

VICTORIA—BOER AND BRITON
From *Our Island Story* by H E Marshall

In the days when Cromwell was ruling Britain with his iron hand, a few stern-faced, silent men sailed out from Holland and landed in South Africa. There they made their home, and there they grew rich and prospered. In the reign of George III, while Napoleon was conquering all Europe, British soldiers landed in Africa and took possession of Cape Town. Later still, when Napoleon had fallen, the **Cape of Good Hope** became a British possession by treaty with Holland. Soon thousands of British settled there, and slowly but surely the colony grew.

So side by side these two races, Dutch and British, spread and prospered. But they could not live together in peace. It seemed as if in all the wide veldt there was not room for both. I cannot tell you here of all the quarrels and dispeace; of how the different colonies called Orange Free State, Transvaal [**Northeastern part of modern South Africa**], Natal [part of modern **KwaZulu-Natal**], and Cape Colony [today part of **Namibia, South Africa** and **Lesotho**] arose; of how the Transvaal at one time owned British rule and at another did not; of how Britain fought and suffered until at last the long years of unrest and trouble ended in the great Boer War;—I cannot tell you of all this, for it would take too long, and much of it would not seem interesting to you. I will not talk much either about the Boer War, for the tears it caused are hardly dry; the graves it made are hardly green.¹

All through this book I have tried to give you reasons for the wars of which I have told, and, although now that we have come to our own time it becomes more difficult, I will give you one reason for the Boer War, which you may understand. From the very beginning of our story you have seen how Britons have fought for freedom, and how step by step they have won it, until at last Britons live under just laws and have themselves the power to make these laws. For it is now acknowledged that the Briton who pays taxes has the right to help to frame the laws under which he lives. You remember how America was lost because King George III tried to force the Americans to pay taxes, although they had not the right to choose and send members to Parliament. Now the Transvaal was a republic, and the government was in the hands of the Boers, as the South African Dutch had come to be called. Yet in some vague way the Boers owned the Queen of Britain as overlord. Those who lived in the Transvaal were chiefly Boer farmers, but gold was discovered in the country and then many other people went there hoping to make a great deal of money. Many of these people were British, and although the Boers were not glad to see them, and wished they would keep away from the land which they considered their very own, these British helped to make the Boer country rich. They paid heavy taxes, but they were called Uitlanders, which means, “outlanders” or “strangers.” They were harshly treated in many ways, they were not allowed to vote for members of Parliament, and so had no voice in making the laws under which they had to live. You have heard how Britons for centuries had fought for this very freedom which was now denied them in South Africa, and you can imagine how hard it was for Britons to bear what seemed to them so great an injustice. This is only one reason why the Boers and Britons could not live in peace together, but it is one which you can understand.²

The Boers, too, had their troubles and their grievances, and, when war came, they fought as patriots fight for their country. The British in South Africa appealed at last to the mother-country for help. The mother-country gave help, and in October 1899 A.D. war broke out. It was a dreadful war, and lasted for two years and a half. We have not yet forgotten the days of sick suspense during the long months when **Ladysmith** and “brave little **Mafeking**” were besieged; nor the gloom which fell upon us as we read of disaster and defeat; nor the cheers and sobs which greeted the news of the relief of

1 H E Marshall was writing in 1908.

2 [Freedom was also an issue in another area. Wherever the British rule slavery is not allowed. The Boers could never understand this and constantly enslaved black people.]

Ladysmith and then of Mafeking. But in the darkest hour one thing became certain. The little island was not fighting alone. The Empire of Greater Britain was no mere name. From all sides, from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, from every province of Greater Britain, from every land over which the Union Jack floats, came offers of help. Britain was fighting, not for herself, but for her colony, and right or wrong, her colonies stood by her, side by side, and shoulder to shoulder.

At length the dark days passed, and the whisper of peace was heard. It was a whisper which grew louder until it was plainly heard. The Boer leaders gathered at a place called Vereeniging to talk together over the terms of peace. Vereeniging means “union,” so it seemed a good place at which to have the meeting. The Boers were treated as the guests of the British, who prepared a camp for them and did everything for their comfort, but as they were led to the camp, through the British lines, the Boers were blindfolded and guarded by soldiers of the Black Watch. This was done because the Boers might not have agreed to make peace, and then the knowledge they had gained of the British camp would have helped them greatly. The meeting lasted about ten days, but at last, on Sunday, June 1, 1902 A.D., the good news reached London. Peace was proclaimed.



Contemporary painting of the relief of Ladysmith by John Henry Frederick Bacon