known  
To the pilgrimaging sun —  
Blooms that never fed the bee  
Nor danced to the wind's wild minstrelsy.

## THE TREK

### XI

EMERGING from those scenes of stony pain,  
The trekkers come to a long and level plain  
Sweeping away before them, dull and dry,  
And flowing to far peaks that prop the sky —  
Blue beaches, where a brown and foamless sea  
Breaks without stir or sound continually.  
On this expanse no comfort-breathing tree,  
Narcissus-like, dreams over its pool of shade.  
From this earth-scabbard no washbuckling blade  
Of grass slips out to dare the scornful sun.  
No rivers roam this waste; no gay brooks run  
And trip across the veld in frolic fun :  
Only dry water-beds, with sand for stream,  
Bake in the torrid heat and tortured dream  
Of days when water cooled their scorching sands,  
Of nights when bird-like stars lit on their hands.

Dry, stunted bush, lean scrub and juiceless  
weed

Grow sparsely from this sullen soil and feed  
The trekker's beast, the roving buck and hare,  
That crop around, with parsimonious fare.  
This endless plain is dotted here and there  
With stone-capped koppies, wind-swept and austere  
Springing like islands from a level sea.  
And when the Summer sun with ruthless glare  
Chastens the earth and sets the heat-waves free,  
These skirmish over the plain in fiery glee

## THRO' THE KARROO

Slicing the little hills, whose gaunt tops float  
On the heat-waves — as a loosely anchored boat  
That on a heaving, greyly-shimmering sea,  
Restlessly undulates continually.

## XII

ONWARD the trekkers toil upon their way,  
Gaining some little ground each weary day.  
The treks are shorter now, the pace more slow,  
Outspans are longer and the sun's hot glow  
Grows fiercer as days lengthen **out**; and now  
Water — at all times scarce — **is hard** to find  
And grazing's sparse upon this **plain** unkind.

Each morning anxious men, with wistful eyes  
And prayerful lips, turn to the barren skies,  
Hoping some grey-winged harbinger of rain  
(Welcome as water-weary Noah's dove !)  
May fleck the blue monotony above :  
Instead, upon the scorched and blistered plain,  
Dry whirlwinds dance and twirl the sleeping dust  
Into strange shapes of leaping fountain — tree  
Bussed by the blast — of column crashing free —  
Pillars that skip — all coloured like crabbed rust  
That bites a once bright blade.

### Further afield

The trekker-hunters ride in search of game ;  
But scanty is the bag these barrens yield :  
The white-rump'd springbok flies with feet of flame ;

## THE TREK

Among the stony koppies far away  
Couches the oribi ; whilst in the grey  
And unrecording scrub the grysbok lies,  
Safe hidden from the hunters' hawk-like eyes.

### XIII

#### SPRINGBOKS

IN the dawn-light blue they scatter the dew  
From their flanks as they gambol on the grey Karroo.  
They feed and stray ; take fright — flash away —  
And the pack that follows is a dun dust-spray :  
Half-buck, half-bird ! — the veld is stirred  
With the flashing ripple of that racing herd !  
As dolphins play, hooping irised spray,  
These curved, leaping racers loop air with clay :  
Footballers, they shun their shadows and run  
Heading-and-heeling-at the red, round sun :  
Brown breakers, they curl and their white manes hurl  
At a beach — none may reach — the horizon's pearl.

### XIV

DEATH's shadow now invades the caravan.  
A trekker dies : a wise and ancient man  
(In youth a hunter and a fighter brave)  
Who stirred the slow, and sober counsel gave

## THRO' THE KARROO

To fiery souls. For him they digged a grave  
Deep in the barren veld he loved so well —  
The inhospitable and harsh Karroo,  
Ringed with far peaks and domed with burning blue —  
That sullen waste that lays a life-long spell  
On all its sons. So, in the unheeding veld,  
Around that grave the mourning trekkers knelt  
While Father Smit, in simple and sincere  
But kindling words, sent up to heaven a prayer ;  
And then exhorted all those gathered there  
To emulate the brave soul gone before  
(Whose passing made them sorrowful and poor)  
To walk, like him, the earth in heavenly wise  
Looking ever to God with trusting, child-like eyes.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

### “ NO MARBLE MARKS THE MEMORY ”

No marble marks the memory  
Of old, heroic trekkers, who  
Fell beside the way to die.  
Now swallowed by the grim Karroo —  
Ringed and roofed with blue and blue —  
Where they belong they lie.

— Only some crumbling heap of stones  
Or half-obliterated mound,  
Shows where some worn old trekker found  
His final outspan. Where he fell,

## THE TREK

In the long trek, his mouldering bones  
Enrich the soil he loved so well.

The toilsome trek for him is o'er.  
He'll ride the sweeping plains no more,  
Nor trace and track, at glint of day,  
Thro' bush and scrub the fading spoor  
Of buck or beast ; nor hear the roar  
Of leopard or of lion at bay.

No high-walled churchyard near the din  
Of hiving city hems him in ;  
Only veld-breezes, in hushed tones,  
Whisper grey dirges o'er the bones  
Clasped by the voiceless, vast Karroo —  
Roofed and ringed with blue and blue.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

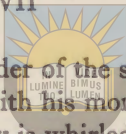
## XVI

ONWARD the trekkers toil across the plain ;  
Tortured by heat and thirst, they pray for rain.  
Each day they look with blank despairing eyes  
Towards the bare Sahara of the skies ;  
But not one glinting bud of hope they see  
To break its listless blue monotony.  
Onward they struggle without hope or haste,  
Whilst weird dust-devils dance across the waste,  
Teasing the travellers with dry-lipped laugh,  
Mirthless and menacing as ghosts at play ;  
And quivering heat-waves swirl like flickering chaff

THRO' THE KARROO

Turning the dull brown plain to glimmering grey.  
Siren mirages mock them on their way —  
Far-flashing lakes as crystalline as dew,  
Girdled with trees greener than ever grew  
To lime heaven's blue-birds with their leafy charm,  
And buckler-off the sun with sturdy arm.  
These beckoning glories fade and leave despair ;  
The sky seems blanker and the waste more bare.

XVII



At last the reckless rider of the storm  
Darkens the midnight with his monstrous form.  
His livid lariat in the sky is whirled,  
Round berg and kop its snaky coils are curled —  
Bull-peaks and heifer-koppies are his herd.  
Across the plain of heaven his steed is spurred,  
Whose angry neighing wakes the sleeping world,  
And, as he passes, tautened thongs of rain  
Tether to heaven the avid, drinking plain.

The sleeping trekkers, tired and travel-spent,  
Roused by the storm now crowd within each  
tent.

They revel in the thunder's crash and roar,  
That jars the hills just as a rock-ribbed shore  
Is jolted by a punching sea ; even more  
Delight they in the thrumming dance of rain,  
Rustling like legioned locusts o'er the plain.  
Cheered by the rain-song, trekkers sleep again ;

## THE TREK

Whilst in the darkness, with unerring feet,  
The raindrops hornpipe on the veld and beat  
A glad tattoo upon each trekker's tent,  
And seem to chant and chuckle, " Sleep content,  
For here's the rain at last — the life-gift, heaven-  
sent."

## XVIII

WITH morn the trekkers see a region new,  
A rain-washed world that glitters like the dew :  
The brimming veldpans \* shimmer in the sun ;  
In sandy gullies gabbling waters run  
Waking forgotten laughers ; and the sun  
Gleams in a softer sky with friendlier glow.

University of Fort Hare

*Together in Excellence*

Onward the trekkers fare, rejoicing now  
In hope renewed and courage ; well they know  
That suddenly — with magic seeming haste —  
The lately arid and unlovely waste  
After its rain-carouse, its night-long feast,  
Will blossom like rose-gardens of the East.

Onward they journey, squelching thro' the mud,  
Which after dust and dazzle seems so good.  
They splash thro' laughing gullies, leaping spruits ; †  
The change from sand to stream each heart elates,  
Whether of man or beast ; each spruit and gully  
So long forlorn and desolate — so dully,

\* Lakelets.

† Rivulets.

## THRO' THE KARROO

Bored with lone life — wakes from its sterile sadness,  
And clasps the smooth-flanked stream with joyous mad-  
ness.

### XIX

THE plain of late so sallow dry and dull,  
Now day-dreams in its broideries beautiful :  
Silent so long, it wakens to the hum  
Of raiding bees that from far koppies come  
To sack its flower-cities late so poor,  
Now Midas-rich with honey-gold once more.

From brimming veldpans\* and from casual vleis †  
Harmonious frogs their croaking chorus raise,  
In strains as harsh as those of cawing crows  
That scabble up the seed a farmer sows.

And now the trekkers — late so tired and worn  
With dusty travel, harassed so and torn  
By fears of drought — in a brave world new-born  
Move on. The desert, now a paradise,  
Reveals strange glories to their dazzled eyes —  
Wakes them to wonder, stirs them to surprise.

### XX

#### TINA

LIKE Proserpina, the trekker-girl, Tina,  
Gathered flowers on a day new-born ;

\* Lakelet.

† Marsh.

THE TREK

Her eyes were echoes of plumbago-flowers,  
Her hair held the shimmer of sun-washed corn :

Short of sixteen was careless Tina —  
Lissom as a young wild-olive tree,  
Reed-straight and lissom, lovely as a blossom —  
When she sped from the camp like a questing bee.

Lightly she capered among the koppies,  
Gay as a curvetting springbok fawn ;  
The vision-caress of her loveliness  
Delighted each flower like the dew at dawn.

Gold and yellow, in the sunlight mellow,  
Flower-pools dappled the sheepish veld ;  
She paused in her prancing and airy-footed dancing,  
And down among the glories in adoration knelt.

Happy as a hill-cloud, she flitted o'er the veld-blooms,  
Heedless of the trammels of space and time,  
With lilt and laughter and the grace of flowing water  
She moved around the koppies in the morning's  
prime.

But time and distance still tether existence,  
Tho' their bonds be forgotten for a few brief hours ;  
And youth with its buoyance and iridescent joyance  
At last grows weary of the loveliest flowers :

Thus blithe young Tina became bewildered Tina,  
Lost and forsaken in the vast Karroo.

THRO' THE KARROO

High-noon found her with frowning koppies round  
her,  
Caravan and trekkers all were hemmed from view.

Wildly she stumbled among the sullen koppies,  
That grimly echoed her frightened cries,  
Till, faint and tired — all hope expired —  
She paused, and to heaven turned beseeching eyes.

No sound came to splinter the frozen winter  
Of silence that held her world fast-bound ;  
But leaping from the shoulder of a lichened boulder  
A drab shadow darted and made no sound :

He clutched the wrist of the terrified Tina —  
This desert-satyr, filthy and squat,  
He stilled her screaming with his eyes' cold  
gleaming —  
This Bushman-Pluto, this Kalahari-rat !

Threatening the lass with his venomd arrows,  
He dragged her along toward his bat-hung cave :  
From a foul Gehenna, in this other vale of Enna,  
Who shall this daughter of Demeter save ?

— A gunshot ringing set the koppies singing,  
And the goblin-horror fell at her feet.  
While with joy and wonder she listened to the  
thunder  
And rollicking rhythm of hoof-beats fleet.

## THE TREK

### XXI

ONWARD the trekkers fared with strength renewed,  
With courage crescent, with fresh hope imbued,  
And mirthful joy rippled the camp one morn  
At the glad news : ' A trekker-boy is born ! '  
As a cloud-weft will suddenly arise  
From some dark hill ; or as from dusky skies  
A new moon flutters ; or from sombre earth  
A flower glistens in the thrill of birth ;  
So from the woman in a dark tent came  
A baby trekker-boy, a tiny flame  
Of love and light.

Still onward in the vast  
Karoo the trekkers toiled. Safely they passed  
Over the Orange River, whose red-brown flood,  
Chequered with floating twigs and thick with mud,  
Like to a monster-snake, slid silently  
And curled thro' tawny veld towards the sea.  
And as they crossed the river to reach the free  
Soil of a new strange region, with one accord  
They carolled psalms of praise to Heaven's eternal  
Lord.

### XXII

“ A TREKKER-BOY IS BORN ”

THERE'S a cloud on yonder koppie,  
Far away, far away,

## THRO' THE KARROO

A cloud with dappled bosom  
Gold and grey,  
See, its sways upon the koppie,  
Like a hornpiping toktokkie,\*  
As gay in its play  
As a wild-duck on a vlei † —  
For to-day that little baby-cloud was born,  
That skyey-boy, that hovering joy was born.

By a busy breeze on high  
Now the baby-cloud is taken,  
And is shaken, lullaby,  
In the cradle of the sky,  
Whilst, hay-ho-ho, in the veld below,  
As slow, slow, the wagons onward go,  
In a creaking tent that reels  
To the roll of wagon-wheels —  
To-day a little trekker-boy is born,  
His mother's joy, a trekker-boy is born.

## XXIII

ONWARD the trekkers trailed thro' a new ' free  
state,'  
Onward with burgeoning hopes and hearts elate :  
Slowly they jolted and journeyed thro' trackless space,  
On, toward the appointed meeting-place,  
At Blesberg highlands near to the great kraal  
Of good Moroka, chief of the Baralongs all.

\* Dancing beetle.

† Marsh.

THE TREK

Maritz and his sky-blue wagons from Graaff-  
Reinet

Came at long last to Blesberg, and were met  
By kind Moroka and his docile tribe,  
And by his wise adviser, friend and scribe,  
The missionary, James Archbell.

Here then

Maritz, his way-worn cattle and weary men  
Settled, and rested from their travel-toil  
In quietude upon a friendly soil.  
And here they welcomed, as the days went by,  
Small treks that dribbled in from far and nigh  
To join their ranks beneath a new 'free' sky.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

PART II

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

(Trigardt : Potgieter : Cilliers)

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*



# I

MAY, EIGHTEEN-THIRTY-FIVE, was near its close,  
When the first trekker-leader moved from those  
Broad wrinkled valleys rich with red-brown grass,  
Thro' which the Indwe's purling waters pass,  
Upon his long trek North. This hero was  
Louis Trigardt, a leader prompt in need —  
Son of a Boer, whose father was a Swede —  
A patient, kindly, well-knit wiry man  
Of fifty-three, whose stirring life began  
Near the Karroo's gem-city, Graaff-Reinet.  
Later, among the hills of Somerset\*  
The Trigardts settled.

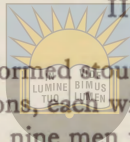
Here kind fortune brought  
A wandering schoolmaster, who stayed and taught  
Louis to read and write. Here Trigardt grew  
To man's estate ; and here in season due  
Married and raised a family of five ;  
And here for two score years did live and thrive.  
But later, troubled by tactless laws and drought,  
Trigardt and other malcontents trekked out,  
And, travelling thro' the wilds of Kaffirland,  
Hard by the Indwe River the little band  
Abode for several years in rural ease,  
And with all neighbouring Xosa tribes at peace.

\* Somerset East (Cape).

## THE TREK

Then, in May 'thirty-five,' twas 'Northward  
Ho !'

For Trigardt and his friends ; so, sure and slow,  
The tented-wagons, jolting, northward go :  
Whilst, in a diary — spiced with humour dry,  
In quaint, coined spelling — as the days went by  
Good Trigardt kept a chronicle of the time,  
Whose matter will out-last this friendly rhyme.



NINE wagons formed stout Trigardt's caravan,  
Nine tented wagons, each with a well-trained span  
Of sixteen oxen ; nine men who weapons bore ;  
Women and children round about two-score,  
And flocks and herds a thousand head or more.  
Grimly along a rough and trackless way  
The trekkers struggled, five long miles each day ;  
And on each Sabbath paused for prayer and praise

Onward they toiled ; tho' oftentimes delays —  
Accident, illness, the lambing of their sheep —  
Checked their slow trek ; but, onward would they  
creep,

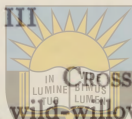
Sure as the stubborn skilpad.\* When they drew  
Near to the Orange, crawling from the blue  
Hazes of space another trek appeared,  
A cluster of ten wagons ; this now steered  
Its course towards them. Then a happy meeting  
Of trekkers on the veld — with friendly greeting,

\* Tortoise.

Laughter and chat — took place, while swift hours  
 sped.

'Lange Hans' van Rensburg was the man who  
 led

This other trek-party, which now combined,  
 Hoping in union fresh strength to find,  
 With Louis Trigardt's trek.



