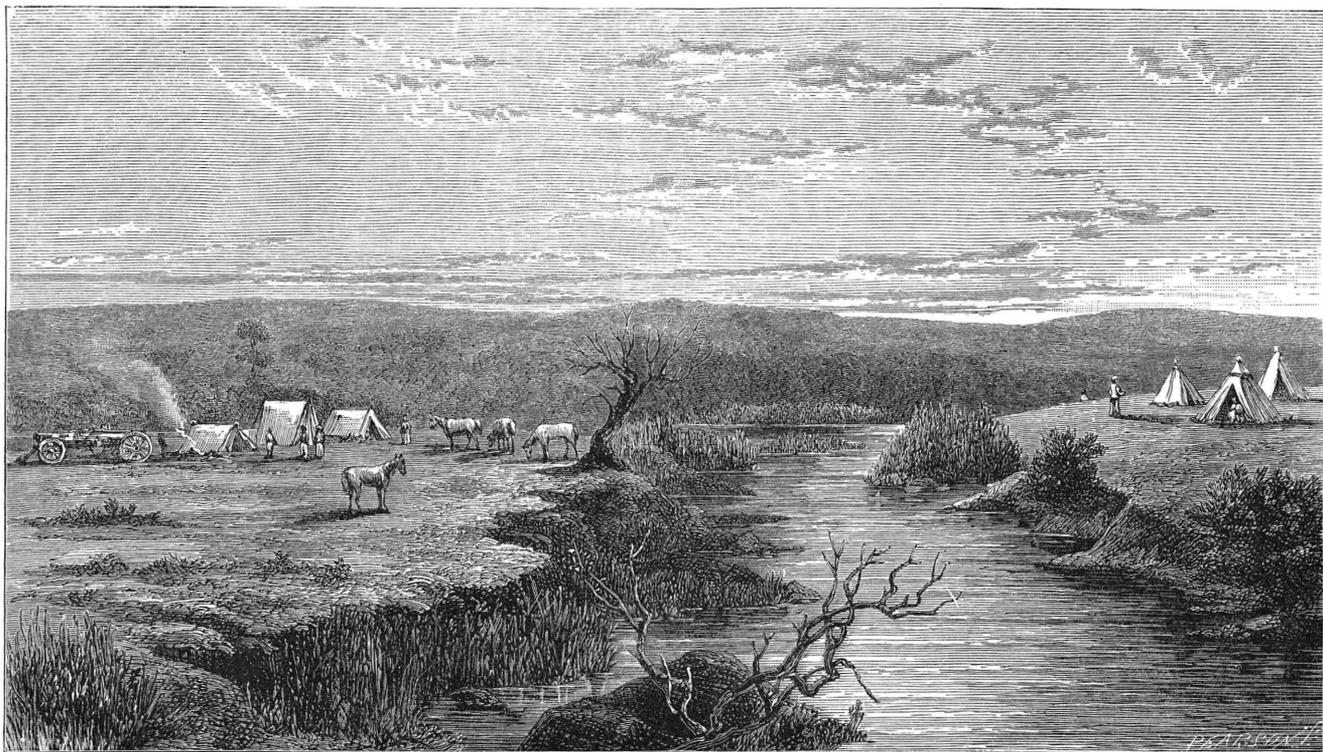


We were just in time to lay in another supply of new-laid eggs at one of the stores, and secure some fresh milk at three shillings a bottle, when the mess president arrived in hot haste,—as usual behind hand, and full of jealousy and reproach that we had stolen a march on him. Poor man! he was assailed with jeers and chaff, which he received good-humouredly enough, all the while grumbling and magnifying his misfortunes. Captain Beresford made a successful raid on an old lady's pet garden, and partly by threats and partly by force induced her to part with a goodly supply of fresh vegetables,—a veritable luxury, and one in which we had not indulged for many a long day. Altogether we returned from Heidelberg loaded with provisions, and followed by two Kaffirs bearing the body of a sheep just freshly killed, on one of whose legs we proposed to feast that night, ignoring our rations of trek with becoming disdain. Invitations were freely dispensed and accepted, and no happier or merrier party congregated round a festive board that night than the one in question. What matter if the plates were tin instead of silver (they were hot, and that was a great matter),—if the cups were of the same metal instead of crystal? The dinner was good, the circum-



OUR CAMP ON THE KLIP RIVER.

“The March to Potchefstroom.”

General Buller's.

stances were pleasant, and every one was happy and cheery ; and with all this what banquet could compare ?

The next day we left Heidelberg at an early hour, and rejoined the troops, who had been travelling over the Veldt by some cross roads, five or six miles on our way. We had but a short march before us, expecting to encamp that day in the bush country, which was something to look forward to, and we promised ourselves a good cheery blaze that night. But the wood proved very thorny and green ; the labour sustained in hacking down a single bush could find no reward ; and we were forced to return to the burning of manure, which constituted our everyday fires, and very hot ones it made too.

On the banks of the Klip River we found the prettiest camping ground of the whole march. Bushes grew down to the water's edge, and the broad stream, with its deep, clear pools and swift running water, was especially inviting. We pitched our tents in a very cosy little nook, without crossing over, which, however, the General did, and his tents faced ours on the opposite bank. The troops likewise crossed on their arrival, and it was interesting to watch the passage of the infantry. They were all very

dusty and footsore, and evidently very thirsty, to judge by the manner in which they drank long draughts of the river water previous to taking off their boots and stockings, in obedience to the command given to do so. Many of them were so tender of foot that they could not face the shingle with their bare soles, and were forced to slip into their boots again before crossing. It took some time to get them all over, and into their stockings and boots once more, by which time the sun was wellnigh down on the horizon, for we had had a long march that day. Here the General received visits from several loyal Boers, who came to find out what was going to be done with the Transvaal and themselves. They were funny-looking old gentlemen, one so hidden in a large wide hat that it was with difficulty his chin could be caught sight of. They had a long conversation, but whether it was satisfactory or not I never inquired, and when it came to an end they waddled off.

Marching forward for the next few days brought us close to our journey's end, and on Monday, the 13th of June, Loup Spruit hove in sight, where, pitching our tents that night, we congratulated ourselves on the fact that the next time we did so it would be to encamp in Potchefstroom.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COLD MORNING — POTCHEFSTROOM — TRIUMPHAL ENTRY '
—DISGUST—THE RUINED FORT—A SORTIE—FRESH PLANS.

