

mousetraps with Bobby, and would take raw and cooked meat from our hands with equal relish. Indeed I am afraid we overfed him, and induced apoplexy. At any rate, one evening as we sat reading after dinner, he dropped quietly from his perch, and died without a flutter.

The aasvogel, a repulsively ugly, bald-headed, bare-necked bird of the most pronounced vulture type, is very common in South Africa, especially in the regions where game is most plentiful. These denizens of the air seem to be perpetually hovering, on the watch for prey, at such immense heights as to be quite out of range of human vision; though their own keen sight enables them instantly to detect the prospect of a feed, and if an animal is killed, or even only wounded, they are at once aware of the fact, and, swooping down from their airy height, sail straight to the spot.

Perhaps you are a "new chum" out hunting, and you bring down an antelope. Although, at the moment of firing your shot, you would have been ready to take your affidavit that—

"No birds were flying overhead,  
There were no birds to fly,"—

your game has hardly fallen before, far up in the grey-blue, a tiny speck appears, at first only just visible, but rapidly increasing in size; then another, and yet another floats into sight, "and still they come," till at last the heavens seem all alive with birds approaching from every direction, outlined against the cloudless sky in different degrees of size and clearness, according to

perspective, but all making the straightest of bee-lines towards the wounded animal. In the Free State, where these birds are very numerous, T——, hunting on horseback, has sometimes found that before he could reach the spot where his antelope had fallen the aasvogels were already on it, and had commenced operations by plucking out the eyes, their special tit-bits.

These nastiest of birds think nothing of overeating themselves till their condition resembles that of Mark Twain's jumping frog after the famous dose of shot, and, when gorged after a good "square" meal, they are so heavy that they have to run a long way before they can rise into the air. On these occasions, if you are active and have a good long whip, you can catch them by switching the lash round their ugly, bare necks. But a little experience teaches you that this sport has its drawbacks, as the aasvogel invariably swarms with animal life of the most objectionable kind.

Owls are plentiful enou<sub>g</sub>h in the Karroo; so too are those other nocturnal birds, the goat-suckers, which at sundown begin to fly about, uttering their weird, plaintive cry. They are queer-looking birds, and seem all out of proportion, with a broad, short head and immensely wide bill, surrounded by stiff bristles like a cat's whiskers. On examining a specimen shot near our house, we were amused to find that, by looking into this preposterous bill, we could distinctly see the creature's eyes throu<sub>g</sub>h the semi-transparent roof of the mouth.

Another of our feathered eccentricities, the butcher-bird, called by the colonists Jack Hanger, likes to eat his game high; and you often come across mimosa-bushes which, stuck all over with small birds, beetles, locusts, etc., impaled on the long, stiff thorns, form his well-stocked larder.

In such a land of snakes as South Africa it is necessary for the birds to resort to many clever and thoughtful devices for the protection of eggs and young; and some of the "homes without hands" are most ingeniously planned and exquisitely constructed.

The golden oriole hangs her graceful nest on the very furthest end of a long bough—over water, if possible, for extra safety,—and always gives the preference to the drooping branches of the willow. The nest is shaped just like a Florence flask with the end curved over; and it is next to impossible for a snake to penetrate into its interior.

Even prettier and more wonderfully made is the nest of the kapok bird, a little creature resembling a tom-tit. The material used in the construction of this small domicile is a kind of wild cotton, well named by the Boers *kapok* (snow). The nest, which is very compact, and looks as if it were made of soft, white felt, is of much the same shape as the oriole's brown flask; but near the outlet it is dented in, forming a kind of second or exterior nest, in which the little paterfamilias mounts guard over his household gods, effectually closing the aperture by the pressure of his back against the curving end of the tube above him. The white

felt is very thick and firm throughout the globular part of the flask, but gradually diminishes in density along the neck, till at the orifice it is so thin and loosely woven that the soft edges, pressed together by the bird, remain interlaced even after he has flown from his sentry-box. No apparent aperture is left; and the little stronghold is quite impregnable, and ready to baffle the wiliest of ophidian marauders, until Mrs. Kapok, by flying out, re-opens the tunnel.

Snakes are indeed one of the greatest drawbacks to South African life. There are so many of them, they are of such deadly sorts, and the obtrusive familiarity and utter absence of ceremony with which they come into the houses render the nerves of newly-arrived inmates liable at any moment to receive a severe shock. After a time, of course, finding that every one you meet has some startling experiences to relate, of the discovery of intrusive snakes in all sorts of places where they were most unlooked-for and least desirable, you become somewhat inured to this unpleasant feature of colonial existence, and move about your house with the caution of one who would not be surprised to find a snake anywhere.

T—, dressing one morning during the early days of his Cape life, had just inserted his foot at one end of his trousers, when a night-adder—a most deadly little snake, with an evil habit of going about at hours when all respectable reptiles are in bed—dropped out at the other. One of our neighbours considerably damaged his drawing-room by firing several shots at a

large cobra, which had startled his wife by paying an unwelcome call. Another friend, exploring the depths of her rather dark china-closet, put her hand on a snake, comfortably coiled up beside the teacups. And a ghastly tale we heard, of some one in bed, putting his hand under the pillow at night for his pocket-handkerchief, and pulling out a puff-adder, makes one feel that—for those at least who live at the Cape—there is more of common sense than of irony in Mark Twain's assertion that it is safest not to go to bed.

We were more fortunate than our neighbours, and never during our four years' residence did I find in any of our rooms that snake for which—as the old lady for the burglar—I was continually looking. Perhaps we owed our immunity to the narrow strips of horse-hair material, with the rough edge pointing upwards, which T——, having read somewhere that no snake will cross this prickly barrier, had nailed along the threshold of each outer door. In the store, which did not communicate with the house, and the door of which was fortified by no friendly spikes, we did occasionally kill a snake—attracted, no doubt, by the legions of fat mice which ran riot among the sacks. The fowl-house, too, would often be thrown into a state of wild excitement and frenzied cackling by the visits of these dreaded reptiles—most inveterate of egg-stealers.