CROSSING with ease

The Orange that between wild-willow trees  
 Was flowing gently as an idling breeze,  
 North by North-East the trekkers onward went —  
 Each plodding ox, each bobbing wagon-tent  
 In heat and cold, in sun and shade, still on.  
 Safely they crossed the roaring Caledon,  
 And lumbered slowly onward thro' a vast  
 And undulating plain, superbly grassed,  
 And mottled with low koppies, boulder-strewn,  
 With tops as flat as tho' they had been hewn  
 And levelled by the lightning's scimitar.

Stubbornly on they went till northwards far  
 They crossed the Vaal. No foes they met to mar  
 Their peaceful, plodding trek; but now and then  
 They came upon grim traces of dark men —  
 Deserted kraals, about which dead men's bones  
 Lay bleaching in the sun like random stones.

## IV

RIGHT ready fighters were the trekker-men,  
 Prone to dissension, quick in quarrel, and when  
 No foes were near they clashed one with another —  
 Father with son, or brother against brother.  
 ' Lange Hans ' van Rensburg to this rule was not  
 A meek exception : so after quarrel hot  
 His trek and Trigardt's parted, even as Lot  
 And Abraham parted in the days of yore.  
 Hans and his trek turned East, and nevermore  
 Were seen of white-skinned men. They seemed to melt  
 Into the vast and all-absorbing veld,  
 Even as a weft of cloud that flutters high  
 Dissolves, and is forgotten by the sky.

But ever on and on, North and North-East,  
 Stout Trigardt pressed with weary man and beast,  
 Till far beyond the Vaal he came at last  
 To pleasant highlands, breezy and well-grassed,  
 Foothills of rugged mountains known to fame,  
 The Zoutpansberg : with Louis Trigardt's name  
 This region shall be linked for evermore  
 As long as winds shall howl and oceans roar.

Here in these highlands Trigardt made a stand,  
 Ended his first long trek ; and now his band  
 Built little houses and rough gardens planned  
 With dams and water-furrows all complete.  
 In this remote Arcadian retreat  
 Trigardt and all his followers will stay,  
 Whilst other treks are wafted on their way.

V

WAGON DRIVER'S SONG

" YEK, trek ; yek, trek ; plod along, my oxen,  
 The sun's as hot as a simmering pot ;  
 But steady and slow, on we'll go,  
 On we'll go, my oxen.  
 Yek, trek ; yek, trek ; pull as one, my oxen.  
 O'er stones and scrub we'll rattle and rub —  
 So stretch the touw, and on we'll go,  
 Onward steady and slow.



*Chorus :*

" Rooiland, Mooiland, Bantom, Blom ;  
 Vlakveld, Bakveld, Donker, Dom ;  
 Houtberg, Goudberg, Bakker, Broek ;  
 Hammerman, Jammerman, Hakker, Hoek !  
 Since the stars began a-blinking, winking,  
 Never a man had such a clinking,  
 Beautiful, dutiful span.

" Hou-nou,\* have a blow, have a blow, my oxen,  
 Heavy's the load and stony the road,  
 So, have a blow, ere on we go,  
 Ere on we go, my oxen.  
 Then, yek-again, trek-again ; trudge along, my oxen ;  
 To the toil-oppressed comes the time of rest,  
 So, stretch the touw, and on we'll go,  
 Onward steady and slow."

\* Hold now.

## VI

Six months before Maritz's trekkers set  
 Their wagons rolling north from Graaff Reinet,  
 Hendrik Potgieter, a tough and trusty man,  
 Trekked out from Tarka with a caravan  
 Of fifty wagons handled by a band  
 Of forty men whose muskets at his command  
 Would blossom with flame. Some women and  
 children rode  
 Upon the rocking wagons ; others strode  
 Sturdily over the rugged stone-strewn veld,  
 Driving on flocks and herds — these soon would  
 melt,

If not well-watched, into the hungry plain  
 That swallowed life even as it sucked up rain.

Hendrik Potgieter, known among his clan  
 As ' Blouberg, ' \* was a doughty fighting man ;  
 A natural leader, patient, shrewd and brave,  
 Who ruled without a rod ; but, gently grave,  
 Reasoned with the recalcitrant till they,  
 Moved to devotion, promised to obey  
 All his commands and went content away.

' Blouberg ' was tough and wiry, tall and lean,  
 With long dark hair, and upper lip shaved clean ;  
 His brown beard was close-cropped and his bright  
 blue eyes

Signalled determination, courage, enterprise.  
 Blue moleskin jacket and skimpy trousers he wore

\* Blue Mountain.

## ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

And a broad-brimmed, green-lined flapping hat of  
straw.

A Dopper strict and devout was Potgieter ;  
A lover of young children : he would stir  
About the camp to find them koekies \* sweet,  
Raisins and other lekkergoed † to eat.

## VII

TREKKING some five or six long miles each day  
Potgieter's party journeyed upon its way :  
Toiling o'er rugged hills that scraped the sky ;  
Trudging thro' endless plains, brown, bare and dry ;  
Crashing thro' stony creeks where wheels woke  
flame ;  
Brushing thro' bush and scrub, till at last they came  
To the sluggish Orange, which maddened by mountain-  
rain,  
Rolled in a red-brown flood blue seas to stain  
With muddy tributes.

So the trekkers stayed

Beside the river and pitched their tents and made  
A snug outspan : then they began to hew,  
Unflaggingly, the gay wild-willows that grew,  
Lining like sentinels the river's brink.  
The swinging axes rang with clank and clink  
Upon the sappy trunks, and the startled trees  
Shook, as tho' pummelled by a sudden breeze,  
Then with expiring shrieks crashed to the ground.

\* Small cakes.

† Sweetmeats.

## THE TREK

Lopping off all the boughs the trekkers bound  
The trunks together and built a giant raft —  
A rough and ready hulk with which to waft  
Women and children over the raging flood.

Then, having tried the raft and found it good,  
Safe, sound and water-tight, the trekkers next  
Sent out their strongest swimmers to swim and guide  
Their timid cattle and horses thro' the vexed  
And roaring river to the other side.  
After long patient labour this was done ;  
And then were rafted to the farther shore  
Their sheep and goats ; thereafter, one by one,  
Their tented wagons were all ferried o'er  
Upon the giant raft ; which lastly bore  
A human freight — to crown the trekkers' toil —  
Their wives and children to a new, free soil !

## VIII

### RIVER SONG

“ WILD-WILLOWS quiver  
Beside the river,  
The red-brown river,  
The Orange River,  
That ceases never,  
But flows on ever  
Unheedingly :  
Fed by the fountains  
On Dragons' Mountains,

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Serenely flowing  
And westward going,  
It pauses never,  
But flows for ever  
    Towards the sea.

But when in anger,  
With crash and clangour,  
Storms shake the boulders  
On Dragons' shoulders,  
And rain comes spouting,  
And springs are shouting

    Impatiently —  
O then the river,  
With savage shiver,  
Sweeps onward, crashing,  
Its high banks lashing,  
Sweeps onward, roaring,  
Its red floods pouring  
    Into the sea.

No longer grieving  
For homes we're leaving,  
On a raft of willows  
We'll cross the billows  
Of this roaring river —  
This raging river —

    Most joyously :  
Returning never,  
Past links we sever  
When we cross the river,  
The red-brown river,  
The Orange River,

## THE TREK

Singing psalms to the Giver  
Of a soil that's free !

Across the river  
We'll wander ever —  
Where hills are bluer  
And laws are fewer,  
Where fields are greener  
And skies serener —

With hearts elate :

Returning never,  
Past links we sever  
When we cross the river,  
The fateful river,  
The Orange river,  
Singing psalms to the Giver  
Of a new Free State ! ”

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## IX

AND so unfalteringly, tho' steady and slow,  
Upon that giant raft the trekkers row  
Their wives and children over the angry river —  
All singing hymns and psalms to the Great Giver  
Of life and light. Then, free from river-toil,  
With eager joy they kneel upon free soil  
In prayers of glad thanksgiving, ere once more  
They move upon their trek. The river's roar,  
That long has teased their ears, soon faints and dies —  
Strangled by distance ; and around them lies  
The still, brown-billowed veld rolling to far skies.

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

So on they trek beneath a jolly sun,  
And few miles from the river have they gone  
When, outspanned in the veld, they come upon  
Another trekking-party, also bound  
For some new snakeless Eden's happy ground.  
This band from Colesberg comes, its leader's  
name  
Is Sarel Cilliers, known to trekker fame.



SAREL CILLIERS was short, thick-set and fair,  
Ruddy, with clipped bright beard, straw-coloured  
hair ;

Lively, alert, self-confident was he,  
A leader who loved order and would see  
It well enforced within his camp. In need  
He could be tactful. Oft-times would he lead  
With fervent eloquence the camp in prayer  
And exhortation. Readily would he share  
In wordy theological debate ;  
Enforcing reason, when the hour waxed late,  
With sudden snort and paralysing stare  
That made opponents gape and further clash  
forbear.

Twenty-five rifles had he at command  
And thirty tented wagons. With his band,  
Which with their families numbered several score,  
Went Liebenbergs, eight families ; Britses, four ;

## THE TREK

Singing psalms to the Giver  
Of a soil that's free !

Across the river  
We'll wander ever —  
Where hills are bluer  
And laws are fewer,  
Where fields are greener  
And skies serener —

With hearts elate :  
Returning never,  
Past links we sever  
When we cross the river,  
The fateful river,  
The Orange river,  
Singing psalms to the Giver  
Of a new Free State !”

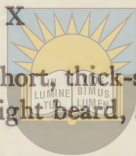
University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## IX

AND so unfalteringly, tho' steady and slow,  
Upon that giant raft the trekkers row  
Their wives and children over the angry river —  
All singing hymns and psalms to the Great Giver  
Of life and light. Then, free from river-toil,  
With eager joy they kneel upon free soil  
In prayers of glad thanksgiving, ere once more  
They move upon their trek. The river's roar,  
That long has teased their ears, soon faints and dies —  
Strangled by distance ; and around them lies  
The still, brown-billowed veld rolling to far skies.

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

So on they trek beneath a jolly sun,  
And few miles from the river have they gone  
When, outspanned in the veld, they come upon  
Another trekking-party, also bound  
For some new snakeless Eden's happy ground.  
This band from Colesberg comes, its leader's  
name  
Is Sarel Cilliers, known to trekker fame.



SAREL CILLIERS was short, thick-set and fair,  
Ruddy, with clipped bright beard, straw-coloured  
hair ;

Lively, alert, self-confident was he, *Port Hare*  
A leader who loved order and would see  
It well enforced within his camp. In need  
He could be tactful. Oft-times would he lead  
With fervent eloquence the camp in prayer  
And exhortation. Readily would he share  
In wordy theological debate ;  
Enforcing reason, when the hour waxed late,  
With sudden snort and paralysing stare  
That made opponents gape and further clash  
forbear.


Twenty-five rifles had he at command  
And thirty tented wagons. With his band,  
Which with their families numbered several score,  
Went Liebenbergs, eight families ; Britses, four ;

## THE TREK

Broekhuisens, four ; van Rensbergs and Krugers,  
three.

Amongst the Krugers was a force-to-be : —  
A sturdy lad, simple, ungainly, plain,  
Who in the years to come was long to reign  
An uncrowned king, a ruler, known to all  
In Southern Africa as ' Old Oom Paul ! '

## XI



THE trekking parties, that by happy chance  
Thus met together in the veld's expanse,  
Joyfully fraternized some hours and then  
A council was convoked of all the men.  
This joint-trek-council, after much debate,  
At length decided to amalgamate  
The treks ; electing ' Blouberg ' to command —  
Cilliers as deputy — the trekker-band.  
Tho' one was Dopper,\* Orthodox the other,  
These leaders worked, as brother with loved brother,  
For the common good with head and heart and hand.

In this free soil, this strange uncertain land,  
Potgieter sent out mounted scouts each day  
To spy the land and guard the trekkers' way.  
Few coloured servants had they, so the boys  
Herded the cattle. Children and women drove  
The nibbling small stock on ; and sometimes strove  
To help the men-folk in their trekking-ploys.

\* Member of one of the Dissenting Dutch Reformed Churches.

## ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Stubbornly on along those trackless ways  
The trekkers journeyed : oftentimes delays —  
Sickness, mishaps, and other tricks of fate —  
Applied the brake : oft were they forced to wait  
For laggard friends who always came too late.

## XII

AND as they journeyed on, with toil and sweat,  
Thro' the strange land the trekkers sometimes met  
With friendly Griquas — hunter-herdsmen who,  
Under the leadership of Adam Kok,  
Had left the Cape and settled in a new  
And unclaimed land with horse and herd and  
flock.

And, farther North, smiling Basutos came  
To woo the trekkers to a friendly game  
Of barter, offering mealies, beans and corn  
For fat-tailed sheep or cow with crumpled horn.

On both sides of the Orange ' mixed-karoo,'  
Grass and karroo-bush, close together grew.  
But farther North ' karroo ' was counted out  
And grass was victor in that stubborn bout :  
Then sailed the trekkers thro' an emerald sea  
Of undulating grass that, noiselessly,  
Hurled its broad billows, rolling unconfined,  
League upon league some tall blue beach to  
find.

“ TREKKING THRO’ THE GRASSLANDS ”

“ As sturdy little schooners  
 That plough the waves and pass  
 Thro’ the sea, heavily,  
 So, thro’ waves of grass,  
 Our wagons slow on must go,  
 Early hours and late,  
 Trekking thro’ the grasslands  
 Of the New Free State.

“ The grassy sea around us  
 Rolls on unconfin’d — Hare  
 Emerald-green in sunlight sheen,  
 Silvered by the wind —  
 Till it reaches azure beaches,  
 Where tall mountains wait  
 For us who ride the grasslands  
 Of the New Free State.

“ Across the sky cloud-schooners  
 Spread their sails and pass ;  
 Shadow-ships in brief eclipse  
 Gloom the gleaming grass :  
 With eyes on the horizon,  
 We march to meet our fate  
 Where Canaan calls o’er mountain-walls  
 Beyond the New Free State.”

## XIV

AND moving on in autumn sunshine mellow,  
The trekkers crossed a river thick and yellow —  
Which they called ' Modder ' \* — and thereafter  
came

To a bright-breasted stream, to which the name  
Of ' Vet ' † they gave because of fine fat game  
That swarmed along the river's bush-lined shore.  
Here for some days they outspanned and a store  
Of biltong was laid in.



Then, on again,  
The trekkers moved thro' many a grassy plain,  
Dotted with flat-topped hillocks, boulder-strewn ;  
And when mild May was running into June  
They came upon a stream which seemed to swoon  
Among its sands : this as the River Sand  
Was known thereafter. In the grass-glad land,  
Around this sand-choked stream, the trekker-band  
Made a long outspan after weary toil,  
And rested three-score days upon ' free soil.'

## XV

Meanwhile Potgieter and his deputy,  
Ready of deed and word, Sarel Cilliers,  
Along with ten picked horsemen started forth  
Armed with their guns and ' trippled ' ‡ gaily  
North.

\* Mud. † Fat. ‡ From ' trippel ' — a quick amble.

## THE TREK

They crossed the cobra-coloured Vaal, eager to  
view

The sweeping grasslands of that region new,  
And found it splendid cattle-country. Then,  
East and North-East Potgieter led his men,  
Burning to find if down some mountain-glen  
A passage lay from that high hinterland  
To the far Indian Ocean's foam-snaked strand.  
But vain were all their eager quests and hopes,  
No outlet could be found.

So on they rode  
To the far Zoutpansberg, where now abode  
The kind and sturdy trekker, Trigardt, who  
With nine tent-wagons and with followers few  
Led the first trek to regions far and new.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## XVI

HERE they foregathered with much joy and glee ;  
Thereafter, Trigardt in their company,  
They rode towards the eastern mountain-belt  
Seeking van Rensberg's party, which the veld  
Had swallowed up even as a hasty river  
Swallows the bubbles gay that gleam and quiver  
On its bright breast. But not a trace did they  
Find of the Rensbergs ; nor could they spy a way  
Down the dark mountains to Delgoa Bay.

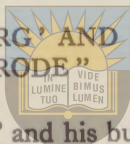
So, weary, disappointed and depressed,  
They travelled back to Trigardt's camp to rest  
Their tired horses. Then, their northward quest

Completed, they — with many a warm adieu —  
Left valiant-hearted Trigardt and his crew,  
And turned their horses southward. On their  
way

They passed thro' grassy uplands where to-day  
Men toil and sweat in earth's dark deeps to gain  
Soil's golden blood and man's most precious bane.

