

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TOP OF THE PASS.

NEXT day we took our pioneers up the mountain and set them to work at clearing away the deep snow, and forming a track to the foot of the pass. From this point our course lay up the left bank of the Bushman's River for a considerable distance; then we crossed it, and had to scramble up a steep hill-side over rocks and loose stones, which at times afforded but a precarious footing.

The snow did not lie so deeply here as we had expected; yet in places the pioneers were working mid-leg deep. Although the Putini lands lay near the Draakensberg, it is probable that these men had seldom handled snow; for the natives shrink from cold, and remain much in their warm huts during the bitter days of July and August. Consequently

our pioneers were praiseworthy in a double degree for the energy with which they worked through such cold as they may never hitherto have experienced.

Before we returned to camp upon that first day a practicable track had been formed to the spot selected by the Colonel as the most suitable for the formation of a line of scarp; and for the next two-and-twenty days the work steadily progressed, with the occasional interruption of a day unfit for outdoor labour, when a fall of snow, or a violent gale which neither white nor black could face, drove us down the mountain and compelled us to take refuge in our camp below. Our life was too regular and monotonous to admit of my giving a detailed account of its daily incidents, and the whole may be summed up in a few words. To march at daylight (about 7 A.M.), reaching the pass and commencing work by 10 A.M, to scarp rocks and build walls, to bore and blast where necessary for our purpose, and then to return to camp by sunset,—such was the routine of our daily life.

As time went on the unusual exposure and hard-

ships which our working-party underwent began to tell upon them greatly. The hard thick soles of their unshod feet began in many cases to crack and split, making marching difficult and painful. Coughs and colds abounded, and some few fell ill with inflammation of the lungs, and other serious complaints. We had no medical man amongst us, but our Chief successfully performed the functions of one. In the course of a very varied experience he had picked up a good deal of practical knowledge, both medical and surgical, and had been careful to provide himself with a plentiful supply of simple drugs, etc., for the use of the expedition. His medicine-chest contained chlorodyne, quinine, carbolic acid, castor-oil, tartar-emetica, turpentine, etc. etc., not to mention lint, plaster, bandages, and splints, in case of accidents.

Upon the first appearance of sickness in the camp the Colonel established a standing soup-kitchen, at which the strongest beef-tea was kept going in large quantities the whole day long. Every morning he had a sick-parade, at which I assisted, while the

Colonel's two native servants attended to carry out his directions. Symptoms were inquired into, medicines dispensed, hot fomentations and mustard applied in cases where such treatment was required, and then the patients were sent off to the kitchen-fire. Here the man in charge was directed to supply each sufferer with a basin of hot soup at once, and the same again at midday and evening. This service the soldier who officiated as cook performed with the greatest willingness, taking an evident interest in the progress of the invalids.

Perhaps the practice was not very regular ;— but it was successful, and the best proof of our Colonel's skill lies in the fact that all his patients recovered. We did not lose one during the whole expedition. The respect in which the people themselves held the Inkos had been great before, but it amounted to awe when they discovered what a great *innyanga*, i.e. "medicine-man," he was. Indeed these simple people have an especial reverence for medical skill, which they seem to regard as something with a touch of the supernatural in it.

Our monotonous existence was varied in my own case by occasional excursions with the Colonel to examine new passes discovered and reported by our Basuto guides.

During one of these he took me, at my request, over the ground of the disaster of the 4th November, 1873, pointing out to me the various positions held by himself and party, and by the enemy; and, as I had expected, I found that I could most thoroughly coincide with those of my own cloth who, having seen the place, asserted that the Colonel had been perfectly right in his estimate of its capabilities, and in his proposed course of action. It moved me strangely to go over the ground with him who had done so well there, and who, but for his faithful Basuto followers, would have been left upon it. Looking upon the great cairn which he had afterwards built above the dead, and which, covered with snow as it was, seemed like part of the mountain, I rejoiced that he stood by my side, alive though not uninjured, instead of lying there beneath the cold gray monument upon that bleak and desolate hill-side. And yet I

thought that, had it been my lot to follow him, and to die upon that day, I would rather have had the soldier's burial which he gave them himself, in the lonely spot on which they fell, with the eternal peace and majesty of the great hills around them, than have been disturbed from my quiet rest, and carried away to the dusty cemetery of Pietermaritzburg. The citizens of that town have erected in their market-square a monument to those who were killed at the Bushman's River Pass, which is a flimsy trifle compared to the grand hills that here "keep record of their names," where "never can a touch of shame sully the buried brow."