One day, soon after we came up-country, Nancy suddenly burst in upon us, her red turban all awry, and her speech so incoherent with agitation that the only intelligible words were "Missis! *Turkey*!! Missis!

*Snake!!!*" On running out, we found the whole poultry-yard in commotion, and the hens clamouring as if each had laid at least a dozen eggs; while our nine turkeys stood drawn up in a row, pictures of imbecile consternation, chattering feebly as they, one and all, made a dead point at a little empty packing-case, protruding from behind which we could just see the ugly, broad head of a young puff-adder. The enemy was soon despatched; and while the turkeys recovered their equanimity—which process took a long time—I indulged in the pleasure so dear to any one with a taste for natural history, and took a thorough survey of this, the first good-sized puff-adder I had seen. And what a repulsive creature it was, with its short, thick, swollen-looking body, toad-like head, and utterly evil countenance! Only the hideous cerastes, with little demon-like horns—so common in North Africa—comes anywhere near a puff-adder in thorough-paced villany of expression.

Of all the Cape snakes the puff-adder is not only the deadliest, but by far the most to be feared. For, being of the same colour as the ground, it is extremely difficult to see: it is lazy, too, and will not take the trouble to get out of your way as every other snake does; yet, when roused, it is very active, and comes at you backwards, springing a long distance with accurate aim. If you are in front of it you are safe, as it cannot strike forward. One morning, T——, lifting up the rug in which he had been sleeping out on the veldt, found the flattened body of a puff-adder, which had evidently

crept between the folds for warmth, and which he had unconsciously crushed to death.

Cobras, some of which are quite six feet in length, are very numerous in the Karroo. At certain seasons this snake is very aggressive, and will come at you boldly if you happen to be between it and its nest. T——, when out shooting one day with a pointer, suddenly saw a cobra lift itself up and strike the dog. The venom was so swift in its operation that the poor animal only turned round once, and died almost immediately.

The *schaapsticker*, which always reminded me of the beautiful but deadly coral-snakes of South America, has a wonderfully-marked skin, the pretty pattern and bright tints of which might well be utilized by some artistic designer of floor-cloths. A delicate, coral-like red predominates among the colours; and altogether the creature is so small and pretty that it is difficult to believe it is one of the most venomous of snakes. It is particularly destructive to cattle and sheep, hence its name, the literal translation of which is "sheep-stinger."

Some of the tree-snakes, too, are very beautiful; and, many of them being of the same bright green as the foliage, a close look is required to distinguish them as they lurk beneath it on the watch for birds, or for little mice which sometimes climb up into bushes, or into the lower branches of trees.

Lizards are very plentiful throughout the Karroo; and, as you walk through the veldt, hundreds of them, startled by your footsteps, dart away in all directions

from one isolated tuft of bush to another, as if running for their little lives. In strong contrast to these bright, active creatures of the sunshine are the slow-moving, pallid-complexioned house-lizards which are so unpleasantly common. There are few things uglier than one of these *hikés*. With his flat, round toes, serving the purpose of suckers whereby he is enabled to retain his foothold as he perches, fly-like, on the ceilings, his low, criminal type of face, brightened by none of the quaint, antediluvian air of wisdom which redeems the chameleon's honest ugliness, and with his general unhealthy and uncanny appearance, it is no wonder that among the ignorant natives he has the reputation of being as venomous as he looks, and that from one end of the country to the other he is more dreaded than any snake. Yet it is somewhat puzzling to think how he can inflict a poisonous bite, when, on looking into his mouth, you perceive that he has no teeth.

An object of even more superstitious dread is that mysterious and deadly creature—half-quadruped, half-reptile, and certainly altogether fabulous—the so-called *dassie-adder*. Throughout the whole country you hear accounts of this strange animal from Boers, Kaffirs, and Hottentots; many of the coloured race declare that they have seen it, and, though some laugh at the tale, the belief in it is evidently very general. The anterior portion of the mythical creature's body is supposed to be that of a *dassie*, or rock-rabbit (the coney of Scripture), to which are joined, in somewhat mermaid-like fashion, the thick body and blunt tail of



a snake resembling a puff-adder. According to all accounts the dassie-adder, whose bite is instantly fatal, is most vindictive, and, running with all the swiftness of a dassie, will chase any one who comes near it. Some say, too, that it goes about at night.

The dassies, so terrible in their fictitious semi-reptile state, are in real life very harmless, timid little animals. They are gregarious, and live among the rocks in such inaccessible places that it is most difficult to capture one of them; and a tame dassie is among the rarest of Karroo pets, so securely do these "feeble folk" make "their houses in the rocks." In appearance the dassie is very like a little brown guinea-pig; as regards intelligence, too, he is just about the equal of his rather uninteresting piebald cousins, and, although he is as pretty, soft-coated and gentle as you could wish, and in his mild, placid way gets very tame, he is nowhere in comparison with that prince of pets, a meerkat.

A not unlikely solution of the dassie-adder mystery seems to be that in all probability the puff-adders prey upon the little denizens of the rocks; and a large snake may occasionally have been seen with a half-swallowed dassie in his mouth, just as a common snake sometimes displays, protruding from his jaws, the head and fore-legs of the inconveniently fat frog which he is unable to gulp down in a hurry. The negro mind is quite capable of evolving a fabulous animal out of even such slight grounds as this.

Of "creepy-crawlies" of all kinds the Karroo possesses more than enough, and—like the snakes—they

invade the house, and make themselves at home in a manner which is free and easy rather than pleasant. Legions of venomous centipedes, scorpions, and big, bristly-legged spiders of the tarantula tribe lurk in the old reed ceilings; from whence they drop playfully down now and then, to the consternation of the unwary inmate sitting beneath, on whose head or book they chance to land. Or, if they do not drop down on you, they lie in wait about the room in well-chosen points of vantage, where their sudden discovery is sure to give you a horrid jump, even if you are lucky enough to get off without a venomous bite or sting.

