

CAMPAIGNING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

1879.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROUTE—PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE—A FLOOD OF LETTERS—RIVAL TAILORS—INSPECTED BY THE DUKE—LAST DAY AT ALDERSHOT—DISILLUSION—EMBARKATION.

THE Zulu War came to us, as to many others, a sorrow and a surprise.

On the evening of the 11th February the papers had been full of accounts of the disaster of the 22d of the previous month at Isandlwana, and it was felt that England would make a great effort to retrieve that reverse ; but that it should come home to us as individuals was not so clear.

Upon the morning which followed the receipt of the news, there was to be a "Brigade day,"—the regiment was quartered at Aldershot,—and, after an early breakfast, I went up to barracks to take part in it. But instead of finding the companies standing on parade in readiness to be inspected, I found the men gathered in groups, not talking much,—just standing as if they had heard something, and expected shortly to hear more.

There were but a few minutes of suspense. On the orderly-room table lay the order for the regiment to be held in readiness "for immediate embarkation on service in South Africa." For the first time we were going to fight.

My wife met me in the entrance to our hut; it was unusual for me to return so early. Besides that, there must have been something in my face which had not been there before.

"We're ordered off to the Cape at once, Nelly!" I said. It was no time for begging one's words.

Nelly gave a slight shiver, and I saw her hand press on the handle of the half-open door she was holding, a trifle heavier than it had

done before I spoke. That was only for a second,—little more. Then she gave a faint smile, and laid both hands on my shoulders, saying, as she kissed me, “I’m so glad, Ned, because I know that you are glad.” And after that she burst out crying.

So the memorable news came to many houses on that memorable day.

Then followed days of hurried preparation ; journeys to town by the morning train, to return by the last one laden with parcels. White’s shop in Aldershot became a fashionable resort : hardly was an afternoon passed without paying it a visit—something had been forgotten ; and then you were sure to meet every one there.

The thing that impressed itself most upon my mind in those last days was the immense amount of lettering that was done in that shop. Every one going out ordered some dozen articles or more, and on each article had to be painted name, rank, and regiment of the owner. The painters sat in corners, opposite to piles of goods, working on endlessly, as it seemed. Buckets, pillows, canteens, valises, tubs, bags, caps, filters, tables, chairs, bedsteads,—all had

to be lettered by those patient men. How they kept the things from getting thoroughly mixed was a puzzle.

Oscillating continually between the shop and barracks, always in a hurry, and laden with the smaller purchases, we, the lucky ones going out, were easily to be distinguished from the unlucky ones left behind, who walked slowly and carried no parcels. Poor fellows, how we pitied them !

The letter-rack in the ante-room could no longer hold our correspondence. When the rack was full, the circulars, books, letters, and other tradesmen's offers of assistance, overflowed on to the mantelpiece ; that full, the writing-table was taken up ; that covered, the floor received the rest. Chaos reigned supreme in the mess. Piles of letters addressed to officers who had long since left were heaped about. The newspapers lay anywhere, torn and mangled, —the mess sergeant was too busy to cut the leaves or sew them together. Parcels which had been opened, left their brown-paper wrappers in the corners. The fire was neglected, and often went out. In the midst of the confusion the

mess property was sold by auction, and the rooms were infested by Jew purchasers anxious for their bargains. For the rest of our time we sat on three barrack-chairs, over a fire without a fender, in an empty hut, lighted at nights by a couple of candles.

Amongst other amusing incidents of the time was the arrival of three tailors, rivals, each anxious to supply us with uniform and helmets fitted for the climate of South Africa. They were small-sized men, unmistakably tailors, and when told to come in, did so with a timid air, as if expecting some rough practical joke from the officers who had need of them.

They halted inside the door, and drew up in a line. Then, as if by signal, each one unrolled his sample red coat, and held it up to view; flimsy, fluttering things, gaudy with gold lace, and about as unfit for campaigning as could be designed.

The things fluttered and glittered; above them peered the anxious faces of the three tailors; opposite were the officers looking rather bored. Eventually the boldest of the tailors spoke up, shaking his coat in our faces; and his

effrontery gained him the day, and he received many orders.

On his delivering my own garments, I suggested, by way of a joke, that I supposed it would do if I paid him on my return.

“Why, sir, you see,” was his reply, “when gentlemen are going out as you are, sir, it is always a case of ready money,”—a pleasant hint which reminds me of the view of Isandlwana taken by my bootmaker, a well-to-do gentleman in the West End, who shook his head over the news pathetically as he said, “Sad business, sir—very sad ; nothing like it in England since I can remember. We lost three customers by it, sir !”