My Colonel, when he raised that mound above them, had planted it with a great mass of beautiful white everlastings, which grew all around, some flowers of which, with locks of hair which he cut from the heads of the dead, he sent to their relatives on his return. The snow covered all when I was there, making the spot doubly melancholy, and I was glad to follow my Chief away from what was no cheerful place to either of us. Before we left he

pointed out, at my request, the little stream, now frozen to a block of ice, where he so nearly lost his life,—also the place, some four hundred yards in advance of his position, to which he rode to parley with the advance-guard of the flying tribe. He was accompanied by his interpreter only, who was without weapons, while he himself was unarmed to all intents and purposes; since with his injured shoulder, put out by a fall the day before, his sword was useless to him, and was carried throughout the day by the Basuto Hlubi; while, although he had a revolver slung round his neck, it was no easy task to use it and to manage his horse with his one hand. I heard (though not from him) how, when the interpreter (Elijah) was wounded, and his horse shot, my Chief rode in and endeavoured to save the man, who then was killed by his side, he himself surrounded, and his horse's bridle seized. Dropping the reins, he used his revolver. This and his good horse saved him; and, after running the gauntlet, amidst cries of "Shoot the Chief!" he escaped with only one serious wound, an assegai having passed through his left arm. He also

received one or two slight wounds, and his patrol-jacket was cut in many places.

Naturally I took the most vivid interest in all that I could learn from my Chief on the subject. But I could never gather more than the barest facts from himself; and it was from the Basutos that I got the fuller account which I desired of what he did and endured upon that bitter day. Of himself he never spoke at all, and, great as appears to be the grudge borne against him by the friends of the volunteers who left him and fled that day, I never heard him say a word against them. As far as I could learn, he has never uttered a word of reproach or accusation against them beyond his most moderate and mercifully-worded report to the commander of the field force, which was published at the time.

Upon another occasion we went over the mountain to inspect the *Giant's Castle Pass*. This was the place where my Chief and his followers passed the night of the 3rd November, 1873, on their way to the Bushman's River Pass, and after the Colonel had had

the fall which so severely injured him, but which yet did not arrest him in his course.

The way up the "Giant's Castle" is very narrow, and excessively steep, passing near the top between two great walls of rock, and over a mass of loose stones and huge boulders. We climbed down the pass for a considerable distance, as the Colonel wished to see again the rock under which he had lain from shortly before sunset on the evening of the third, until nearly midnight. We easily found the place where still remained the line of stones which had been piled beneath the overhanging rock to prevent his rolling down the steep side of the pass from the place in which his helpless body had been laid. There was still visible the long grass that had been collected and packed within the line of stones, to form a bed for their injured commander, by the hands of the devoted few who had stayed with him, one half of whom lay dead on the mountain-top before the sun was high on the following day. From this spot a most wonderful view presented itself. The country beneath appeared like the waves of the sea running mountains high, and

then petrified before they fell. Their crests rose so tumultuously one above another in all directions that it seemed as though nature had exhausted her wildest fancies in flinging the great hills into forms which should have no leading or consecutive line amongst them, and which should appear to be in utter defiance of all law and order. Such was my fancy as I looked down upon that amazing scene, though no doubt a better geologist than I would have traced a rigid obedience to law, even there, where my eyes could discern nothing but chaos.

My eyes only were long chained by the view beneath me, for my imagination was soon busy with a scene which a few quiet words from my Chief summoned up before me. The same frozen sea of hills, but glowing in the last rays of the setting summer sun, was visible to my mind's eye. But I thought of the rough hard resting-place beneath the overhanging rock as occupied by a bruised and shattered figure, whose weary eyes rest upon those burning hills as they changed rapidly from fiery red to deep rose, and through pale pink to pearly gray. The injured

exhausted man wonders as the last ray vanishes whether he will ever see the sun again ; for he and his few brave attendants are alone in this wild spot ; their comrades have gone on ahead, and a numerous armed foe is supposed to be close at hand. But with the fading light the tired eyes close in a quiet sleep, which strengthens mind and body for the exertions yet to come.

We retraced our steps to the top of the pass, and found it a severe climb indeed. It was much like going up a gigantic staircase, all the steps of which were broken down, and the ascent required efforts that tried the soundest lungs and the strongest limbs.