One evening, as I was getting ready for bed—oblivious for once of cautious habits acquired, years before, in that land of “jiggers,” the West Indies, where you never venture to walk slipperless, even across your bedroom—my bare foot suddenly encountered what seemed like the point of a red-hot needle sticking straight up out of the floor; and, looking down, I found that I had trodden on a scorpion. Fortunately, it was not one of the large black ones, which are the most venomous, but only a light-coloured specimen, about two inches and a half in length. It was, however, quite bad enough; and although T—recklessly poured away over the foot our whole photographic supply of ammonia, and made me drink the greater part of a bottle of strong Cape wine in the hope of neutralizing the poison—though, alas! only producing other and sad results—it was many hours before that red-hot needle showed any signs of cooling

down. And then an exaggerated form of "pins and needles" set in, followed by what resembled a succession of powerful electric shocks running up the leg at intervals of two or three minutes. Altogether, the victim of a scorpion's sting can well realize the feelings of gouty patients, who dread to see even their best friends coming within five or six yards of them. It was two days before I could put my foot to the ground; and then, for several more, I could only hobble painfully with the aid of a stick.

Colonial boys are fond of setting scorpions to fight with tarantulas. The great spiders are most pugnacious, and seem only too glad of an opportunity to fight with anything. T— once watched one of them in desperate battle with a centipede. The vicious spider, whose body was as large as that of a mouse, seized his antagonist and shook him savagely, just as a terrier shakes a rat; then, letting him go for a time, he would spring upon him, pick him up, and worry him again, apparently with fiendish pleasure. He continued this mode of warfare until the final collapse of the poor centipede, whose pluck in facing such an adversary at all deserves to be commended.

Prominent among insect nuisances are ants of many different sorts and sizes, the worst of all being the mischievous rice ants. Many a carpet or curtain is utterly ruined by these creatures, which have a trick of coming up unexpectedly through the floor in large numbers, generally during the night, when they can carry on their destructive work without interruption.

They work with a zeal worthy of a better cause, and the amount of damage their powerful jaws can do in one night is almost incredible.

Very pretty necklaces are made of the threaded eggs of one kind of ant. They are rough and irregular in shape, and possess such a soft lustre, that—but for their deep golden colour—they might almost be taken for inferior pearls.

It is some satisfaction to know that the ranks of Cape ants are considerably thinned by several inveterate enemies. One of these is that strange burrowing animal the ant-bear, called by the Dutch *aardvaark* (earth-pig). \* There is one in the Zoo; and it is about as uncanny and nightmare-like a beast as could be imagined or dreamed of—a sort of crazy combination of calf and pig, reminding one of the Mock Turtle in "Alice's Adventures." Like that tearful animal, it possesses a head and body which do not in the smallest degree appear to belong to each other. The longest, narrowest and boniest of calves' heads, so pallid and sickly in complexion, and so entirely hairless, as to appear not only dead, but neatly scraped and cleaned all ready for cooking, is joined—without the intervention of any neck to speak of—to a fat, pig-like body, very scantily clothed with short, bristly hairs. The eyes are large and dark, the bare, pink ears are of rabbit-like proportions, and the calf's head terminates in a pig's snout, thickly lined with hair. This latter is the only hirsute adornment possessed by the goblin-like coun-

\* *Orycteropus capensis*.

tenance, to which a very cynical expression is given by the animal's ugly trick of wrinkling up its enormously long snout. The thick legs, and the feet, armed with large claws, are immensely strong; so, too, is the broad, flat, almost hairless tail, about the shape of which there is something unpleasantly suggestive of a puff-adder. The specimen in the Zoo has a damaged tail, the result of the force the captors found it necessary to use in dragging it from its hole. A riem was once tied to the tail of an ant-bear, and a span of oxen fastened on to draw it out of the ground. But, after much ineffectual tugging, the experiment ended in the breaking of the riem—or of the tail—our informant had forgotten which; at any rate the animal remained in its hole.

Many a time does the unwary rider, cantering across the veldt, come to sudden grief in one of the deep, trap-like holes made by the ant-bear, which seems by no means an uncommon animal. But it is quite possible to live many years in South Africa, and, however often you may tumble into its holes, never once see the creature itself. For, being of nocturnal habits, it is active only at night, when it tunnels its way underground like a mole, occasionally coming to the surface, and now and then emerging in very unexpected places.

Some members of a hunting-party, camping out for the night, were much surprised to see the ground heave up suddenly in the centre of their tent, the passing of an ant-bear a little below the surface being the cause of the miniature earthquake. And during the war in

Zululand an Irish sentry was on guard at midnight, when suddenly, close to him, the ground opened, and out of it rose a ghastly living Jack-in-the-box. The moonbeams shone full on the horrid form, long head, and deadly-pale, calf-like face; and the man—small blame to him—dropped his gun, deserted his post, and fled in horror, shouting to his astonished comrades the awful news that he had seen Old Nick himself! And indeed, if, on one of our moonlight strolls about the farm, an ant-bear had suddenly risen in our path, I am quite sure that we should have taken to our heels with equal alacrity.

The cage of the Cape ant-bear at the Zoo being next to that of the American ant-eater, a good opportunity is afforded for observing the marked dissimilarity of the two animals, which indeed could hardly be more unlike each other. One of the numerous points in which they differ is that the American ant-eater is toothless, while the *ardvaark* possesses teeth.

The ant-lion, so often pictured in books of natural history, is common in the Karroo; and it was a great pleasure for us when, for the first time, we saw him in real life, and examined his cleverly-constructed, funnel-shaped trap, hollowed out in the soft, sliding sand,—down which his victims tumble, to find him waiting open-mouthed at the bottom.

Talking of the ant-lion reminds one of another excavator, still more familiar to Cape colonists, the trap-door spider. His "diggings" are in the form of a perpendicular, cylinder-shaped box, the lid of which, level with

the surface of the ground, is so neatly made that it is quite impossible to detect it when closed.

