

DINGAAN'S DAY

Come, my children, hear my story,
 'Tis a tale that must not die;
 How we broke the power of Dingaan
 'Neath that hot December sky.
 For my grandma often told me
 Though her eyes filled up with tears,
 Speaking with a great emotion,
 Stories of the pioneers.
 Noble tales, the shame my telling,
 Tales of courage, past belief,
 Of those leaders of our people,
 Gert Maritz and Piet Retief;
 Trekking on thro' daily perils
 Where no white man ever sped,
 Trekking on, with unseen dangers
 Lurking round their waggon bed.
 Many months of toil and progress,
 Many deeds whose echoes ring
 Ere they reached the land they sought for,
 Guarded by a warlike king.
 Here they sent their leader forward,
 Brave and fearless Piet Retief,
 Whom they trusted, loved, and honoured,
 Envoy to the Zulu chief.
 With his warriors about him,
 Trained to answer to his call,
 With the open hand of friendship
 Dingaan met them at his kraal;
 Welcomed them with open feasting,
 Gave them terms of lasting peace;
 But the traitor's heart within him
 Bade him make the feasting cease
 Gave the order: "Kill the wizards!
 Let the assegai drink blood!"
 So the bravest of our leaders
 Perished in the Zulu flood.
 What are treaties without honour?
 Brave men die when traitors serve.
 But the thought of retribution
 Strengthened heart and iron nerve;
 So they gathered, and they waited,
 Few to meet the coming war.
 While the traitor Dingaan wonders
 At the white man's ways and wits,

Calmly stood they in the laager,
 Rifles firmly held in wrist,
 Whilst the Zulu armies gathered
 Round them like the mountain mist.
 As the breakers lash the seashore,
 Wrecking furies on each rock,
 So the Zulu armies charged them;
 So they stood and bore the shock.
 And our women, what they suffered,
 'Midst the dust, and blood and pain!
 Women of stupendous courage,
 Quick to load, and true to aim.
 Now was time for retribution,
 This our fateful day and hour,
 And we wrote in blood our history
 When we shattered Dingaan's power;
 For the river, running seaward,
 Where the Zulus left their dead,
 On that hot December evening,
 Ran with water mingled red:
 Red, as soil washed from the kopjes
 Leaves a mark upon the plain.
 'Twas our mark of retribution,
 So we wiped away our shame.
 Now my children, I am weary,
 Aged with cares, and other things,
 You, my children, must remember
 When the aloe blossoms redden,
 When the storm clouds fill the sky
 On the hot December evenings,
 How we met the assegai.
 Well they call us Afrikanders.
 Like the flowers upon the veld
 That perhaps received their colour
 From the blood our heroes spilt.
 Surely we have bought our birthright,
 Ah! the price we had to pay,
 Before we broke the power of Dingaan,
 On that hot December day!

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¹ Alfred James Davey (1882-1948), the youngest son of an English farmer, settled in South Africa in 1902 and made his home in the Eastern Province. A nurseryman by profession, he had the countryman's observant eye and love of the land, as well as a keen awareness of the past. A natural sense of rhythm and the gift of imagery found their expression in a number of poems on South African and English themes. These lines on *Dingaan's Day* in which the narrator is a mother and a descendant of the Voortrekkers, were first drafted in May, 1914, were revised by their author during the 1920's, and have never been published previously.