A few days later I got the whole story of the Colonel's first ascent of this place (in 1873) from one of the Basutos who assisted him on that occasion. The man told me that, when my Chief awoke after his sleep beneath the rock just described, he immediately insisted upon going forwards ; but, in consequence of his injuries, the men who were with him took three hours to get him up a place which he ascended in fifteen minutes at this time, nine months later. At

first, it appears, they carried him in a blanket, but, after awhile, it became impossible to advance any farther in this manner, on account of the intense pain which this mode of progression inflicted upon his dislocated shoulder and shattered frame, as well as because the strength of the bearers was failing, owing to the excessive steepness of the pass. None could have blamed him had he given up his purpose, and ordered himself to be conveyed back to the camp. But no amount of personal suffering would induce him to relinquish the work entrusted to him while it was possible for a brave determined spirit to conquer and control the body's pain. What he had to do was to take his men to the top of the Bushman's River Pass as speedily as possible, and there he and they should be if he preserved breath enough to give his orders, and consciousness to know that they were being carried out.

He got over the rest of the way on foot, by means of a blanket passed round his body, with two men holding on to either end, and slowly pulling forwards, whilst two others supported him from behind as well

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as they could. They were obliged to halt every two or three steps, and lay him down upon the ground to give him rest, yet his spirit was undaunted to the last. His first order, upon reaching the mountain-top after this terrible ascent, was to upsaddle the horses; but then he sank to the ground, utterly exhausted and overcome. Yet half-an-hour's rest was all that was necessary to restore his resolute spirit to the mastery; and when the horses were brought up to where he lay, he made his men lift him on to his gray Basuto horse, and led the advance himself, over a rough and broken country, as energetically as if he had been in his usual state of health and strength. After riding for a few miles, the gray horse fell lame, and the Colonel then caused himself to be lifted from its back, and placed upon that of his favourite "Chieftain," who bore him safely through all the dangers of the rest of that eventful day.

I have told this incident simply as it was told to me by Jabez, without any unnecessary flourishes of description or admiration. Yet I venture to say that few will realise the facts of the case without appre-

ciating the indomitable courage and perseverance with which my Chief pushed on to his assigned post, regardless of himself, of his own severe suffering and extreme exhaustion. He cared only for his duty, and did that with a noble fortitude which should be an example to all. In setting such an example he has done the state a service which should not be overlooked; and, if ever man deserved honour from his fellows, my Chief has earned it in two instances which stand prominently forward,—not to mention his admirable conduct at the Bushman's River Pass; first, for the fortitude and determination which I have just recorded; and, secondly, for that which took place immediately on his return, wounded and nearly exhausted, to the head-quarter camp at Meshlyn next day. Captain —— and his detachment had, it appears, been sent to support my Chief by holding the Giant's Castle Pass until his arrival there from the Bushman's River Pass. This detachment, however, entirely lost its way upon the mountains, and never approached the pass at all; and upon the Colonel's return to camp he heard that the party was

supposed to be lost and to be in great danger from the enemy. Fearing that this might indeed be the case if Captain —— should reach the Giant's Castle Pass, meeting there in all probability a large and triumphant force of Langanlibalele's men, he at once volunteered to lead a party to the rescue. He started upon the quest within a few hours of his return to camp, and found the missing men next day, after marching all night in search of them.

The appreciation of the troops for this act of devotion on my Colonel's part, was plainly shown by their turning out *en masse*, and giving him three cheers, after he had been lifted upon his horse, and was about to take his place at the head of the relieving force.

We met with a good deal of severe climbing work during our excursions to new passes, sometimes riding, sometimes walking and dragging our horses after us over places where one would have thought that nothing four-legged save a goat could have kept its feet. Upon one of these latter occasions the Colonel very nearly lost his horse altogether. He

and I were climbing up a steep bit of hill, our horses following us, led by the more practised Basutos, when a scuffle and a shout made us look round just in time to see a confused heap of legs and tail disappear down the side of the hill. The Colonel's horse Chestnut had slipped up and rolled over and over again down some fifty yards before he was brought up, immediately above the bed of a rocky stream, by a tree into which he plunged, and there hung, to all appearance dead. We scrambled down to him with all the speed we could, the Colonel being the first to reach the tree, when Chestnut proved himself to be alive by greeting his master with a joyful neigh. To our no small surprise and relief, when he was extricated from his unpleasant position, and set upon his legs again, he proved to be absolutely uninjured by what might have proved an uncommonly awkward fall but for the long heather and brushwood with which the sides of the hill were thickly clothed.

It was about this time that we were much annoyed in camp by the marauding propensities of some huge dogs, which, left masterless by the dispersion

of the Hlubi tribe, had become perfectly wild, and would, indeed, have proved formidable antagonists to an unarmed man. They lived in the rocks hard by, and, coming out at night, wandered about the camp, attracted, probably, by the smell of freshly-killed meat.