It froze hard during the night at Loup Spruit, and the cold was exceedingly severe. All night long I shivered and trembled and shook, cowering beneath the blankets, which seemed powerless to afford warmth ; indeed, had it not been for the protection afforded my feet by my two little dogs, I verily believe these useful appendages to man's comfort would have dropped off altogether. No sooner did the first gray streak of dawn begin to appear than I was up and prowling about outside the tent. Close by shivered and trembled the mules, their coats shining with frost, and their tails tucked between their legs in abject misery. I consoled them with a liberal supply of mealies and oats mixed up together, which they were not slow to appreciate ; and the crunching and munching which ensued put some life into the silence

which seemed to reign all round. Then I fed the horses, and in the dim light folded and shook out my blankets, and wrapped them up in their waterproof sheet. Everything that could be collected I brought together in preparation for an early start, after which I got a fire to burn, and indulged myself with a cup of hot chocolate. This put some warmth into me, and I began to revive; at half-past five the *reveille* sounded; the distant camp began to stir; in General Buller's tent, close by, a light commenced to burn; soon his cook had an opposition fire going, and we were fairly launched into a new day.

Without waiting for his waggon, which followed with ours, the General started off as soon as dressed, with Captain Browne, to ride forward to Potchefstroom. Several matters had to be arranged before the arrival of the troops, and a suitable spot chosen for their camping-ground. Anxious also to get on ahead, we were not very long behind him, and at starting sent our horses along at a smart gallop, in order to get them and ourselves warm. By the side of the waggon track we frequently passed small bands of half-naked, shivering Kaffirs, who were huddled together on the ground, indulging in their morning's sleep. These natives were on the trek to

the Diamond Fields. They had probably performed many hundred miles on foot, and had still a long distance before them ere they reached their journey's end.

With the appearance of the sun the frost vanished, and about midday the heat became intense. Our road led through several low shady woods, for whose shelter we were very grateful, and the sight of trees once more was indeed refreshing. About one o'clock, emerging from the last of these pleasant retreats, we came in sight of Potchefstroom. "There it is," we called out to each other; and in the distance a long line of houses, nestling in weeping willows, told us that at last we had looked upon this famous town. On the outskirts we were met by Captain Browne, who had been sent by the General to guide the waggons to the camping-ground; as they followed close behind us, he turned, and we all rode into Potchefstroom together.

It was a quaint little place, with its long row of unevenly built houses, its broad, sandy street, over which the weeping willows arched and cast their welcome shade. Cosy cottages peeped from their green retreats, and many a curious glance followed us as we rode along. I saw few with the sign of welcome on their features; the English

colonists did not see the use of our troops marching through a town which they had not conquered or taken by force of arms ; the Boers regarded the matter with contempt ; and the very children jeered in imitation of the sentiments they had heard expressed at home.

I noticed, as I rode through the principal and in fact only real street of Potchefstroom, that many of the larger stores were shut up ; one very big one particularly attracted my attention, and on making inquiries as to whom it belonged, I was informed that the owner had suffered severely during the siege, and had been forced to close up the building. The windows were smashed in, and all the stores had been taken away by the Boers, many of whom might have been seen parading the streets dressed up and fitted out in the trophies of their marauding hands. The original owner had departed from the place, and had sought to console himself by sending in a large claim to the Government—£200,000 I heard mentioned as the amount ; but whether eventually he obtained any recompense in the settlement of such claims by the Royal Commission, I have not heard.

We met General Buller in one of the little side streets, who gave us instructions where the

tents were to be pitched; and having ridden on and chosen the ground, we left the two waggons belonging to ourselves and the General in charge of the servants, and rode back to witness the entry of the troops. The order in which they moved was as follows:—First came the 94th with bayonets fixed, looking very dusty and not at all imposing; they were followed by the Inniskillings in half sections, which was done, I suppose, in order to extend the column, and give it as much effect as possible. The rear was composed of the 15th Hussars, mounted on their little colonial horses, and looking the picture of soldiers. Here were no weeds or weaklings, but men on whom one could depend in time of emergency. Soldiers of the old system, with long service to commend them, they presented a martial appearance indeed. My impression was evidently shared by two Boers, who had been standing close by me as the troops filed past. On their stolid countenances no expression of approval or disapproval could be traced, and I purposely stood near them in order to catch any remarks that this pageant might elicit. But they preserved religious silence until the 15th made their appearance. “Here are the blue coats,” said one; and when the troop had passed by, the other curtly

observed, "Yes, those blue coats *are* soldiers, if you like."

Riding on to the head of the column, I was able to take more notice of the manner in which the troops were received. A few feeble cheers strove to make themselves heard; but they sounded more like wails than anything else, and the onlookers consisted chiefly of Boers. The greater portion of the English colonists manifested their disapproval of our home policy by closing up their houses and keeping within; the few who did put in an appearance regarding it with grave disapproval. A well-dressed-looking Englishman who stood near came up and addressed me:—

"How long do those troops remain here?" he asked, "and why have they come?"

"It is a pretty well understood matter," I replied, "that the sealed orders of the General will instruct him to remain at Potchefstroom two or three days, and then march down country, whence he came."

"And he leaves here no garrison—nothing?" again inquired my friend.

"I believe not," I answered. "We have marched through the Transvaal to assert the Queen's authority; we shall now display a Union

Jack, burn a bonfire, and then return with honour. It is almost a foregone conclusion that the Transvaal is to be returned to the Boers. This march through the country is doubtless done to pacify the public at home."

"Pah!" said the man, turning away; "they need not have troubled to come; we don't want them. The sooner they go the better."

The expression of opinion volunteered so freely by this colonist was but a type of the universal feeling that I found everywhere prevalent amongst Englishmen. Disgust and contempt had asserted their reign, and the minds of the settlers harboured all that was bitter and unfor-giving towards the authors of a policy which they asserted would be their ruin. In a stationer's window I saw two large prints—one of Lord Beaconsfield, the other of Mr. Gladstone. Garlands of *immortelle* flowers adorned the frame of the former, and the words, "Sacred to the Memory of Him who brought us Peace with Honour," were prettily arranged in letters composed of many-coloured flowers at the bottom of the picture. Close by, draped in crape, hung the likeness of Mr. Gladstone reversed, and the words "Death to Honour" arranged in letters composed of faded flowers.

“Is not that a rather petty way of showing your spleen?” I inquired of the master of the shop, who stood at the door.

“It is as we feel, madam,” he answered; and I felt silenced by this rebuke, for the reply evidently came straight from the man’s heart, and disclosed the genuine feeling of its author. He, however, to please me, and at my particular request, reversed the picture of Mr. Gladstone to a more dignified position, though he refused to remove the inscription above it; and I having superintended this process to my satisfaction, turned to watch the pageant once more. But the troops had all filed by, and the triumphant entry into Potchefstroom was over; so, leaving the main street and my discontented friends, I rode back to camp and luncheon.