XVII

“ WHERE ‘ BLOUBERG ’ AND HIS BURGHERS  
RODE ”



WHERE ‘ Blouberg ’ and his burghers rode,  
A hundred years ago;  
The eland and the buffalo  
To and fro, serene and slow,  
About the pastures strode —  
‘ Making hay while it was day : ’  
And, in the star-shot nights,  
The leopard and the lion prowled,  
Snarled and hissed, or coughed and growled,  
Hyenas laughed and jackals howled ;  
And there were furry fights,  
Fierce tooth-and-claw delights,  
Where ‘ Blouberg ’ and his burghers rode  
A hundred years ago.

Forests of grey soaring stone,  
Where human creatures laugh or groan,

## THE TREK

Trees of granite trunk and bough  
Rise in that region now :  
No wild beasts stalk, but hard men walk,  
Who suck the golden blood  
Of earth from rock and mud.  
On moonless nights a million lights  
Challenge the starry heights :  
And there are ruthless fights,  
But now no more of tooth and claw,  
A deadlier jungle law  
Prevails than wild beasts used to know  
A hundred years ago.



University of Fort Hare

**REJOINING** after his rough eight-weeks-ride  
The trekker main-encampment close beside  
The leisured, softly flowing River Sand,  
Potgieter found that many of his band  
Had left the camp and scattered : some had moved  
Towards the Vaal ; others, more daring, roved  
Beyond the confines of that yellow flood.

Now to the peaceful camp came tales of blood :  
Umsilikazi's \* scouts, out of the blue,  
Surprised the straying Liebenbergs and slew  
Eight adults and four children and took three  
Children, with herds and flocks, as spoils of victory.  
' Blouberg ', in times of stress a very rock,  
Sternly recalled the scattered trekker-flock ;

\* Matabele chief, formerly one of Chaka's captains.

And pushed North-East, where on a little hill,  
 Then nameless but now famed as ' Vegkop ' \* still,  
 He pitched his tents and toiling day and night  
 Made preparations for the coming fight.

XIX

WITH fifty wagons a ring-fort was built,  
 Fifty huge wagons almost tilt to tilt,  
 Lashed end to end with trek-chains, and between  
 Wheel-spokes and in all openings thorn-trees green  
 Were tightly piled or woven breastworks these  
 That with their long sharp stinging thorns would tease  
 The approaching foe. In this embattled ring  
 Four wagons were drawn up to form a square ;  
 This, with rough planks and hides for covering,  
 Sheltered the women, children, household gear.  
 Within the fort the trekkers' horses were  
 Carefully tethered ; whilst on plain and hill  
 The flocks and herds were left to roam at will.

Meanwhile the trekkers and their women toiled :  
 Bullets were moulded ; guns were cleaned and oiled ;  
 Small buckskin bags were made for the slugs of lead,  
 Which, at close range, cause havoc as they spread.  
 Then to each man, behind the wagon-wall,  
 Posts were assigned where gunpowder and ball  
 Were placed in dishes ready to each hand.  
 And so that brave, resourceful little band,

\* Battle Hill.

## THE TREK

When nineteenth of October showed its light,  
Was ranged and ready for a ruthless fight.

### XX

## VEGKOP

### I

THE trekker-camp at break of day  
Was ready for the coming fray,  
And presently espied  
A dark advancing tide  
Sweeping across the shining veld.  
Then solemnly the trekkers knelt,  
Their heads all bowed and bare,  
While Cilliers offered prayer.  
Thereafter in the wagon-fence  
They made a gap and issuing thence,  
Riding nor fast nor slow,  
They moved to meet the foe.

As they approached the swarthy mass,  
Now grimly squatting on the grass,  
Potgieter made essay  
The holocaust to stay  
And parleyed. But, with cobra-hiss,  
The foe leapt up, advanced ; at this  
To earth the trekkers sprang,  
Their steady snaphaans \* rang !

\* Muskets.

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Two raking volleys straight they poured  
Into the swart and savage horde,  
Then, mounting, back they rode —  
While galloping to load  
Their smoking muskets — and again  
They turned and showered blighting rain  
Upon the startled foe,  
Whose coming now was slow.

Twelve volleys from the belching roer,\*  
The trekker's trusted friend and broer,†  
Had rattled harshly, when  
Potgieter and his men  
Regained the camp — without mishap ;  
Right speedily they closed the gap,  
Whilst loud the women sang,  
Their cheering voices rang  
Sweet in the mellow morning air.  
Then Sarel Cilliers raised a prayer,  
A brave and solemn plea  
To God for victory.

The trekkers then with careful toil  
Their muskets cleaned from smut and soil ;  
While steadfast Potgieter  
Around the camp did stir :  
To all he uttered simple words —  
For little sounds can sharpen swords —  
To stimulate and cheer,  
Brave words to banish fear.

\* Musket.

† Brother.

## THE TREK

Meanwhile the foe like locusts swarmed,  
And steadily their legions formed  
Into that half-moon shape  
That stays a foe's escape :  
That battle-plan of Chaka dread,  
The savage bull's stupendous head,  
With curving horns that close  
Like pincers on their foes.  
But having formed their ranks the mass  
Squatted once more upon the grass,  
Safe, out of gunshot range,  
To watch the foemen strange,  
Whose smoking-clubs had havoc made  
From further distance than the blade  
Of well-hurled spear might go  
And lay a foeman low.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

The trekkers, now impatient, wait  
Their tardy foe, for soon or late,  
With shout and crash and din,  
The battle must begin.  
Suspense may shatter ev'n the strong,  
So ' Blouberg ' to a whip-stick long  
Fastened a kerchief red  
And waved it overhead.  
This invitation to a fight  
Found prompt acceptance — front, left, right,  
With clangour, shout and hum  
The Dark battalions come.

Kilted with leopards' tails were they  
 And plumed with feathers long and gay,  
 With bushy ox-tails tied  
 To wrist and elbow, ankle, knee,  
 They came in war-like panoply,  
 With shields of tough ox-hide —  
 Long oval shields, spiked at each end —  
 Bucklers that needful cover lend  
 To warriors in fight :  
 Shields white-and-red each veteran bore,  
 While youthful wights untried in war  
 Had shields of black and white.  
 Two throwing-assegais had each  
 To check the foeman out of reach,  
 And one short stabbing-spear —  
 Broad-bladed was this weapon dread —  
 A knob-kerrie \* with heavy head  
 Completes each fighter's gear.

Onward they came in war-array,  
 Their crest-feathers like pennons gay  
 A-flutter in the breeze ;  
 Each shield was beaten like a drum,  
 As on they came, with hiss and hum  
 Like drone of distant seas.  
 Onward they came, now nigh and nigher,  
 But Potgieter still held his fire,  
 Till thirty paces they

\* Knob-stick.

## THE TREK

Were from the trekker-camp and then  
He gives his eager anxious men  
The word for which they pray.

The trekkers' muskets flashed and roared  
And deadly volleys were out-poured  
Upon the yelling foe.

The trekker women, good at need  
To help their men with word and deed,  
Now hurried to and fro

To bind up wounds and guns to load ;  
Help from their ready fingers flowed,  
From white lips words of cheer.

The muskets belched out loud and fast  
Upon the foe a withering blast,

But still those foes drew near.

Vainly against each wagon-tent

The hurtling assegai was sent,  
Knob-sticks were hurled in vain.

The desperate foe now bravely strove  
Some shackled wagon to remove,

They strove with utmost strain ;

The wagon-ring they could not break,

The sheltered Boers they failed to shake,

So vanquished, they retire ;

While into them and after them

The trekkers without stay or stem

Still poured their deadly fire.

Swiftly the swarthy legions fled,  
Leaving great heaps of warriors dead

## ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Upon the blood-soaked plain.  
Triumphant trekkers raised on high  
Their glad hosannas to the sky  
Again and yet again.  
And when they saw the black cloud melt  
Into the vastness of the veld,  
They all, with one accord,  
Knelt down and prayers of thanks did raise  
And joyful hymns and psalms of praise  
To Heaven's eternal Lord.

Thus ended Vegkop's wondrous fight,  
Five thousand 'black' 'gainst forty 'white' —  
The snaphaan \* 'gainst the spear.  
The Matabele fought right well,  
Right valiantly they fought and fell  
And conquered conquering fear.  
But vain was assegai, well-tried,  
Vainly the bull-head's hornèd pride  
Came with tremendous shock :  
Shattered and set at naught were these —  
Shattered like angry rolling seas  
Against a steadfast rock.

## XXI

THO' victors proud in Vegkop's stubborn fight,  
The trekkers now were in a grievous plight :  
Two of their men were killed by assegais,  
Each third man bore a wound ; before their eyes,

\* Musket.

## THE TREK

In his abrupt retreat the conquered foe  
Had driven off their flocks and herds ; and so  
With wagons but no oxen the trekkers now  
Were stranded on the veld. Small store had they  
Of food ; the nearest camp was far away ;  
So conquest's joy was darkened by dismay.

In his necessity wise Potgieter  
Sent to Maritz, by mounted messenger,  
Appeals for succour. Near Thaba Nchu then  
Was Maritz camped with all his trekker-men.  
A hundred wagons had he at command,  
A hundred wagons and a trusty band  
Of well-armed horsemen. He and Moroko \* sent  
Trek-oxen to Potgieter ; with these went  
Some mounted trekker-guards to reinforce  
Potgieter's trek upon its southward course.

## XXII

So South-South-East Potgieter's course was set ;  
And in due time the two trek-parties met  
At Blesberg near Thaba Nchu. Thereupon  
The two decided to combine : anon,  
A constitution was drawn up with care  
And duly passed by all the trekkers there.  
These next as commandant and voorsitter †  
Of the War Council chose brave Potgieter.  
Maritz was chosen as the president,

\* Chief of the Baralong tribe.

† Chairman.

## ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Or chairman of the Trekker Parliament,  
And of the Trekker Court chief-magistrate.

Then, after careful thought and long debate,  
It was decided straightway to invade  
Umsilikazi's kraals in mounted raid,  
In order to retrieve the sheep and cattle  
Swept off, in the retreat from Vegkop's battle,  
By Umsilikazi's foiled and flying legions.  
So, swiftly thro' unpopulated regions  
The trekker-horsemen confidently sped,  
And fell upon the kraals when dawn broke red  
Over the hills. Women and children fled  
Startled and screaming in unbounded fright ;  
But the dark warriors waged a stubborn fight  
Against the invading foe. It was all in vain  
And they too fled, leaving four hundred slain  
Upon the trampled, blood-impurpled plain.

## XXIII

THE raiders now incontinently fired  
The desolated kraals ; and then retired.  
Riding in triumph South, they drove before  
Their horses seven thousand head or more  
Of captured cattle. But when at length they came  
To Blesberg Camp, dissension's withering flame  
Broke out amongst them. Maritz put up a claim  
For an equal sharing of the captured stock :  
This, Potgieter — that imperturbable rock —

## THE TREK

Opposed ; and held, with firmness and good sense,  
That, prior to a share-out, recompense  
Be made his trekkers for their sheep and cattle  
Looted by the foiled foe in Vegkop's battle.  
Potgieter and his followers had their way ;  
Dissension died, to flame another day.

Grievous it is, incredible and odd,  
How good folk quarrel in the name of God :  
To many Christians their specific creed  
Means more than Christ and more than Christ-like  
deed.

Again the trekkers quarrelled and the split  
Was over the unhappy Father Smit.  
Smit, who from Holland hailed as Mission-teacher,  
Was to Maritz's band tutor and preacher.  
A learned man was he, whose voice was strong ;  
His sermons were word-jewels two hours long.  
But Smit was not ordained : howe'er inclined  
The solemn nuptial-knot he might not bind ;  
Nor could he babes baptize ; and so, indeed,  
A shepherd sad was he, unlicensed and unfee'd.

Maritz was fain the Volksraad \* should install  
Smit as official predikant ; † but all  
The Doppers ‡ were opposed, for these preferred  
From good James Archbell to receive the Word ;  
For Archbell, said they, tho' a Wesleyan  
(Disgruntled Smit dubbed him, ' Arminian ! ')

\* Parliament.

† Pastor.

‡ Members of Dissenting Dutch Reformed Churches.

ORANGE RIVER AND VEGKOP

Was an ordained and licensed minister.  
And thus between the clans of Potgieter  
And of Maritz, dissension's blighting flame  
Spluttered and hissed once more. Just then there  
came  
News of the trekking North of Piet Retief —  
One who would banish all dissension's grief ;  
Hope of the trekker-folk and their ideal Chief.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

PART III

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S  
KRAAL  
(Piet Retief)



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## I

RETIEF was fifty-seven when he set forth  
From Winterberg upon his long trek North.  
A sturdy, well-made man of carriage upright,  
His dusk-brown hair and beard were flecked with  
white,

And his dark, luminous and wide-set eyes  
Flashed courage, leadership, and enterprise.  
Tho' self-contained, a friendly man was he,  
Tactful and swathed in old-time courtesy,  
But to the wise his eagle-glance spoke clear,  
' No liberties, good friends, are taken here.'

*University of Pretoria  
Together in Excellence*

Of Huguenot stock, a Western Province man  
Was Piet Retief. His restless life began  
In seventeen-eighty at a hamlet known  
As Wagenmaker's-vallei, which since has grown  
Into the sleep-charmed, tree-bespeckled town  
Of Wellington.

On his father's farm he had  
Good education, for a country lad.  
But tiring of the dull monotony  
Of the paternal wine-farm, later he  
Left for the mother-city,\* there to learn  
The life of thick-massed people and to earn  
Business experience.

\* Cape Town.

## THE TREK

Four years he stayed  
'Neath Table Mount ; in the next eight he made  
Many long journeys : to and fro he went  
About the land by his employer sent.

## II

AT thirty-four he married and settled down  
At Mooimeisiesfontein, near Riebeeck East —  
A tiny dorp — not far from Grahamstown.  
But even then his wanderings had not ceased :  
Once more the ding-dong pace of farm-life proved  
Unbearable to him, and so he moved  
To Grahamstown.

There he secured a share  
In contracts for transporting food and gear  
To the British pioneers, who recently  
Had settled down to farm upon the land  
In Bathurst district and in Albany.

Relief now prospered and the chief command  
Of the Grahamstown burghers lay in his strong hand.  
So all went well. But, sudden as the flame  
Of a veld-fire, to him disaster came :  
He had contracted to erect and build  
Magistrates' offices ; but being unskilled  
In estimating costs, good fortune veered  
And lightly left him, and he was declared  
A bankrupt. So, sore sickened with the strife,  
The quicksands and the shoals of city life,  
He left the town and sought once more the free,

The twice-deserted country, whose monotony  
 Had teased his eager spirit. Wherefore now  
 He sought the Winterberg, whose sky-stroked brow  
 Made all the neighbouring mountain-peaks seem mean  
 and low.

III

RETIEF'S FAREWELL TO ALBANY

“ You dales and downs of Albany,  
 On your curved slopes, like scattered sheep,  
 Grey rocks and lichened boulders lie  
 Half-hidden in the grass and sleep,  
 Sun-washed, serene, in breathless ease.  
 In your deep kloofs are ancient trees,  
 Grey yellow-woods, whose creaking breath  
 Is spent in droning songs of death —  
 Dim and unending threnodies.  
 Oft in such grove a kaffir-boom  
 Flaunts gaily many a flame-like plume,  
 And perforates the woodland-gloom,  
 As veld-fires slash the fur of night  
 Making it bleed with angry light.  
 Green dales and downs of Albany,  
 Sadly, to you I bid, Good-bye.

“ Good-bye to you fair frontier town,  
 Whose white-walled houses, churches brown,  
 Glow from a cup-like vale rimmed round  
 By gentle hills. In you I found

## THE TREK

Friendship and love. At first success  
Came with full hands to hail and bless :  
Drought-like misfortune followed fast  
Blighting the blooms too bright to last ;  
So now, once more, tho' weary age  
Brings its dull load, I must engage  
In other ventures, start again  
Far from these pleasant haunts of men.  
And so, farewell, proud frontier-town ;  
Farewell again to dale and down.

“ For I was born a restless man,  
Just as the sea — since time began —  
Drives on, with angry clap and roar,  
Its white teams on an endless shore  
And never pauses to outspan.  
Yes, restless as the winds that shake  
Soft, yellow spangles from the thorn,  
Or as the gold-pronged clouds that rake  
The sun-ploughed hills when day is born ;  
And restless as the wild-colt rills,  
That race among the resting hills.  
— But I must curb this restlessness,  
And in the vast veld seek redress  
For town-misfortune, town-distress :  
There, maybe, I shall find the balm  
That men have dreamed of, which is — calm.”

