

was the experienced driving of our whip. He certainly was a first-rate coachman, and the six horses were handled by him with the greatest dexterity. They were a wild, well-bred, pulling chestnut team, and gave him no little trouble; but they were real beauties to go, and took us along at a tremendous pace. About ten miles on the road we pulled up at a pretty little wayside inn, where the chestnut team were allowed to go free, and replaced by six bays. Behind these the pace in nowise decreased, neither did the bumpings or joltings, which seemed on the contrary to grow worse and worse as we proceeded. Though I essayed conversation at first, I soon relinquished the attempt as a bad job, turning my attention to the preservation of my arms, which were beginning to feel painful and tender under the rough treatment they were receiving.

This second stage having been accomplished as quickly as the last, a halt of half an hour was called for breakfast opposite a small hotel, where another relay of horses was found awaiting the cart. The place was kept by a Swede and his two pretty daughters, and the cleanliness and air of comfort which surrounded it on all sides was exceedingly pleasant and welcome to us dust-stained travellers. In a small, cool sitting-room,

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breakfast was served, consisting of bacon and eggs done to perfection, two roast chickens, tea, coffee, buttered toast, and some delicious bread and butter. For this sumptuous repast the sum charged was very moderate, two shillings a head being all that was demanded.

Punctual to the minute, Mr. Welch was heard playing a warning tune on the horn outside, which signified that time was up. Out we all bustled, hastening to take our seats, for which operation the impatient little man would give us but scant law. With an elaborate and successful catch of his whip and workmanlike salute, he had put his horses into motion, and before one exactly knew whether one was on or off the cart, the lumbering vehicle was once more flying over the ground.

On nearing the Drakensberg range, we began to enter upon some grand scenery. The country all round became a succession of rocky heights, and the glimpses which I was able here and there to obtain into the valleys below afforded scenes of extreme beauty. The great range itself towered high above us ; and Mr. Welch, in reply to my query as to how we were going to penetrate to the other side of this impenetrable barrier, pointed to a winding pass, high up on the Berg,

which he informed me went by the name of "De Beer's," and was the only means of passage from this side of the Drakensberg to the other. At the base of the mountains, and before beginning the ascent, we halted for a third time opposite an inn of evil appearance, bearing the name of "The Good Hope" Hotel. Here eight strong oxen replaced the team of horses, who were taken out of the cart and led on ahead to the summit by two Kaffirs.

The first portion of the ascent proved very steep and severe, the road, which was the work of recent engineering skill, winding round a perpendicular cliff, which overlooked on the other side a sheer precipice. A few disjointed masses of rock formed the only wall or barricade to provide against the danger of any ascending cart or vehicle slipping backwards and falling over the precipice. It appeared to me a very unsafe position, as, from my seat in the cart, I looked down many hundreds of feet below, and felt that on the powers of a few oxen our lives apparently depended. The strain on the yoke was indeed so great, that at every moment we would come to a stop; then the cart would begin to retrocede towards the yawning gulf, only to be arrested in its course by stones hastily

pushed behind the wheels by the driver of the oxen.

After a bit we got on to safer ground, when any little excitement attendant on the first portion of the ascent came to an end, and we found the occupation of sitting behind the crawling oxen monotonous to a degree. My suggestion to descend and climb the pass on foot was, however, not received with favour by the other occupants of the cart, the extreme heat of a midday sun being regarded as a strong deterrent to any exertion. I was therefore forced to follow my own suggestion alone, and quitting the cart pushed on ahead of my companions, whom I soon left far in the rear. The roadway proving rough and dusty, I left it, and, striking into a mountain path which appeared to lead upwards in the required direction, I quickly succeeded after some difficult scaling in reaching a commanding ridge or ledge of rock, from which I hoped to obtain a good view of the country around. In this hope I was not disappointed. From my eyrie perch a magnificent scene lay stretched at my feet; far away below was "Fair Natal," and to the west the grand, gaunt heights of Basutoland flashed sternly and defiantly in the distance—a portion of the Maluti Mountains

being just distinguishable through the golden haze that trembled on all around. The ranges of the Roode and Witte Bergen in the Orange Free State were distinctly visible, while along the eastern portion of the Drakensberg arose a succession of crags of the strangest shape and appearance, which lost none of their wonder or artistic formation under the many changing influences of the dazzling mirage.

The ledge to which I had gained access was a portion of a high toppling crag, which stands out conspicuously visible on the eastern summit of the De Beer Pass, coming from Natal. On its surface grass of the softest, flowers of the sweetest, formed a luxuriant carpet, over which the boughs of mountain ash trees cast their welcome and delightful shade; and on this luxurious couch of nature I was able to lie down and rest myself while awaiting the cart, which I could see far away below me—a mere speck in the distance.

It was a spot of extreme loveliness, which I am not going to attempt to destroy by description; it was a scene that it was well worth travelling many miles to behold. One of its greatest charms was its perfect solitude, its complete isolation from the vicinity of civilisation, from which its protective height will long separate it. The

mountains of the Drakensberg must ever form a barrier which all the skill of man would fail in levelling: with their existence is linked that of the snug little nook—that glimpse of Paradise which it was my good fortune to wander across that day.

It took the post-cart two hours to reach the summit of the pass, and the horses were reharnessed at a little inn close by. Then away we went again as quickly as ever, and before long had crossed the spruit which marks the boundary between Natal and the Orange Free State. Down one steep hill the foremost horses took fright at something or other, and, communicating their alarm to the others, they one and all proceeded to bolt. After a few fruitless efforts to pull them up, Mr. Welch directed his attention to keeping them, if possible, on the road, and a nasty turn in the distance seemed to awaken apprehensions in his mind that a spill was imminent. Counselling us to hold fast—which was, however, easier said than done—he set himself to work to direct the course of his runaway vehicle. Clinging on with all our might, we awaited the catastrophe, which we felt must surely come. To add to the confusion, the four young ladies at the back of the cart began to scream, and the

chorus much resembled that of a lot of hungry pigs. For the life of me I could not keep from laughing, and very heartily I did so, which in a manner had the effect of alleviating their fears. Before long a steep ascent came to our rescue, and did for us what all the power of man could not manage—*i.e.* brought the runaways to their senses.

