

Life Story of an Indomitable Man

Career and Characteristics of "Oom" Paul Krueger, Recently Re-elected President of the Transvaal Republic.

The recent re-election of Paul Krueger, "Oom" Krueger, as the Dutch of South Africa delight to call him, to the presidency of the Transvaal republic, gives interest to the following readable sketch of this remarkable man printed in the *Illustrated Herald* at the time of Krueger's first rise into international prominence a year ago.

No one of the great men of the world has a more interesting personality and career than Paul Krueger, president of the Transvaal republic. During his life time he has raised himself by his own efforts from cowboy to king. His title is that of president, but for all that he is a king in everything else, and no monarch in the world rules his subjects with more autocratic hand. It is true that there is a congress, called the volksraad, and it has the lawmaking power, but when the volksraad refuses to do as Mr. Krueger wishes he threatens to resign. This he has done five or six times, and it has always resulted in "Oom Paul's" having his own way. Thus he rules not by fear or by armed force, but because the Boers have absolute confidence in his judgment and are willing to allow him to be a virtual dictator.

Krueger's career has much in it to remind one of Lincoln. The Americans in the republic call him the African Lincoln, and the strong will is a trait of both men. Just as much as is the fact that both rose from humble beginnings to be rulers of their nations.

The republic of which is Krueger is the virtual dictator is really an oligarchy. The Transvaal is an area of about 300,000 square miles. In this vast territory only a million people live. And of these three-fourths are the native blacks, who are of a low order of intelligence. There are 300,000 whites, and of these less than 30,000 have any voice in the government, and these constitute the body of men who have successfully defied Cecil Rhodes, Chamberlain and the power of the British nation which had hitherto carried things in Africa with a high hand.

RECENT DIFFICULTY.

It is this oligarchical rule that has been the cause of the recent disturbances in the Transvaal. The 90 per cent. of the whole number of white people who are disfranchised have always been hostile to the rule of the Boers and have plotted to bring about British rule in the Transvaal, being themselves for the most part of British birth. That these whites are disfranchised is to a great extent their own fault, and is not the injustice that it would seem from the total statement of fact. The truth is that foreigners in the Transvaal have the same rights as they have in the United States. The British have not allowed to vote without being naturalized, but the laws of the Transvaal, like those of the United States, do not allow foreigners to vote unless they have sworn allegiance to their adopted country and renounced allegiance to their native birth. And this can only be done after a residence of a certain number of years.

That the foreigners have been checked is due to the genius of Krueger and to nothing else. For the foreigners are not like the miserable native Kaffirs. They are men of English birth, and full of pluck. Not only this, but they have vast fortunes, which they have made from mining. They are the natives, and they also have the keenest of incentives to lure them on in their contest with the Boers—other gold mines that the Boers will not allow to be dug.

Yet Krueger has shown true statesmanship by the way he has always remained the master of the situation. His statesmanship of the past two years has not been more astute than that displayed by him twelve years ago, when he was able to maintain independent state under the condition is one of the most remarkable achievements of the nineteenth century. But the Boers are of good blood. In their veins mingle that of the Dutch, the French and the Spaniards two centuries ago, and also that of the Huguenots, who were expelled from France by Louis XIV. and the suggestion of Mme. de Maintenon. The Catholic tenacity of liberty and rights survives in the Boers.

BLOOD THAT TELLS.

In all his struggles Krueger has had the little band of Boers united in his support. Thus a small body of men should have been able to maintain themselves so long as a semi-independent state under the condition is one of the most remarkable achievements of the nineteenth century. But the Boers are of good blood. In their veins mingle that of the Dutch, the French and the Spaniards two centuries ago, and also that of the Huguenots, who were expelled from France by Louis XIV. and the suggestion of Mme. de Maintenon. The Catholic tenacity of liberty and rights survives in the Boers.

Originally the Boers settled Cape Colony, and there began the British aggression against which they have constantly struggled and which has implanted in them such a hatred of the English that the word "Englishman" is the most severe epithet one Boer can apply to his enemy. The English robbed them of their lands and persecuted them for several generations. Then, in despair, the Boers resolved to seek a new country, where they could be free. Then began the great trek, or exodus, of 1834-36. They divided. One part settled in the Orange Free State the other in Natal. The first were conquered by the British in 1848, but afterward gained a semi-independence.

Later those at Natal were dispossessed of their lands. Again they took to their wagons and founded the new republic, at first called the Dutch African Republic, but afterward changed to South African Republic. This was in 1853. The land which they occupied was regarded as worthless, and the British allowed them to live in peace until 1877, when they were attacked by the British governor of Natal. For four years the Boers nursed their wrongs, and then they made a concerted attack upon the British and won every battle. As a result of that war, which was directed by Krueger, the English were forced to allow the Boers a semi-independence. They were recognized as an autonomous republic, but under the suzerainty of the British Empire. This meant that the Boers were to govern themselves in everything, but that their dealings with foreign nations

should be had only through the medium of the British foreign office.