IV

IN eighteen-twenty-four he left the town  
 And on a farm remote soon settled down.  
 This lonely frontier-farm lay on that highland  
 Where Winterberg looms like a lofty island  
 Above the billowy hills that surge below.  
 Curbing his restless soul ; now, sure and slow,  
 He worked his farm. By eighteen-thirty-four,  
 He had regained lost ground and was once more  
 A prosperous man ; Field-Commandant was he  
 Of Winterberg ; and by the whole community  
 Held in respect. An active part he played  
 In the Sixth Kaffir War and thereby earned  
 The friendship of the Governor.

Retief now made  
 Efforts for the redress of wrongs that burned  
 And galled his frontier fellow-countrymen.  
 He wrote long letters to the Governor — but then  
 Good D'Urban's hands were tied, he might not act  
 As he thought best ; with all his kindly tact  
 He could not mend the breach, nor give relief  
 To discontented men. And so Retief,  
 Finding his efforts vain, in ' thirty-seven '  
 Set out to find on earth a lesser Heaven.

V

RETIEF'S trek, swelling as it swept along,  
 At the Orange River was a hundred strong  
 In tented wagons, with about six-score  
 Of well-armed men. On the river's northern shore

## THE TREK

Waited Maritz with a large deputation.  
Gert slyly hinted that Piet's reputation  
Had far-outstripped his plodding oxen's pace ;  
And then assured him that the highest place  
In the Trek-Government would be his to grace.

And when Retief at length into the main  
Encampment rode, many, eager to gain  
A glimpse of him, in wild excitement swarm  
Upon the tented wagons, and with warm,  
Hilarious salutes of voice and hand  
Hail the great Chief, who to the Promised Land  
Shall lead triumphantly the wandering trekker-band.

At a great gathering that eve Retief  
Was chosen as the Commandant-in-Chief  
Of all the trekker-laagers : further, he  
Was Governor named of the Trek-Company.  
And that same meeting later gave assent,  
Without undue deliberation and debate,  
That Maritz still should be the President  
Of the Trek-Volksraad and Chief Magistrate  
Of the High Court of the new Trekker State.

## VI

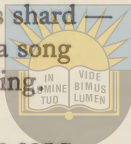
### “ LET US SING A SONG ”

LET us sing a song,  
As we swing along,  
Of rolling wheels  
And the tent that reels,

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Of the yoke-skei's squeak  
And the disselboom's creak —  
Let us sing a song  
In the morning.

Let us sing a song,  
As we swing along,  
Of the rhythmic beat  
Of oxen's feet  
On ground baked hard  
As a potter's shard —  
Let us sing a song  
In the morning.



Let us sing a song,  
As we swing along,  
Of the sail's flip-flap,  
And the whip's crisp clap  
That echoes clear  
From the koppies near —  
Let us sing a song  
In the morning.

Let us sing a song —  
As we swing along  
And follow our star,  
O'er the hills afar,  
To a land that's free  
As the uncurbed sea —  
Let us sing a song  
In the morning.

## VII

RETIEF now set about to organize  
 The scattered treks. Well did he realize  
 He could not make the state that would survive  
 Till, with great labour, he should lead or drive  
 The wandering trekkers to the Promised Land.  
 A heavy task waited his willing hand :  
 From Blesberg to the bush-fringed river Vet  
 Trekkers from Tarka, Colesberg, Graaff-Reinet,  
 Winterberg, Cradock, Beaufort \* and Somerset †  
 Were roughly scattered when Retief began  
 To rule these Easterners — he a Western man  
 Without the following of a family-clan  
 Like Potgieter, Maritz and many more  
 Whose kin were as the sands on the sea-shore.

Right difficult he found it was to yoke  
 The frontier-farmers with the dorp-bred folk.  
 These Boers, great pioneers in their great day,  
 Were dour, suspicious, impatient of all sway  
 Even by their chosen leaders. Furthermore,  
 Grave error had been made, strife was in store,  
 For (outmanœuvred, as one would infer,  
 By Gerrit Maritz) the valiant Potgieter,  
 Hero of Vegkop and the leader tried  
 Of all the Doppers, had been set aside —  
 Unhorsed of his command, no part had he  
 In the new rule of the Trekker-Company.

\* Beaufort West (Cape).

† Somerset East (Cape).

VIII

WHEN the new governor sought to install  
 Erasmus Smit as predikant \* for all  
 The trekkers, an ' unedifying † stir,'  
 Raised in the Dopper ranks of Potgieter,  
 Went thro' the congregation, as a madcap breeze  
 Rustles the sapless reeds and combs the trees  
 Upon a river-bank. Therefore Retief,  
 Astounded and perplexed beyond belief  
 By a tea-cup tempest, meekly must desist.

But as no mortal could for long resist  
 Sad Smit's perpetual importunities,  
 Supported by Susanna's angry pleas,  
 Retief at length was able to appease  
 The malcontents, and did himself install  
 Smit as official predikant \* for all.

So Smit at last attained his heart's desire  
 And preached with forceful eloquence and fire,  
 Un-pulpiting Archbell, whom stern Smit called,  
 " The Wesleyan, Remonstrant, Archibald ! "

IX

ONCE more the trekker-caravans set forth  
 Upon their long-protracted journey North.  
 Beside the Vet some were constrained to stay  
 Awhile and shoot ; others pressed on their  
 way

\* Pastor.

† Smit's Diary.

## THE TREK

To pause beside the dawdling River Sand.  
Meanwhile the governor, Retief, began  
To guide and drive with firm and skilful hand  
His straying and unwieldy trekker-span.  
The rules he made are witness to his wise,  
Strong leadership and power to organize :  
— Servants must be well-treated ; should any  
man

Molest the native tribes or take their young  
Children, by force or stealth, a fine was wrung  
From his tight-buttoned purse ; again, if he  
Slaughtered wild-game without necessity —  
A common fault — or if he set alight  
The waving grasslands, or refused to fight  
Veld-fires, then soon again his purse should

know

Bitter constraint ; and furthermore at night  
Each man must take his turn on sentry-go,  
Without distinction ; and readily each day  
Patrols must ride ahead to guard the trekkers'  
way.

Further, the wise and vigilant Retief  
Made verbal treaties with each Native chief  
Of the surrounding tribes : Moshesh, the great ;  
Sikonyela, and chiefs of lesser weight  
For peace between the trekkers and each Native  
State.

X

OUTSPAN SONG

“ OUTSPAN, saddle-off with the setting sun,  
Unyoke the tired oxen and let them stray and graze ;  
Off-saddle, outspan, another stage is won,  
And weary trekkers now may rest around the camp-  
fire's blaze.

“ Slowly have we struggled on sweating in the heat,  
Jolting over stones and scrub through a dusty spray ;  
Now may we rest sore limbs and tired feet,  
While husky evening breezes hum a dirge for dying  
day.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

“ Stir around, children, quickly take your turn,  
Gather up for kindling sticks and bushes dry —  
Dry sticks and bushes that soon will crack and burn,  
Spiralling blue smoke aloft towards the bluer sky.

“ Boil we now the kettles and brew the coffee strong,  
Pour it in the beakers and drink it black and hot,  
Munch we now the brown bread and chew the tough  
biltong,  
And taste the lekker \* springbok-stew steaming from  
the pot.

“ Then having eaten let us gather round the fire,  
And, sorely striving to forget each sad forsaken home,

\* Savoury.

## THE TREK

We'll build in the blue-smoke new homes of hearts'  
desire,  
Forgetting all the toils behind, we'll dream of joys to  
come."

## XI

FIERCE quarrelling now shook the trekker-folk,  
Who suffered not the teasing whip and yoke  
Of discipline with equanimity,  
For were they not free people on a free,  
Unfettered soil, the Land of Liberty?  
And so dissension troubled them and soon  
The leaders quarrelled too. From middle-June,  
Blazing and smouldering alternately,  
The withering fires of wrath burnt on apace  
Until September. Impetuous Piet Uys,  
Volcanic ever, was the one who kindled  
Afresh these spirit-fires and fanned their flame  
Tempestuously, till sullenly they dwindled  
Swathed in the ash of sorrow and despair.

Short, thick-set, sturdy was Piet Uys and fair,  
With surge of shaggy, golden beard and hair :  
Lion-like in spirit, lion-like in face  
Was this young Hotspur of the House of Uys.  
In April ' thirty-seven ' he had set forth  
From Uitenhage upon the long trek North.  
His followers numbering five-score souls or more  
Were mainly kinsfolk. But while young Piet bore

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

The brunt of leadership, with force and fire,  
The nominal leader was his aged sire,  
Jacobus Uys. This greybeard sat at ease  
Upon his wagon, nursing on his knees  
A noble copy of the Holy Writ,  
Its front page bearing an inscription fit,  
Presented to him by the Grahamstown folk ;  
And many cheering words those worthies spoke,  
When Uys' trek passed thro' that frontier-town —  
Since grown a city of learning and renown.

Eastward along the coast in ' thirty-four '  
Piet Uys had led a party to explore  
The scarce known region of remote Natal.  
Returning southward Piet was lyrical  
About that lovely land where all was good —  
Good grass, good water, abundant firewood,  
Timber for building, easy-coming rain,  
No fever, little frost. As the domain  
Strictly reserved for his particular clan  
Thenceforth did Piet, that bull-at-a-gate young  
man  
Regard Natal's bright paradisal Land.

Now at the Orange River Piet left his band,  
The Uitenhage trek-party, and hurried on  
Galloping North, North-East and reached, anon,  
The Trekker Headquarters, and there he pressed  
Clan Uys' claim to Natal, and boldly stressed  
With pride his right and competence to be  
A leader of the Trekker-Company.

## XII

GAUNT and disgruntled Hendrik Potgieter  
 Supported Hotspur Uys — fresh harbinger  
 Of trekker strife — and now an angry stir  
 Ruffled the camp, which hummed like a hive of bees  
 Robbed of its treasure, or like leafy trees  
 Racked by rough winds. Potgieter and Piet Uys,  
 Stung by chagrin and anger that no place  
 Had been assigned to them in the supreme  
 Government of the **Trek**, could see no gleam  
 Of hope that in the **Trekker-State** to be,  
 The great Republic of the brave and free,  
 They would be rulers. Therefore did they maintain,  
 Fiercely, the fight, in which no foes are slain,  
 The war of politics, the bliss and bane  
 Of Afrikaner-folk — who, to this day,  
 Quarrel and wrangle in the same sad way.

The flames of strife lit by 'Blouberg' and Uys  
 In hasty selfishness, blazed on apace,  
 Quickened and nourished by gratuitous fuel,  
 Thro' three long meetings toward the end of June.  
 In these sad concerts anger called the tune.  
 Each meeting ended in a wordy duel  
 Between Maritz and Uys. When the last bout  
 Was over, bluff Piet Uys, that fighter stout  
 In word and deed, rode swiftly South again,  
 Sleeplessly stirred by anger and disdain,

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

To seek his kinsfolk and with them to take  
Counsel since all their future was at stake.

XIII

RIDING HORSE

“ACH, but how I love to ride  
Vos, my trusty horse and tried,  
With his steady tireless tripple\*  
Easy as the rhyming ripple  
Of a shallow, singing spruit, †  
That works early hours and late,  
And gambols as it ambles  
In the Suniversity of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

“Chasing eland on the plains,  
When I drop my bridle-reins  
To lift my gun, Vos gallops on,  
Like a river in the sun,  
Like a river, strong and deep,  
That swerves along with steady sweep,  
Brightly gleaming, bravely streaming  
In the sun.

“And when near the wagon side  
On my Vos, I gaily ride,  
With young Sannie looking on,  
Who to me is moon and sun,

\* From “trippel” — quick amble.

† Rivulet.

## THE TREK

Vos will arch his neck to tune  
With the curve of the new moon,  
And he cocks his flowing tail,  
Proud as eagle in full sail,  
For, of course, the cunning horse  
Knows that Sannie's looking on,  
In the sun.

*Chorus :*

“ My sporting horse, my courting horse,  
Swift and steady, ever ready ;  
My riding horse, my striding horse,  
Safe in battle, smart with cattle ;  
Ach, what kingdoms can be won  
With a horse and with a gun !  
So I ride, with joy and pride,  
In the sun.”

## XIV

APART from all the wrangles as to rule,  
Raised by hot Uys and ‘ Blouberg ’ stern and cool,  
One bristling question teased the Trekker-band,  
Day in, day out, where lay the Promised Land ?  
Was it the High Veld, or was it the Low ?  
Was it to North ? Or East thro’ mountain-snow ?  
Where lay the Canaan to which all should go ?

Potgieter voted North, for he had seen  
Beyond the Vaal the grasslands waving green,  
Barred with the silver of vivacious springs  
And starred with flowers, a Land for cattle-kings.

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Further he stressed the point, political,  
That the enticing region of Natal,  
Basking in beauty by the passionate sea,  
An easy prey to England's ships might be,  
Not so the inland North.

But Piet Retief,  
The Governor and Commandant-in-chief,  
Favoured Natal. Of late he had sent out  
A trusty band of outriders to scout  
Among the eastern peaks. These men had found  
Five difficult passes, five rough tracks that  
wound

Among precipitous crags to the radiant Land  
That lay below. So along the River Sand,  
Eastward he now moved slowly; after him  
Waveringly came Maritz, still smart and trim;  
Whilst, hesitant and tardy, far behind  
Gaunt Potgieter, his stubborn thoughts inclined  
To the magnetic North, still dawdled on;  
And in the valley of the Caledon,  
Far to the South, dauntless Piet Uys began  
To take the rearguard with his waiting clan.

## XV

MEANWHILE the burden of his governorship  
Lay heavy on Retief: a fatal slip  
Was the embitterment of Potgieter —  
Due to Maritz. But after all the stir,

## THE TREK

The party-jealousies and quarrels hot  
That quickly followed, Piet Retief could not  
Retreat before Potgieter and felt bound  
To give Maritz support. Often he found  
That tedious and irksome was the role  
Of peacemaker to his proud restless soul  
That craved for action in fields far and wide.

But scarcely had the noise and tumult died  
Of recent bickerings, when with Maritz  
Retief fell out about the exigent Smits.  
— As cause of strife almost might Smit eclipse  
Helen, whose beauty launched a thousand  
ships.

Whilst in all innocence this good man tried  
His scattered and unruly flock to guide,  
His managing and more ambitious spouse —  
Susanna, Gerrit's sister — strove to rouse  
In slow Erasmus Smit a proper sense  
Of his importance to the Trek and hence  
(When Piet Retief was chosen as the head  
And governor of all the treks and led  
The vanguard with his followers) the Smits  
Forsook the camp and guidance of Maritz  
To join the governor's more important train.  
So when Maritz demanded back again  
From the blank Smits the wagon he had lent  
To them — that sky-blue wagon in whose tent  
They long had travelled — he would not relent.  
Susanna stormed ; Erasmus vainly strove  
By argument and scriptural text to move

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

His irate kinsman : but at length Retief  
Appeased the hurt Maritz and brought relief.

XVI

WHILST in the High Veld days were warm and  
bright,  
Skies clear and blue, 'twas bitter chill at night ;  
And shivering trekkers loudly would complain  
Of ice-cold nights, and, inly, sighed in vain  
For their deserted homesteads far away  
In the warm South. Few trekkers wished to stay  
In those bleak regions ; many longed to go  
Beyond the Vaal ; whilst others chose the low,  
The sunny, sheltered Bushveld of Natal.

This point and jealousies political  
Still stirred the restive trekkers, and at length  
Retief at Tafelkop — to test his strength —  
Held a great trekker-gathering ; and there  
Was wrangling, argument and blaze and blare  
Between the ' Opposition ' and the ' Government.'  
Muskets were flourished, gossamer-silence rent  
By angry sharp-toned voices ; and at last  
Piet Uys flung out ; and, as he hurried past,  
" Where are we going ? " someone asked, " please  
say ! "

And Uys said, " Each is going his own way,  
One forward and the next aside but none  
Following ! "

THE TREK

At the setting of the sun  
Uys and Potgieter rode away to their  
Own camps ; whilst, at headquarters, evening  
prayer  
Was held by an old trekker, who long and late  
Expounded David's scorching hymn of hate :  
' *Hold not Thy peace, O Lord !* '

XVII

" FROM HUMAN TEMPEST "



FROM human tempest —  
Dry-storm of the spirit —  
From ~~clash and clangour~~  
O save us, Lord !

From the eye's red lightning,  
The mouth's black thunder,  
From strife and anger  
Save us, good Lord !

From sterile hatred's  
Hard droughts of the spirit,  
That blight all flowers  
Of thought and deed,  
O Lord defend us,  
In mercy send us  
Love's saving showers  
In our sore need.