After this we went quietly enough; and with two or three more stoppages to change horses, in the gloom of the evening, Harrismith, nestling beneath the shadow of some strange isolated crags, hove in sight; and we entered the town in grand style, pulling up in front of the hotel amidst the flourish of a brass band, which struck up at our approach, and the cheers of an assembled crowd of people. Here we were informed that another post-cart, running in connection with that of Mr. Welch, would start punctually at twelve o'clock that night, and that as it contained only three seats we had better secure them as quickly as possible, if we wished to continue our journey without delay. This we at once hastened to do; and having settled with Mr. Welch and secured our saddlebags, we entered the hotel, where we obtained comfortable accommodation and a fair dinner. This disposed of, we gladly availed

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ourselves of the few spare hours before us to lie down and get some sleep ; but my rest was a good deal broken and disturbed by the discordant sounds of the brass band which had greeted us on our arrival. Harrismith not boasting of very extended surroundings, the area in which the brass band revolved was ever in the closest proximity to the hotel. The selection of tunes, if by such an appellation the ghastly sounds emitted can be termed, was also not of the most numerous ; and before long I became acquainted with the entire programme, which was repeated again and again with unflagging energy. How I envied my husband the stolid indifference with which he slumbered on through it all, and even hailed as a relief the bugle blast, which, punctually as it struck twelve, was heard resounding outside, announcing the arrival of the post-cart.



## CHAPTER XIX.

ONWARD ONCE MORE—AN AWKWARD POSITION—PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENCE—AMIDST REPUBLICANS—DISCOMFORT AND REMONSTRANCE—ESCAPING A WETTING—ON THE VERGE OF DESTRUCTION—GIVING DIRK THE SLIP—THE WORLD IS VERY SMALL—A RACE FOR THE POST-CART—A WARM WELCOME.

AN open, rickety-looking two-wheeled cart, to which were harnessed four white horses, a muffled figure holding the reins, and the snow falling thickly around, was the scene that presented itself to our horrified gaze as we came forth from the warm, cosy hotel into the bleak night air. Oh! how uninviting those two snow-embedded seats at the back of the post-cart looked, and how desolate and dreary was the prospect of a midnight drive under such circumstances. Little dreaming what a journey was before us, we had, on leaving Lady-smith, provided ourselves with neither rugs nor greatcoats, and our sufferings in consequence promised to be the reverse of trifling. Everybody in the hotel was buried in slumber, and the

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sleepy boots who superintended our departure was in no position to supply us with anything suitable to protect us from the inclemency of the weather. Scrambling with difficulty into the back seats, from which we ruefully brushed the fast-melting snowflakes that covered them, we proceeded to take counsel as to how we should manage to retain them while the vehicle was in motion. Never before have I come across so badly balanced a trap. Our combined weights served to topple it backwards in the most alarming manner, which neither the weight of the driver nor that of another passenger seated beside him, with our saddle-bags and the mail-bags all piled in front, could avail in any way to counterbalance. The driver, whose husky voice impressed us with the idea that he was a very old man, endeavoured to console us with the information that it was all right, the cart was constructed to balance in such a manner; and in the same breath giving vent to a peculiar cry, he set his horses in motion, and without troubling to look behind him to see whether we were lying in the road or not, which would most assuredly have been our fate had we not clung on to the back rail of our seat with all our might and main, he dashed away at full gallop, whirled round a corner

or two, and after several of the closest shaves which it has ever been my lot to experience (and they have been many), fairly settled down into a good racing gallop over the darkest and roughest road imaginable.

All night long we continued this species of travelling. The snow ceased to fall, but it came on to freeze with great severity, and a cutting wind froze the very marrow in our bones. It is with unpleasant memories arising that I look back on that horrible night drive, and detail our experiences with a kind of grim satisfaction that it is really a thing of the past. Even the rising sun brought with it at first scant consolation; we had sunk into that congealed, inanimate, torpid state, which seemed to defy the power of the most scorching rays to dissipate. In this, however, we were mistaken, for no sooner had the sun acquired sufficient height than the icy feeling in the atmosphere vanished, the chill blast changed to a soft warm wind, and we began ere long to feel the heat stealing once more into our petrified and frozen bodies.

Our course varied only by stoppages to change horses and obtain exceedingly hasty meals, we continued to jolt and bang along in the same old rickety vehicle all day. We were due to arrive

about five o'clock at a place called Bethlehem, from which another post-cart was timed to start at eight o'clock that night, in which we had determined to prosecute another ninety miles of our journey from Bethlehem to a place called Winburg. But ere reaching Bethlehem our driver halted, and diving into a secret recess of the box-seat he produced two pairs of loaded pistols, which he proceeded to distribute amongst us, with strict injunctions to keep a sharp look-out as we went along. On inquiring the reason of these ominous-looking preparations for an attack, he informed us that the district through which we were about to pass was infested by deserters and cut-throats, who would make small bones about attacking and rifling Her Majesty's mail, and murdering its occupants. This was cheerful news certainly; but, if not exactly pleasant, it served in a manner to awaken us from the weary feeling of lassitude into which fifteen hours' jolting in this miserable conveyance had reduced us. I found myself even enjoying a pleasurable excitement, which every dark shadow or curiously shaped rock served to heighten and enhance. Over and over again I was on the point of giving a false alarm, and mechanically on several occasions I felt my hand tightening on the pistol I held,

as some Kaffir or wayside traveller hove in sight.

