

First National Bank

UNITED STATES AND CITY DEPOSITORY

Capital, \$100,000.

Surplus, \$117,000.
(UNDIVIDED PROFITS)

Resources, \$1,275,000

THE OLDEST BANK IN THE CITY!

INTEREST PAID ON SAVINGS ACCOUNTS.

Organized in 1891, Succeeding the Bank of Newport News, Which Was Organized Previous to 1888.

W. A. POST,
President

J. R. SWINERTON,
Vice-President.

J. A. WILLETT,
Cashier.

ARTHUR LEE,
Ass't. Cashier.

All Loans Made Under the Personal Direction of the Directors at all Times

Directors

W. A. Post, J. R. Swinerton, J. W. Clements, Saxon Holt, R. G. Bickford, W. W. Willett,
M. V. D. Doughty, C. B. Orcutt, J. A. Willett.

The Despatch Bearer

A rumor came to town that a battle would be fought in the morning. In the early afternoon it was nothing more than a rumor. Many of the kind had come to the town before, and had been soon forgotten. On this occasion the correspondent of a London newspaper met his despatch rider in the center of the main square and began to question him concerning the last talk of a battle.

"Do you know anything about this rumor of another fight?" he asked.

"No."

The correspondent shuffled his boot in the thick dust, then walked a few steps away and returned. The despatch rider watched him closely, as an older man might look upon a youngster whom he had grown to know through close companionship. The tall form was bent slightly forward. From under the shadow of the hat brim one eye shone with a light of intensity, a light of almost eager desire, which being testified that despite the long years of his own particular experiences the mind still retained the activity and keen knowledge of earlier days. The thin scar line of a long healed cut led him from the lower lid of the other eye diagonally across the cheek. That other eye was blind.

"Are we going out in the morning?" asked the despatch rider.

"I don't know yet. I'll see you later about it."

When the moon had risen, so that the dust lay white in the square, the correspondent spoke to his despatch rider again. "Well start at dawn," he said.

Then the correspondent returned to his hotel. Many other correspondents were seated in the long room which had been at one time the parlor. A stout man sat slumped in a lopsided arm chair with his hands folded across his stomach. An artist who was particular about a pair of whiskers and a clean shaven chin was sketching on the back of a menu. When the door opened to admit the correspondent from London, the men turned to see who it was.

"How are you, Nethersole?" said the Australian. "Anything new?"

"Not that I know of," Nethersole carelessly replied.

Following a quick rap at the door, the tall form of the despatch rider appeared on the threshold. "May I see you a moment, Nethersole?" he said. The two men left the room, and the door closed.

"Nethersole's up to another of his games," remarked the stout man, which remark easily carried through the ill fitted door, so that it was heard by Nethersole outside. The correspondent smiled slightly up at his despatch rider.

"There's no game this time," he

said. "It will rest with you, Kennet. What do you want?"

"I wanted to know if you would let me have the bay tomorrow. That black of mine is off his feed tonight."

"Certainly. Good night, Kennet."

Later on the Canadian and Nethersole stood together on the steps of the hotel looking out into the dust and the moonlight of the square.

"What time are you going to start out?" asked the Canadian.

"Just before sunrise. Coming along?"

"I'll meet you here at dawn."

When the morning came the first gray light broke cold over a fevered city. On the veranda of the hotel the Canadian stood leaning against a post. From out the mist which blurred the farther side of the square he saw approaching the hotel a man, in whom he soon recognized Nethersole's despatch rider, walking and leading his horse.

"Anything new since last night?" asked Kennet.

"Not that I know of."

The despatch rider leaned against the next post of the veranda. He began filling a pipe with tobacco as if thinking of other things. "The dawn is a strange hour," he said quietly. The tone of the voice betrayed that his mind had gone back to happenings in the years which had passed. "Some people think the dawn mysterious," Kennet continued. "Poets have been pleased to call it by beautiful names. But I don't like it. It feels cold, and all the things that have happened to me have come then. There was the time when the Kafirs attacked us. That was at dawn. They said I ought to have held the place, and I did; until I got that slash across the eye and went down. Then the mill burnt. That was at three-thirty-five A. M., and left me grooming horses in a livery stable. Then it was just getting light when the message came to me mine telling us the home company had failed. I was standing in the house where the wire was, watching a palm grow out of the melting mist. I would have cleared from that business in another half-year, because the stuff was there. Then the message came, and we quit work. That operator we had was a funny fellow. He shot himself later. Kennet stopped for a moment.

"And after that?" asked the Canadian.