XVIII

GOVERNOR RETIEF now seeing how 'twas plain  
 That union was but a vision vain,  
 And the great trek could not united be,  
 Resolved to act immediately, so he  
 Pressed on towards the East, eager to view  
 Natal — the trekker's Canaan, free and new —  
 Guarded by Dragon-peaks and fringed by the Indian  
 blue.

His trek now travelled thro' a stretch of bleak,  
 Burnt-up, and treeless veld : here cattle weak  
 With cold and hunger fell beside the way ;  
 Here lads and lassies round about must stray  
 Seeking dried hartebeest dung, as this was all  
 The fuel they could find ; here many a kraal,  
 Abandoned, told a tale of bitter rue  
 Of battle, fire, and flight to pastures new ;  
 Here lions prowling round in hungry ire  
 Lent to the black-furred night their eyes of fire,  
 And to the star-swept hills their voices hoarse.

Retief now sent ahead a mounted force  
 To guard the pass down which the trek should go.  
 Then ever onward, resolute and slow,  
 The tented wagons toiled across the parched  
 Sun-blistered veld. But whilst thus onward marched  
 Retief, his wavering, faint-hearted train  
 Hung back in doubt to see which way the main

## THE TREK

Trek was to move. So when Retief at length  
Pitched camp close to the mountain-pass his strength  
Had dwindled down to wagons scarce a score.

But with the travail of the desert o'er ;  
Shielded by distance from the jarring noise  
Of jealous strife, Retief now breathed the joys  
Of a new life in a new glorious scene :  
Here grass-waves lashed with reckless surge of green  
Grey, cloud-like boulders ; here streams foamed and  
splashed

Among stone-throated gullies, or snake-like flashed  
Thro' fern and bracken ; here the glad sky trailed  
Her blue skirts round the peaks, whilst eagles sailed  
In scornful pride on strong wings overhead ;  
And glorious blooms, great mountain-lilies red,  
Burst from those highlands where, in care-free hours,  
Retief went with the meises\* gathering flowers.

## XIX

### “ IN THE HIGHLANDS ”

“ WE have trailed through desert spaces,  
We have toiled through dusty places,  
Sweat and struggle, loss and hardship  
Have we found :  
Now we've come to breezy highlands,  
Where the gaunt peaks rise like islands  
From the billowed sea of hills  
That surges round.

\* Lassies.

“ Overhead are eagles sweeping,  
 From high crags are conies peeping,  
 Breeze and bracken wrestle oft  
 In frolic fun ;  
 Every white-sailed cloud that passes  
 Trawls its shadow o'er the grasses,  
 Running brooklets leap and chuckle  
 As they run.

“ Boulders on the grass are sprawling,  
 Eager waterfalls are calling,  
 On the breeze their flute-like music  
 Dies and swells :  
 In these rich and restful hours,  
 Let us go and gather flowers —  
 Mountain-roses, mountain lilies,  
 Mountain-bells.”

XX

LEAVING the sleeping camp, at break of day,  
 Retief walked out alone and made his way  
 'Mongst startling peaks and pinnacles of rock,  
 Ravines and gullies foaming with the shock  
 Of racing waters and gigantic boulders  
 That sprawled around, moss-capes about their  
 shoulders.

Retief toiled on until at last he came —  
 Just as the fisher-sun, majestic,  
 Caught the grey peaks in quivering nets of flame —  
 To the stark edge of a stupendous wall,

Where, awed, he tarried, breathless and amazed  
 At the power and glory circling round him there :  
 Flashes of Heaven, visions following prayer !  
 And in the light of joy he stood and gazed  
 At hanging crags and haggard precipices ;  
 Rock-barriers of a prodigious size ;  
 Earth-corrugations like colossal thighs  
 Of sleeping Titans ; at blue-grey abysses,  
 And racing brooks that, from their streaming tails,  
 Sped like white horses champing down the vales.

Gazing afar from his high pedestal,  
 He saw the radiant region of Natal  
 Sweeping away, a ruffled sea of green  
 And rounded hills, dappled with groves serene  
 Of shining trees ; and in the vales between  
 He saw — like agile, twisting snakes of pearl —  
 Swift, sinuous rivers dart and dive and curl,  
 Dashing against red rocks white foam-flowers to  
 unfurl.

And in that vast and tingling solitude,  
 ‘ In silence in the visionary mood,’  
 He mused and meditated late and long —  
 This poet, unawares, whose only song  
 Was action, action (let the small man sing) ;  
 This leader, now without a following ;  
 This statesman whose great plans had all proved  
 vain ;  
 This governor, shorn of his fickle train ;  
 Without a force, a Commandant-in-Chief :  
 But first and last, invincible Relief.

## DRAKENSBURG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

And as he stood and gazed with eager eyes on  
The radiant Land that rolled to the horizon,  
Dipping beyond that to an unseen ocean,  
His restless soul was stirred to strange emotion,  
His being quickened with a 'sense sublime,'  
That soared beyond the reach of prose or rhyme ;  
A sense of dedication, of high power  
To meet the claims of each exacting hour ;  
He felt that he, none other, was the Moses,  
Who to a Land of honey, milk and roses —  
Despite the stings of warfare and the thorns  
Of toil, or wag-'n-bietjie \* pricks and scorns  
Of jealous foes — would lead the trekker-band :  
And while he mused and watched, the Promised Land  
Summoned with silent voice, beckoned with unseen  
hand.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*  
XXI

MEANWHILE, some straggling trekkers came along  
And soon the camp was fifty wagons strong.  
Leaving strict orders that the trek should not  
Move in his absence from the pleasant spot  
Selected for his camp ; with wagons four  
And fifteen men Retief pushed on once more  
Toward the mountain-pass. Thence, undismayed,  
Slowly and painfully these trekkers made  
Their journey down a monstrous mountain-wall,  
Whereon their tented wagons seemed as small  
As curious flies upon a dome of glass,

\* "Wait a little" — tree with crooked thorns like small fishing-hooks.

## THE TREK

Then, safely thro' the dangers of the Pass,  
They outspanned at the mountain's foot, where  
they

Paused two long days hoping that, weak delay  
And vacillation past, Maritz might yet  
Join them in their great quest. But with regret  
They went at last without him.

On they rode  
Thro' hilly country where swift rivers flowed ;  
Thro' tangled forest and bush-cloaked ravine,  
Where careless song-birds over-taxed their bills ;  
O'er bold-hipped downs bristled with thorn-trees  
green :

On, to the Valley of a Thousand Hills,  
Whose tumbled host of hillocks well might seem  
Like countless bubbles on a boundless stream.  
Here wild-bananas, palms and paw-paws grew,  
Thorny acacias, torch-like aloes, too,  
Whose circling moths were avid yellow bees.  
And in the hollows flourished stinkwood trees,  
Dark-leaved tabute ; groves of yellow-wood —  
Moss-bearded giants that stubbornly withstood  
Buffeting winds and lashing whips of rain.

Still pressing on towards the Indian Main,  
They rode thro' grassy vales and woodland glades ;  
Cornfields they saw and mealie-patches green,  
And kraals of beehive huts with palisades  
Of thorn-bush ringed. At last the broad, serene,  
Expanse of ocean swam into their view  
Slicing the grey horizon with its blue.

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Onward they rode and in late afternoon  
They came upon an islet-starred lagoon,  
That shimmered near a Bay, majestic,  
With huts upon its edge and this was Port Natal.

### XXII

FROM Port Natal Retief a letter sent  
To Dingaan, sovereign-king of Zululand,  
Seeking an interview. Then having spent  
Some restful days he and his little band,  
Heading for North and East, trekked on once more  
And camped their wagons near the grassy shore  
Of the Tugela River deep and wide.  
Leaving the camp, upon a two days ride  
Retief set out, with five men in his train  
Including Thomas Halstead and John Cane,  
From the Port Settlement. Both men with fluency  
Spoke in the Zulu tongue, and proved to be  
Friendly and trusty guides from Port Natal  
To Umgungundhlovu, Dingaan's capital.

Dingaan obese, but tall and dignified,  
Resplendent in his robes, white, black and red,  
Received his visitors with pomp and pride.  
He would not speak of business, but instead  
He entertained his guests to startling shows  
Of warriors with shining assegais,  
Who dancing stabbed imaginary foes ;  
While long-horned oxen of great strength and size,

## THE TREK

Whose coats flashed like the sun on mealie-patches,  
Took part in those great games and leaping matches.

### XXIII

#### ZULU WARRIORS' CHANT

“ ARISE, great black Vulture,  
Devourer of other birds,  
Flap thy prodigious wings  
In the scorching face of the sun,  
And darken his dazzling eyeball.

“ Thou art the mighty Elephant,  
Whose stupendous trunk  
Breaketh off spreading branches  
In the high forests of Heaven,  
Making the nesting stars  
Tremble and fall, like blossoms from a tree.

“ Thy voice is the crash of thunder  
Shaking the deep-rooted mountains  
Like dry reeds in a raving wind.  
Thy breath is the curled snake of the lightning  
That destroys man and beast  
And sets the parched grass aflame.

“ Thou art King of all Kings,  
Sharper than the stabbing spear,  
Harder than the hardest stone —

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Nothing can hurt thee !  
The fire-carriers cannot fight thee :  
All that come against thee  
Shall perish ! ”

### XXIV

UMGUNGUNDHLOVU, a huge oval kraal,  
Lay on a gentle slope ; a lofty wall  
Of planted poles with bushes interwove  
Surrounded it ; below it lay a grove  
Of dark-boughed trees, thro' which a brooklet drove  
The shining share that as it furrows sings.  
Within the kraal in close concentric rings  
A thousand beehive huts or more found place ;  
Whilst in the middle of the oval space  
Was a great sanctuary, a ring-fenced shrine  
That held the Zulu gods — silk-coated, long-horned  
kine.

At the high end of that huge oval stood  
King Dingaana's palace. Pillars of polished wood  
Adorned with coloured beads in quaint designs  
Propped up its roof of finely plaited grass.  
Its earthen floor — where blood with fat combines  
To form a polish — was like shining glass.  
The huts of Dingaana's wives and concubines  
Ringed and re-ringed his mighty palace round,  
Even as high-soaring Saturn is ring-bound  
By swarms of merry meteors. Outside

## THE TREK

The palisade rose the accursed ' Hill  
Of Execution.' Here the earth was dyed,  
Brindled and barred by many a frozen rill  
Of dried and drying blood ; here human bones  
Lay bleaching in the sun like useless stones,  
And vultures — ' Dingaan's children ' — day by day  
Swooped darkly down to seek their carrion-prey.

## XXV

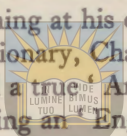
THE trekker-party waited till at last  
Enormous Dingaan sat, majestic,  
Upon his favourite throne — an armchair vast  
Placed near the gate of the great cattle-kraal —  
And listened while Retief, serene and bland,  
Made application for a grant of land  
To the United Trekker Company.

Dingaan replied that this request should be  
Granted, but only if and when Retief  
Restored to him some cattle that the chief,  
Sikonyela, had filched : ' If possible the thief  
As well,' he grimly added.

In high glee,  
Retief left Umgungundhlovu, Dingaan's kraal,  
And on his journey back towards the sea  
On Pastor Champion he made a call.  
Champion — the head of an American  
Mission near by, a good and kindly man —  
Knowing the king and all his heathen wiles,  
Now warned Retief on no account to ride

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

With a commando near the king. With smiles,  
Superior, Retief lightly replied,  
That ' Kaffir ways ' were well within his ken,  
That Afrikanders and not Englishmen  
' Understood Kaffirs.' Champion stressed his  
doubt :

Different were eastward tribes, he pointed out,  
From fierce war-welded fighting Zulu folk.  
And then, with pride, he added quietly  
That a true born American was he.  
Retief replied, laughing at his own joke,  
That the good Missionary, Champion,  
Tho' born and bred a true ' American,'  
Was just as near being an ' Englishman '   
' As made no difference ' betwixt one and one.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## XXVI

LEAVING the Mission with his company  
Retief rode back again towards the sea.  
Two men from Port Natal he sent to tell  
The laager on the heights that all was well.  
With several local British friends he then  
Discussed the future : promising that when  
The new State was established in the Land  
Special consideration would be theirs,  
In grants of ground, as early pioneers.  
Howbeit they were made to understand  
That, as the Trekker-Boers were bound to be  
In the new State in great majority,

## THE TREK

The country would be ruled according to  
The trekker mode, to Boer ideals true.

A letter to Dingaan Retief now wrote,  
In which he urged the king to take no note  
Of stories 'gainst the trekkers he might hear ;  
Further he stressed, with gusto, the severe  
Defeat of Umsilikazi at the hands  
Of Maritz and Potgieter's chastening bands.  
Lastly, he said, the predikants \* would show,  
From Holy Writ, the agony and woe —  
The shattering, the strange, heart-breaking things —  
That God had wreaked of old on wicked kings :  
A subtle hint that Umsilikazi soon  
Might be invisible to sun and moon.  
— Great Homer nods, sometimes, just as a thistle  
Bobs to the breeze : even so, in this epistle,  
The writer nodded, or was transiently insane.  
But all unconscious of the bitter bane  
Laid up, Retief set out, in highest feather,  
On his return to camp, in blue and beaming weather.

## XXVII

MEANWHILE the trekkers on the misty heights  
Waited, thro' many anxious days and nights,  
For tidings from Retief. Oft were they scared  
By tales of hostile natives on the way  
To raid the camp, to pillage and to slay.

\* Pastors or, in this case, missionaries.

## DRAKENSBURG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

And once a dark and dreadful rumour reared  
Its serpent head, by which Retief was slain,  
Beyond Tugela's flood with all his train.

Often with sudden snarl or angry growl  
Leopards would stalk, or hungry lions prowl  
Around at night ; lean jackals spiralled high  
Sawing the silence, their blood-chilling cry ;  
Whilst from near hilltops the morose baboon  
Grunted and gibbered at the timorous moon.  
And oftentimes rough winds would fiercely grip  
And shake the tents ; and rain with reckless whip  
Lashed them ; while hailstones pelted like a swarm  
Of stinging bees. Oft a swift thunderstorm —  
Scribbling mauve lightning on the cobalt sky —  
Crashed o'er the camp and rocked the hills hard by.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*  
XXVIII

## TREK-LULLABY

“ THE sun has set and in the skies  
The little stars now open eyes,  
'Tis time for those of babes to close,  
So, sleep, sleep ; while high stars keep  
Watch over you, my baby.

“ All day the wagons jolted on,  
Thro' dust and dazzle of the sun ;  
But now at last, day's trek is past ;  
Still are wheels, no longer reels  
The tent ; so sleep, my baby.

## THE TREK

“ Hark, ‘ who-whooh ’ say the silly owls ;  
‘ Yah-ah, yah-ah ’ the jackal howls ;  
Breezes hustle as they rustle  
Trees, where cheep birds ere they sleep ;  
So, sleep, my bird, my baby.

“ Now darkness gathers in the trees,  
Just like a swarming bunch of bees ;  
And brown bats shear eve’s dusky hair ;  
The moon creeps from her nest and peeps  
At you, so sleep, my baby.”



XXIX

University of Fort Hare

*Together in Excellence*

As those twelve spies, by Moses sent, returned  
With clustered grapes — those glowing grapes that  
shook

Their globes of sunlight over Eschol’s brook ;  
With smooth pomegranates that had slowly burned  
Thro’ golden rind with inner ruby fire ;  
And purple figs whose leaves were Eve’s attire :  
So, to the waiting camp, at last there came  
Retief’s two riders bearing tropic fruits —  
Bananas brown and barred with yellow flame  
Like the puff-adder’s coat (the snake that shoots  
Backward to strike its prey), with paw-paws, green  
As the bush-mamba’s skin of emerald sheen,  
A fruit whose inner gold to sight and taste  
Gives equal joy.

DRAKENSBURG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

The messengers in haste  
Gave, with their offerings ambrosial,  
Glad tidings of Retief's great ride as well  
And his successful quest. The camp went wild,  
Youth laughed and danced and old age bobbed and  
smiled.

Retief's young daughter on a rock near by  
Boldly inscribed in paint his cherished name ;  
And fervent Smit, heedless of coughs and sighs  
From tired hearers, proceeded to sermonize,  
Reciting with the thunder of a lion —

*“ When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion ! ”*



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

Now the headquarters-camp upon the height,  
Stirred by good news, began to move — despite  
Retief's instructions. During their long stay  
In camp the trekker-men had cleared a way  
Down the steep slopes : boulders aside were shoved ;  
Embedded rocks were dug from earth and moved ;  
Thick growths of bush were cut and cast aside ;  
And into gullies, far more deep than wide,  
Loose stones were packed.