The walking-leaf tribe is very largely represented in South Africa ; and besides simulating leaves of many different kinds, the creatures assume numerous other forms, some looking just like pieces of dried stick, others like bits of straw, blades of grass, etc. The plant, or portion of a plant, which they personate so admirably, is always the chosen resting-place on which they sit, motionless and meditative, often defying detection. The praying mantis is worshipped by the Hottentots, who perhaps, like the ancient Greeks and Romans, look on him as a kind of soothsayer or fortune-teller (*μάντις*). But in spite of being the Hottentot god, and of possessing such a pious-sounding scientific name as *Mantis religiosa*, he is a most pugnacious little beast ; and if he has a difficulty to settle with one of his brethren, the pair will fight it out like the Kilkenny cats.

Not long ago, at a North African picnic, one of these same little creatures caused much amusement by the tact which he displayed in doing just the right thing at the right time, and in the prettiest manner. It was a very hot day, so close and oppressive that we all felt rather languid ; and conversation flagged as we sat at luncheon round the table-cloth spread on the ground in the interior of a large tent. Suddenly, during a long pause, a little mantis appeared on the scene. With a jaunty air, and with all the cool self-possession of a popular performer advancing, confident of success, towards the footlights, he stepped on to the tablecloth,

and, crossing it in a bee-line, drew up before Her Britannic Majesty's Consul, to whom, with many jerky inclinations of his gaunt, bright-green body, he made what appeared to be a series of most obsequious bows. Then, having obeyed the first requirements of etiquette, he passed slowly along the line of guests, halting occasionally and paying his respects to one or the other. He seemed quite unabashed by all the notice and applause which he received; and as the plate in which he finally deposited himself was handed round among the guests, he calmly surveyed each one in turn, while continuing, very literally, to "bow and scrape." If he had been a paid performer, engaged beforehand, he could not have played his little part better; and all agreed in giving him a vote of thanks for his timely appearance, which just gave us the mental pick-me-up which, on that enervating day, we all needed. I believe some one carried him home at last in a paper cage; though whether he fulfilled the brilliant promise of his first introduction to human society, and became an intelligent pet, we never heard.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### OUR NEIGHBOURS.

Hospitality of Cape colonists—Cheating and jealousy in business—Comfortless homes—Spoilt children—Education—The “School-master”—Convent schools—A priest-ridden nation—The *Nachtmaal*—Old French names—A South African duke in Paris—Fine-looking men—Fat women—Ignorance of *Vrouws*—Boers unfriendly to English—A mean man.

THERE is much to be admired in the character of those decidedly unpolished diamonds, the colonial-born, English-speaking inhabitants of the Karroo. They are a fine, sturdy, self-reliant race, splendidly fitted in every way for their extremely rough-and-ready surroundings. In kindness and hospitality they are unsurpassed, even by the much-praised dwellers in Arab tents or white, flat-roofed Moorish houses; and in the isolated homesteads where they live their rough, but simple and healthy lives, the heartiest reception is invariably accorded alike to friends, slight acquaintances, and even perfect strangers. Perhaps you are one of the latter, and, on a long journey, you outspan at the dam of a farm, with the intention of remaining only long enough to give the horses the necessary water and rest before you *trek* again. But no sooner is your

cart or spider seen to stop than you are sought out, with kind and pressing invitation to come in. No matter how full the house may already be, how late or inconvenient the hour of your unexpected arrival on a Cape farm, a place is always found for you at the table; and, if needed, some sort of a night's lodging, of however *impromptu* a description, will be prepared for you. The colonist joyfully makes you welcome to his best. If you are staying in his house, a mount or a seat in his conveyance is always at your disposal; and the longer you can remain, the better he and all his kind-hearted family are pleased. It is true that their home is far from being a luxurious one, and that none of them have much idea of comfort; but the latter article being, on account of the isolation and of the bad servants, somewhat difficult of attainment, it is on the whole just as well that no one misses it sufficiently to regret its absence; and one cannot but admire and envy the philosophical manner in which the colonists take things as they come, making themselves perfectly happy under any circumstances.

Altogether there is so much that is lovable in the colonial character, that you are sometimes disappointed to find that there is a reverse to this bright side of the picture, and that—even by those who have received you the most hospitably, and who apparently, while you were their guest, could not do enough for you—you are liable, in business transactions, to be woefully cheated. It is thought no disgrace to get the better of any one in a bargain, whether on an iniquitously

large or contemptibly small scale; on the contrary, it is considered rather clever and smart to "do a shot" on the guileless and unsuspecting new chum, fresh from a country where a somewhat different code of honour obtains.

Business jealousies, too, are another source of trouble to the uninitiated. If any farmer has a project which seems likely to turn out a good thing for him, he had better be careful that no bird of the air whispers it about beforehand among his neighbours and rivals, who, one and all, will only be too glad if they can bring his plans to naught.

Time seems to be of no more value to the Cape colonists than it is to the followers of Islam, and "letting things slide" is pretty generally the order of the day. One is rather puzzled at this weak point in otherwise active, energetic characters; and certainly, living as these people do in the splendid air of the Cape—exhilarating as champagne, and making all who inhale it feel glad to be alive—they cannot, like the limp, supine inhabitants of Eastern lands, plead the excuse of an enervating climate. Much of the discomfort in the houses is due to this frightful habit of procrastinating. Whatever is broken is, as often as not, left unmended for an indefinite time; little repairs, which need but the minimum of time and trouble, but the neglect of which would cause daily annoyance and discomfort to any but these easy-going mortals, are put off from week to week and from month to month. And every one is just as happy and contented, with

violent draughts and clouds of dust blowing in through two or three broken windows at once; or with a glass outer door whose handle has been off for months, and which continually flaps noisily backwards and forwards, admitting gusts of cold wind and flocks of turkeys and fowls into the room; as if all things were in perfect order. Poultry and domestic animals, indeed, have it all their own way on Karroo farms with the delightful freedom enjoyed by their brethren in Irish cabins. At one house, for instance, if the dining-room was left for a moment when the cloth was laid for a meal, half a dozen fowls would be on the table, picking the bread to pieces; while in another I have several times assisted our hosts in ejecting a too-friendly pig from the bedroom. To give South African pigs their due, I must say that in that driest of climates they are less uncleanly in their persons, and hence rather less objectionable indoors, than they would be in Europe. But we had English prejudices, and discountenanced the visits of members of the farm-yard; and Toto had standing orders, which he faithfully obeyed, to keep the rooms clear of live stock of all kinds, with the exception of privileged pets.