But though we watched and kept a sharp lookout, neither brigand nor murderous villain hove in sight. Perhaps we were saved from an attack that day by the fact that murder and robbery had already been committed, several hours previous to our arrival in this district, on the person of a young man who had left Bethlehem that morning for the purpose of joining some waggons of his which were outspanned not far from the town. As we approached the outskirts, we came upon a riderless horse, who, with one girth missing, a loose saddle, and a back sore and tender, was making the best of his way back to the stable from which, a few short hours previously, he had issued with his burden safe and well. Inquiry served to prove that before starting, the owner had bragged in a public house of being the possessor of ready cash, which he carried about his person, to the amount of £200. A blanket which had been strapped in front of his saddle was missing, as well as the girth, and the conjecture arrived at, after some investigation of the affair by the authorities, was, that he had been secretly surprised and made away with, and that his body, rolled in the missing blanket, had been in all

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probability effectually secured, safe from the most minute and careful search. The greatest apathy and indifference was, however, manifested in the affair, which gave proof sufficient that such occurrences were not infrequent; and we could not but congratulate ourselves on our safe journey through a district rendered unpleasant from the deeds of murder and violence that had therein taken place from time to time.

It was with a fervent *Deo gratia* that we descended from our uncomfortable positions at the back of the post-cart. In the hotel we were regaled with a meat-tea, which was largely attended by the influential members of the town of Bethlehem, whose conversation in many varied forms both amused and interested me. This half-English, half-Boer community of colonists, with their republican free-and-easy manners, was new to me in every sense of the word. The freedom between master and servant was also extremely evident, and it seemed strange to be seated at table with people whom in England we should relegate to the servants' hall. In this country every white man goes by the name of Mister; they are an independent lot, and regard each other with views of perfect equality. But all this time the fresh post-cart, which was to carry

us on another night's journey of ninety miles, was awaiting us just outside the hotel. Hurrying through our meat-tea, we followed the proprietor, who led the way, assuring us as he went that the driver to whom we were about to be entrusted was the finest of his profession on that road, and that he felt sure we should make a comfortable journey in the best of post-carts. This was cheering enough, though I am bound to say that when at last I came in sight of both driver and post-cart my heart somewhat sank, and the sanguine hopes raised by the assurances of the proprietor died away very quickly. A rough-looking vehicle, in which was seated a repulsively hideous Hottentot holding the reins, gave us a very good idea of the kind of journey before us that night; yet, though we were fully prepared for one of weariness and discomfort, we little foresaw the many stirring events which would occur on that memorable night's drive.

Having been penned into the centre of the cart, much after the manner in which farmers carry their sheep to market, the signal to start was given to *Dirk*, for so our driver was called. Like an arrow from a bow he had set the horses in motion, and, whirling round a corner, dashed off at so furious a pace that the cart swayed from

one side of the road to the other in the most violent manner. Down a steep hill helter-skelter we went, narrowly missing an overturn into a deep gully which ran parallel with the road, and all but overturning a passing cart, the inmates of which stared at us in astonishment and amazement. "What are you doing, Dirk?" I inquired, "for goodness sake, pull up and go slower; we shall be shaken to death, or else you will end by breaking our necks."

"No, no, missis," answered the man in very broken English; "me get over bad road before darkness comes on."

As he in no way offered to abate the pace, we were forced to accept this explanation as a satisfactory reply; but the misery we endured for the next hour or so quite beggars description. The night had become so dark that we could not distinguish the leading horses, and having for some time left the main road, we were now travelling over a narrow sandy track, which Dirk seemed to experience some difficulty in sticking to. At last we pulled up at a wayside house, where, he informed us, he intended to outspan for an hour or two to rest the horses, the next relay being yet some distance off. In this house we sought shelter, and found it tenanted by a woman



stretched on a sofa, and a young boy and girl seated near the fireside. They made no effort to rise, and evinced no sign of welcome as we entered, the woman merely rolling about and groaning in the most distressing manner. Thinking that perhaps we were *de trop*, we turned to go outside again, when the woman suddenly called to us and told us to sit down. Hoping she would offer us some coffee, we did so ; but not a bit of it, and for the next hour or so she raved and talked away about deeds she had done, how she had shot Zulus down during the Zulu War, and Kaffirs down during the Kaffir War, and how she would do it again if she only got the chance. Then she began to cry, and to complain of fearful pains in the head, which last statement made me fairly believe that we had got into the abode of a raving maniac. Under the pretence of looking for Dirk, we slipped outside, but not before the woman had begun to scream at the top of her voice, and to declare that I was going to murder her. To speak the honest truth, I really felt very uncomfortable and hardly safe, even when the door was well closed behind me. Dirk, too, could be found nowhere, and it was only after a long and vexatious search that he was at length discovered fast asleep on a cinder heap just outside the bar.

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Shaking him roughly, my husband ordered him to get the horses harnessed at once, an order with which he seemed most unwilling to comply ; and it was not before another good hour had been wasted that we got fairly under weigh again. By this time the moon had risen, and threw more light on the road we were pursuing, but Dirk's driving continued as erratic as ever, and we ran several exceedingly narrow risks. About ten miles further on we halted to change horses, after having spent over half-an-hour in knocking up two sleepy Kaffirs, who were discovered in a large barn buried in some bundles of oat hay. From a kennel hard by a savage dog came rushing out as though he intended there and then to make a meal of me ; but with the instinct natural to his race, he quickly was able to distinguish between a friend and a foe, and we were soon on the best of terms. As soon as the fresh team was put to, we continued our journey, Dirk doing his best to upset us into a deep spruit ; as it was, our saddlebags and both our dogs were bumped out into the stream, and had to be fished out wringing wet.

Gradually the road became more desolate and lonely ; vast tracks of seemingly desert land stretched away on either side of us ; gaunt crags rose from out the plains ; and the moaning night-

wind whistled through the flapping cover of the post-cart. Suddenly Dirk pulled up, and in a mysterious voice asked me if either myself or the master possessed a watch and money? "Of course not," I answered, "at any rate, not for you;" and apprehending foul play, we set ourselves to watch the man closely. Before long I became aware that we had left the road and were driving rapidly over the Veldt. Twice I spoke to Dirk, calling his attention to the fact, but he never answered until, suddenly coming to a full stop, he informed us that he intended to outspan. This information was accompanied by a long, low whistle, which was answered by another whistle not far off, and presently I heard voices close by. Ere Dirk was well aware of my intention, I had snatched the reins from his hands, and, putting the horses into a gallop, guided them in the direction in which I thought the road would lie. Fortunately my bump of locality served me in good stead, and we soon regained it; but it was not until we had put several miles between ourselves and the voices on the Veldt that I consented to restore Dirk the reins.