Another phase of the times was the arrival of men’s fathers—or other near relatives—fine old fellows, with their eyes always following their sons’ movements ; trotting down into the town to bring back some small thing that might be useful ; trying to chat unconcernedly with the rest as if they were down amongst us on a pleasure-trip, and as if the queer life they had suddenly tumbled into had been theirs during the last half-century. It was a hard time of dis-

comfort for most of them, and the pangs of parting were rendered none the less bitter by the weary mockery of keeping up cheerful appearances when the hearts were full.

Meanwhile in the huts the men were being fitted with boots and clothes, accounts were being signed, sickly men picked out to remain behind, warnings given, threats or promises held out, anything to keep the men together under such exciting circumstances. Six hundred volunteers arrived,—men whose faces we had not seen before, and who had not seen each other's faces till they met on our parade-ground. A company, yesterday fifty strong, to-day expanded itself into over a hundred, and you walked down a double rank of strange faces peering curiously at you, and wondering what sort of a "cove" you were likely to prove by your looks.

Added to all, it was bitterly cold weather—snow one day, and slush the next—thoroughly inclement, cheerless, and miserable. Then our boxes had to be returned to store, or packed for travelling, and we slept in the blankets meant for future use in Zululand.

There were farewell dinners to be eaten at

neighbouring messes, speeches made and returned, when the champagne made hosts and guests equally feel heroes, followed by headaches and more packing in the morning.

On one of these last days the Duke of Cambridge came down from London to inspect the regiments for Africa. From an early hour the camp was alive with vehicles hired by parties of tourists and sight-seers. The sides of the parade-ground were lined with patient groups of that class of nondescripts who never fail to attend when anything is going on. They appear to belong to no particular set—mere idlers, with more time on their hands than they know how to get rid of.

A tall, young-looking man, with curly hair, and a big coat profusely trimmed with Astrakhan wool, gained an entry into our desolate ante-room, introducing himself as the representative of the 'Daily Telegraph,' sent down specially to report on the day's doings. This was our first acquaintance with the ubiquitous "correspondent."

On parade we turned out in our white helmets, which gave the men a smart appearance,

but looked sadly wintry against the leafless trees and snow-heaps. One desolate sub-lieutenant, destined to be left behind, wandered round the flanks of the companies, wearing one of the usual black-felt helmets, and looking as disconsolate as the Peri at the gate of Paradise.

Mingled with sight-seers were piteous groups of ladies, intently watching our movements, and appearing to derive what little consolation was possible from the companionship of one another. Wives, mothers, and sisters gathered in quiet groups, taking a sad interest in those very dear to them, soon to be separated and lost to sight.

After the "march past" the Duke took the officers on one side, and delivered a short speech, interrupted by an obtrusive "correspondent," who, note-book in hand, edged in behind us, only to be ignominiously turned away. The Duke looked older and more bent; his well-known face is puffier than of old, and the purple and red are creeping over it with unmistakable strides. He rode the handsome old roan charger which has been his favourite for years, and spoke earnestly and kindly, as is his wont.

"A little steadiness wanting, gentlemen; the

march past' not all that can be desired: steadiness and drill are what are required. You have a regiment of young soldiers who have much to go through, and it is by steadiness and drill that you will do all you should. That it will be done so, I have no doubt; that every officer and man will do his duty when the time comes, is only what, as English soldiers, you will do, as others have done before you." To all of which we said a silent "Amen;" and then the kind-hearted old soldier rode away, and we were dismissed.

My own hut looked empty and dismal enough without Nelly and the children. An officer and his wife had been to look at it, and the time of my departure was evidently a matter of deep interest to them. In the little dining-room—so small that Patrick, our soldier-servant, standing in the doorway, could hand the dishes pretty well all round the table—was my camp-bed, a portmanteau, the company's defaulters-book, and a pile of opened letters—some bills, others parting words from friends. Patrick, on his knees at the fireplace, was vainly trying to blow some life

into the fire. Outside, the snow was falling and the dead leaves driving. The little gate we had put up to keep a neighbour's fowls out of the garden hung on one hinge. The gravel-walk was littered with straw from the packages, now carted away. Opposite, the regimental "wash-house" was closed, and the clothes-lines, till yesterday never empty, were gone with the soldiers' wives sent home; rather a mockery on the word for those whose homes were broken up—the husband to fight in Zululand, the wife to find a scanty welcome with parents or sisters more pinched than herself.