Even more terrible than the intrusive animals are the spoilt children. During their earlier years the little colonists are left very much to themselves: they run wild, like young colts, about their native farm, no one takes the trouble to interfere with them, and they are allowed to retain, unchecked, all the rude, rough habits which they have acquired from their uncivilized Hot-

tentot nurse-girls. They do as they like, say whatever comes uppermost, and behave at table in any sort of outrageous fashion that pleases them ; while the father and mother sit unmoved, apparently surprised at nothing their progeny may see fit to do. The latter being totally unencumbered by bashfulness, the presence of strangers acts as no restraint ; and a dinner taken in the company of a large family of boys, of stolid parents, and indifferent elder sisters, is for the newly-imported English visitor a novel and rather startling experience, the details of which, however, are best left to oblivion.

But, on the whole, the young Africander's bringing-up—unpleasant though he certainly is during the process—is no doubt the best possible one to fit him for the rough and active life of the farms, and to form in him that independent character and those habits of self-reliance and smartness in money matters which, when he is grown up, stand him in such good stead. And he *does* grow up with astounding rapidity ; being at fifteen a thorough man of business, able to “do a deal” with any one, and taking good care, you may be sure, that the transaction is no unprofitable one to himself. In this respect he affords a decided contrast to the average young Englishman, who, at twenty-five, is often—where business matters are concerned—as inexperienced as a boy.

The difficulties in the way of providing the children with a good education are by no means one of the least of South African drawbacks ; especially for those living on the far-off country farms. Colonial schools do not

seem to be much in favour, at least for boys, and the great ambition of a Cape parent is to send his sons home to be educated in Europe—most frequently for the medical profession, a doctor's position being the most coveted one in the colony. In the Edinburgh University, especially, the Africander element is in great force. Those parents who cannot afford to have their boys educated in Europe generally contrive to secure the services of some broken-down gentleman, occasionally even of a clergyman, who lives on the farm and—too often for a shamefully small salary, indeed in one or two instances for nothing but his keep—fills the post of tutor, or, as his employers call him, "schoolmaster," to the turbulent young tribe. As may be imagined, his life is not a very enviable one, the breaking-in process being all the harder in consequence of the long period, prior to his advent, when his charges were allowed to run wild out of doors all day long—to the immense benefit, no doubt, of their robust young bodies, but to the utter neglect of all intellectual and moral training.

The schoolmaster does not seem to have been a very general institution in the days when some of the older colonists were young; and a business correspondence with Karroo farmers sometimes elicits the wildest vagaries of orthography. T——, for instance, received a letter from one of our neighbours, in which the following sentences occurred: "Your hostridges are vary onpleasand on the public outspan. Pleas to try and halter tham." Another correspondent, intent on the purchase of ostriches, told us he wished "to bye buirds."

For girls, the convent schools in several of the larger towns are undoubtedly the best, both as regards the good, sensible education imparted, and the refined, lady-like manners which are invariably acquired by all who have been brought up under the tutelage of the nuns. Throughout the whole country, the convent-bred girls can always be recognised at a glance, and the contrast is very striking between them and the less fortunate ones who possess but the superficial education and second-rate manners of the average colonial boarding-school. Even the daughters of the roughest Boers, if sent to a convent school, are turned out perfect ladies, and return to their up-country homes with gentle and gracious manners strangely out of keeping with their uncouth surroundings. But there are many parents, of course, to whom all the advantages of convent education could not compensate for that insuperable objection, the risk of Romanizing influence; and intending settlers in the colony who do not wish to expose their daughters to that risk will do well to bring out a good governess with them, and keep the girls at home.

The Boer's great desire, like that of his English-speaking neighbour, is to get his boys educated in Europe; but, instead of the medical profession, the pastorate is the object of his ambition. For these Cape Dutch, although Protestants, are quite as priest-ridden as any Roman Catholic nation; the *predikant* is a great man indeed throughout the widespread circle of his parishioners, and to offend him, or even to fail in paying him the exact amount of deference he considers his due, means to be boycotted.

The *nachtmaal*, or communion, is only administered—as among Scotch Presbyterians—twice or three times during the year; and on these rare occasions the little town or village where there is a Dutch church becomes the lively scene of an immense gathering of Boers, *vrouws*, and families. They have come, many of them from long distances of three or four days' journey, plodding along in waggons drawn by long spans of oxen, driving in roomy conveyances of every possible queer and antiquated shape, or travelling on horseback—the stout, ungainly women, in their white *kappjes* and gaudily-coloured dresses, cantering clumsily by the side of their lords. The crowd of outspanned vehicles, drawn up close together, form a kind of large camp; and, the Boer being always ready to combine piety with business—and, if need be, with a good deal of cheating,—the *nachtmaal* ends with a busy fair or market, in which a very brisk trade is carried on, all kinds of farm produce being sold or bartered.