So on we went, and my eyes began to grow heavy; sleep very nearly took possession of me; and had it done so, I verily believe I should

not now have been here to tell this tale. A sudden jolt made me spring to my feet and hastily look ahead for any fresh danger. Not a moment too soon. What I saw made me once more seize the reins, while with a tremendous effort I managed to pull the horses up just as they were about to trot headlong into a yawning cleft in the Veldt, quite twenty feet down. In another second we should have been a struggling, or, I should rather imagine, an inanimate heap; as it was, the shock was almost as startling as the reality. My husband, being short-sighted, had not perceived the danger into which Dirk was hurrying us, and to the sudden jolt, which so thoroughly banished sleep from my eyes, must be ascribed our narrow escape. I don't think Dirk realised in the slightest degree the danger into which he had unwittingly led us, for he angrily inquired why I had taken the reins and was always interfering with his driving. My only reply was to point to the chasm yawning in front of the horses, accompanied by an order to get down at once and assist us in backing them away from their perilous position. This he sulkily proceeded to do, and after some difficulty we managed to get the horses, who were unaccustomed to the work, to back the cart a considerable distance. As soon as we regained

the road I restored the reins to Dirk, who, to my surprise, though it was down hill, started the horses into a gallop, and then let go all the reins, which at once fell amongst the feet of the wheelers, and left the animals unrestrained to their own headlong career. Before I had time to jump up and endeavour to regain them, up went Dirk's legs in the air as he tumbled backwards in my lap. As my readers may imagine, he was very quickly ejected from this position, while I hastened to scramble over the front seat and then across the splash-board on to the pole of the carriage. In this manner, I fortunately succeeded in getting hold of the reins, which, as good luck would have it, were trailing behind and had not got entangled in the wheelers' feet. Putting the brake hard down, my husband came to my assistance, when, uniting our strength, we succeeded in getting the horses to adopt a more moderate pace. After this, while he managed the brake and kept an eye on Dirk, I took charge of the six horses and acted Jehu; but the road was a complicated one, and our late driver, whom we began to suspect of being very drunk, would not assist us with much information. About five o'clock in the morning a place called Senekal was reached, where the weary horses stopped of their own accord at a wayside house,

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thus dumbly informing me that here I must obtain relays. Their information proved correct, for having knocked the sleepy occupants up, fresh horses were brought out and harnessed there and then. During the operation, Dirk took the opportunity to slip indoors, and when we wished to proceed, we found him so hopelessly buried in a drunken sleep, that nothing we could do would awaken him. Another half-hour was therefore spent in searching for a guide, and at last, after some difficulty, we obtained the services of a Boer, who, for a consideration of £2, consented to accompany us as far as Winburg—distant forty miles—and which the post-cart was timed to reach at eleven o'clock that morning. Leaving Dirk to his drunken slumbers, and chuckling to ourselves over the dismay and fright he would experience on coming to his senses and finding his cart and horses gone, we started off once more. Twenty miles on the road, we obtained our last relay, and an hour before the appointed time the inhabitants of Winburg were surprised by the arrival of Her Majesty's mail-cart, which, driven by a lady, might have been seen entering the town! Our first care was to deliver the mails at the Post Office, our next to discover the owner of the post-cart and horses; and both these matters

having been satisfactorily accomplished, we repaired to the hotel, there to await the departure of another post-cart, in which we wearily felt we would have to spend the remainder of that day and the whole of the following night ere arriving at Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State.

We had not to wait long before round it came to the front door of the hotel, at which, for the honour of having a cup of coffee and some slight refreshment therein, we were in the act of paying the landlord a remuneration of £2! The man was a Yankee, and it struck me that I had seen his face before. He talked a good deal about London and the friends he had made therein, asking me if I was acquainted with the Marquis of Queensberry, a great friend of his! I did not gratify him with the information that he was at that moment conversing with a sister of his great friend; for, the moment he made this remark, I recalled his face as that of an American whom in childhood I had once seen at my brother's house in town, and recognised in my friend a gentleman who had taken in several people at that time, and having obtained small sums of money from them on loan had then disappeared and never been heard of since. After years, I had thus chanced upon him, one whom I never expected to see

again ; and, as the charge of £2 for slight refreshment will prove, still apparently engaged at his old game of making money ! Truly the world is very small.

We found one fellow-passenger in the cart also bound for the Diamond Fields, whose companionship we had during the rest of our journey. All that day and throughout the night we continued our jolting career. Our driver, a very ugly Hottentot, was nevertheless a good whip, and we were troubled with none of the scenes of the past night. Frequently we recalled Dirk to our minds, and wondered whether he had yet recovered from his inebriated condition.

In the dawn of early morning Bloemfontein was reached, after three days and three nights of almost incessant travelling, and another day and night still in prospect. Since leaving Ladysmith, I had not known what sleep was, and began to wonder whether I should ever know what it was again. We were informed on entering the hotel that the next post-cart would not leave Bloemfontein until mid-day, which gave us a good opportunity to indulge in a hot bath each, which was very soothing to our aching bones. Then, in the public-room to which we repaired, we found breakfast going on ; and as we had touched nothing



solid since leaving Bethlehem, we were not sorry to join in with many others assembled. At eleven o'clock we sauntered out to look for President Brand's house, which after some search was discovered, and Mrs. Brand duly visited. The good lady entertained us with a lengthened exposition of her views on Englishmen and Boers in general, which I need hardly say preponderated much in favour of the latter. The room in which she received us was much darkened and felt deliciously cool, so that it was positively painful to issue into the outside glare once more. When we did so, it was to go in search of the Volksraad, the House of Parliament of the Orange Free State, which Mrs. Brand assured me was well worth seeing. As it was by far the largest building in the place, we found it without difficulty, one of the officials connected therewith showing us through with all the airs of a grand monsieur. I must confess I did not feel very much impressed with either Bloemfontein or its Volksraad. The glowing description of its might and wonders given by the Boer farmer at Sunday River proved to be, as I imagined at the time, a terrible stretch of imagination. Though the town was pretty, it was a very ordinary sized one; and as for the Volksraad, it much resembled a town hall.