And now a task began,  
For patient ox and wonder-working man,  
Of hauling heavy wagons safely down  
From the sky-stabbing peaks that spiked the crown  
Of the vast mountain — lolling in long rest —  
O'er the deep corrugations of its breast,

## THE TREK

Down its tremendous thighs and lifted knees  
To its far-spreading feet, between whose toes  
Many a merry brook, brisked by the breeze,  
Tickles and chuckles as it softly flows.

Slowly and painfully each wagon went,  
With back wheels skidded, down the steep descent.  
Two wheeler-oxen only, tried and strong,  
Were to each wagon yoked ; and many long  
And tested reims \* in slip-knot fashion were tied,  
Like sailor's ropes, securely on each side  
Of every wagon : these reims were held, amain,  
By lusty trekkers, who with steady strain  
Kept toppling wagons up. Slowly they scraped  
Along the steep descent ; abysses gaped  
Around them ; often were the wagons rocked  
By racing torrents ; sometimes wheels were locked  
In stony channels, from which stalwart men  
Wrenched them prodigiously. Then on again,  
With aching limbs and bodies bruised and jarred,  
The trekkers struggled, yard by agonized yard —  
Down perilous ways to the new paradise  
Which lay unrolled before their sweat-dimmed eyes.

The old and sick were borne down that rough road  
In wagon-beds, while friends beside them strode  
To shade them and to fan away the flies.  
With careful steps women and children trod  
Down those abysmal slopes, where many fell  
And galled and bruised their limbs. But all was well,

\* Thongs.

For when they reached the mountain-foot at last  
 Joy brought its balm to pains and perils past.  
 — But gazing on the league-long shadows cast  
 By soaring peaks, one greybeard shook his head  
 Right mournfully : “ Woe to the land,” he said,  
 “ Upon whose borders shadows black are shed ! ” \*

XXXI

THE good news spread — even as a sudden breeze  
 Scatters the cast-off clouts of Autumn trees,  
 Or as a snake-like flame thro' sun-dried grass  
 Leaps and uncurls before the chasing wind.  
 From all directions to the mountain-pass  
 Came waverers, who had remained behind  
 When the great trekker, Moses, Piet Retief,  
 Had shown the way : now in renewed belief  
 And admiration of their steadfast chief,  
 They leaped unblushing from the dubious fence  
 And hastened to the Drakensberg ; and thence,  
 Down several passes, from the mountains' shoulders  
 Guided their wagons which, like great grey boulders,  
 Slid — oft impeded — down the mountain-side.

So, when Retief returned from his long ride,  
 He found a thousand wagons scattered wide  
 Below the Drakensberg and all along  
 Those mountain-streams that, with light-hearted song,  
 Laughter and flashing dance, still hastened ever  
 With silver tribute for Tugela River.

\* “ Woe to the land that has black shadows on its borders.”

## XXXII

IN hurrying across the mountain-border  
 Trekkers had disobeyed the rigid order  
 Made by Retief, ere he to Dingaan went  
 Upon his mission, and the mandate he sent  
 By his two messengers from the far coast.  
 Retief was chagrined that the trekker-host,  
 Despite his charge, like an invading band  
 Had swept down boldly into Dingaan's Land.  
 He felt moreover that by this rash act,  
 Before the stolen stock had been restored,  
 His trekker-folk had jeopardized the pact  
 Made with Dingaan, the king and sovereign lord  
 Of all the Zulus. But 'twas now too late  
 To turn again; the trek must face its fate  
 In the New Land.

Retief with him had brought  
 Some native-servants to relieve the strain  
 On hard-worked trekker-folk ; and now he sought  
 To organize the camps and to maintain  
 Good rule in Church and State. Thus plans were  
 made

For Nagmaal \* quarterly. Next he essayed  
 To solve a problem that was serious :  
 The matter of good Smit's emolument ;  
 For tho' at many times and various  
 Smit on his own deserts waxed eloquent  
 His purse was in a state precarious.

\* Holy Communion.

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

The point was settled, and Smit complained no more,  
Tho' on less \* than forty pounds he was passing poor.

XXXIII

MEANWHILE Piet Uys and Hendrik Potgieter,  
Disgruntled leaders who had stayed behind  
In the Trans-Orange State, began to stir.  
First, all their fighting forces they combined ;  
Then, after needful preparation, plans were made  
Umsilikazi's country to invade.

In the rich valley of the Marico  
They left their wagons ; then to meet the foe  
Rode fifty miles. They launched their swift campaign  
Near Umsilikazi's capital, Kapain.  
After a fiery nine days' running fight  
The shattered enemy was put to flight.  
In that brisk fight the trekkers lost no men ;  
And they rounded up ere they turned South again  
Seven thousand head of hornèd cattle,  
Which they took with them as the spoils of battle.

After their final and complete defeat  
The Matabele streamed in long retreat  
To the far North. So ' Blouberg ' and his band  
Were left in sole possession of the land  
Beyond the Vaal — from the eastern mountain-belt  
To the great Kalahari on the West.  
And satisfied with his successful quest  
' Blouberg ' now settled down in the High Veld,

\* His salary was fixed at £37 : 10s. a year.

## THE TREK

The grass-glad region, where swift fountains flow,  
He held the ' High ' Veld, let who would the  
' Low.'

### XXXIV

ANDRIES PRETORIUS of Graaff-Reinet,  
Who served as volunteer the force that met  
And trounced the Matabele, came along  
To Piet Retief's camp with a joyful song  
And tale of victory. With him there came  
Fighting Piet Uys, that reckless human flame,  
Who in unhappy and not long past days  
At Tafelkop set the whole camp ablaze  
With crackling wrangles and dissensions rude,  
With smoky bickering and burning feud.  
But now perhaps because grim Potgieter  
Was not at hand Piet's ready wrath to stir ;  
Or haply the success of great Retief  
Had roused in Uys respect and fresh belief ;  
Maybe, because his recent raid appeased  
His fiery spirit, Hotspur Uys was pleased  
To chant most dulcetly a different tune,  
Changing his lion's roar to ring-dove's croon.  
— His quarrel with Maritz was liquidated  
By friendly grip of hands ; and Uys, elated,  
Promised to take the oath of fealty  
To the United Trekker State as soon as he  
Had brought his trek into the New Country.  
So, in rare tranquil mood, he started on  
His long rough ride to the far Caledon

To fetch his band.

Meanwhile Pretorious,  
 Who found the Trekker-Canaan glorious,  
 Set out upon his homeward way to get  
 His kinsfolk and their gear from Graaff-Reinet.

XXXV

THE news of Umsilikazi's overthrow  
 Was briskly passed on to his ancient foe,  
 The Zulu king, with comments by Retief  
 Natural and to the point, perhaps, but scarcely  
 wise.

Retief then started on his enterprise  
 For the recovery of Dingaan's herd  
 Filched by Sikonyela, the petty chief,  
 From Zululand.

By means of friendly word  
 Sent by Retief the robber-chief was lured  
 To the commando-camp, and there endured  
 Captivity until he should restore  
 The Zulu king's three hundred head of kine,  
 Together with four hundred cattle more  
 As bail for future conduct, or as fine  
 For past misdeeds. His guns and horses, too,  
 His captors took ; and he was left with new  
 And bitter thoughts about those White men, who,  
 Tho' once his friends, now reft from him his wealth,  
 Grabbing far more by force than he had gained by  
 stealth.

## THE TREK

Retief returned in triumph from his raid,  
To Dorenkop which he had lately made  
His headquarters. There was he met by Smit,  
Once more in trouble — he could not keep from it  
When the good governor's broad back was turned :  
Now to Retief, in bitter words that burned,  
He told as oft before a tale of woe :  
Hot-gospeller Cilliers could not resist,  
He said, the lure to preach and never missed  
The slightest opportunity of doing so.  
Smit therefore urged that Cilliers should abstain  
From ' holding forth ' : or else should first obtain  
His (Smit, the predikant's) consent to preach.  
(Smit had forgotten how, by stirring speech  
And moral force, Cilliers stood by him well,  
In his adversity, when James Archbell —  
The godly missionary, Wesleyan,  
Styled, in his wrath, by Smit, ' Arminian ' —  
Was chosen by the Dopper clan to be  
Their spiritual guide). Once more Retief  
Smoothed matters over and assuaged Smit's grief.

## XXXVI

RETIEF, moreover, was dismayed to find  
That trekker-groups were roaming, unconfined,  
Eastward of Dorenkop and this despite  
His warnings and commands. The keen delight  
Of eland-chasing lured the hunters on ;  
Others when grass and wood ran short, anon,

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Scattered and wandered ; many of the band  
Were now within the folds of Zululand.

Because the roving trekkers could not be  
Bridled and checked by caution or decree,  
Retief resolved to visit the retreat  
Of King Dingaan in order to complete  
Their verbal pact — for he had kept his word  
By sending to the Zulu king the herd  
Sikonyela had filched. His only need  
Was Dingaan's signature upon a deed  
Ceding to the United Trekker-band  
In perpetuity Natal's fair Land.

Meanwhile dark rumours percolated thro'  
To trek-headquarters from the settlement  
Of Port Natal : warnings from those who knew  
Black-mamba-Dingaan, that the king was bent  
On treachery and murder. Leaders met  
In council : Gert Maritz and eloquent  
Cilliers, and others. By fresh fears beset,  
All were uneasy now ; and one and all  
Besought their friend and governor not to go  
In person to the Zulu monarch's kraal.

Gerrit Maritz (for this his name shall glow  
Unsoiled by time) offered to go instead,  
Since *his* death ' would not mean so much,' he  
said,


As his great chief's. But the latter gave no heed  
To warnings ; he was leader and must lead :  
He would walk warily and by no deed  
Cause Dingaan to distrust him. Wherefore he

## THE TREK

Now called for volunteers, and seventy stout,  
Tried trekker-men stepped forward cheerfully.  
With these and thirty grooms he started out  
Upon his last great ride beyond the shore  
Of the Tugela ; and those left behind  
Saw him and his companions — nevermore.

## XXXVII

### “ MAGIC CIRCLE ”



SOMETIMES about the veld I've seen,  
Hitched high betwixt two thorn-trees green,  
A spider's web, a lace-like snare,  
That quivered in the listless air.  
This gossamer-net to earthly eyes  
Twinned with the full-moon as to size,  
And, like a frailer moon, it shone  
With frosty glitter in the sun.

This flimsiest of filmy things  
Was woven in concentric rings,  
Whose inner circles, deftly caught  
On radiating lines, were wrought  
Into a thing that dazzled thought :  
For never mortal hand or eye  
Could frame such faultless symmetry,  
Such eye-delighting deviltry.

Oft in such web may one behold  
An emerald spider, starred with gold,

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

Who in the snare that he hath spun  
Takes a siesta in the sun ;  
And, ere his forty winks are done,  
He dreams lewd dreams of luscious flies  
And midges of prodigious size —  
Grilled moths and crisp grasshopper-pies.

XXXVIII

UNTO the Zulu king Retief had sent  
Word ere his former visit, but had spent  
So little time in following his word  
That spider-Dingaam, in his ringed retreat,  
Had not yet spun his snares. The king had  
heard University of Fort Hare  
How Umsilikazi *Together in Excellence* had sustained defeat,  
Months since, at trekker hands on Battle Hill  
And then at Mosega. This boded ill  
For Dingaam and his folk. So, to gain time,  
He made a pact, masking his plotted crime,  
With Piet Retief. But meanwhile, privily,  
He sent a force to intercept and slay  
Piet and his little party on their way  
Back to the Port. This fell scheme ran agley,  
And the un-murdered men, unheedfully,  
Rode on : nor ever did Retief know of  
This broken web, this sign of less than love,  
Spun by the king.

Later when to Dingaam  
Came letters from Retief, which dwelt upon

## THE TREK

Umsilikazi's woe and dreadful things  
That God had wrought of old on wicked kings,  
Dingaan was filled with fury and alarm  
And daily plotted means and ways to harm  
The trekker-folk ; and so, when he received  
From them the herd by Sikonyela thieved,  
Pressing demands he sent to Piet Retief  
That guns and horses taken from the thief  
Be also handed him. Retief declined  
This amiable demand.

Later the kind  
Good missionary, Owen, \* was confused  
And badgered by the king for fire-arms  
And lessons in their use. Owen refused  
These strange requests : mid threatenings and alarms  
His tents for guns were searched, but searched in  
vain.

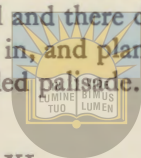
## XXXIX

Now from Retief came messages again  
Of Umsilikazi's overthrow — despite  
His legioned warriors — and his northward flight.  
Added were hints about the nameless woes  
That came to kings who were the trekkers' foes.  
A later message from Retief there came  
Saying that shortly he would come to claim  
Completion of their pact, by the King's hand  
Upon a script ceding Natal's fair Land  
Over to the United Trekker Band.

\* Francis Owen, an Anglican Missionary.

## DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

In his great kraal with its concentric rings  
Of beehive huts Dingaana was sitting now,  
A big black spider bent on guileful things,  
Deliberating when and where and how  
He would ensnare and slay those white-skinned men,  
Who now were coming to his kraal again,  
Bestriding hornless cattle and carrying  
Clubs which spat fiery pebbles that could sting  
Even distant foes to death. These wizards then,  
Without their lightning-sticks, must be decoyed  
Into his ring-fenced kraal and there destroyed.  
So regiments were called in, and plans were made  
To hide them in the circled palisade.



XL  
University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

ON February third, one-eight-three-eight,  
Retief rode up, and, with a merry ditty  
Of musket-shots, encamped near the great gate  
Of Umgungundhlovu, Dingaana's ring-fenced city.  
The king was friendly to his trekker-guests ;  
His warriors before them hummed and pranced  
And beat their shields. Then, after hot requests,  
The trekkers on their horses leapt and danced  
And curvetted about ; then a fresh round  
From their long guns they fired, and the sound  
Of the White wizards' lightning and quick thunder  
Filled the swart gaping crowd with fear and wonder.

The guileful King gave tongue to a desire  
That his good guests a hundred rounds should fire,

## THE TREK

But smilingly Retief refused. And then  
Dingaana, with blandishments, tried once again —  
And soft persuasions — to induce Retief  
To pass the guns and horses of the chief,  
Sikonyela, to him ; Retief once more  
Refused and left Dingaana sulky and sore.

On the next day (a Sunday) sly Dingaana,  
In royal robes upon his seat of pride,  
With Piet Retief formally carried on  
Negotiations : but, not satisfied  
With the interpreter Retief had brought,  
In a near Mission-camp the king now sought,  
By messenger, another. So, meanwhile,  
Dingaana wove his dark web of hate and guile :  
While anxious Owen, who was racked with dread,  
Solemnly warned the trekkers, but they smiled and said  
All would be well as the king's heart was good.  
How good ! How good ! Had they but understood.

## XLI

ON Monday yet another regiment made  
Its way into the great ringed palisade,  
With leaping and with dancing and loud humming,  
And with bright spears upon their hard shields  
drumming.

On Tuesday morning Dingaana signed a deed,  
Whereby unto the trekkers did he cede  
All the broad lands between Tugela River  
South to where Umzimvubu's waters quiver.

Then, having shown his 'heart was good,' this  
giver

Of legioned acres proffered warm requests  
That his good trekker-friends might be his guests  
At a last beer-drink in his central kraal ;  
And, as a sign of fellowship, that all  
Should come unarmed, so all in friendly wise  
Might drain the gourd.

As unsuspecting flies  
Are lured into the circle glittering  
Of some tree-spider's web, so to the ring —  
The inmost of that many-circled sphere,  
Dingaan's great kraal — the trekkers found their way.  
Big-bellied gourds of potent Zulu-beer  
Were handed round by maidens young and gay,  
Tall, black-eyed girls, attired only in  
Brief aprons, bracelets and bright necklaces  
Of cunning bead-work — Hebes of bronze skin  
As lithe and graceful as young umgwenya \* trees.

And then dark warriors leapt and danced and shook  
Their kilts of leopard's tails : as a quick breeze  
Rustles the tufted reeds beside a brook  
So were the spotted kilts and bright head-plumes  
Of those swart dancers stirred. As foam illumes,  
With its light frilling, sombre waves that curl  
And gather in black bulk before they hurl  
Their strength upon an irresponsive shore,  
So this black dancing wave, fringed with the bright  
Sharp foam of spears, curled in its gathering might  
And shook its crest. Its hum became a roar

\* Kaffir-plum.