I found our tents pitched close to a little stream immediately facing the ruined fort of Potchefstroom. On our right, and in front of us also, was the cemetery, enclosed by strong brick walls. From its north-western face a cavalier, or raised earthwork, had been made by the Boers, extending in length some 400 yards, and joining on to a sap, from which they could look into the English trench that ran up from the fort to within a few yards of their own earthwork. Between

the two was the magazine, to command which the English trench had been dug; but it must have been dangerous work getting at the stores in such close proximity to the Boers. At the back of our tents much evidence yet remained to show the havoc committed during the siege. Potchefstroom itself was in the hands of the Boers at that time, and the hastily erected fort in which the besieged held out was all that remained to the English. One of the evidences of the havoc wrought by their shells was the minister's house, whose ruins stood not far behind our tents. Struck by one of these missiles, it at once caught fire, and all that now remained were the burnt, charred walls. A line of small houses extending from this spot was riddled with bullets, and the whole appearance of the Tronk, or gaol, was that of disfigurement and ruin.

After luncheon we rode across to the fort itself, distant from our tents not more than 400 yards. To me it appeared a marvel how so many people had managed to squeeze into so small a place; its entire circumference could not have exceeded 250 feet, while the interior space must have been even more limited. All around was ruin, but sufficient remained to give one a fair idea of the structure and size of the fort, and a good insight into the

heroic efforts of the besieged, who must have worked hard to have made it so strong. When they first occupied it the defences consisted of a slight ditch and some mealie bags, which, under the gallant hands that toiled so bravely, eventually assumed more imposing proportions. The sufferings of the besieged must at the very outset have been terrible, in consequence of the scarcity of water. Expeditions had to be sent out some 1200 yards from the fort, under cover of darkness, to bring it in, all digging inside for a long time proving fruitless, until the Royal Artillery found some, at a depth of sixteen feet, on the left front, which fortunately supplied them throughout the three months. However, for the first fortnight they do not seem to have lacked provisions, as full rations of tinned meat and biscuits were issued; but from this period the rations were reduced to half, and mealies made to serve the loss of the other portion, until, towards the last days of the siege, even mealies began to fail, they having been for some time the only food left to the reduced, suffering, but gallant garrison.

It was found necessary, after a time, to destroy the powder in the town magazine. This lay, as I have already remarked, some 200 yards to the right rear of the fort. The besieged, however,

occupied it, and by means of a sap carried on communication with its defenders. Up to within a few yards of it the Boers had also run a sap, and would before long have reached the magazine, had not Lieutenant Hay, acting under orders, made a sortie with ten volunteers for the purpose of dislodging the workers. Under heavy fire, and across an open space of over 250 yards, this gallant little band charged. Two of our men fell, and for a few minutes the rest lay down to get their breath. When they rose to renew the charge thirty Boers were seen making off in the trench, on whom a heavy fire was directed, which told severely amongst the enemy. Up these saps and round to the Boer trenches I rode. Very little of the dangerous work had been done by the Boers, who had forced into this service all their civilian prisoners and numerous Kaffirs. It must have been hard for these poor fellows to feel that they were working against their own friends, and still worse for those in the fort, whose every retaliating shell or aggressive bullet often laid low those whose work in the trenches was compulsory.

We found the graves of its gallant defenders not far removed from the right rear of the fort. They were in a terrible state of untidyness, which

was well in keeping with both the interior and exterior of the place. Torn clothes, worn-out boots, old tins, helmets, and many other articles, lay scattered about in great profusion, giving ample proof of the recent occupation. Several bands of men were sent up from the camp by the General's orders to tidy up the graves and clear out the fort. At first there was some talk of levelling it to the ground, but the project was abandoned as involving too much time and labour in the few days' sojourn at Potchefstroom, which had been set aside to rest and refresh the men. On our return to camp we were somewhat agreeably surprised at receiving a visit from a gentleman, who informed us that his name was Captain Baily, and that he was nothing more or less than own brother to our "Jim Baily" of English renown. We gave him a hearty welcome, and accepted an invitation which he gave us on taking leave that afternoon to visit his farm, which stood about a mile distant on the outskirts of Potchefstroom. He bore away with him a present we made him in the shape of a leg of mutton! which he assured us would prove a great treat, nothing but trek being available in those parts.

The remainder of that afternoon and the following day was spent in seeing the sights of

Potchefstroom. True, there was little or nothing to be seen; but we enjoyed ourselves fairly well, wandering about the place, inspecting the ruins, and chattering with various members of the English colony, who entertained us with many a stirring tale of the late siege. Then it was pleasant to feel that for those few hours at least there would be no wearisome trekking or necessity for exertion; and the reaction of one day's idleness acted with good effect on the spirits and tempers of our party. It was not unneeded either, for we had in prospect on the morrow a long ride before us, a distance of over one hundred miles to traverse, in a journey that had been planned to visit Pretoria. The arrangements were, to leave our waggon behind with the troops in charge of Captain Beresford and two servants, while we two, accompanied by my groom, and taking with us one extra horse to carry the packs, should push forward to Pretoria. It was with some misgivings that we settled these plans; the country we should have to traverse was unknown to us, and the instructions given by various people with a view of putting us on the right way were so vague and contradictory that we felt as wise when they were over as before they had been given. However, to Pretoria we had to get, and to

Pretoria we meant to get, by hook or crook. The few preparations that had to be made were gone through the evening before, and in anticipation of an early start next morning we ate our dinner an hour before the usual time, and sought our couches to rest and sleep. I say to rest and sleep; but this proved harder than we imagined possible, for with the rising moon there arose also along the length and breadth of Potchefstroom a wild medley of ghastly sounds. Prolonged and dismal howls rent the air; the barking of dogs, the screams of cats, and the discordant crowing of hundreds of cocks, suddenly burst forth, producing the most excruciating noise. Seldom have I heard before sounds so discordant and horrible. They banished all wish or desire to sleep, and for over an hour we were doomed to listen to their disgusting melody. Then the angel of peace drew nigh as by magic; the uproar ceased; silence and rest took possession of the moonlit night: their soothing influence made sleep once more possible, and availing myself of the opportunity, it was not long before I sought the Land of Nod. Yet even there my rest was disturbed, and my dreams haunted by the wild notes of the nightingales of Potchefstroom still ringing in my ears.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNRISE ON POTCHEFSTROOM—FAREWELL POTCHEFSTROOM—
FRUITLESS INTERROGATION—TWO WELCOMES—DISTANCE
CALCULATED BY TIME—AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE—AN
UNSAVOURY MESS—A GENIAL COMPANION—CAMPING OUT—
A LONELY GRAVE—PRETORIA HO!—DEVOTION OF PUNCH
—A MIDNIGHT LETTER.