As we were listening somewhat impatiently to the prosy information vouchsafed us by our guide, the distant blast of a bugle and a low, rumbling sound made us stand at attention, and hastily consult our watches. The hands pointed to twelve o'clock, the hour at which the post-cart was due to start.

“Good gracious, we shall miss it!” exclaimed my husband; upon which we both set off running as hard as we could, leaving the prosy official and his explanation unfinished, staring after us with mouth wide open with astonishment. As we issued from the large folding gates, there, true enough, was the post-cart coming down the street at a merry pace—another minute and it would have passed on into the open country, and we should have been left behind. Our frantic shouts and excited signals, however, attracted the attention of the driver, who at once pulled up. There was very little room left, but we managed to squeeze in somehow, and congratulated ourselves on having had the forethought to put our saddle-bags in the cart before starting on our round of visits.

Varied only by about ten or twelve stoppages to change horses, the rest of our journey contained much sameness. All that day the post-cart flew

along, and our fourth night's travelling was accomplished in safety. At six o'clock on the following morning, a place called Boshof was reached, where we were transferred into a kind of omnibus, which carried us over the remaining twenty miles to Kimberley, and about twelve o'clock that day we entered the long, straggling, dusty, dirty town, which took us over half-an-hour to drive through.

Here we found some difficulty in getting accommodation of any kind or sort. Every hotel was crammed, and the prospect of sleeping in the streets began to assume an aspect of probability; but just as we were giving up the search in despair, our friend of the post-cart arrived and took us to a place of refuge in the shape of a third-rate hotel, where, however, we obtained very fair accommodation, or at least thought it fair in our delight at getting in anywhere.

News travels fast, and although we had given assumed names to the landlord, the truth eked out before long. Ere we had been two hours in Kimberley, most of the dignitaries of the town had left their cards, and much hospitality was shown us in the numerous invitations to dinner which we received. One gentleman in particular, Dr. Mathews, a member of the Legislative Assembly

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at the Cape, and a gentleman much esteemed and looked up to in Kimberley, was especially solicitous to show us every attention and courtesy. The night of our arrival, he and Mrs. Mathews entertained us at dinner in their charming residence, when several guests were also invited to meet us. Our old, dusty, travel-stained garments were again shown, much at a disadvantage, against the evening clothes and dresses of the others, and we felt rather like two ruffians; but the warm welcome accorded us on all sides soon put us at our ease, and we spent our first evening at Kimberley in a very pleasant manner, rendered doubly delightful after the hardships of the past few days.

## CHAPTER XX.

KIMBERLEY—THE MINES OF FORMER DAYS—A GOVERNMENT REFUGE—GOVERNMENT PROVISIONS—DIAMOND WASHING AND SORTING—"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE"—AWAKING SLUMBERS—OFF THE ROAD—AN UNCOMMUNICATIVE BOER—LIFE'S LAST STRUGGLE—PROLONGED GREETINGS—THE GREAT GOD SLEEP—AN ORIGINAL PONY—OVERTURNED—DRUNKEN RHAPSODY.

FIFTEEN years ago the spot whereon Kimberley now stands was a vast stretching Veldt, on which few farmsteads or habitations of any kind existed. But in 1857 the children of a Dutch farmer called Jacobs discovered a stone, which for some time they used as a plaything; until a passing traveller, observing it one day, and remarking that it was peculiar-looking as well as somewhat heavy, offered to purchase it from the farmer's wife. She scouted the idea of selling a stone as ridiculous, but gave it to him, and the pebble soon after this changed hands. When eventually it reached those of a Dr. Atherstone of Grahamstown, he set all doubt at rest as to its

value with the information that it was a diamond ; and this stone, weighing twenty-one and three-sixteenth carats, was sold for £500.

After this a search was instituted, and, fresh finds taking place from time to time, there was soon a rush on the country around. Companies were formed, claims bought up, and the marvellous change, which in a few years turned a desert into a large and populous town, took place. But what they once were, Kimberley Diamond Fields are now no longer. In the days of their infancy, the wondrous sight of thousands and thousands of claims being each separately worked by their owners might have been seen. Like one vast spider's web, ropes extended from the mouth of the pit all round in countless thousands, threading the seemingly inextricable maze to the depth of the pit below. A confusing vision of buckets ascending and descending in their busy work of carrying aloft the hitherto hidden gem, disembowelled from the very jaws of the earth, and of assisting in the great work of excavation, flashed before the onlooker's eye. In that pit below, the working forms of the swarthy sons of Africa might be distinguished in dense masses ; and they, fashioning out the pit which was to bring gain to the white man, forgot not the future for which

they lent their toil—slaving that the white man might become enriched; they too could look ahead and dream of an El Dorado—for was not the money gained by such toil to be quickly converted into arms and ammunition, to store up for future use, wherewith, when the time should come, to wrest back from the ever-closing grasp of civilisation their own fair land!

But those times have come and gone; hopes have been raised and lost, and a great change has fallen upon Kimberley. At the present moment it is a vast straggling town, but many of the buildings are merely temporary constructions. Their owners look forward to the days when diamonds shall cease to be found in the vast pits, from which the present prosperity of the town is obtained; and when those days arrive, the fall of Kimberley will be even quicker than its rise.