THE TREK

When Dingaan rose, obese and menacing,  
And thundered : " Kill the Wizards ! " Then the ring  
Became an inner circle of Hell ; and soon  
The bloody ' Hill of Death ' \* received, as boon,  
A spoil far lordlier than it had known  
In all its years of shame and misery.  
And ' Dingaan's children ' \* from the naked sky  
Swooped down to rend heroic flesh from bone.

XLII

DIRGE FOR RETIEF



FREEDOM and power  
He craved and sought  
In deeds that flower  
From the seeds of thought,  
And ever for his people and land he wrought.

His aspiration,  
Early and late,  
Was to build a nation  
Unfettered and great —  
To establish a nation and to make a state.

His splendid vision  
He followed still,  
Tho' of sour derision  
Oft poured his fill,  
Oft served with the charred crusts of ill-will.

\* See page 100.

DRAKENSBERG AND DINGAAN'S KRAAL

— Of the golden eagle  
That floats on high,  
Of birds the most regal,  
Men seldom spy  
More than shadow on earth, black speck in the sky :

Great spirits are lonely  
And live unknown,  
For men see only  
Their shadows thrown  
From Everests where they wander alone.—

Lonely, unresting,  
He went his way,  
Resistlessly questing  
Thro' night and day  
The vision that beckoned, but would not stay.



University of Fort Hare

Together We Excel

Now earth's toil over,  
From some new shore  
New plains he'll discover,  
New peaks explore  
In lands untroubled by Time's mute roar.

But the feathers regal,  
The plumes of gold,  
Of this human eagle  
We may now behold —  
They are Earth's and ours, to have and hold.

PART IV  
WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER  
(Andries Pretorius)



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

I

HAVING by treachery got rid of these  
His unsuspecting white-skinned enemies,  
Dingaen sent out his armies to dispose —  
As with Retief and party — of all those  
Trekksers now scattered in the West beside  
Little Tugela, Bloukrans, Bushmans, Mooi  
And other streams that swell the flowing tide  
Of the Tugela.

Insane with battle-joy,  
With plumes a-flutter, gleaming assegais,  
Swart warriors hurried westward to surprise —  
Armoured in darkness — and to slay and spoil  
The white-faced wizards who on Zulu soil  
Encroached as tho' that lovely land were theirs.  
And so with ox-hide shields and brandished spears,  
On a wide front and in a murky night,  
The Zulu impis opened up the fight.  
Upon the scattered wagon-camps they crept,  
And slaughtered many trekker-folk, who slept  
In tranquil ease unconscious of all ill.  
And then the raiders were no longer still,  
Triumphant shouts burst from their brazen throats,  
As Prinsloos, Liebenbergs, Bezuidenhouts —  
Man, woman, child, alike — the slayers slew.  
The Bothmas held out ; but when dawn broke blue

## THE TREK

Their cattle were collected and, anon,  
Were driven and stampeded in upon  
Their laager by a fierce and cunning foe,  
Who followed fast to seal in blood their woe.

## II

TREKKERS in the encampments farther back,  
Roused before daybreak by the distant crack  
Of guns, imagined that the noise was made  
By Piet Retief and his triumphant band  
Returning from the wilds of Zululand.  
But when the shots became a fusillade,  
Persistent and more near, and stragglers came,  
Wounded, and breathing tales of blood and flame,  
Commandos from the laagers galloped out  
To help their scattered friends and stay the rout.

One such, by Sarel Cilliers led, drew nigh  
To a small wagon-camp from which the foe  
Had thrust the Rensburgs ; who on a hill hard by  
Were holding out, and signals made to show  
That they were short of powder. Whereupon  
Cilliers beat off the looting foe and won  
The wagons by the Rensburgs lost ; and then,  
With powder laden, Marthinus Oosthuisen  
Dashed up the hillside on his willing horse,  
Dashed up the hillside thro' the battling force  
Of yelling Zulus, who stopped the fight and gazed  
At the heroic Boer, admiring and amazed :

And when unscathed he broke thro' the black rings  
 Of heathen-warriors — even as the poet sings  
 Of brave Horatius, this bold trekker's peer —  
 His enemies ' could scarce forbear to cheer ! '

The small commandos coming from the West,  
 With gathering strength now fiercely onward pressed.  
 But their dark foes refusing further battle  
 Fled with their loot, ten thousand head of cattle,  
 Across Tugela drifts and well away,  
 Ready to raid again another day.



FIVE HUNDRED folk were slain in that black night ;  
 Many bore wounds, all were in woeful plight ;  
 And that sad region sown with rich red grain  
 As Weenen — ' place of weeping,' place of pain —  
 Was known thenceforth. Tho' news had not come  
 thro'

Of Piet Retief, the stricken trekkers knew,  
 By the dark portent of the Zulu raid,  
 That their great chief was dead. Many, dismayed,  
 Debated whether they should struggle back  
 Up the precipitous and perilous track,  
 Which to descend was sweat, and which should be  
 In the ascent — blood, sweat and agony.  
 Some trekkers thought it grievous to forego  
 The lovely land without a downright blow  
 Struck to secure it, and so, fast they stood.  
 But others wavered : some, even tho' they would,

## THE TREK

Could not without their lost trek-oxen move.

In this dread hour the women were to prove  
The better men, for in their rage and grief —  
When news came of the murder of Retief  
And all his men — the women all were bent  
On meting to the king just punishment.  
“ God,” said the fiery Susanna Smit,  
“ Will not leave this Dingaan unrecompensed  
For his foul deeds, now will our men acquit.”

So, by their women spurred, the men commenced  
To muster scattered forces and to weld  
Them into three large laagers, strongly held.  
And mounted trekkers daily were sent out  
From all the camps to guard the drifts and scout  
Around for lurking foes. A mounted band  
Was sent to Port Natal to spy the land,  
To gather news and to discuss with those,  
Who might assist them, means to quell their foes.

## IV

### “ WEENEN ”

WEENEN, Weenen, place of weeping,  
Where upon a midnight dread,  
When no moon bloomed overhead,  
Zulu warriors came creeping —  
All unseen save by the eyes  
Of the unrememb'ring skies —  
Fell on trekker-outposts sleeping,

WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

And the sleepers waked no more  
Upon earth's time-troubled shore.

Weenen, Weenen, place of sorrow,  
Place of weeping, place of pain —  
Your grim lesson was not vain :  
From black night blooms bright tomorrow,  
Drought fails beneath the spears of rain,  
Bitter loss is big with gain —  
Weenen, Weenen, place of sorrow  
Blood-splashed milestone on the way  
To Blood River and Dingaan's Day.



University of Fort Hare

MEANWHILE, across the wrinkled mountain-belt,  
Potgieter came from his beloved High Veld  
With a small force to help. Then bold Piet Uys  
Brought all his followers down the mountain's  
face,

And camped beside Little Tugela's shore.  
But now dissensions shook the camps once more  
As in past days. This time the angry stir  
Rose between bluff Piet Uys and Potgieter,  
Great cronies once, now torn by jealousy.  
These two debated fiercely who should be  
The leader of the punitive campaign  
Against Dingaan ; nor did their friends refrain  
From party strife, which was and is the bane  
Of our South Africa.

(Even at this time,  
 After a hundred years, in our fair clime  
 Do selfish hates and jealousies and fears  
 Set our grim folk together by the ears.)

Perhaps some slight amusement might accrue  
 To Gert Maritz at this fall-out of two  
 Confederates, in former days his foes.  
 But he was busied by the pressing woes  
 Of widows and of orphans, left by those  
 Brave trekker-men who fell with Piet Retief,  
 And had no time for strife nor for the grief  
 That sapped him in the loss of his great chief  
 And staunchest friend. Maritz was still  
 Chief-landdrost of the Court and president  
 Of the United Trekker Parliament.  
 The post of governor, which none could fill  
 Like Piet Retief great both of heart and head,  
 By many lesser men was coveted.

After debate, it was at length agreed : —  
 That Maritz should at Headquarters remain  
 In charge of all the camps ; that Uys should  
 lead,  
 As Chief-Field-Commandant, in the campaign  
 Against Dingaan. But it was understood  
 That Potgieter, who showed no likelihood  
 Of taking orders from young Piet Uys, should  
 Lead his own friends and followers. So this  
 band —  
 Split from the start, divided in command —  
 Set out despondently for Zululand.

## VI

NORTH-EAST, they rode and crossed the Buffalo.  
 On the fifth day their quick, elusive foe  
 By shrewd retreat had brought them to a gap  
 Between two hills — the contemplated trap.  
 Spiked with high rocks, these hills were rough and  
 steep,

Buttoned with boulders, slashed with gullies deep ;  
 The rocks and stones, that pimpled them all over,  
 And gaping dongas gave effective cover  
 To several thousand Zulus, who now waited  
 Hoping to see their white-skinned foes checkmated.

The Boers were cramped ; the terrain did not suit  
 Their way of warfare. But Uys was resolute  
 On instant action, so started that sad fight  
 And moved against the hill upon the right,  
 Leaving the leftward hill to Potgieter,  
 Who, liking not the field, was slow to stir.

With all spare horses and his camp-equipment  
 And a reserve of twenty men Piet Uys  
 Impatiently remained behind, and sent  
 His fighting men up the embattled face  
 Of that dark hill against their hidden foes.  
 Bravely the trekkers charged ; as they drew nigher,  
 From lurking places countless warriors rose  
 And swarmed to meet them. But the blasting fire  
 Of trekker muskets shook the Zulu host,  
 Which broke and fled. Uys at his rearward post

Could bide no longer then : " Waiting," he  
 cried,  
 " Is not men's work." Calling his son to ride  
 With him, he galloped up the rough hillside.

## VII

HENDRIK POTGIETER, who did not approve  
 Of giving battle there, was slow to move.  
 With great reluctance he advanced at length  
 Up the left hill. When pushing on he saw,  
 More markedly the overwhelming strength  
 Of the positions chosen by the foe,  
 Back from the snare he thought it wise to draw  
 His fighting force, hoping thus by a slow  
 Retreat to lure the foe to open ground.  
 But a small bunch of eager hot-heads found  
 Retreat distasteful : therefore — in despite  
 Of ' Blouberg's ' orders — charged the hill to  
 fight  
 An army by themselves. When, to the sound  
 Of beaten shields and yells, the Zulus came  
 Sweeping upon them, like the booming flame  
 Of a veld-fire driven by the wind,  
 Their horses bolted, stampeding those behind.  
 Thus ' Blouberg's ' force, on that unlucky day,  
 Disordered and unruly raced away  
 In mad confusion from an unfought fray.

## VIII


MEANWHILE the scattered force of Pieter Uys,  
 Lured on by crafty foes, pursued apace  
 Until at last, amongst high crags, it found  
 Itself held up and swiftly ringed around  
 By Zulus in great force. Collecting then  
 His scattered but unbeaten fighting men,  
 Uys started to retreat. Blasting a gap  
 Thro' the dead circle that surrounded them  
 The Boers escaped. But terrible mishap  
 Overtook Uys, who, riding on the hem  
 Of his retreating force, was in the side  
 Pierced by a spear. Continuing to ride  
 He bled profusely. Later when he spied  
 A wounded friend, whose horse had broken down,  
 He stopped and helped him up on to his own.  
 Bearing two heroes, the heroic horse  
 Struggled along upon a blood-stained course.

Fainting at length from loss of blood, which welled  
 From his gashed side, the valiant Uys was held  
 Fast to his saddle by two gallant men,  
 Who had returned to rescue him. And then,  
 Briefly recovering, he asked these friends to lay  
 Him down upon the grass : when this was done,  
 He said his end was near and begged that they  
 Should fly. Sadly they went. When Dirk, Piet's son,  
 A lad of barely fourteen years, looked round  
 And saw his father, helpless on the ground,

But still alive, and saw the swarthy pack  
Of Zulu-wolves draw near, he galloped back  
And springing from his horse he stood beside  
His dying sire, and scornfully defied  
His dazzled foes, and fighting still he died.

IX

“ MEN PASS ”



MEN pass like dewdrops  
That, in the morning,  
With rings and brooches  
Adorn the grass :  
Their deeds heroic,  
Time and death scorning,  
Are founts unfailing  
In years that pass.

Men sink to silence ;  
But, like sweet music,  
Their high deeds haunt us,  
And echo on :  
Thus of their spirit  
May we inherit —  
The deed still stirs us ;  
The doer gone.

Courage, first merit  
Of the human spirit —

WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Courage, endurance,  
Self-sacrifice —  
Is one tho' threefold :  
Who saves self, loses ;  
Who gives life, saves it,  
And never dies.

X

THE dire defeat and death of Pieter Uys  
And hurried retreat of Hendrik Potgieter  
Caused in the trekker-camp affrighted stir.  
Disasters seemed to follow hard apace : —  
Relief and all his band had been laid low  
By treachery ; swift came a second blow  
The midnight raid upon the camps. For these,  
All unforeseen, bitter calamities  
Guile and surprise were vindicating pleas.  
But no excuse could aid the trekkers now :  
Had not their fighting men been forced to  
bow,  
Astoundedly, to hideous defeat,  
And scatter in precipitate retreat  
Before the bright spears of a dark-skinned foe ?

And so the trekker-folk were filled with woe  
And bleak amazement at this third fell blow  
That shook them. Then their ' worse ' became  
a ' worst,'  
Thunder, blue lightning, and black tempest burst

## THE TREK

Upon their camps, hail and torrential rain.  
So, in discomfort, misery and pain —  
Man, woman, child, stripling and drooping maid —  
They huddled in their wagon-tents and prayed  
That the glad sun might show his face again.

## XI

LEADING his clan across the mountain-belt  
'Blouberg' returned to his beloved High Veld.  
'Traitors and cowards' had been the bitter cry  
Flung after them; but with his head held high  
'Blouberg' rode off with all his fighting-band  
From the black-shadow-rimmed, unlucky Land.

At Vegkop and Mosega he had proved  
His skill and courage, and was now unmoved  
By baseless taunts. He held it was not sound  
To fight on difficult and broken ground,  
That helped the enemy, as Uys had done :  
Such fights were lost ere they were well begun.

Potgieter from the first had steadfastly  
Favoured the High Veld and disliked the Low :  
After this visit, more than ever he  
Held he was right and wise in doing so.  
The 'High' was fresh and cool, tho' bright and  
sunny ;  
Unlike the 'Low,' heat-racked and scourged by rain ;  
The 'High' Veld also had its milk and honey,  
Just like the 'Low' Veld ; but here, once again,

WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Held the advantage, for its sable bees  
Were stingless now — not like the enemies,  
Guarding the lowland-hive, sharp stingers these  
And difficult to handle. Wherefore he  
Besought the Boers to leave the Low Country  
And seek the High Veld, but they twittered at him  
Like birds that spy a snake. So, gaunt and grim,  
In his old, green-lined, flapping hat of straw,  
All unperturbed by taunt and rude guffaw,  
'Blouberg' rode back across the Dragons'  
Mountains  
To highlands of red-grass, criss-crossed with star-  
frequented fountains.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*  
XII

So back across the crinkled belt of blue  
Rode 'Blouberg,' leaving many trekkers who  
Would fain have followed. But their leaders  
spoke  
Strongly against retreat ; while women-folk,  
Rock-like, opposed return. Widows and wives  
Hammered upon the many trekker lives  
That had been lost. Blood, said they, must have  
blood ;  
Their slaughtered sons and husbands should not lie  
Shamefully unavenged — Dingaan must die,  
And his black legions with a crimson flood  
Must pay for all blood spilt.

## THE TREK

So trekkers drew,  
With promptitude, together into few  
And larger camps. Wisely they strengthened these  
Rough wagon-rings with sod-walls and felled-trees,  
To make them safe against invading foes.  
And then they sent out urgent messages  
To friends at Port Natal, also to those  
Kinsmen who still, beyond the mountain-belt,  
Wavered between Natal and the High Veld.



BUT once again close contact did not breed  
Conformity : the leaders disagreed  
On plans to fight Dingaan, and who should lead  
The raid. And then between the clans, Maritz  
And Uys, a quarrel rose, which all good Smit's  
Eloquence could not heal, tho' staunchly he  
Preached at great length on Deuteronomy,  
Chapter the thirty-second, verse twenty-eight,  
And sternly dwelled on all the ills that wait  
On nations ' void of counsel ' and made prayer  
That all might ' understand.'

But in despair  
Some small groups o'er the mountains trekked away  
Back to the High Veld ; others South would stray,  
The largest to Gatsrand ; to Bushmansrand  
Another went. But Maritz and his band  
Drew back, and near Little Tugela's side,  
Under the Drakensberg, they made a stand  
And pitched their tents : for this out-going tide

## WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Of casual treks was strongly disapproved  
By wise Maritz ; so cautiously he moved  
Backward in hope of checking those who roved.