"—Have some tobacco?"

The artist who wore whiskers and Nethersole came out of the hotel together, shutting the door noiselessly behind them. Nethersole walked rapidly to the stable, brought his horse, and mounted.

"Come on," he said.

The three men rode away from the square, leaving behind them the artist

complaining to the fat man, who had just come to the porch. They passed slowly through the town and finally entered on the beginning of a long road which led away over a great reach of plain toward where the rising sun had just lifted clear of the crest of a dome shaped hill in the far distance. The road lay broad as an avenue. The despatch rider rode a little ahead and to one side. At times all three turned on the veldt to pass a bullock train plodding in slow tread toward the distant hill; the bullocks, swinging languidly from side to side, and the quick cracks of the whips and wild cries of the Kafir drivers mingling with the incessant creaking of the loaded wagons to interrupt the stillness which overhung the vast plain. The sun rose higher from the hill crest.

"Hadn't we better be getting a move on?" asked the Canadian.

"No," answered Nethersole; "there's no hurry. Get a tip late last night that the attack wouldn't be made till tomorrow. Thought we had better get out here, though."

Over mile after mile of the wide and barren road the three men continued toward the place where it had been said a battle would soon be fought. They continued for miles without speaking, walking their horses, riding three abreast.

At one time two black dots of horsemen appeared against the sky of the rise behind. Nethersole fixed his glasses on them.

"That must be 'Whiskers,' and he's riding, I suppose, with old fat Bill. They were going to start out together. We've got to beat Bill. And he knows a thing or two about this business."

An hour later they saw before them against the sunburnt grass of an upward slope, many large squares of the darker brown which marked the bivouac of an army. The commanding general's headquarters were in the yard of a sun bleached farm house. From here the orders set forth in carrying their orders to the different parts of the army. The general stood in the scanty shade of a dust covered sapling. Nearby a trooper sat leaning against a broken fence, chewing at a large chunk of bread, and occasionally breaking off pieces to feed his horse. Several officers and men leaned with their backs against the whitened wall of the house.

"Nothing will happen today," said the general in answer to the correspondent's question.

"Would you advise us to wait?" "I would."

That night when they were camped outside the lines of artillery Kennet shoved a log end farther into the bed of the fire, and began whistling.

"What is that tune, Kennet?" asked Nethersole. "It's got running in my head."

"That thing? Cissy Haragen used to sing it in Melbourne."

"But I heard it in London."

"Yes, I know. The company went there afterward," explained the des-

patch rider. "But Cissy Haragen and I left them and joined a local show in Sydney."

"Was that the time you told me about,—when you wore blue tights?"

"Yes, and you'd have laughed. I sang the second to that song, and she wore pink tights and I wore blue. I was meant to be a kind of prince. That was the nearest I got to playing Hamlet." And the despatch rider laughed a little at the fire.

"So you wanted to play Hamlet?" asked Nethersole.

"Oh I suppose so. I was younger then."

Again the dawn broke over the land, a clear windless dawn. The silent army formed in order of battle. On the extremes of either wing lay the dark lines where the cavalry had been stationed. The battle front of the British extended for at least four miles,—found miles of sloping grade to where the river flowed deep and sluggish along the incurving base of the range. In the red light which followed the dawn the order had been given to advance. Across the wide stretch of veldt, bare and slowly dropping to the river bank two miles away, the brigades marched on to the attack.

The center, under the blazing heat of noon, again across that aching empty plain the broken regiments crawled back to camp, leaving behind them the silent guns and their dead and wounded lying in the sun.

The despatch rider rode at a walk across the lines on which the troops were retreating. "They've failed," he said, sweeping his arm forward in a half tragic gesture of contempt. "Poor devils! It wasn't their fault. But just the same they have failed. Cissy could have said that in good style. Poor little woman!"

He met a private soldier who held his rifle by the stock, dragging the muzzle with half closed eyes.

"You see me?" asked the man.

"Yes."

"And you see these five men up there? We were twenty-seven. Escort to the guns. The rest are down there in the ditch. Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going up there to headquarters, an' I'm going to say, 'Give me a drink!' an' if they don't do it I'm going to shoot 'em—shoot 'em all! Got any water on ye?"

The despatch rider's bottle was empty. He himself had not drunk since dawn. "Yes, I know. But I wouldn't shoot if I were you. That's it over."

"All right. I'll think it over."