DAY was breaking when I awoke on the following morning, and the pale flush tinging the eastern sky gave warning of the sun's approach. The air was cold and crisp, but its freshness drove sleep away and infused life and vigour into the sluggard body, which shrunk from its first chill touch. A glorious morning it was; I remember it amongst all others for the grandeur and beauty of its sunrise. The town of Potchefstroom and the surrounding plains seemed enveloped in one large golden wave, and the rosy tints on a brilliant sky added to the rare and exquisite colours which suffused the whole scene. Not a morning to waste in dozing away in a stuffy tent, thought I to myself, as I listened to several prolonged snores

hard by. "Get up, you lazy creatures!" I shouted, and the snores ceased; a general shaking went on inside each tent—proof sufficient that the inmates were stirring; and then one or two lazy bipeds made their appearance, with the pinched, cold look of unwilling risers deeply marked on their features. It always amused me to watch Captain Beresford emerge from his tent, insomuch as he was obliged to do so on all fours. This tent, which we called the blue bedroom, to distinguish it from a similar one that went by the name of the green-room, was nothing but a tiny *tente d'abri*, so low and narrow that a small child would have to bend to get inside. As Captain Beresford stood considerably over six feet, the spectacle presented by his attempts to get in and out of his bedroom was extremely ludicrous. On the morning in question, in trying to be more agile than usual, he caught his back against the top of the tent, and the whole thing came bodily to the ground. This catastrophe was not serious, however, and a few minutes were sufficient to restore the fallen edifice. We would fain have lingered over our last breakfast together, and the prospect of a separation from the column and our cheery friends made us quite melancholy; but still a change is always pleasant, and the look-out was not so dreary as to

fill us with any inordinate pangs of regret. We were going to fresh scenes of interest; we knew that at our journey's end we had hospitable friends ready to welcome us; while the quick travelling in which we should indulge would be a welcome change in the weary jog of a monotonous march. So, breakfast over, we lost no time in making a start. It was found necessary to take two pack-horses, which increased the number of our animals to five. One of these became the charge of my husband, my groom superintending the other; and the place I occupied was that of whipper-in, should the animals lag or show signs of laziness. Having started them going, I galloped down to the headquarter tents to take leave of General Buller, after which, by following a short cut across a broad plain at the back of the camp, I managed to overtake them on the outskirts of Potchefstroom. A few minutes later a turn in the road hid the town from our view, and with its disappearance we felt that our journey had really begun, and that we were well launched on our way to Pretoria.

For the first hour or so we cantered along gaily enough; then the heat became oppressive; our horses began to show signs of distress, and we were forced to slacken speed to a considerable

extent. Occasionally a bye road would help to confuse us in our desire to keep on the right track, and a good deal of discussion as to which was the correct course to take would ensue. Inquiry of passing Boers served little to enlighten us; to our queries of "Pretoria?"—accompanied by signs and pointing in the direction in which we imagined the place lay—they returned a stolid stare, or ejaculated a few incomprehensible syllables, which only confused us and left us as ignorant of what we desired to learn as before. A large waggon containing a whole family of several generations passed close by us on one of these occasions, the old Boer who carried the whip appearing a very patriarch, with his long gray beard and snow-white hair. A strong span of twelve fat, sleek oxen lazily followed their forelouper, a tiny little Kaffir boy, who could not have been more than seven or eight years old; while from the interior of the hooded vehicle peeped and peered many women's faces, some young and comely, others old and ugly, and innumerable children of all ages and sizes, whose curiosity was aroused to have a look at the "Englishmann." On signing to the old Boer to halt, the most extraordinary cries and sounds at once proceeded from his lips, sounds which I should have thought

sufficient to frighten any animal into frantic exertion. But the effect on the oxen was quite the reverse, and on the forelouper giving vent to a long admonishing whistle, the animals came to a dead stop, and the rumbling, unwieldy vehicle halted. "Wo ist Pretoria?" inquired I, accompanying the interrogation with the usual signs and pointing. All the reply that was vouchsafed, however, was a grunt from the Boer and a giggle or two from the women. This was confusing; and, as we had no time to waste, there was nothing for it but to ride on at once, after bidding an ironical adieu to the old Dutchman, who replied only by a stolid stare. Happily, a little farther on the road we fell in with a spider coming from the direction in which we were going. It was driven by an Englishman, who at once gave us the information we desired, accompanied by instructions which served to assist us greatly on our journey. On learning that we were bound for Pretoria, he begged us to tell Sir Evelyn Wood that we had met him thus far on his journey, adding that he was the bearer of a despatch from the General to Major Clarke and General Buller at Potchefstroom. Promising to do so we parted, and with confidence as to keeping the right road, at least for some

distance farther, we endeavoured to make up our lost ground by putting on the pace a bit. Fifteen miles on the road brought us to a place called Stompoerfontein, where we decided to off-saddle for half an hour and give the horses a feed and a roll. This was found to be most necessary, as the pony ridden by my husband already began to show signs of fatigue; and as we had over fifty miles more before us that day the look-out was not as reassuring as might have been desired under the circumstances. Stompoerfontein was not an inviting looking place; lonely, dreary, and consisting of only three houses, all of which had the appearance of being deserted, we were somewhat at a loss where to off-saddle. As time, however, was precious, we rode up to the door of the most presentable of these dwellings and endeavoured to obtain an entrance. After repeated knockings a tall, fat, sour-faced *frau* made her appearance, and in a harsh voice and unintelligible tongue, evidently—though we did not understand her—demanded our requirements. Pointing to the horses I made signs that we wished to off-saddle; but her only reply was to slam the door in our faces, and we heard the key turned and double turned in the lock—proof sufficient that for us there was no admittance to the mansion of this

inhospitable Dutchwoman. However, there was nothing for it but to make the best of matters; so, giving vent to our wrath in compliments the reverse of polite against all Boers and Dutchmen in general, we prepared to continue our journey not a little crestfallen. But help was nearer at hand than we anticipated; a turn in the road brought us in sight of a tiny, tumble-down-looking shanty, at the door of which stood a man smoking a short clay pipe. He was a rough-looking creature enough, but there was something in his features when I looked at them which convinced me that they were not those of a Boer. "Good morning, mister," I called out to him; and it was like music to one's ears to hear the answer returned in the tongue of the old country. Here we felt sure of a welcome, and a few minutes later saw the horses enjoying their roll and feed of crushed mealies, with which the good fellow hastened to supply them. We found him, like many others, a sufferer from the late war. Previous to the Boer insurrection he had been comparatively well-to-do and in comfortable circumstances; but the poverty to which he had been reduced was now all too apparent, and the dejection into which he had fallen was painful to witness. His wife informed me that they had

lost everything, and that she feared her husband would never sufficiently recover from the bitterness of his misfortunes to endeavour to build up once more his fallen house. When I informed them that the English Government had decided to return the Transvaal to the Boers, their indignation knew no bounds. "This, then, is the reward we receive for being loyal!" exclaimed the man; "throughout the war neither pressure nor persecution would attract me to espouse the Dutch side; my loyalty has been my ruin, and I must be a beggar for the rest of my days."