With the discovery of great stores of gold beneath the soil of the republic began the troubles of the Boers. The foreign population, lured by the yellow metal, constantly increased, and they have caused the trouble which now exists and which is familiar to newspaper readers, and which culminated in Jameson's raid.

A MODERN WASHINGTON.

There have been but three presidents of the South African republic during its existence of forty-three years. Until 1871 M. W. Pretorius was president; he was succeeded by Thomas F. Burgers, who served until the downfall of the republic in 1877. Then Stephanus Johannes Paulus Krueger became president, and since then he has been the leader of the Boers, for whom they have the same feeling that Americans have a hundred years ago had for George Washington.

So humble is the origin of President Krueger that very little is known of his early life. It has been said that he was born in Mauch Chunk, Pa., and that at the age of 12 years he ran away from America to Africa. This story is told by a Charles Krueger of Indianapolis. However, the president himself says that he was born in South Africa, and the story is therefore chiefly interesting as illustrating the obscurity which surrounds the early life of the statesman. Rustenburg, South Africa, was his native town; the year of his birth was 1825, and he is now 72 years of age. His father was a farmer, and he received his training in the veld on horseback with a gun in hand. His father belonged to the "Dopper" or Dutch Separatist church, whose members at that time gave more attention to physical than mental accomplishments, so that Paul did not see very much school, but he learned a great deal about the use of the rifle.

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STRANGLING A PANTHER.

When yet a boy Krueger was famed for his skill with the rifle and for his courage. He was a sprinter, too, and he could outrun any of his young associates. He wore no shoes, for his parents were too poor to buy them, but barefooted he trudged along the hot sandy wagon roads of South Africa. A few months from home a large panther made its appearance. The oxen took fright and bolted. The jostlings of the rude wagon threw the little sister on the ground. She was at the mercy of the ferocious animal. Without a moment's hesitation young Krueger jumped from the wagon and went to her rescue. Although unarmed, he fought the panther. It was a hand-to-hand contest and lasted for several minutes, and the panther at times seemed to have the best of it, but the boy got the animal in a tight grip and with his strong arm strangled it to death.

For some time the Krueger family remained at Potchefstroom, then the seat of government, and then they moved northward. A year afterward he entered the Boer army, where he distinguished himself in the many little wars which were fought and quickly rose from the ranks. He became a field cornet (outside magistrate) then a district commandant, then a commandant, and today he is commander-in-chief of the army as well as president of the republic.

Through all of this period his courage has been marked as it was on the day when he strangled the panther. More than forty years ago he himself amputated the thumb of his left hand, injured in a gun explosion.

PIRIED OUT HIS TOOTH.

A few years ago, when he was suffering from a toothache he gave equal proof of his physical endurance. It was suggested that he go to a dentist. He asked how much the tooth doctor would charge and upon learning that it would cost him a couple of dollars he refused to incur the expense. The pain had increased in a couple of days so that he could not sleep. Then he got up and pried out the tooth with his claspinette and went to sleep without more ado.

During the Jameson raid he was anxious to lead his men in person. When the news reached Pretoria on December 31 that Jameson, with his force, was nearing Krugersdorp Krueger saddled his horse in order to personally lead the burghers into battle. "Now that this Jameson is on the Veldt," cried the old man, "we'll soon see what he's worth." The chief justice of the republic had great difficulty in persuading the president that his brains in Pretoria were of more value than his hand and eye would be on the Veldt.

Peace as well as war has been the scene of Krueger's exploits. During ten years preceding the war of independence he was a member of the executive council, and in the following year he was elected president. Since then no one has thought of choosing anyone else as chief magistrate. During these sixteen years his power has been absolute, and the wisdom of allowing him to do as he pleases has been shown by the great success which he has achieved. Perhaps he has made some mistakes, but if he has the world would know of them. His set policy during that time has been to discourage immigration and prevent the foreigners from participating in the government. This seems a strange policy, but it must be remembered that his experiences and those of the Boers with Anglo-Saxons and others hailing from Europe has been such as to convince him that the foreigners are adventurers without honor. At the same time President Krueger has a warm admiration for America, and like the other Boers, he treats people from the United States with consideration. An American who

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called on him recently said that Krueger's words of parting were:

REGARD FOR AMERICA.

"I love America, and I believe that the big republic across the ocean is our friend. I love to think of the United States as our big brother. When you go to the United States tell the people there for me that there is a small nation here loving their country and their liberty, that idolizes the American flag and the free institutions of the country. May the United States ever prosper and remain true to the principles of our forefathers in my sincere wish."