Kennet continued on his way. The slowly walking men with half closed eyes became more frequent now. Here a cluster of four men crawled back in single file over the plain, and the corporal who led them spoke in a choked and tired voice. "Oh, come along, you men!" Here an officer walked with painfully stumpy steps, and slowly, with his chin sunk on his chest, with his eyes looking down at the dead grass before his feet, his

eyes half closed. There a trooper lay close behind an ant hill, thinking perhaps in his thirst dried brain that he was still under the enemy's fire.

"And these also. All of them have failed," said the despatch rider. He had come into a strange humor. The state of uncertainty of all things which exist in a time of battle had seized possession of his mind. Besides, he felt the thirst in his own throat. He came to a Kafir graal, turned into a temporary field hospital, to which place the wounded were being brought in from all parts of the battle field.

As he rode away from the hospital, he saw that Nethersole was close upon him. "Are you all ready, Kennet?" he asked. "You'll have to start back at once. Here's the cablegram. What time is it now?"

"Ten minutes of one."

"The censor's office closes at four. You have three hours a .1 ten minutes, and it's three-thirty miles. Can you do it?"

"Give me the message."

The despatch rider turned his horse and set out on the road for the town. Nethersole called after him. "You're the first away. Keep the lead, Kennet!"

Twenty-three miles lay ahead of him—twenty-three miles of barren, sun dried road, which seemed always near its ending and always led farther on. If the town had been twenty miles distant, the start would not have seemed so far away, because then he would have entered soon on the nineteen miles, whereby a long gain would have been accomplished. But there were still these three miles to be ridden through. They were unnecessary, and a large addition.

"There is a vast difference between twenty-one miles and nineteen miles," said the despatch rider. "I don't know why, but there is."

He had started forth riding his horse at a slow trot. By his judgment of the nature of the horse he knew that this was best.

"Besides," he argued, "he's a little weak in the hind hock. If I galloped him, he would slip and weaken more. Then I'd lost time. Better take it slow and long."

The screech of a shell, one of the last fired at random by the enemy at the broad retreat, rushed through the air above him and burst in a wreath of spent dust in the road in front. He passed the last of the retreating army, the kopje on which the naval guns were stationed, a bullock train plodding through the sunlight toward the army carrying food supplies; then he rode along the empty road alone.

When he dismounted at the end of two miles he began walking with more eagerness than was his custom, so that the reins by which he led the horse behind him grew taut and he felt the pressure on his arm. Foot by foot he passed over the ground, and though this walk was adopted only for a breathing spell, he knew that he was always creeping nearer to the

town. The dust rose in tiny clouds about his boots at each footstep. After a time the arm began to ache from the lagging pressure against it. Then he mounted the horse and rode on at a trot.

"Must have gone four miles," he said. In no way did it seem strange to him that he spoke these words out loud. All round him lay the far reaches of barren land, with the road leading on, always on. The muscles of his legs were held tight, that he might conform his body to the sway of the horse's stride. The muscles began to pain him a little; but thus he could ride his horse more steadily. By the half unconscious grip of his knees, the man transmitted to the instinct of the animal a sense of the insistent force which lived in his mind: "You're going to do the work, and I'm going to make you do it!" he said.

How far had he gone now? Perhaps seven miles—it ought to be. That left sixteen in front. He had dismounted again to walk, when he recognized the spot where he had stopped the afternoon before to examine one of the horse's hoofs. Then he became aware that probably for a mile he had been listening to the dull and regular clicks of loosened shoe. Yes, he could move it with his fingers; but he continued walking, with the rhythmic click just behind him, till he came to the place where the first water was.

"I'll give you just three goes to wash your mouth out."

He counted the three drinks by the swallows in the horse's throat, then pulled up the straining head and went on at that slow, persistent trot. The incessant sound of the dull clicks came from underneath him now. He thought once that they answered with a tone of mockery a throbbing which sometimes, after periods of great toil, a throbbing which woke him from unconsciousness on the hillside at dawn that time he had failed to hold the place. Then he came to understand that the clicks were the complement of the sound hoofbeats. By reason of this, the instinct which had been long trained made him realize that the time of the real ride had begun.

His knees gripped the saddle flap with a slightly lighter pressure. With himself, but talking out loud, he guessed the question of removing the bit from the horse's mouth to ease him; then concluded that later he would need the bit to exert a further influence that was to sustain the animal through the last miles. Again he came to a water hole; again he counted the three swallows in the horse's throat and rode on. "About ten miles more," he said.

He had entered the beginning of the long plain which was the last. The road ran straight before him. He could see the place where the town lay against the farthest hills. But the road seemed to have no ending. All round was that land, flat and empty; always the strong sunlight shone down on the plain from out the