At dinner, on the night of our arrival, it had been arranged that Dr. Mathews should accompany us on the following day to all the sights most worth seeing in the town. The Doctor was furthermore good enough to place his carriage at our disposal; and on the morning in question, and at the appointed hour, he arrived, driving it himself. Our first impressions of Kimberley were made in a whirlwind of dust, which continued to

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blow about in large clouds the whole of that day ; so that these impressions were at the most unfavourable, at least as far as the weather was concerned. We commenced business by a visit to the hospital, where the richer portion of sick inhabitants of the town could, by paying for it, be accommodated with comfortable rooms, every manner of luxury, and good food. I must confess that its inmates did not interest me, and the culminating point was reached when I was thrust into a hot, stuffy room, where a woman lay sick with fever. The atmosphere was so horrible that I soon made a bolt for it, and glad was I to reach the open air. In sad contrast to this comfortable abode was the Government Hospital, which we next visited, and in which were huddled a great many white, as well as black, patients. Into the ward-room set aside for the former, the wind and rain both found their way, and the walls were damp and of unhealthy appearance. The room or outhouse set aside for the Kaffirs more resembled a barn, as indeed it was, than anything else ; and the miserable aspect of the poor sufferers therein was pitiable to behold. Many lay on mattresses on the ground, where the cold draughts swept over them night and day, and on which they were stretched out, helpless to move or assist them-



selves. One poor sightless Kaffir, who had lain on his bed of sickness and pain in this miserable hole for over two years, informed us that it was the dream of his life to return to Maritzburg, where his parents were living. On inquiring why the Government did not gratify this wish, I was informed that the several waggoners passing down-country who had been spoken to on the subject had demanded two or three pounds over the sum which the Government was disposed to grant; and that, in consequence, it was preferred to keep him on its hands, rather than expend these two or three extra pounds in gratifying the oft-repeated prayer of the sick and sightless man! I no longer regretted having paid a visit to this quarter, and having left the matter in Dr. Mathews' hands, I am convinced that by this time the poor man is at last made happy.

On another bed hard by a man lay dying. He had that morning undergone the amputation of both arms and legs, and now in this den of misery was eking out the last few hours of life. Poor wretch! his hot, dry lips were parched and cracked with thirst; but by his side there was no attendant to see to his wants, and soothe with care and tenderness his few remaining hours of existence. Other sights and scenes of suffering met

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me wherever I turned ; but, sickened and disgusted at beholding what I could neither help nor remedy, I begged my companions to hasten their departure. Subsequent inquiry as to the manner in which this hospital was provided for by Government proved to me that the only attendants of the many sick I had seen were one old man and his wife, whose duties were too numerous to be properly fulfilled ; the entire charge of the hospital, care of its inmates, as well as all the cooking, cleaning, and other menial tasks, devolving entirely on their shoulders. What wonder then that this overworked pair could find no time to devote to the dying man, whose miserable condition I have just described ? That this description is exaggerated in any way is by no means the case ; rather have I failed to find adequate words to depict it in its real light ; but that such a condition of things is a disgrace to any responsible Government is a fact which it is impossible to lose sight of, and in which I am sure my readers will agree.

From the hospital, the horses' heads were turned in the direction of the Du Toits-Pan Pit, not far distant, where upon our arrival we were received by the manager of one of the companies working therein. This gentleman

conducted us about, explaining the whole system of working, and showing us many valuable and wonderful inventions in the way of machinery. Standing on the edge of the vast pit, in which hundreds of human forms, apparently not bigger than so many crows, were busily engaged in their endless work of excavating, while the buzz and boom of machinery at work fills the air, the mind becomes awed and wonderstruck at the sight of what the lust for gold and the power of man has been able in such a short time to accomplish. Up they come—those round iron barrels, in which the soil containing the precious stone reposes,—hundreds ever on the upward move; while, whirr! they descend as quickly as they rise, emptied of their load, to be filled afresh.

The soil, when brought to the summit, is carted away and strewn on the ground, where it is left for a fortnight or three weeks to pulverise in the sun. At the expiration of this time, gangs of Kaffirs, superintended by a white overseer, break the large, dry lumps into powder, and this in turn is carted away to be placed in the washing machine. It is during the process of first breaking that some of the largest diamonds are discovered, and the overseer has to keep a sharp look-out on the workers in consequence.

In spite of the terrible penalty incurred by any one detected in the act of secreting a good find, thefts are very rife, and many a diamond finds its way into Kaffir possession in spite of the sharpest vigilance. During the process of washing, the gravelly substance, which is full of garnets, as well as the diamonds, sinks to the bottom of the machine, while the earthen substance disappears in another channel. When it has been thoroughly washed through two or three times, this gravel is collected and strewn on tables, where searchers, with steel instruments somewhat resembling very broad knives, carefully turn it over and over in minute search. Then it is that the precious jewel is discovered in all manner of sizes and shapes, when it is placed in a small tray, on which another overseer keeps his watchful eye. I was given several little heaps of gravel to dissect, and in half-an-hour had succeeded in discovering about twenty or thirty diamonds, of very fair size, and some so perfectly shaped that they had every appearance of having just left the cutter's hands. It was certainly a very interesting sight, and thanks were particularly due to the courtesy of one of the partners, who, having arrived shortly after us at the pit, had taken us all over the different portions of the mine, thoroughly explain-

ing the nature and use of the machinery, in which I was especially interested. On leaving, I was presented with a handsome diamond, which I afterwards in the course of my further travels unfortunately lost; or rather, I should imagine, it was stolen. There remained yet to be visited the other three great pits of Kimberley, respectively named "The Old De Beer," "Bulfontein," and the "Kimberley" mine itself, whose great gulf yawned in the very centre of the town. In due order each was visited; but as all the pits are worked much in the same manner, each visit became a mere matter of repetition.

In the afternoon the governor of the gaol conducted us over the prison, in which every species of malefactor seemed to be gathered together. There were a great many in for diamond stealing and illicit diamond buying, men as well as women, some of whom were respectable people of the upper class in Kimberley. I came across two of Sekukuni's chiefs immured in this uninviting abode; but I trust ere now that as their master has been restored to his rights, from which we so cruelly dragged him, so, too, have these unfortunate victims of a mistaken policy been allowed to return to their country. They were stately, dignified old men, and received us

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superbly, as though they had been in their own kraals dispensing hospitality.

In another portion of the prison we saw a Kaffir who had been seized for killing his wife. As he had not been tried when we saw him, he was permitted to wander about in the company of a lot of other criminals, though chained hand and foot. On inquiring of the gaoler whether he would be condemned or not, the man replied in the affirmative, and proceeded to relate how formerly this murderer had been the hangman's assistant in that very gaol. On the occasion of the last execution which had taken place, he was still serving in this capacity, and brutally, at the last moment, jeered at the man on whom the final sentence of the law was about to be carried out. "You may mock, but you mock your own fate," answered the condemned, and even so his words had come to pass.

