

The Wreck of The Haarlem

THE Dutch (the Netherlands) having thrown off the Spanish yoke towards the end of the 16th century became the foremost commercial power of the time. They had obtained Eastern products from Portugal, but Portugal then fell under Spanish rule, and her ports were closed to the Dutch, who then started to build up an Eastern trade for themselves, and in 1595 a Dutch fleet of four vessels rounded the Cape of Good Hope touching on the coast to procure fresh provisions, water, etc. This was the first intercourse of the Dutch (the Boers) with South Africa.

On the return of the fleet, several Dutch companies were formed for Eastern trade. In 1602 these were united into the Dutch East India Company with power to make treaties, build fortresses, enlist troops, etc. Its offices were in Amsterdam and other cities in Holland. As Holland and Spain were at war the Dutch made a prize of the Portuguese ships, factories, etc, in the East.

In 1619 the English company proposed to the Dutch to jointly establish a fort in South Africa, but the latter did not consent. In 1620 the English company instructed their captains to look for a suitable place for a fort, and two of these hoisted the English flag at Table Bay. This action was not confirmed and thenceforth the English ships made St. Helena their port of call.

Nothing of consequence took place till 1648 when the Dutch East India Company's ship "Haarlem" was wrecked near Table Bay. The crew were there for over six months. They had seeds and started a garden. They got meat from the natives. So fruitful did the soil show itself to be, that the officers reported it to the Company in Amsterdam, on