Such was the outlook on our last day at Aldershot. On the morning of the next, late in February, we stood on parade for the last time, while the General of our Brigade addressed to us a few words of God-speed. The snow lay thick on the ground, and the men beat a dismal tattoo with their feet as the words came across the ranks :—

“Let every bullet find its billet in a Zulu's breast. You are leaving your sweethearts behind you, men: let each man's rifle be henceforth his sweetheart; let him cherish it as he

would the girl he has left behind him." The sentiment called forth a good cheer. Then the band struck up, and we marched off to the station.

The sight-seers were gone ; but here and there stood those quiet groups of ladies, two or three together, tearless and brave, though their hearts were breaking. And as the "line" passed them, now and then a handkerchief would be waved, or a hurried embrace snatched as a last good-bye.

At the barracks the men turned out with three hearty cheers ; an ovation continued throughout the town, making me feel that, for my own part, I would suffer a great deal rather than not deserve the confidence which so many of our countrymen showed in us.

Just when the cheering was at its height, and the "line" was surrounded by throngs of people crowding round to shake hands for the last time with their friends in the ranks, a small shop-boy struggled up to me, presenting a bill for one-and-eightpence, which he demanded of me to pay on the spot. Never was a case of disillusion more plainly illustrated—never did a more

complete awaking from a dream take place. A moment before, my heart was beating high with heroism, longing for some forlorn-hope or desperate service with which to prove my devotion to my country; now, my only feeling was one of disgust, and a longing to kick the wretch trundling along by my side with his horrible "little bill."

Never was greater enthusiasm shown than on the occasion of the reinforcements starting for Natal. At Southampton the two trains conveying the regiment passed slowly through long lines of people, all shouting and cheering, the women waving handkerchiefs, and urging us on to go out and avenge our fallen soldiers. The dockyard was crammed; even the vessels lying alongside the *China*, on which we were to embark, were filled with spectators. Windows of the warehouses commanding a view of the ship were occupied by parties of ladies, while the gates leading to the landing-place were besieged by anxious crowds, all begging for admittance. So the afternoon wore away: the men were stowed below like so many sardines in a box; the officers snatched a minute now

and again to consume bottles of champagne with their friends in the saloon; the old Duke paid us a flying visit, and at last we cast off from the quay, and steamed slowly past the dockhead. The crowds, there as elsewhere unmindful of the bitter wind, cheered and waved their handkerchiefs, while the band on board played "Auld lang syne" and "The girl I left behind me," till the men could blow no longer. Then more leave-taking as the steam-tender alongside blew her whistle; a rush to the gangway; and a few minutes after the order, "Full speed ahead," England was once more a thing of the past.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHINA—THE PUFF LITERARY—PACKED TIGHT—ST VINCENT—OUR FIRST SCARE—THE TROPICS—THE QUEER BIRD—ARRIVED.

THE China, like the Russia, is one of the Cunard Line, and proved an excellent and comfortable vessel, though now considered behind the age, and only runs across the Atlantic during the summer when an extra steamer is required. Everything about her denoted strength and safety. Her plates were a third thicker than those used in the construction of ordinary iron ships, while fittings and appointments were solid and old-fashioned. Anything required for the ship's fitting is supplied to the order of the chief officer, the Company considering that if a man is fitted for so responsible a post he is the best judge of the ship's requirements. Another

excellent rule forbids the ship's officers to mix with the passengers. On a "Cunarder" there is none of that lounging about in fancy costume by the side of the young' ladies which is so conspicuous amongst the officers of many ocean lines. The captain alone dines in the saloon, taking it in turns to preside at the upper and lower tables, thus avoiding jealousies. The watch on deck is kept constantly at work night and day: thus there is none of that hauling men out of holes and corners on dark nights when a sudden call for them arises. This excellent rule had its disadvantages, as the silent hours of the night were continually disturbed by holy-stoning decks, or tramping after some rope, the hauling of which could well have been left till morning.

The table, supplied from the ice-house throughout the entire passage, furnished a superabundance of solid food. No French cookery or "kickshaws" are allowed on so conservative a line: goose, ducks, pork, colossal joints, huge hams, and thick rich soups appeared as regularly as dinner came round, filled in with smaller dishes in which the same meats, cut up

and disguised with sauces, did duty as *entrées*. With these were a sprinkling of American dishes, with names strange to English ears. At lunch the invariable dish was stewed prunes, boasted by the Company to have been supplied at that meal without a day's interruption since its formation.