His own foreign policy is very brief. "All that we ask," he says, "is to be left alone." And on one occasion, at Bonkershuit, he said to some Boers who had traveled scores of miles to meet him:

"My boys, I have tried to build this country for you. It is yours. Never, never permit anyone to take it from you."

President Krueger is veritable matter of the state, and it is believed that with his death it will be destroyed. The constitution is ambiguous and is construed entirely to suit the president. The road and the volksraad, the two houses of the congress, are completely under his dictation. He lives in Pretoria, the seat of the government. The town is small, and it is not nearly so large as Johannesburg, which since the gold discoveries has grown very rapidly and is a progressive city. The government buildings at Pretoria are pretentious, but the home occupied by "Oom" Paul is small, a low-built house of the ordinary South African type, and, like the others, it has a garden with trees and shrubs.

He is autocratic in public life, but very democratic in private life, and access to him can be had with ease by anyone. A gentleman who called upon him recently says that he found the president seated in a comfortable padded chair alongside of a table, on which, among some papers, was a big tobacco box. At his feet was a big spittoon. He sat well back, with his hands over his chest.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

He is not a handsome man. His height is more than six feet and he is very fat and waddles when he walks. His face is dull, flabby and expressionless. His small blood eyes are hidden by the heavy lids. Long, thin

straggling hair covers his head. His face, with its shaved chin and upper lip and fringe of beard something after the fashion of that of Horace Greeley, is familiar to newspaper readers. His dress is slovenly and he does not look like a ruler.

He always shakes hands with visitors. He roars in a loud voice when he converses and gesticulates very violently with his left hand. He cannot so employ the other, for in it he holds his big meerschaum pipe, which he constantly smokes. He uses the spittoon frequently and drinks copious draughts of gin and water.

Literature has no delicias for him. The Bible is his favorite book and almost the only one which he has read. It is the only one which he reads at all frequently. "The History of the Princes of Orange," a history of the thirty years' war, part of "Moly's Dutch Republic," Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and Macaulay's account of "William of Orange" is all else that he has read. In fact he is what might be called illiterate and he knows nothing about literature or history.

He cannot even speak English. Pietly, not love of the book for its literary merit, is responsible for his reading the Bible so often. For Oom Paul is very pious. Near his house is a church at which he is a regular attendant and he often preaches himself. In religion he is what is called a "dopper." It is worth while to explain this word, for it shows the extremely close relationship between the "doppers" and the old Puritans. The word is derived from "dop," which is German for bowl and is supposed to apply to this sect of religionists because they wore their hair as if the barber had put a bowl upon their heads and cut around it. According to this derivation "round head" would be an apt perfect translation of the word "dopper."

This strict adherence to religious forms is a prominent trait of the Boers. An apt illustration of the extreme to which it is carried was given during a recent debate in the volksraad.

PIETY.

From March to December, 1888, there was a drought in the Transvaal and many hardships ensued. The representatives of a waterworks company finally resorted to the expedient of shooting dynamite into passing clouds in the hope of bringing rain. These acts were brought to the attention of President Krueger. He convened the volksraad, and the experiment of these intrepid Utlanders was the subject of a long and grave discussion. One Boer statesman from Witfontein presented a bill making it high treason to explode dynamite in the heavens that bend above the Transvaal. Such an act, he contended zealously, was trying to fly in the face of providence. If God wanted the South African Republic to have rain he would send it. It was impious for godless Utlanders to first explosives in the direction of the infinite. The Witfontein Boer's arguments and his bill prevailed, and dynamiting the clouds was forbidden. Another statesman proposed a measure setting apart certain days for the people to pray in unison for rain.

A long debate followed. A member from Lydenburg exclaimed that it would be irreligious to bother God about the matter. A staunch member of the Krueger party resented this. It was an insinuation, he declared, that the Boers were an inconsequential people. "We are a brave and a free people," said he, "we made the English, who pose as God's chosen people, retreat ingloriously before us. In the name of God and the Dutch republic we regained our freedom. God was with us at Bronkspuit and at Majuba Hill. Shall we hesitate, therefore, to pray whenever veid and spruit is calling for rain?"

Krueger is strictly honest, yet he is a millionaire. This is due to the fact that he has always saved seven-eighths of his salary, which he has invested in lands near Johannesburg and Pretoria, which have increased thirty fold in value. If he were dishonest he could be worth as many millions as he now owns hundreds of thousands, for plenty of temptations would have been offered to him.

When Paul Krueger dies, Africa will lose one of the greatest men in its history and the Transvaal republic will lose its great mainstay.

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