Essay Competition. Class "C."

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Subject: An Imaginary Visit to a Gold Mine.
A Visit to a gold-mine.

I live in Parkton outside Johannesburg. Sometimes Daddy takes me to the Durban Deep mine at Roodepoort. Would you like me to take you with me on an imaginary visit to it?

To get to the mine we take the main West Reef Road. When we get near the mine, we see the dumps, which are called ‘rock’ dumps and ‘slime’ dumps. The rock dump is greyish blue and rises to a sharp point. Some little trucks, called ‘Cocopans’, run up the side of the rock dump, they are pulled up by a steel cable.

When the trucks get to the top, they tip out the mined rock and coal to the bottom where they are filled up again. The ‘slime’ dumps are wet soil from which the gold has been extracted. These dumps are yellowish white and flat topped with sides like terraces. The mud is pumped up from the pumping station at the bottom.

By this time we are near enough to see the
buildings at the shaft head. One is built over the shaft, which goes 17,000 feet down. The shaft is a steel framework with a big wheel round which the cable is wound. This cage is known as a 'ship'. The 'ship' takes the miners down the different levels and also brings the mined rock up to the surface. An electric motor winds the cable which is marked so that the winder can stop the 'ship' at different levels where work is going on.

Now we will go down the mine. First we get a rock hat and an electric lamp. The miners' hats are made of steel; ours are made of light fibre and are to protect our heads from falling rock.

A 'ship' has just arrived full of mine-boys mostly Bantus, and some white overseers. The mine-boys go out of the 'ship', talking and laughing. Each of them has a meal tin. Then they go to the baths to wash the dust and dirt off. Then another lot of boys get into the 'ship' and we do also. Suddenly a big bell rings and the overseer who is our guide pulls us in for there are no doors, and with no warning at all the 'ship' descends. As we go down our stomachs feel as though they are going to knock our heads off, and we try to grab something to stop ourselves floating. "Swallow" shouts our guide. We do so and our ears go pop and we feel alright again. Suddenly we feel very heavy and
although we try to stand up we slowly go towards the floor. Just as we feel we are going to crumple to the floor the lift stops and we bob about gently on the end of the cable. We have come down 17,000 feet in three minutes.

Our guide takes over and leads us along the level, which is like an underground station. Other tunnels lead off from here. Some tunnels are twenty miles long and lead from one mine to another. Down in this tunnel is all a bustle. Some little 'tubs' run from the rock face with mined rock, and go into the 'skips' to be taken to the surface. The tunnels are lit by strings of electric light. Hundreds of little native boys are running about. The light shines on their trousers showing very white against their black bodies, which are the same colour as the walls.

There is a pumping station to pump the water out of the tunnels and fresh air into them. There is a real power to supply emergency electricity in case of an accident. There is also a first aid station and an engineer's centre were the engineers are if they are needed. One of them is Daddy's brother.

Our guide takes us along the level and shows us the various passages. One has surveyors surveying the pieces of ore-bearing rock. Another has geologists taking samples of rock. Another passage has many native boys who are working...
with pneumatic drills drilling holes for the dynamite. Someone lights the fuse and there is a terrific bang and pieces of rock go whistling about. There are big tractor fans drawing the dynamite fumes out of the tunnels. Then the "tubs" come along and are loaded up with the rock, and go to the "ships" which carry them to the surface. As soon as the rock has been cleared away engineers come along with pit props to support the tunnel roof. Then the surveyors and geologists go to another tunnel.

Having seen all the other tunnels our guide takes us to a "ship", which is loaded with "tubs" going to the surface. In a short time we are back where we started. Glad to be once more in the warm bright sunshine after the dank and cold mine. We hand in our rock hats and lamps. Then we follow the "tubs" to the crushers. Here the "tubs" tip the rock onto a rubber belt, where it is sorted out. The useless rock goes to the rock dumps in the "cocopans". While the gold bearing rock is crushed and what a noise! When it comes out the rock is a fine dust, it is treated with cyanide.
to extract the gold, the waste rock or slime goes to the dumps, while the gold mixed with the extracting chemicals goes to the refinery. This is the next and last place our guide will take us. In the refinery the gold is separated from the chemicals. Then it is melted into bar-gold, our eyes nearly pop out of our heads when we see all the pure yellow gold. The refinery fore-man gives us one to hold and we nearly drop it because it is so surprisingly heavy. Everyone laughs and we feel very much at home. Soon tea is served out of a flask and we have it sitting on a bar of gold! This is the finale of our visit. We feel it was worth while. I hope you will see one for yourself one day.

Post-mark of
my Uncle's
Christmas letter.

Daddy told me about the gold mine on his last visit home. He has gone back to Kilimanjaro and we hope to go early in 1953.