On the cabin-table lay an album, magnificently got up in crimson cloth and gilt edges, containing the history of the Line—photographs of the steamers, plans of the cabins, rules and regulations, charts of the routes taken, and a series of amusing papers by popular well-known authors, describing their experiences on tours to America and other places to which they had journeyed by the assistance of the Company. These papers were not unlike the advertisements which appear in local papers from the “gentleman's tailor” or the “practical hatter,” as the descriptions of scenery or travel invariably led up to the final “puff,” cunningly hidden as the reader read it through, unwitting of the trap into which he had fallen, until the charms of the Company had been impressed on his mind. In the Cunard Line the “puff” appears

in various disguises—all, however, winding up with the sentence in capital letters announcing it as “The Company which has never lost a man!”

We were, however, terribly cramped for space, officers as well as men. The ventilation found us out, too, as soon as the weather grew warm, hinting that the construction of vessels built for the Atlantic trade and cold weather was a little out of place in hot climates when crowded with soldiers.

Two companies were berthed on the “orlop deck,” a subterranean-looking place which could only be gained by descending several ladders in a shaft which, for its black depth, might have led to a coal-mine. Daylight never reached this black-hole. By the dim light of the “bulls’ eyes” could be seen the forms of men stripped to the waist, their bodies glistening with moisture, bending over the mess-tables, trying to read, or fingering dirty packs of cards. The tables were ranged in rows on either side, each accommodating twelve men. Against the ship’s stern hung knapsacks, tin pots, straps, and odds and ends; from the deck protruded the hooks

which supported the hammocks at night. The rifles stood in racks down the centre of the ship, —space already lumbered up with bales of spare blankets and hammocks for which no room could be found in the hold. At one end, under the shaft, was a hatchway, greasy with moisture and many feet. This was continually opened, and casks and other stores hauled into daylight by a gang of men, who still further diminished the light and air which struggled into this “infernial region.” When it was cleared out on disembarkation, all the property lost during the voyage was unearthed from its recesses—rifles, bayonets, straps, bags, boots, clothing, all rusty or rotten from the damp and heat.

Thus early in the day our much-vaunted heroism began to receive some rude shocks.

At St Vincent, into which we put for coal, we experienced the first of a series of scares which came to us from that time until the close of the war—scares common to those whose hearts are bent on great things, and fear at every moment that they will not share in them.

As we rounded the Point, steamer after steamer burst into sight. Here lay all the

transports which had sailed for Africa before us. The *Russia*, *Florence*, *City of Paris*, *Olympus*, *City of Venice*, were in that quiet bay, with not a sign of moving on amongst them; and the idea quickly gained ground that the war was over without our assistance, and that telegrams detaining the troops had arrived.

The scare spread to the men; and it was curious to watch the crowd of faces peering towards the harbour, anxiously awaiting the pilot-boat which should put us out of our suspense. But no pilot came off; and it was not till we had steamed past the isolated rock which stands sentry over the entrance of the harbour, and had dropped anchor among the rest, that we learnt that the detention of the fleet was from want of coaling accommodation, and not from any bad news from England.

St Vincent, hitherto one of the quietest of the world's out-of-the-way nooks, enlivened only by a passing ship, woke up one fine morning to find herself the centre of the most extraordinary excitement. The water in the harbour was dotted thickly with the huge iron hulls of transports, while fresh arrivals almost hourly kept

sending up the flags at the tiny signal-station in a continued flutter. Fleets of boats filled with officers or men, all in uniform, were flying to and fro between the shipping and the long wooden pier, now crowded with people; the wire railway which conveyed sacks of coal from the depot to the lighters was everlastingly at work; the washerwomen in a crowd were pounding away at our linen at the stream outside the town; bugles were sounding, revolvers were cracking in continual practice, signal-flags were waving,—everywhere was life, bustle, and excitement.

The Praga da D. Luiz, a small square in the centre of the town by the sea, was thronged with visitors listening to a military band, sent ashore by one of the regiments, which discoursed waltzes and polkas, to the delight of the entire population, who gathered round twenty deep, dressed in gay-coloured clothes, many of the women executing dances of a somewhat florid character round the outer circle. The Hotel Luso-Brazileiro hard by was doing a roaring trade. Portuguese waiters were everywhere, flying with many gesticula-

tions after liquids of sorts. The popping of corks was interminable, the Babel of languages quite indescribable.

“Waiter, beer!” “Yes, my dear!”

“Waiter, brandy and soda!” “At your service, my dear!”

Such were order and reply within that low, green-shuttered building.