It was impossible not to feel the greatest sympathy for the unfortunate man, and all I could think of in the way of comfort and consolation I endeavoured to bring forward to cheer him up; but every effort was unavailing, and there being no time to spare in further attempts, I relinquished the case as a bad job. It took a full quarter of an hour to saddle up once more and get the packs firmly fastened on to the sumpter horses. In this we were actively assisted by Mr. Macdonald—for such was the name of our hospitable host—who would accept of no remuneration for his pains; neither would he consent to take any payment for the horses' feeds, which caused me much embarrassment, until the happy thought of giving it

to one of his boys suddenly struck me. When we started to continue our journey we did so with the kindly and genuine welcome of these poor people deeply impressed upon us, and it will be long before the memory of their ready hospitality is effaced from my mind.

We got over the next twenty miles easily enough, the rest at Stompoerfontein having done the tired horse good. But 15 stone is a great weight to carry through any journey, and it was decided before starting on the next stage to transfer the packs from one of the horses that carried them to the back of this animal, so that a fair division of labour might be shared alike. We were about this time beginning to look out for "Wonderfontein," which our late host had informed us lay some three hours and a half distant from his place. In these parts distance is always measured by time, and the horse's pace is regulated to an average of six miles an hour. Instead of inquiring the distance of any passer-by, it would be necessary, if you wished to save explanation, to ask how many hours it was to the place one wished to go to, and the reply would be at once prompt and to the point. From several passing Kaffirs we strove to find out where Wonderfontein lay, as we felt certain that we must be somewhere

in its close vicinity ; but their replies were unintelligible, and as they all pointed in different directions, we felt that there would be some difficulty in deciding which was the right one. To add to our perplexity, the road suddenly branched off into three separate ways, the wheel marks in each being as deeply traced on the one as on the other, so that we could jump to no conclusions that the one which appeared most used would be the correct line to pursue. In this dilemma, we suddenly beheld a waggon slowly approaching us, while in an another direction I caught sight of two mounted Boers crossing some water not far off. Leaving the others to elicit what they could from the occupants of the waggon, I galloped down to the water's edge, and, trusting to the influence of distance to make German intelligible, I boldly inquired in that language the right road to Wonderfontein. To my surprise the reply was returned in the same tongue, and the speaker, riding back, courteously gave me the information required, as well as minute directions as to how I should find the farm of one Oberholzen, a loyal Boer, at whose house we wished to off-saddle. On rejoining the others I found them vainly trying to induce a Boer to put them on the right road ; the information I brought put

an end, however, to any further useless interrogation; and following the instructions given me by the courteous German, it was not many minutes before we arrived in sight of Oberholzen's farm. At the door of his house stood the old man ready to receive us; by his side was a young woman and a small group of children; and as we rode up a gentleman appeared from the interior of the building, and, coming forward to meet me, begged permission to render any assistance in his power in the matter of interpreting or affording us help in any way. Somewhat surprised, I inquired of him how he knew who we were; to which he replied that he had heard at Potchefstroom of our intended journey, and being about to make the same himself he had hoped to fall in with us on the road. By starting at an earlier hour and by taking a short cut he had, however, missed us that morning, but he trusted to be of use to us during the remainder of the journey if we would permit him to have that pleasure. This was an agreeable surprise; visions of our ride being greatly facilitated by the addition of this gentleman to the party began to arise, and we congratulated ourselves on the fortunate *rencontre*. With the assistance of our host's grandsons, two young boys of twelve or fourteen years old, we

unsaddled the horses and attended to their wants, liberal feeds of barley and chaff being strewed on the ground for them to indulge in. On going inside we found a woman nursing the inevitable baby and surrounded by half a dozen young children of all sizes and ages. The old man, Oberholzen, was exceedingly anxious to make us comfortable, and jabbered away without end; but his polite sentences were entirely lost upon us, and I was not sorry when our new friend made his appearance and put matters on a more equal footing by translating the old gentleman's speeches. Of these we had a succession, while the *frau* prepared some refreshment; and I must confess that this latter process filled me with a good deal more interest than the stories of "mine host," for the breakfast we had partaken of that morning had been but a hurried meal, and the cravings of hunger were beginning to assert themselves.

At last we were called to the meal; and the old man having taken his seat at the head of the table and signed to us to place ourselves beside him, the children were next permitted to range themselves at the lower end of the board. Grace was then gone through,—a very elaborate affair, somewhat resembling a short service; and at last, just as I was beginning to wonder when the whole

business would come to an end, and we should be allowed to feed, the dish was brought in. For some time during the carving process I racked my brain to discover what the savoury mess before me consisted of. It was the funniest looking concoction I had ever seen, and seemed to consist of fat, and fat alone. On inquiry our new friend informed me that it was boiled mutton-bone, the usual fare of the Boer, and that even at that moment old Oberholzen was descanting on its excellence. Hungry as I was, I could not agree with him ; it was a dish that might have delighted the heart of an Esquimaux by the preponderance of its fatty and glutinous substance ; but I must say, when I had bolted the last mouthful, the sigh of relief to which I gave vent was indeed genuine and heartfelt.

In course of the conversation sustained through the interpretation of our new friend, whose name I made out to be Mr. Latour, Oberholzen informed us that he had disowned two sons for fighting against the English during the war. This sin, he asserted, he would never forgive them as long as he lived, and proceeded to question us on the future policy of the Government in regard to the Transvaal. I could not bring myself to break the truth to him, and left it to others to inform

this loyal old man. Probably ere now he has tasted of the gratitude of nations, and felt the revenge of his countrymen, whom he refused to join in their rebellious and insurrectionary movement.