### XIV

AGAIN the rain fell in unceasing flood ;  
In all the camps was misery and mud —  
Mud that could suck the velskoens \* from men's  
feet ;

Stores now ran low ; little was there to eat  
Save flesh and flesh. And then a heavier stroke  
Fell on the camps : fever among the folk  
And measles, too, took their sad toll of life ;  
While deadly foot-and-mouth disease was rife  
Amongst the cattle. *Old Jacobus Uys*  
Died in July and found a resting-place  
In the bright land with shadows on its rim,  
A country far more dark than bright to him,  
A soil that avidly had drunk the flood  
Of his great son's and grandson's purple blood —  
The death-disdainers, who died unsubdued.

Fearing another, sudden Zulu raid,  
Maritz sent orders (which were not obeyed)  
Asking the Gatsrand trek to join his own.  
The Gatsranders their lands had ploughed and sown,  
Had built sod-huts and water-furrows made  
To irrigate their lands, and therefore they  
Thought Gatsrand a good place wherein to stay.

\* Home-made shoes.

## XV

MARITZ was right, for soon the Zulu forces  
 Fell on Gatsrand. Their leaders all rode horses  
 And muskets bore, all spoil of the disasters  
 Of Uys and Piet Retief. Now, like proud masters  
 Of all they saw, the ' whole of heathendom ' \* —  
 So seemed it to the Gatsranders — had come  
 Against them. The invading Zulus found  
 No weak spot in the laager ; round and round  
 They circled wildly firing ; but in fear  
 Of trekkers' gun-fire never venturing near  
 The wagon-ring. A troop of horse  
 Was sent to skirmish with the Zulu force ;  
 But swift and skilful were their enemies  
 In taking cover behind rocks and trees,  
 So little blood was spilt. With shut of day  
 Suspended was the intermittent fray.

The stout defenders spent a sleepless night ;  
 They doubled guards and hung out lanterns bright  
 Against surprise attack. The Zulus, all  
 Beyond the range of trekker's musket-ball,  
 Lit countless fires, round which they sat and grilled  
 Flesh hacked from many a luckless, living beast,  
 Reft from the Boers. The evening air was filled  
 With anguished bleats and bellowings ; the feast  
 Went on all night, and with the dawn began  
 The fight once more. Again the Zulus ran,

\* Annals.

WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

And fought and ran and hurled long assegais,  
Wrapped round with blazing grass, in and among  
The wagon-tents, hoping their enterprise  
Might fire the camp. Vainly their spears were flung,  
Vainly all day the running fight went on.  
At fall of night the Zulus set aflame  
The veld ; at dawn they, with all flocks and herds,  
were gone.

XVI

THEN Gert Maritz with reinforcements came,  
And galloped forward hot-foot on the track  
Of the fast-flying, raiding enemy.  
Some of the looted stock his men brought back ;  
But most too far had gone, so cautiously  
And with reluctance he gave up the chase,  
And hastened laager-wards. And then, apace,  
The disobedient Gatsranders, reprov'd  
By late events, now turned and swiftly moved  
Back to Maritz's laagers at the foot  
Of the great mountain-range.

Forced then to put  
Their backs against the wall, to friends and kin  
In the Old Colony the trekkers sent  
Appealing messages, in hope to win  
Spring-succour in their wintry discontent.  
And they themselves, in misery and pain,  
Held gamely on tho' lashed by whips of rain  
And buffeted by the ambidexterous blast.  
Ills and misfortunes fell upon them fast :

## THE TREK

Servants deserted them, mean thieves who took  
Their guns and horses ; all supplies ran low ;  
Then, in September, came a shattering blow —  
The sudden death of Gert Maritz — which shook  
The Trekker-Company.

Maritz had been  
Ambitious, masterful and quick to act,  
Touchy of temper, sometimes lacking tact,  
But kind in trouble — a leader wise and keen.  
He was the dandy of the trek, and wore  
His brown bell-topper and his well-cut clothes  
Thro' all the times of tumult and the blows  
Of black disaster which the trekkers bore.  
All honour be to this great pioneer  
Who in adversity was debonair  
In manner, neat and spruce in dress — the heir  
In spirit and deportment even of those,  
Whose polished fingers flicked from lace-fringed cuff  
Imaginary particles of snuff,  
As affably they bowed to the machine  
Of death — the one-toothed smiling monster, guillo-  
tine.

## XVII

THE trekkers' fortunes in these grey days were  
At lowest ebb ; tho' never to despair  
They bowed their heads ; but, facing fear and need,  
In prayer they found sure refuge and relief.  
After Maritz's death it was decreed  
That, ' Pietermaritzburg,' the name should be

## WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Of the small town marked out and fondly planned  
As future capital on Bushmansrand ;  
Thus linking in this name the memory  
Of wise Maritz and matchless Piet Retief.

In a sod-hut, at this time, the good Smit  
Opened a little school and over it  
Ruled well, affording scholars — bright or glum —  
The customary, plain curriculum.  
In this most necessary and most wise,  
But almost unrewarded, enterprise,  
Erasmus, as assistant, had his wife —  
Spur, solace, help and worry of his life —  
Susanna, who taught well each eager girl  
Neat needlework and knitting, plain and purl.

University of Fort Hare

*Together in Excellence*

And in October month the first Nagmaal,\*  
Was held in the new country of Natal,  
With a large congregation of the folk  
And a collection (one pound ten) that broke  
All records. Unmistakably, but slow,  
The tide of fortune now began to flow.  
Good news came from all sides : within the bay  
Of Port Natal a ship at anchor lay,  
Laden with stores of every useful sort  
From Cape Town friends. Then came a glad  
report,  
One of the trekker-messengers had met  
Andries Pretorius of Graaff-Reinet,  
Who with a goodly company was set

\* Holy Communion.

## THE TREK

Upon the way to join the trekker-band,  
And sent good wishes and a brief command  
That preparations should forthwith be made,  
In all the camps, for a determined raid  
Upon the Zulu king. And so, all thro'  
The next two months the willing trekkers drew  
Together, labouring with stress and strain  
To make them ready for the great campaign.



UPON November's twenty-second day  
Pretorius, mid welcomes glad and gay,  
With sixty men joined the Headquarters' camp.  
Here was the Joshua whose spirit's lamp  
Would quell the trekkers' gloom and 'stablish them  
In the bright land with shadows on its hem.

Andries Pretorius of Graaff-Reinet,  
A tall and heavy man who was not yet  
Past forty, was with unanimity  
Made Head-Commandant of the Company  
Of Trekkers. In his absence 'twas decreed  
Stephanus Maritz, a brother of the dead  
Gerrit, should act as temporary head  
Of the home camps. Erasmus Smit, to speed  
The trekker forces on their perilous way,  
Preached a great sermon (on the text, he spake,  
" O Lord, defer not, and do, for Thy name's  
sake ")

When they, upon the eight-and-twentieth day

## WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Of bright November, ready and great of heart,  
On their adventure made at length a start.

The trekker force, about five hundred strong,  
Crossed the Tugela River and pushed along  
Towards Umgungundhlovu, the great kraal  
Of treacherous Dingaana, the fell Zulu king.  
On Sunday, ninth, in prayer and thanksgiving  
The trekkers spent the day ; and one and all  
Took oath before the war-chaplain, Cilliers,  
That if God granted them the victory,  
To him they'd build a church to celebrate,  
With praise and prayer and with thanksgiving great  
And undefiled, each anniversary  
Of the deliverance — they and their posterity —  
To the latest day. (No oath more faithfully  
Was ever kept.)

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

### XIX

AFTER their day of rest,  
And spirit-balm, the trekkers onward pressed  
Thro' wild rough country, burning as they went  
The tall rank grass, that amiably lent  
Safe cover to an agile lurking foe.  
Onward they pushed and crossed the Buffalo,  
And skirmished with small scouting parties sent  
To check their march. But no adventures now  
In broken ground, such as to Uys had brought  
Defeat and death, would the new chief allow :  
Vain were enticements, vainly the Zulus sought  
To lure them on, to trap and to ensnare.

On Saturday, December's fifteenth day,  
 They camped beside a river, intending there  
 To keep the Sabbath. Strong in every way  
 Was the new camp : a river on one side,  
 Its vassal, a ravine both deep and wide,  
 Upon another good protection gave.  
 So, readily, the open sides to save  
 The strong and skilful trekkers quickly built  
 A fort. The wagons almost tilt to tilt  
 Were drawn and lashed with trek-chains end to end ;  
 Raw hides were then stretched tightly to defend  
 The outer wheels, while under and between  
 The wagons heavy stones and thorn-trees green  
 Were tightly packed. Against the wagon-screen  
 Ladders were placed for fighting men to use.

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

XX

WHEN the sun lit the lamps of myriad dews,  
 Upon December's fateful sixteenth day,  
 The Boers were braced and ready for the fray.  
 Gazing around, they saw ' all Zululand ' \*  
 March to the attack, a multitudinous band —  
 Countless as locusts — all in war array.  
 Shouting and drumming on their shields they came,  
 Dark wave on wave fringed with the foam of spears ;  
 And as they came the Boers with joyous cheers  
 Met the black tide with waves of smoke and flame  
 From thundering muskets.

\* Annals.

WEENEN AND BLOOD RIVER

Upon a day so bright,  
' As if ordained,'\* each Boer could mark the  
sight

Of his snaphaan.† Powder was plentiful  
And slugs also — a handful of each one  
Rammed hurriedly into each smoking gun,  
And then the trekker marksmen point and pull  
And swift death follows.

All around a sea  
Of sable forms rolled on amid the smoke.  
On and yet on it swept but finally  
It paused in hesitation and then broke  
In a great backward wave. Then, like a trumpet,  
spoke

Pretorius and bade the burghers charge  
Upon the foe, who wavered and then fled  
Hotly pursued. Upon the broken marge  
Of the swift river countless warriors bled  
Hiding beneath their shields ; while many a  
score

Floating like otters — noses above the kind  
Brim of the river — soon incarnadined  
Its crystal surface with their crimson gore.  
Thereafter that clear stream, whose waters quiver  
Beneath each breeze, was known as the Blood  
River ;

And as Blood River Battle was the fight  
Known, that took place beside its waters bright.

In multitudes the stricken Zulus lay  
'Around the camp at finish of the fray —

\* Annals.

† Musket.

## THE TREK

Heroes, who gave their lives to save their soil.  
And the proud trekkers crowned their day of toil,  
In which three men were wounded and none slain,  
By raising heart and voice in glad refrain  
Of prayer and praise and holy thanksgiving,  
World without end, to Heaven's Eternal King.



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## I

THE rolling wheels are still ; the trek is done.  
No more the trekkers in the dawn-light blue  
Ride thro' the great grey plains of the Karroo,  
Where each drab koppie, dazed by the rising sun,  
For a few tingling moments throbs and glows  
With the red lightnings of a bursting rose :  
No more in days of drought will they turn grave eyes  
And prayerful lips toward the brazen skies ;  
The strong sun shall not smite them with his blaze,  
Nor the elvish moon enchant with foam-shot rays ;  
Swift storms shall bellow and crash by, unheard ;  
Nor will the dew-song of some hidden bird  
Wake them to wonder at a world new-born.  
No more will they inspan in the flush of morn  
To toil across the never-ending veld,  
Or over some vast, rock-spiked mountain-belt  
To haul their magic wagons. Nevermore  
At daybreak will they trace the fading spoor  
Of buck or beast ; nor will the lion's roar  
Or leopard's snarl shatter their midnight sleep.  
No more on galloping horses will they sweep  
Over harsh plains chasing the buffalo,  
Blesbok and eland, nor will their bullets bring low  
The wing-foot springbok's leaping loveliness.

No more the clang of battle and the stress  
 Of hurtling assegai and hovering death  
 Stirs their brave hearts or quickens their still  
 breath.

No more when dusk comes with the whirring bat  
 They'll gather for the camp-fire's song and chat ;  
 And when sad night binds up day's burning scars  
 They'll dream no more beneath a tent of stars.

II



THESE sons and daughters of the wide Karroo  
 Built and wrought far better than they knew :  
 And we, South Africans, who are the heirs  
 To all they struggled for in bygone years,  
 Are we, my brothers, worthy to inherit  
 Their splendid legacies ? What of the spirit  
 Of those great pioneers do we possess ?  
 Have we their courage and their steadfastness ?  
 Their grim endurance, simple piety ?  
 Their rock-like faith, kindness to human need ?  
 We praise and honour them : how far do we —  
 Dwarfs to their gianthood — follow their lead ?  
 Their greatness is an Everest, not to be won  
 By us, who drowse and dally in the sun :  
 Their strength's beyond us, but their weaknesses  
 We equal or excel with fatal ease,  
 For do we not, my brothers, to this day,  
 Wrangle and quarrel in the old sad way ?

## EPILOGUE

### III

NOT marble monuments engraved with gold  
Would the great Voortrekkers — men wise as  
bold —

Ask as memorial : rather would they  
Charge us, in memory of them, from day to day  
To guard the honour and the sacred dust  
Of this our Homeland, given to us in trust,  
This Land now blest, now blasted, by the sun,  
Where, with so much to do, so little's done.

They would that we, scorning soft ease, should toil  
With brain and hand to save our precious soil  
From rape of raiding floods that ruthlessly  
Carry its riches to the sterile sea —  
From slow, unheeded hosts of noxious weed  
That, grimly creeping on from year to year,  
Render vast regions barren to the need  
Of man and beast — from locust-swarms that rust  
The shining sky and fall like wind-blown dust  
On glad green fields, leaving them brown and bare  
And joyless as a scorched Saharan plain.  
They would that we should capture and enchain  
The sudden floods of devastating rain,  
That sweep across our cracked and blistered earth,  
And storing them should save from torturing  
dearth  
Our thirst-racked land — starring the broad Karroo  
With flashing lakes of water sweet as dew.

## THE TREK

They would that we should help our brothers too,  
Who, pressed by powers of drought, disease and  
blight,

Strove thro' long years, but worsted in the fight  
Have fallen to paralysing poverty —

Bedfellow of despair, harsh as the sea

And cheerless as the blank Siberian snows.

They would that we should raise and 'stablish those

Who by the spell, stronger than Circe's wine,

Of sorcerer-suns that with fierce beauty shine

Have been debased and drugged to vile repose,

Sapped of vitality, quenched of the gleam

Of saving hope, blinded to beauty's dream.

They would that we should be both kind and just

To the Dark Man who is to us a trust

And not a "burden"; nor in turn should we

A load upon his toil-bent shoulders be,

But give him light and opportunity,

Spur him with hope and speed him with goodwill,

That he may struggle up the painful hill

Of progress, and with head and heart and hand

Stand forth a worthier son of his ancestral land.

## IV

### "THE SUNSHINE LAND"

Blue skies burning above

Leagues of brown earth and sand :

This is the land that we cherish and love,

This is the Sunshine Land.

## EPILOGUE

The grim Karroo is ours :  
Whose barren sunburnt plains  
Melt suddenly into a mist of flowers  
After long-awaited rains :

Whose hoarded glories unclose,  
At dawn and day's decline,  
When sombre koppies are isles of rose  
In seas of amber wine.

Our Dragon Peaks that rise  
— Vast billows foamed with cloud —  
Surge magnificently to the sky's  
Shores serene and proud.

Ours the mimosa-thorn, of Fort Hare  
The chinchin-chie's star'd snows,  
The aloe kindled when day is born  
And pearl-pink mountain-rose.\*

The hoopoe in brindled dress  
Is ours, the spreu also,  
The sugar-bird's flower-like loveliness,  
The plaintive piet-myn-vrouw.

The oribi shod with wings  
Is ours, the eland too,  
The springbok that leaps and circles and  
swings  
And ripples the still Karroo.

\* Protea.

THE TREK

— No mad tyrants enslave  
This land, unfettered are we,  
Free as the wind on the veld, or the wave  
That frills the skirts of the sea.

Here amid infinite space  
May mind and spirit expand,  
Making us worthy of time and a place  
In this our Sunshine Land.

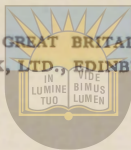
Her silence sings to the soul :  
She beckons with unseen hand  
When surly seas bellow and roll  
’Twixt us and her bright strand.

University of Fort Hare  
Tugela University of Education  
Unto this earth we own,  
Love, and serve while we live,  
Our blood and bone for fountain and stone  
After life shall we give.

*Blue skies burning above  
Leagues of brown earth and sand :  
This is the land that we cherish and love,  
This is the Sunshine Land.*

THE END

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
R. & R. CLARK, LTD., EDINBURGH



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*