With the gaol the last sight of interest in Kimberley had been visited; and, with sight-seeing at an end, all desire to remain vanished. But the post-cart was not due to leave for several days, and herein lay the difficulty. How could we get down country without it? The brilliant idea of hiring a private carriage and four at length struck us, but the idea we found easier to con-

ceive than execute. No driver would be tempted, save at an exorbitant price, to undertake the journey; and the prices demanded were so much beyond all reason, that we did not feel justified in indulging the cupidity of these Kimberley sharks.

So we decided to await the post-cart, though most unwillingly, and had resigned ourselves to the inevitable, when one evening, as we were sitting by the window of our room, watching the passers-by, a cart drawn by four horses drew up with a flourish at the door, and a young man seated beside the driver descended. Soon after we heard him inquiring for us, and almost immediately he entered the room in which we were sitting. He turned out to be the owner of the cart in question, who had come to make a bargain and turn an honest penny. Ere long a contract was entered into and signed, and when the man left it was with the engagement to convey us down-country in his cart for the sum of £80.

We decided to start at daybreak on the following morning, and accordingly at the appointed hour our carriage arrived. It was drawn by four strong-looking horses, who seemed to treat their light duty with sovereign contempt, judging by the way in which they dashed up to the door. We were not long in taking our seats, and, our

saddlebags having been stowed away, the driver was told he might proceed. This he lost no time in doing, and in the gray, dull light of early morning we rattled through the silent streets of Kimberley, where all slumbered save we. Some, hearing the noise of the horses' feet and the rumble of the carriage-wheels, must have been startled in their sleep, and roused from their dreams of gold-making ; for several times a blind was hastily pulled up as we passed, and the white, scared face of an awakened dreamer would be seen peering forth, clothed in his or her full *costume de nuit*.

We soon reached the outskirts of the town, and its dusty, dirty streets, and money-making, money-thinking population, were left behind. Kimberley, like all things human, faded from sight : to us it became but as a strange dream of the past, a portion of that ever-moving panorama which passes daily before one's eyes, and which, because of its strangeness, is stored up by memory, and, when other sights have passed away, is not forgotten.

Twenty miles on the road we stopped at a shady wayside inn for breakfast. Here we were joined by the proprietor of our carriage, who arrived very hot and dusty on an equally hot



and dusty pony, and leading a spare one besides. He informed us that, on second thoughts, he did not think the leaders we had come so far with would do the journey satisfactorily, and he had therefore brought these two strong ponies instead. We were a little mystified as to his real reasons for taking the two horses away, and not very much inclined to believe his statement. However, as the ponies looked fat and strong, we made no objection, and as soon as the animals had been fed and rested, we harnessed up and started again in the afternoon. After going about fifteen miles, one of the wheelers began to evince symptoms of weariness, and by the distressing way in which he sweated, we could at once see that something was wrong. The country through which we were passing was quite unknown to either ourselves or our driver; it was one of those short cuts, which invariably prove the longest, and which we had been induced to take by the landlord of the inn at which we had halted, who assured us that by following the post-cart line we should go at least a hundred miles out of our road. We had, in consequence, though not without misgivings, started on a short cut across country, which, had we known the way, would have been all very well, but as we did not, was,

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I consider, a somewhat rash undertaking. It led to frequent deviations from the right route, which resulted in doubt and a good deal of argument, and, when these remedies failed, in a drive to some farmhouse, which, with the usual perversity of human things, was always exactly in the opposite direction to that which we were pursuing. Arrived at the farm, it was generally but vague information which we received, and the driver invariably seized the opportunity to have a chat with the people of the place. When we urged him to hurry on, he informed us that he was getting information as to the right road to pursue,—a statement which we did not think ourselves bound to believe.

As soon as it was ascertained that the horse was really unfit to proceed, we decided to halt at the next farmhouse that showed itself; but in so deciding we counted without our host. The owner of the place, a surly-looking Boer, was furious at our outspanning on his territory, and, although he could see for himself the woeful condition of the poor beast, absolutely refused to allow us to remain. After a great deal of confabulation, he agreed to the space of one hour as the limit to our stay, adding that if we did not depart then he would send his men to turn us off.

On inquiring the distance to the next farm, he replied that it was ten miles. Ten! if he had said a hundred, we could not have felt more flabbergasted or disheartened, for the prospect of accomplishing such a distance with the sick animal appeared impossible. Poor beast! What would I not have given to have been able to get him into a warm stable, and on to a clean bed of straw; that warm stable and straw was temptingly near, and yet the brute who called himself a man stood calmly by and refused his help or pity.

One of the ponies having been substituted as wheeler, the sick horse was put in his place. How the next ten miles was accomplished, I never can quite make out. Once, but once only, the driver had used his whip, and brought it down with cruel severity across the suffering animal's back. My blood boiled up; the indignation I felt knew no bounds as I snatched it from his hand and broke it to pieces. I will not here repeat all I said to him; but my anger may find extenuating circumstances in the reader's thoughts, when he reflects on the cowardice of that lash on the poor beast, whose efforts were those of a dying animal struggling, with its honest, noble nature, to do its duty to the last.

The sun was setting, and the chills of evening

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were beginning to make themselves felt, when, after the weariest journey I ever remember to have performed, a distant farmhouse hove in sight. On getting near it we found the farmer busily engaged in penning his sheep, assisted by boys of all ages, probably his sons, and several active Kaffirs, who appeared to occupy the position of sheep dogs. He did not seem to have much time to waste in talking, for, on inquiring if he would allow us to outspan at his farm for the night, he replied in a few muttered words, and by a wave of the hand towards the house. This we, however, took as permission, and accordingly at once made our way thither. At our approach, a crowd of yelling curs rushed forth, and their discordant din was galling in the extreme, partaking as it did of an inhospitable sound. They were followed to the door by several dirty-looking women, who, on being asked the same question, replied vaguely, then settled the matter by saying that we must await the master's return. This was impossible, the horse's state was growing more precarious every moment, and the only hope of saving his life was getting him into a stable without any further delay. At this juncture in the proceedings, a neat, clean-looking young girl came up. Her appearance was that of an Englishwoman, and