The repast being over, we went out to see if our horses had finished theirs. This they had done; so saddles and bridles were once more brought out and preparations made to continue our way. The whole family assembled to see us off, including the woman with the baby; and as it is the custom in these parts to shake hands with everybody all round, the time occupied in so doing was somewhat long. But at last the final handshake was gone through; and, tendering to our aged host our final thanks for his kindness and hospitality, we started for the Veldt once more.

The country through which we passed was flat and uninteresting, its vast track of veldt appeared wholly deserted, save when now and then at long intervals a house would appear in the distance. Beyond a few travelling Kaffirs trekking to the Diamond Fields, human beings were scarce, and the deserted country seemed given up to the undivided possession of a few springbok and another species of antelope whose name I did not know. Altogether it would have been a weary ride had it not been for the cheery conversation

of Mr. Latour. He informed us that he was an American, and had held important posts under the English Government in Pretoria and elsewhere; he was also the chief auctioneer of the place, and before the war had driven a thriving trade. But the outbreak had been the cause of great loss to him, and the proposed cession of the Transvaal to the Boers by the English Government would put the climax on his misfortunes and accelerate his ruin. Though he grew despondent at times, he was generally cheery enough, and the anecdotes which he recounted of that period during the sieges of Potchefstroom and Pretoria served to interest us during the most monotonous portion of the journey. At the end of thirty miles the horses began to show signs of fatigue, and the day was fast passing away. We were desirous of reaching a place called Grobler's Farm, some nine miles farther on; but it was impossible to proceed without another off-saddle, and consequently we were not sorry when, on turning a corner of the road we were pursuing, a large wayside house suddenly presented itself. This, Mr. Latour informed us, was the dwelling of a friend of his, Mr. Jacoby by name; and the gentleman in question soon put in an appearance from the interior of a waggon, in which he was holding a *levee* of friends. During

the twenty minutes off-saddle, which was the longest period we could afford to give the horses, Mr. Jacoby entertained us in his own house with coffee and conversation. He spoke English fluently, and seemed a most intelligent and well educated man. During the siege of Pretoria he had linked his fortunes with those of the British and turned his arms against his rebellious countrymen. The news of the proposed cession of the Transvaal which we brought struck him like a thunderbolt, and for a long time he remained incredulous. Then when he began at last to perceive that we were seriously speaking the truth, his indignation knew no bounds. I will pass over the remarks which ensued, as repetition of an oft-repeated story; but it was impossible to blame the man for the contempt which this friend-forsaking policy inspired in his hitherto brave and loyal breast. The last nine miles were wearisome enough; the horses were beginning to grow stiff and footsore, and we were obliged to take them along quite quietly. But at last, as the sun began to sink below the horizon, Grobler's hove in sight; and the tired animals, scenting oat hay and other delicacies, brightened up considerably and made haste to arrive at what their instinct told them was their night's resting-place.

But Grobler's, reached, was not the place we had anticipated it to be. The house was full of Boers, and the only accommodation that could be offered was a small and very dirty bedroom, one look at which was sufficient to dispel any wish to become its habitant. Procuring some bread and a few mutton chops, we accordingly retired to a convenient camping ground close to a delightful little stream, where the horses were tethered and blanketed and liberally supplied with oat hay, which, besides affording a favourite repast, was the means of making them a most luxurious couch. So comfortable did they look that we at once thought we could not do better than imitate them, and, a few more bundles of the oat hay being procured from Grobler's, we laid out for ourselves very comfortable beds on a smooth, hard piece of ground close to the horses. Then a fire was lit, the chops were cooked, and a hearty meal followed, enjoyed all the more because we had earned it after our long ride of seventy miles that day. Dinner over, I sauntered up to the inn to look about me and examine the place at my leisure. A fragrant smell of tobacco and square-face (gin) pervaded the air; and as I peeped into the apartment which served the purpose of dining, sleeping, and drinking room combined, I congratulated

myself on having decided to encamp in the open air. Round a long wooden table some twenty or thirty Boers were congregated. Every man was smoking and drinking, and many were playing cards. From the tenor of the conversation I made out that one of the players was the murderer of the man Malcolm (who had been killed during the war, at Edgson's store), his companions in the game being his own keepers. This man was being conveyed a prisoner to Pretoria, to take his trial for the murder before a Royal Commission; but the anticipation of conviction did not seem to trouble him much, and, discussing the matter, I heard him openly vaunt the inability of any one to convict him, describing the trial which would take place as a sham and a farce, gone through with merely to satisfy the English public at home. This assertion was greeted with a round of applause and much laughter, provoked by several remarks of the landlord, Grobler himself, who spoke of England and the English people in terms the reverse of complimentary. As the conversation was neither pleasing nor edifying I soon tired of listening to it, and, leaving the men to their cards, square-face, and bad tobacco, I returned to camp and my straw bed. My head once on the saddle (I was going to say the pillow!), I

remember very little more beyond a bright moon, a clear night, and a brilliant, star-bespangled heaven. Contrasting these favourably with the smoky atmosphere I had not long quitted, and weary with the exertions of the day, I speedily fell asleep. We were up and stirring the following morning before five o'clock, and an early start was made. Indeed we were already a good many miles on the way before the sun rose, for we wished to reach Pretoria before midday—added to which the cool hours of morning were considered the best travelling time for the horses, who started rather stiff and footsore. It was not long, however, before they warmed to their work, and we went along merrily enough. Crossing the Crocodile River we came upon Edgson's store, and halted for a few minutes to visit the grave of the murdered Malcolm. It was close by the roadside, immediately facing the store, and half concealed by some thick trees which formed part of a little wood or jungle, which grew right down to the banks of the Crocodile—a lonely resting place, which would soon be effaced and forgotten, while he who lay beneath would sleep on unavenged, for, to repeat the words of the murderer himself, "he defied conviction, and looked upon the trial

which would ensue as a mere sham and farce, gone through with but to satisfy the English public."

The store itself was in a most dilapidated state, and the late owner had trekked away from the scene of ruin and desolation with a curse on his lips, levelled both at the Boers, the authors of his ruin, and at that administration which had permitted these acts of rapine and spoliation. Far away he had wandered to the green estancias of South America, a ruined man, with no means or opportunity to seek redress; all that remained to him he had left behind, and a fresh life of labour and struggle would have to be faced and gone through, ere the ruin wrought during those few lawless days could be repaired or forgotten.