In nearly all the Dutch houses you find curious old family Bibles, many of them in black-letter, with quaint and interesting maps. In some of the latter, representing Africa, the lakes Victoria and Albert Nyanza are marked, though quite in the wrong places. The good old French names borne by so many of the Boers tell of their Huguenot descent; Du Plessis, De Villiers, Du Toit, Du Barry, etc., are all names of frequent occurrence in South Africa, although the French language is never spoken, the Dutch having prohibited its use among the refugees when the latter settled in



the colony. Some time ago, Napoleon III., anxious to restore the ancient nobility, sent for one of these Boers, who, in the old country, was the heir to a dukedom, inviting him to resume his title and estates. The colonist came to Paris, and, after giving European life a fair trial, became homesick for his vineyard and his farm, and—perhaps impelled by that attraction which seems to draw back to the Cape those who have once lived under its bright sky—decided in favour of his old-fashioned life, and, resigning all his ancestral rights, went joyfully home to the rough surroundings of his childhood.

Although the Boers are fine, well-built, handsome men, their feminine relatives, far from equalling them in good looks, are as fat and ungraceful as any inmates of Turkish harems. Fortunately, however, excessive obesity is in the eyes of a Boer the very quality of all others which constitutes the chief attraction of a *mooie vrouw* (handsome woman); and when he uses the latter expression you may be sure that he speaks of a ponderous being, no less than thirteen or fourteen stone in weight. In this matter of taste the Boers resemble not only the Turks, but also the Zulus, who can pay a woman no higher compliment than to compare her to a she-elephant. The *vrouws* become *passées* at a very early age, and are apparently shortlived in comparison with their lords, if one may judge from the fact that it is no uncommon thing to meet a man of fifty who has already had three wives.

Intellectually, no less than physically, the Boer

women are considerably the inferiors of the men. They have evidently lived for generations in blissful ignorance, with no more education than falls to the lot of the Oriental ladies they so closely resemble in figure. Their husbands and fathers have been quite contented with the existing state of things; and it is only of late years that a few of the more enlightened parents, beginning at last to recognise the value of female education, have been sending their daughters to the convent schools.

In Spain, an equally strong contrast may be observed between the men and the women; but it is reversed, the advantage being on the side of the *señoras*, who somehow appear too handsome and intelligent to belong to the ignoble, mean-looking men.

The Boers used to be very friendly with the English; but now—thanks to the sad and too well-known manner in which our Government has muddled South African affairs—we are most unpopular. Formerly, if an Englishman on his journey came to a Dutchman's house, he was most hospitably received—though etiquette demanded that on his departure he should offer money in payment for his food and bed, in order that his host might have the pleasure of refusing it; but now, were he to present himself, the chances are that the Boer would insultingly offer him a night's lodging in the negroes' quarters, as was once the case with T—.

Meanness is a prominent trait in the Boer's character. Indeed, the reputation which he has acquired

—not altogether justly—for being such a splendid shot, really and truly proceeds from his excessive care to make sure of his game, and thus waste no cartridges. Here is an instance which almost equals Max Adeler's mean man. When T——was at the Kimberley Diamond Fields, a Kaffir fell one day from the narrow pathway left between the claims into one of the latter, belonging to a Dutchman. He landed on the little table used by the Boer for sorting his diamonds, and—the height from which he had fallen being eighty feet—not only the table, but nearly every bone in the unfortunate man's body was broken. He seems, however, to have possessed a wonderfully strong constitution, and actually recovered from his terrible injuries; and, his case exciting very general sympathy among the kindly diamond-diggers, a subscription was made for him. But, long before he was convalescent, the Boer called on him, demanding payment for the broken table, the whole value of which did not amount to more than thirty shillings.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### GOOD-BYE.

Recalled to England—Regrets and farewells—Cape horses lacking in intelligence—"Old Martin"—A chapter of accidents—A horse "after Velasquez"—The Spy's revenge—Virtues and faults of Cape horses—Horse-sickness—Good-bye to Swaylands—Kaffir crane—The voyage home—Dogs in durance—St. Helena—A visit to Longwood—Home again.

AT last, after several busy and most enjoyable years of ostrich-farming life, the time came when—our presence being required in England—we bade farewell to our colonial home, and, leaving the management of affairs in the able hands of a friend from the old country, with whom T—— had recently entered into partnership, took our departure from Swaylands, not without many regrets. Although, within the wide circle enclosed by our wire fence, we were not leaving many of our human fellow-creatures, there were plenty of good-byes to be said; for those who live on these out-of-the-way farms come to be on very intimate and familiar terms with their live stock, and all our creatures—even the fowls, and those tamer members of our large family of ostriches which for years had been daily looking inquiringly in at our windows, and picking and stealing

round the kitchen door—were old friends, from whom we were sorry to part.

But, strange to say, the very animal which in England becomes one of the friendliest seems here the least domesticated; and it cost us less of a pang to bid adieu to our horses than might be imagined by people at home, unacquainted with the surprising lack of intelligence which, in the Cape Colony, distinguishes the equine race. Their independent lives, and the freedom which most of them enjoy to roam as they will about the veldt, unfettered by the restraints of a stable, seem to have rendered them very indifferent to human society. It is no use trying to make a friend of your horse; he contemptuously repels all your advances, obstinately refuses to eat out of your hand, despises pieces of bread, lumps of sugar, and all such delicate little attentions wherewith you have never failed to win the heart of his English brother, and, however many years he may have lived with you, persists to the last in remaining on the coldest and most distant of terms.

Among all our horses the only really intelligent animal was one of Arab descent. But our good-bye to him was said a year before; and now, on leaving Swaylands, we can but take our last look at "the place where the old horse died." The faithful old grey friend who lies under that rough clump of bush was a favourite of long standing. He had belonged to T—many years ago, was sold by him on leaving the colony, and, after changing hands several times, chiefly among

acquaintances of his former owner—in remembrance of whom he acquired the name of “Old Martin”—was repurchased by T—— soon after we came out. Although by this time he was a long way past his prime, he was still considerably the best of all our horses, and for pluck and endurance we have never seen his equal. At the end of the longest day’s journey—even though it had covered sixty miles—he would come in pulling as hard as at the start, and apparently as fresh. No matter how poor his condition—and South African horses do indeed get poor during long droughts—he was at all times equally ready for work. We never insulted him by carrying so unnecessary an article as a whip; for he did everything with a will, and whether cantering, trotting, or only walking, always seemed to be endeavouring to run away with you. As a lady’s horse he was simply perfect, all his paces being equally delightful for the rider.