The Colonel had a fancy to possess himself of one of them, a noble-looking fellow, whom we had seen several times at a distance, thinking that he would make an excellent companion could he be caught alive and tamed by kindness. Accordingly one night,—it was the evening of the day on which Chestnut had taken his perilous roll,—a trap was set, baited with fresh meat, and so contrived that it would catch any animal that entered it, alive and uninjured. We retired to rest, confident of finding a foolish-looking prisoner in the morning. But the camp had not long been silent before we were roused by a tremendous disturbance, and some of us rushing out, were just in time to see escape two great dogs, who had entered the trap together, and, by their united efforts to get out, had completely smashed it. Next

day we determined upon another plan. We cut a hole in the side of a bank, in which hole was placed a large piece of meat for bait. We then bent a sapling which grew opposite our hole, so that a noose attached to the end of it hung down exactly over the hole. The arrangement was such that when the dog seized the bait he would release a catch, the sapling would fly up, and the animal, having his head in the hole, would be caught by the noose round the neck, and swung off the ground in a manner perilous to his neck should he not be immediately released. Captain ——'s soldier-servant, who took the greatest interest in the dog-catching, willingly undertook the post of watch, in order to prevent any captive being hung outright. The rest of us, after visiting the trap, and seeing that all was quiet (although we were aware that the dogs were prowling about at no great distance), went to bed, and most of us soon fell asleep. But, as upon the previous night, we were shortly aroused by a most frightful uproar, to which the former disturbance bore no comparison whatever. Shouts of "Sentry! sentry! Come here! come here!" and then the sentry's cry of

“Turn out the guard!” repeated twice, made us all jump out of bed and hasten to the spot.

A bright moon was shining, and by its rays we beheld Captain ——’s servant, holding on with all his might to the bushy tail of an enormous yellow dog, which he was swinging round and round to avoid its teeth. He was shouting vigorously, meanwhile, to the guard for assistance, while they stood helplessly looking on at the struggle between man and beast. Just as we ran up to the place, the poor fellow, who was quite exhausted by his exertions, let go at last, and the dog made off as fast as he could run.

The man was greatly chagrined at his failure, having set his heart upon carrying out the Colonel’s wishes. He was also somewhat inclined to grumble at the guard, who, however, very naturally did not see the point of seizing the huge brute with their naked hands; for, while it was all very well for the man who held the tail, there was no second tail to hold by, and there was a very formidable array of teeth. It appeared that hearing the trap spring, the soldier had rushed out, and found that two dogs had been hunting

together again, for there were two caught in the noose. The moment they found themselves captured they fell to fighting and tearing each other, the smaller of the two struggling out of the noose and bolting as the man approached. He had only just time to catch the other by the tail before he was clear as well, and then ensued the comic performance, the finale which we witnessed.

“Well!” said the Colonel, “the dogs show excellent good sense. We shall never catch one if they persist in hunting in couples.”

Our chances were over for the night, so we turned in again, after a hearty laugh, and a stiff glass of grog all round. The latter was a highly desirable precaution, for it was freezing hard, and our attire was of the most airy description.

After this all our efforts in setting traps proved futile, for the dogs had learnt a lesson, and would not approach them again. Nevertheless they continued their nightly visits to the camp, attracted, doubtless, by the joints of beef and mutton which hung upon a framework of poles some height above the ground. Beneath

this they ran, and sat, and jumped, until the ground was beaten hard and smooth by the constant action of their paws. Not that they seemed starving; from the occasional glimpses that we caught of them, they appeared to be in very good case; but I suppose beef was a luxury which they seldom enjoyed.

Although we were unfortunate in our attempts upon the full-grown dogs, we managed to secure some of the breed. To our great satisfaction we found a litter of pups amongst the rocks, which, after watching for some weeks, we took into the camp, where we brought them up, and where their mother visited them at night, but resisted all our attempts at enticing her into sharing their comfortable captivity. By the time the camp finally broke up these pups were able to march with the men, and went with them to Pietermaritzburg. But they never attained the fine proportions and noble bearing of those that escaped us, and were always unmistakably the regular "Kaffir-dog." Strange to say, although brought up by us, and treated with the utmost kindness, they never reconciled themselves to our white skins; and

while they were on excellent terms with all the natives, they would never allow a white man to approach them. One of them was taken by my Chief, and kept at his quarters. It was many months before he succeeded in making friends with *Kwibi*, as the dog was called by the grooms. After that I believe his devotion to the Colonel was excessive, but he would never look at any other white man.