The roofs of most of the houses are provided with a sliding opening, out of which the entire household can protrude their figures and look down upon the scene below,—a marvellously cheap way of getting a panorama of the surrounding world when required.

Above all shone a glorious sun, warming up the soldiers wistfully gazing at the shore they could not visit, with its delights of foreign damsels and cheap brandy. Poor fellows! they basked in the light and heat, forgetting the biting cold just parted from, and the close confinement down below.

But a Government comfortably at home, and ever mindful of all things, had, as usual, forgotten one thing—the fact that a port adapted for the coaling of one steamer per week can hardly

stand the strain put upon its resources when steamers requiring the same arrive by the dozen almost daily. Coals there were plenty, but boats were few, and men to work them fewer still; the soldiers worked well on board when the coals did come, but were unable to do more: so delay ensued, and nearly a week was lost, when telegrams urging our despatch with the utmost speed had been the motive power of the whole force.

Did the captain return on board, he was instantly pounced upon by a dozen anxious ones, with inquiries as to the number of lighters coming, and the probable time of departure. The officers of a battery of artillery on one of the transports, anxious to show an example to the men, lowered themselves into the coal-bunkers with the rest, and shovelled away at the descending coals with an utter disregard to fresh air or personal cleanliness.

Outside the harbour, as if infected with the general confusion, a whale spent an hour or more in jumping clean out of the water, and displaying his body and tail alternately for our gratification.

St Vincent left at last, the days passed in the usual routine-life common to troops on board ship. Of grumbling there was very little, of quarrels there were none—as one saturnine man observed, “Thank goodness, there are no women, so we have peace!” Courts-martial were frequent: the monotony told upon the men, and some of the higher spirits broke out and had to be suppressed. Pilfering small articles crept in, becoming a real nuisance, and had to be put down. Did a man clean his belts for parade, and lay them in the sun to dry, if he took his eyes off them for a moment, the chances were, his waist-belt or knapsack-straps had disappeared. A rifle, put away carefully cleaned in the rack, was gone the next morning, and the unarmed wretch appeared with fear and terror. Everything that a soldier has is marked with a number corresponding with that he himself is known by, so in theory it is easy to detect a man wearing another man’s things; but practically, in a ship crowded with many more than a thousand souls, space is contracted, and to find out numbers on articles, all black and grimy more or less, is no easy matter. So many

a pleasant morning was spent among the troops, fallen-in in long lines, swaying to and fro as the ship rolled, trying this somewhat unexciting game of finding out who was who by numbers.

The weather, too, on the "line," grew warmer than was pleasant, and the heat below was stifling. A stout captain found it especially so, and blew and puffed most vigorously—meals became distasteful to him, and night-time insupportable. Little Brown, who sat next to him at dinner, found his gigantic elbows somewhat in the way, and meekly gave in to superior rank by screwing his body into the smallest space possible. But heat, and the sufferings it entailed on our stout warrior, prevailed.

"Mr Brown," said a voice hoarse with anguish and much stretching, "I wish you would be good enough not to take up so much room."

Poor Brown, occupying inches to the other one's yards, retreated at the sound, till it looked as if he would vanish altogether; and for that day at least the gingerbread-nuts, and other delicacies beloved by boys, were untouched.

Another young officer had been provided by his anxious parents with a diary, magnificently

got up in green leather and gold, in which he was to record his daily doings. For days he sat with the book before him, intent on the incidents of each hour, but finding none worthy of record. His devotion to the wishes of his parents, and to the diary, became a marked feature on board, and he was watched with much interest by the younger officers. At length he was seen to open the long-gazed-at volume, and seizing the pencil, make an entry. A rush was made at him instantly, and the book captured after a faint resistance; for the exertion of so much literary work had proved exhausting. So the book was taken from him, and the contents given out to the world at large: "*March 20th* — Saw a queer bird; query, condor?" For the rest of the campaign the youth was known as "The Queer Bird;" and little wonder! On another day we passed the homeward-bound Cape mail, but got no news from her of importance. Yet some bright spirits on board managed to extort a telegram from her as she steamed past us, which was carefully written out and put up in the place of honour in the saloon, amid some excitement among the juni-

ors, who, pencil in hand, took it down, one after another, with touching faith and simplicity. The document thus inserted in many a diary and home-letter ran as follows: "Nyanza to China,—Kafir king prisoner, with first wife and son. Peace; but Boers continue troublesome. Reinforcements unnecessary. You will probably be sent to Fiji Islands."