instinctively I addressed her in English. She at once replied in the old tongue, and, on hearing our story, requested us to follow her. Before long, and on turning a projecting crag, which had hitherto kept it out of sight, a neat-looking farmhouse suddenly gladdened our anxious gaze. Pointing towards it, the girl informed us that it was occupied by a Boer and his family, who would be sure to make us welcome ; and she then proceeded to show us where the stables stood. We begged her to go to the house and prepare the inmates for our arrival, while we made straight for the stables, in front of which the weary horses required no bidding to pull up. As we went towards the sick animal for the purpose of at once removing his harness, I noticed that the poor beast staggered as though he could hardly keep his feet ; and no sooner was he freed from the trap than his hind legs began to sink, and in another moment he would have fallen. Seeing this, I hastily urged him on ; but his walk was so feeble that I could only just manage to get him into the stable before he fell down. Then I knew that ere long all would be over, and though for the next hour we did everything that was possible, under the circumstances, to restore him, it was but too apparent that he must die. The driver having

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seen to and fed the remaining three horses, took himself off to the house, whither my husband soon followed him. I could not, however, leave the poor beast; the feeling that he had been faithful to us, even to his last mite of strength, was strong upon me; and though my presence could in no way benefit him, it seemed cruel and unfeeling to leave him in his hours of agony. So I sat on beside him moistening his dry mouth, in which, had it not been for the water, the tongue would have shrivelled up to nothing, and stroking the black, glossy neck which had bent itself proudly for the last time. The horse seemed grateful for these little attentions; the distressing moaning, to which at first he had given vent, gradually died away, and he lay quite still. Suddenly he raised his head, and the bright, quick eye glanced towards me as though speaking its dumb thanks: then, with a slight quiver, which ran through the whole of its frame, the head sunk slowly to its former position, the eye became blue and glazed, and the willing, noble spirit which was given to man for use, but not abuse, had gone—whither, all the science of humanity has failed to fathom.

The sufferings and final death of the poor beast, added to the weariness of the day's drive, had the effect of considerably depressing my

spirits. On entering the house, I found my husband and the driver seated in one corner of the principal room, conversing in low voices. An air of silence and oppressive neatness pervaded the scene; in another corner was seated the Frau, with her hands before her; while round the room children of many ages were also seated, apparently unoccupied. On entering, they all rose, but did not quit their places; and this recalled to my mind the Boer custom of shaking hands with everybody. I therefore proceeded to journey round the room, and, having shaken hands with everyone, found my way to an empty seat, between two prim-looking little girls, who were sitting bolt upright. Ensnouncing myself, I too relapsed into a statue, which, at the expiration of an hour, was awakened for a few minutes into life by having to go through another series of hand-shaking with several men and women who arrived. These I made out to be visitors, and the women having exchanged a few monosyllables, relapsed into silence; while the men, to whom the custom of removing their hats was unknown, sat down and began to smoke. In about five minutes they all rose, and each went through the ceremony of hand-shaking all round before terminating their short visit. I could not help laughing as I

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watched the grave demeanour of a small girl of about four years old as she went through the ceremony, and it was to me a matter of wonder how her wrist had not come to pieces long ago, as she was evidently an old hand at the work. There was not a baby in the room, or I should have been curious to see whether it too was subjected to this machine-like process; but for a long time my wrist and hand felt quite tender, and did not recover for several days from the effects of these prolonged greetings. The visit over, we again relapsed into statues, and I was just beginning to wonder whether we were expected to remain as such all night, and whether they ever indulged in food in this house, when the English girl appeared and began to lay the cloth. Then each statue, one by one, disappeared into an adjoining kitchen, followed by the Frau, upon which I and my husband simultaneously pricked up courage enough to break the silence, and inquired of the girl what time they fed. She replied that supper would be ready almost immediately, and proceeded to disappear in the same direction as the others. At length the food was brought in, and followed in triumphal procession by the whole family. It consisted of the inevitable Boer food, viz. boiled mutton bone, on



which the fat of the animal preponderated largely over the lean. A plate of fat was placed in front of me, a piece of bread, and a cup of tea. There was no salt forthcoming to make the fat palatable, and sugar was a thing unknown in the tea. Being hungry, I, however, bolted my food, the while indulging in covert glances of amusement at my husband's face of silent despair. To think that he should be reduced, after all, to drinking tea, and to see him actually swallowing it, was almost too ludicrous. I fairly laughed outright, which at once drew upon me the astonished glances of Frau and family, who doubtless thought that they had unwittingly admitted a raving lunatic into their house. Seeing the impression I had created, I hastily endeavoured to remedy the mistake, and, during the remainder of the meal, behaved in the most exemplary manner. But when the family rose to go to bed, and the English girl showed us the way to our room, the relief we experienced was indeed heartfelt; the wearying experiences of the day had been almost too much of a good thing, and we longed for a rest, which was greatly needed. In the clean, cosy little room into which we were ushered that rest came quickly. The couch allotted to myself was composed almost entirely of feather-bed,

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covered with sheets of snowy whiteness. With a fervent blessing on the hospitable Frau, who had given us the best of what she possessed, I was soon buried in the folds of the feather-bed. After that I remember no more: the great god Sleep had come in gently unawares—that sleep which brings its comfort to the weary, the sorrow-burdened, and the suffering; it came to dispel the effects of a depressing day,—to give its golden help to rest and refreshment. And so it did. On the following morning we were up with the sun, and having routed the driver out of his slothful sleep in the carriage, where he had ensconced himself, we proceeded to arrange the horses in “unicorn” fashion. As the fellow wheeler to the one that had died stood at least 16.2, and the ponies were not much over 14 hands, the effect produced may be imagined when one of these latter was placed alongside the former animal. However, they went well together, and that being all that was required of them, we journeyed along easily enough. At a wayside inn, near a stream enjoying the name of Mud River, we managed to purchase a substitute in the place of the dead horse; which purchase came not a moment too soon, one of the ponies taking it into his head to evince signs of illness.