In former times T—— and his four-footed namesake had gone through many adventures together; and now, when after the lapse of years these two friends and comrades met again, the old horse instantly recognised his master with unmistakeable signs of pleasure.

One of these early adventures came very near costing the good grey his life. T——, during a journey on horseback, came one evening to a river crossed by an open railway-bridge consisting only of iron girders. To save time and avoid a circuitous route he decided to take a somewhat reckless short cut and lead the horse over that bridge. In this Blondin-like fashion they

had proceeded about half-way across, when poor old Martin's foot slipped, and down he came, falling in such a position that his body lay prone on the narrow iron pathway formed by the rail and girder, while on either side two of his legs dangled helplessly over space. Sundown was approaching; so too was a train which, as T—— remembered, was very nearly due; but, though he tried his utmost to help the poor animal to his feet, all was unavailing, and presently the train hove in sight. T——, waving his handkerchief with wild gestures, succeeded in attracting the attention of the engine-driver, who stopped the train and came to his assistance. But, with all their efforts, they could not succeed in raising the horse from his perilous position; the train could wait no longer, and they had no choice but to resort to the kill-or-cure expedient of rolling him over into the water below. Falling from a height of some twenty-five feet, he went so deep into the mud at the bottom of the shallow African river that T—— was unable to pull him out, and had to leave him there all night. On coming back next morning with a span of oxen and some stout riems, he was horrified to find that during the night the unfortunate animal had sunk deeper and deeper into the mud, till little more than his nose remained above water. It was the work of much time and exertion to drag him out; and during the process his neck got such a twist that for the remainder of his days there was a crook in it, which caused his head to hang meditatively a little on one side.

Another time he was attacked by a large swarm of vicious bees, which settled all over him, stinging him so severely that his whole body swelled up, and he assumed the proportions of that preposterously inflated horse by Velasquez in the picture-gallery at Madrid. For three days the poor old fellow stood immoveable; then, after taking an enormous drink of water, he gradually recovered.

Very different, too, from the unintelligent Cape horses was "The Spy," a well-known steeple-chaser, imported into the colony by T— some years ago. An incident which occurred during his voyage out recalls the oft-told anecdote of the elephant and the tailor. The horse-box in which the Spy was placed being just outside the door of the saloon, his head was in close proximity to the waiters as they passed and repassed during their attendance at meals. One of these waiters, being of a malicious turn of mind, found great enjoyment in teasing the unoffending animal, and missed no opportunity of giving him a rough knock on the nose in passing. For a while the Spy bore this treatment patiently; but he was biding his time, and at last had his revenge. One day, as the obnoxious waiter, bearing in either hand a steaming dish of currie and rice, was stepping briskly along to the saloon, he suddenly found himself grasped in a pair of powerful jaws, whisked clean off his legs, shaken like a rat in the grip of a terrier, and, finally, ignominiously dropped on to the deck among the *débris* and scattered contents of his dishes.



Although the horses produced by the Cape Colony are the best in South Africa, they have been much over-rated. It is true that a large number of them are capable of getting through a good deal of slow, continuous work under the saddle, with poor food and hardships as to shelter; but the vast majority of the colonial horses are in all respects indifferent animals, and devoid of good looks. In one point, perhaps, they surpass all other equine races in the world—their feet being generally excellent, and the hoofs so firm and hard as rarely to require shoeing, even on very long journeys. Many horses of most unprepossessing exterior are scarcely to be matched for speed and endurance in the field; but, taken *en masse*, South African horses are a failure. They are almost invariably poor and timid jumpers, and, when in harness, move but very small weights. A light cart containing two persons is sufficient to tax the powers of a pair of average horses, and even then jibbing is always imminent. At least eighty per cent. of the Cape horses are desperate stumblers, and uneasy in their paces—faults attributable to round, heavy shoulders and defective hind-quarters. Among the good horses the greater proportion are ill-tempered, and delight in buck-jumping, whenever they have the rare chance of being in good condition.

The terrible distemper known as “horse sickness” periodically causes great destruction in many parts of the colony; and the fear of it operates as a check on breeders, who would otherwise import better horses to improve their studs. A “salted horse”—one

which has had horse-sickness—is very valuable, even if abounding in all kinds of equine misfortunes or faults. Such animals range in price from £25 to £100, according to age and quality. Horse-sickness is most partial in its operations; and sometimes, in the case of two adjoining farms, one will be severely attacked by the disease, while the other remains perfectly free from it.

And now, at length, the day of departure has come; and we leave Swaylands, though not in our own cosy little American spider. That fairy chariot, alas! is *hors de combat*; its strong, though delicate-looking wheels have succumbed at last to the roughness of Karroo roads and the dryness of the South African climate; and as we pass out at the little gate we take our last look at it as it lies there on the ground, a forlorn, sledge-like thing. What glorious drives we have had in that once daintiest and prettiest of little carriages—travelling to hunts or dances, fetching our mail, or sending off precious freights of feathers to the Port Elizabeth market! and how vividly the recollection of them comes back to us as we pass for the last time along the familiar Mount Stewart road!

Even now, at this time and distance, we can still conjure them up, and see and hear once more the well-known and loved sights and sounds of the Karroo. Animal and bird life start into quick motion all round us: the little *duyker* antelopes spring up from their forms among the bush, and dart gracefully away; the flights of pretty Namaqua partridges run along the ground quite close to us; the *knorhaans*, rending

the air with discordant, over-powering noise, chatter out their loud disapproval of our approach; the little bright-eyed meerkats stare audaciously at us, then dive into their holes in pretended fear of us; the air is all full of the sweet scent of mimosa-blossoms, and T——, singing joyously in the overflow of good spirits induced by its pure, fresh, exhilarating qualities, enlivens the journey with one song after another as we spin merrily along on our airy, bicycle-like wheels; while Toto, equally happy, careers at our side, chasing every animal and bird that he sees, though seldom able to catch anything much swifter on its feet than a tortoise.