The present inhabitant of the place was a young Englishman who had taken possession of the dilapidated domicile. He was very anxious that we should off-saddle and partake of his hospitality, but we were forced to decline in consequence of the necessity of pushing forward with as little delay as possible, in order to reach Pretoria before midday. After leaving the Crocodile we forded successively the Tokeskey and Hennops rivers, at the former of which a short off-saddle took place for breakfast. This

was close to the small location of Dritz, which consisted of one or two houses only, and a forsaken and dilapidated store. Then, as the sun began to strike down with all the intenseness of midday heat, distressing alike to ourselves and to the horses, the hilly and rugged outskirts of Pretoria hove in sight, and a few minutes later saw us threading their winding intricacies previous to entering the circular basin or plain in which the town lay.

It was with feelings of unmixed satisfaction that we felt our weary journey was at length ended. One hundred and eight miles in twenty-eight hours, including all stoppages and the night's rest, is by no means bad travelling for any horse, and our good steeds had performed the journey pluckily and well. Most of them were little more than ponies, the biggest standing about 14.2, and the smallest 13 hands. This last was a Basuto pony and my favourite mount—a tough little specimen, who could stand any amount of hard work and long distances, provided his one fancy was not denied him. This fancy consisted in always being near and in close attendance upon a cream-coloured mare belonging to my husband. She went by the name of Nancy, was a Zulu pony, and had been all through the

Zulu war. From the first day he saw her, Punch, —for so my pony was called—fell desperately in love; and as you valued your own peace of mind and the comfort of the whole camp, particular attention had to be paid that they were never separated. On one occasion this rule was infringed upon, and Nancy was saddled and sent off with my servant on her back on an errand into Newcastle. No sooner had she disappeared from sight than Punch, who had been growing more fidgety and anxious every moment, set up a wild screech of despair so intense in its misery that it startled every one who heard it; and before any one could get near him to restrain him, he had flung himself back with all his might on the ground, bringing his whole weight to bear against the cord which held him. The toughest hemp could hardly have resisted the shock, and on this particular occasion it broke like thread. Away like lightning went Punch, his heels flourishing defiance at his pursuers, and his shrill, piercing neighs resounding far and wide. In answering echoes came the voice of Nancy from the distance, and silence only was restored when the former had succeeded in rejoining his lady-love. Punch's devotion never grew less; on the contrary, each day bound his affection more closely to

Nancy, and when I left Africa for England, having decided that Punch should be brought over, I was obliged to give instructions that Nancy should accompany him. They came back to this country with the 15th Hussars, and now stand in two large loose boxes side by side at home. Through the bars which divide the boxes Punch is able to keep a continual watch on Nancy; he is very happy and contented because she is near. A comfortable, lazy life he leads, too; he munches his hay and ruminates over his oats with quiet complacency: a pony with great force of character, he doubtless dreams of the hard times of past days, the long, weary trekking and oftentimes doubtful fare. He has probably often ere now contrasted his present quarters with those of other days, and in his sleek well-to-do appearance manifests plainly his appreciation of luxury and ease.

But in my account of Punch and his doings, I have wandered rather wide of Pretoria. Very dusty and travel-stained was our appearance as we approached the town, so much so that my suggestion to encamp on the outskirts was received with favour, and we decided to find some quiet nook where we could encamp for that afternoon and night, proceeding on to Govern-

ment House in the morning. At this point Mr. Latour separated himself from us, and rode on to his own place in the town, while we proceeded to select our ground. Tom was despatched to procure food, and when he returned he was sent off once more in search of the commissariat department, and rations for the horses. All that afternoon we were very busy, and the time slipped away quickly enough. We took our last meal about eight o'clock; then, spreading a blanket under some thick bushes, I rolled myself up in it, and, even more weary than the night before, was soon fast asleep.

It must have been near midnight when a horse treading close to me, and a bright light flashing in my eyes, made me spring up from where I was lying. "Who is it?" I called out; and the answer came back through the darkness in a voice which I knew well. "It is I—Walkinshaw; is this Lady Florence Dixie's encampment?"

"Yes, Walkinshaw," I replied; "here I am; but how did you manage to find us out?"

"I have brought a letter for your ladyship," answered the man; "the General told me to find you, so I hunted about until I did. Will your ladyship read it?" he continued, holding the light and the letter out together.

The envelope was addressed to myself in the handwriting of Sir Evelyn Wood, with the superscription, "No one knows where," meant doubtless as a guide to Walkinshaw, his servant, towards more quickly tracing our whereabouts! This, after an hour's search, the clever fellow had succeeded in doing; but then Walkinshaw is a servant in a thousand, and it would be hard to find his equal. The letter contained an immediate invitation to Government House, and ran as follows :—

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TRANSVAAL,
SOUTH AFRICA, *June 18, 1881.*

DEAR LADY FLORENCE—*On dit* you have arrived, and leave early to-morrow! Pray don't. Come here. Will board you; and if you are bound by the next post-cart, we'll try to add to Sir Beaumont's weight by to-morrow week. If you come to 9 o'clock breakfast, I'll mount you both for a ride to the scene of a fight at 11 A.M. Yours very sincerely,

EVELYN WOOD.

Pens and paper not being handy, I sent back a verbal message by Walkinshaw, to say that we would be at Government House for breakfast; then, bidding the man good-night, I returned to my blanket to resume that sleep which the incident related had interrupted, and ere the sound of his horse's hoofs had died away I was once more in the Land of Nod.

CHAPTER XV.

PLEASANT ANTICIPATION — GOVERNMENT HOUSE — TAKING IT EASILY — STRUBEN'S FARM — A WASTE OF LEAD — A BOER CHAMPION — IMAGINATION'S DREAM.

TOWARDS the early hours of morning it came on to freeze with great severity, and insufficiently provided with wraps as we were, it may be imagined that we suffered a good deal in consequence. One blanket apiece was all that we possessed, and these having been supplied from the commissariat were of poor and thin material. The regulation blanket is not of the warmest, and we had reason to ascertain this to be the case on this occasion. I was not sorry when the rising hour arrived, and I was able to forsake my hard and chilly place of rest. The anticipation of a decent breakfast,—of chairs and tables once more, a warm bath in prospect, and the pleasure of finding one's self again in a real bed, was something to look forward to. The hardships of the past and those of the present seemed to melt away before

the pleasures of anticipation, and I found myself greedily revelling in the advent of those coming joys.

At nine o'clock we saddled Punch and Nancy, and, leaving Tom to pack up the few things that we possessed, we started to look for Government House. A short ride along a straight road, lined with weeping willows, from which pretty little dwelling houses peeped out here and there, brought us in sight of our destination. How cool and shady it looked to us weary travellers—a very paradise, half hidden in trees, the sight of which seemed to invite rest and repose.