These tortoises, by the way, always afforded Toto excellent sport; he considered it his bounden duty to bring to us—no matter from what distance—all that he could possibly grasp with his teeth; and, many of them being much too large to be carried in this way, he was often obliged to put them down for a while, to rest his poor aching jaws. Sometimes he would come to a standstill before a gigantic specimen, and call us, with loud, excited barks, to the spot where some fifty pounds of splendid material for soup were to be had for the picking-up. He would stand barking triumphantly at the creature, which, in response, kept up a low, roaring noise, expressive of deepest disgust at his proceedings. And when the prize was secured, and we drove off with it safely ensconced at our feet, Toto was a proud dog indeed.

Somehow, on this last drive into Mount Stewart,

everything is tantalizingly looking its very best; the *veldt*, refreshed by recent rains, is of a lovely soft green, and delicate flowers peep from it in all directions; the dazzling sunshine—so soon to be exchanged for cold northern skies—seems brighter than ever; and, in the clear atmosphere of the Karroo, the bold outlines of the far-off Cock's Comb are lifted up, as it were, by a strange effect of mirage—the mountain appearing quite detached from the horizon, and with blue water flowing at its foot. Just before we reach the turn in the road which hides the homestead of Swaylands from our view, we stop and look back; and, if it must be owned, that last look at the poor little ugly house—our dear home for the past few years—is taken by not quite undimmed eyes.

Then on, at a brisk pace, to Mount Stewart, where, at the pleasant little hotel in which we have so often been hospitably entertained, the host and his numerous family are assembled in full force to bid us God-speed. I take my last, wistful look at a long-coveted tame Kaffir crane, a delightful bird, who, in his neat suit of softest French-grey plumage, stalks solemnly—as he has been doing any time these four or five years—about the precincts of station and hotel; and am introduced to a newly-captured baby jackal, which T— has just bought, and which is to accompany us to England. Then the train, at its usual leisurely pace, crawls down with us to Port Elizabeth. More good-byes—and at last we and all our zoological collection are safe on board the Union Company's *S.S. Mexican* ;

and soon the coast of Algoa Bay recedes from our view.

Toto does not enjoy his journey as he did when outward-bound ; for there are too many of the canine race on board, and one little pair of pugs in particular—belonging to richly-jewelled passengers of the Hebrew persuasion, who have not trained up their dogs in the way they should go—commence the voyage by invading everybody's cabin, and making themselves generally so objectionable that on the second day the captain's fiat goes forth for the impartial consignment of all the dogs—good, bad and indifferent—to hen-coops. There they are accordingly, on the second-class deck, ranged in a dismal row, at one end of which poor little caged Anubis, the jackal-cub, yelps piteously for mother, brethren and freedom ; and there, for the four weeks of the voyage, they are condemned to remain. All are profoundly miserable ; but poor old Toto—being so much the largest—is the most to be pitied. In that narrow cage, where there is hardly room for him to turn round, he travels through the steaming heat of the tropics ; his legs become cramped and stiff from want of exercise ; he fattens like a Strasburg goose on the Irish stew and other substantial viands from the saloon table with which the waiters—cruelly generous—persist in stuffing him ; and when, as a rare treat, he is allowed half an hour's liberty for what is ironically called a "run" on deck, he is able to do little more than sit down and pant.

With better luck than often falls to the lot of travel-

lers by steamer, we remain a sufficient time at St. Helena to allow of a somewhat hurried visit to Longwood ; and, going ashore with a good number of fellow-passengers, we charter the few carriages and saddle-horses to be had in the little town, and proceed, as fast as we can, up the steep, zigzag road. We notice that in this island there seem to be two completely different climates within a very short distance of one another. Down near the sea-level, bananas and other tropical plants grow luxuriantly in the close, stifling heat : but as we ascend we come into another climate ; the air is almost cold, there is a fine, drizzling rain ; blackberries, bracken, and other home-like plants border the roadside, and we might imagine ourselves in England, but for the bright-hued little birds which peep fearlessly at us from the bushes. Though the excursion is a most enjoyable one, especially after being cooped up on board ship, Longwood itself is disappointing, the house being quite dismantled, and containing nothing but a very beautiful bust of Napoleon, which has been placed by his family in one of the rooms.

Our passage is throughout a calm and prosperous one : we have pleasant company on board ; there are none of the cliques and small enmities which so often spoil the enjoyment of a voyage ; some of the passengers play and sing well ; good concerts and theatricals enliven many of our evenings ; and our only disappointment is the unkind fate which again brings us through Madeira in the dark. And at last, one lovely April morning—which seems to have been made on purpose

to welcome returning colonists, spoilt by a long continuance of Cape sunshine—we drop quietly into Southampton; English violets and primroses are brought on board in delicious profusion; the usual hurried farewells are exchanged while most of us struggle wildly with refractory bags and wraps; Toto, in an alarmingly plethoric condition, waddles forth from his hen-coop; and very soon we are on *terra firma*, and—paying the first dread penalty of the newly-landed—pass through the ordeal of the Custom House. This turns out to be a very lengthy and tedious business; for, since we have been away, new and stringent regulations have come into force, and we find that our innocent cabin-trunks and hand-bags are all suspected of containing dynamite. Not until every package has been thoroughly ransacked are we allowed to depart, and seek our train. Then the latter bears us along through woodland scenery, brilliant with all the fresh tints of an English spring, which for us seems to have a new beauty. And in a few hours we find ourselves back in old, familiar scenes; friends from whom we have long been parted are round us once more; and the dear, delightful, rough South African life is a thing of the past.

THE END.

HOME LIFE  
ON AN  
OSTRICH  
FARM

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*A. MARTIN*

G. PHILIP & SON