Turning in at some gates guarded by two smart-looking sentries of the 21st Royal Scots Fusiliers, we rode up to the front of Government House, and, dismounting, relinquished our ponies to two 15th Hussar orderlies, who came up to receive them. At the same moment Walkinshaw made his appearance, and informed us that everybody was dressing, and breakfast would be ready before long. This was satisfactory information, for I must confess I felt hungry enough; but when it was followed by an offer of a warm bath which could be prepared at once, the satisfaction of the moment was increased and the offer gladly accepted. Following Walkinshaw I

was ushered into a cool little room, which the man informed me had been prepared for myself, and in one corner stood the steaming and inviting bath, in which I soon hastened to indulge.

My toilet completed, I next went in search of the breakfast room. Here I found every one assembled and looking so smart that the worn, travel-stained habit in which I was dressed presented a most shabby spectacle, and strikingly contrasted with the clean orderly appearance of every one. However, they had been living in comparative luxury, while I had been posting along dusty roads; so the contrast was hardly to be wondered at, and if it amused them it bothered me but little. Sir Hercules Robinson appeared in white waistcoat, frock-coat, and well-fitting trousers. Looking at his neatly tied tie, I began to feel myself transported back to London, and to wonder was I really in the Transvaal after all? The military appearance, however, of Sir Evelyn and Major Fraser, as also of his aide-de-camp Captain Slade, dissipated any misgivings or doubts as to my whereabouts, and the friendly greeting of everyone reminded me that we had fallen amongst friends. A hearty breakfast followed, which we both enjoyed and appreciated, during which the plans for the day were discussed

and arranged, and a ride decided on to the scene of the one British victory during the Boer war—The Zwart Koppie—distant about ten or twelve miles from Pretoria. After breakfast Captain Slade went out to order the horses to be in readiness in an hour's time, and I seized the opportunity to ensconce myself in an easy chair in the verandah, which overlooked a shady garden, in which were pitched several tents. Two of these were the bedrooms of Captain Slade and Lieutenant Hamilton, the latter Sir Evelyn Wood's private secretary and brother of Lady Colley. Several larger tents acted the part of offices to the secretaries and those engaged in the work of the Royal Commission, there being no room in the house itself suitable for the purpose, with the exception of the one used by Sir Evelyn Wood himself.

They looked very picturesque, peeping out from amongst the green trees, and the scene was a pretty one. So I thought as, leaning back in my easy chair, I gave myself up to the soothing influences of all around. Outside a hot sun was shining, but it could not penetrate the thick shady awning of the weeping willows, and the verandah was a cool and comfortable spot in consequence. I felt quite sorry when Sir Evelyn made his

appearance booted and spurred for the ride, for I felt that I must be up and stirring, and resented activity with the lazy sloth of one to whom rest was a new and pleasurable enjoyment. Before long Colonel Gildea arrived, which was the signal for a general mount, and in a few minutes we were galloping down the tree-lined streets of Pretoria, a large and merry party. On gaining the outskirts of the town, our road became picturesque and interesting, and the number of natural fortifications formed by the rugged and uneven ground was exceedingly striking.

We got over the ground quickly enough, our gallant leader taking us along at a real good pace, so that distance could scarcely be measured in the ordinary Boer calculation of time! Dull none of us felt; we were in good spirits, as the merry conversation sustained testified to be the case, and every one was surprised when the gables of a large armhouse peeping out from amidst an ocean of green suddenly appeared in sight, and we became aware that we had already got over more than half the distance to be traversed. Under the shade of some giant poplars which surrounded the building we halted to change horses. These we found ready, waiting us in the charge of the faithful Walkinshaw, and that process having been

gone through, we were speedily in readiness to continue the journey. The name of this place was "Strüben's Farm," situated about a mile and a half from "Daniel Erasmus's Farm." During the siege of Pretoria this latter place had served as a laager, with about twenty or thirty waggons, and was garrisoned by a force of a hundred Boers, who maintained a strong position on the left-hand bank of Six-mile Spruit under a hill. To it "Strüben's Farm" served as a kind of outpost, where from twenty to thirty men were placed in laager in an equally strong position.

It was an exceedingly pretty place, but desolate from the fact that the owner no longer lived there. Since the war he had left it altogether, and had placed it in the market. Looking at its cool avenues and glistening lake I could not help thinking that it would be a delightful purchase, and once or twice during the ride that day I found myself seriously contemplating the matter. Having, however, slept over it that night, the decision arrived at in the morning was in the negative. Soon after leaving "Strüben's Farm," we sighted in the distance "The Zwart Koppie," when Sir Evelyn took occasion to air and exercise the knowledge of several officers of the party by asking them severally to calculate the exact dis-

tance which separated it from the place on which, at putting the question, he had pulled up. The replies given were all pretty satisfactory and close within the real distance, Captain Slade just missing complete accuracy by about four yards. On reaching the scene of the engagement we all dismounted and scrambled up the small masses of disjointed rock, of which the "Zwart Kop" is composed. On the summit we clustered round Colonel Gildea, while that officer gave us an interesting account of the attack, and pointed out the different positions occupied by our men in their advance on the Zwart Kop. It was here that the Boers endeavoured to entrap us by treachery, hoisting the flag of truce, upon which the Colonel and his orderly crossed the river and rode towards them, carrying a white handkerchief affixed to a lance. Getting him within easy range, the enemy treacherously opened fire, at which dishonourable act the 21st Fusiliers were at once ordered to advance, and, crossing the river, took the place after some short but sharp fighting.

Before mounting again we followed Sir Evelyn to the Zwart Kop farm close by, which we found dismantled and deserted, and riddled with bullets. It was prettily situated on the edge of a shady

wood, which had proved of much service to our men in their advance, affording them thick covert against the deadly Boer aim. Bullets had left their mark on everything around, and the waste of lead at that period of the fight must have been indeed great. I'm afraid that many of us on this occasion did not sufficiently appreciate the glory of victory, or attach sufficient importance or reverence to the fact that the ground on which we trod was the scene of the one English success during the whole war; perhaps it was that we were in a glib humour that morning, and inclined to ridicule everybody and everything, or it may have been that our ride had made us hungry, and that we were eager for luncheon. Be it as it may, we lost no time in obeying Sir Evelyn's order to mount; and following the General, who started off at a gallop, Zwart Kop and farm disappeared from view,—probably, as we were returning to Pretoria by another road, never to be seen again.

A ride of twenty minutes through a wild rugged country, in which the kraals of the Bapede tribes were thickly scattered about, brought us to the farm of one Senõr Don Malmapius, a Portuguese gentleman, with whom Sir Evelyn had arranged to halt for luncheon that day. I think the worthy