These and other small amusements passed the days, weary enough as they were, till all our heads were turned towards the bows, where we were told the land was to be seen—a dim dark cloud over the eternal sea-line, growing darker every minute, till those who from the first said they saw it did see it with the rest of us, plainly now,—the great cliffs, frowning cold and grey, we were bound to—the mountains of South Africa—or, as we soon got to call it, the "Great Funkland!"

CHAPTER III.

CAPE TOWN—THE GREAT FUNKLAND—MIDSHIPMAN'S
POETRY.

SIMON'S TOWN, where we put into for coal and other business, had set aside its usual sleepiness, and was all life and bustle.

At the anchorage lay the City of Paris, having just knocked a big hole in her bows, and therefore busy transferring the 21st, which she had brought out, to the square-built Tamar, with her heavy spars and cream-coloured hull—a good old troopship, known to most of us at one time or another.

Inside, again, were the Olympus and Florence, a fleet soon added to by the arrival of the Russia, thus transferring the excitement of St Vincent to this far-away spot. In the man-of-war anchorage lay the Tenedos, ordered

home with a hole in her bottom, and the Active, flying the Commodore's pennant. Ashore were groups of officers intent on the latest news; squads of invalided soldiers, not considered strong enough for the front, and left behind in the Naval Hospital; naval officers cheery and full of spirits, all moving to and fro between the little club and the wharf over which the big South Atlantic waves kept dashing in a most uncomfortable way. Cape Town, twenty-four miles away, was equally excited by the landing of the Prince Imperial and the presence of more transports. Every one was abroad to see the Prince; ladies found shopping to do from morning till evening in the hopes of meeting him, and the theatre was decorated with tricolor flags, and a box retained for him under promise—so said the manager—of his presence: all to no purpose; the Prince stayed with the Governor, and did not move out at all.

The same afternoon some officers drove over to Cape Town to enjoy a few hours' relief from the constant companionship of the British soldier, soon to become apparently eternal, returning next day with the first instalment of the

Great Funkland news. Men lately returned from Zululand had talked to them freely of the terrors of the place: defeat was a certainty—death indeed a mercy; tortures of the most appalling nature, described with a realistic force quite convincing, were the certain lot of those unfortunate enough to escape death. Isandlwana was an everyday occurrence in wars of this kind: the names of officers who had fallen there were quoted as instances of fresh horrors; their bodies had been recovered all but unrecognisable, owing to their treatment—or Zulu prisoners, previous to execution, had boasted of the tortures inflicted on Englishmen. The listeners were young and ready of belief, and the accounts of what they had heard cost nothing in the telling, and were detailed on board as the most cheerful news to be had.

The shadow of the Great Funkland was darkening over us already.

Indeed our stay at Simon's Bay was not the brightest part of our campaign. Our anxiety to get on, and to be in the middle of the war before too late, was a serious trouble. Our faith in our generals had not yet been shaken, and our great

fear ever was lest the troops already in Natal should do the work without us. Anything was better than delay. Only let us be moving on, and we should be happy.

The news sent home of the peril imminent to the colony was still fresh in our minds. Hurried away at the shortest notice, we certainly felt that every delay was fraught with danger. What might not an hour bring out? Our advent in the threatened colony must be anxiously expected. Our landing would be the signal for the war to be brought to a conclusion one way or another. But delay followed delay; routine was everywhere — red-tape as rampant as at home. Cape Town, excited about the Prince and the tales of torture, found a far more burning question in the consideration whether it might not be called upon to contribute a share of the expenses. So to pass the time, and get away from our own thoughts, some of us drove over to Cape Town.

The road, such as it is, follows a portion of the shore of False Bay, in which again, in an indentation, lies Simon's Bay. It is a wild drive round the Bay, the road oftener than

not following the sands, or mounting the cliff-side in an artificial cutting. Villages devoted to fishing are passed; a larger one, Kalk Bay, with some summer villas of the Cape people facing the sea—their bathing-machines the rocks, covered with seaweed, in front, as indeed we saw, without any attempt being made by the bathers to conceal the fact. At the head of the Bay stands a public-house, rejoicing in the name of “Farmer Peck’s,” a picture of the “Gentle Shepherd of Salisbury Plain,” and a wonderful signboard with sentences on it in several languages, popularly said to be the work of a midshipman. It runs thus:—

“Multum in parvo, pro bono publico.
Entertainment for man and beast all of a row.
Lekker kost as much as you please.
Excellent beds without any fleas.
Nos patriam fugimus ! now we are here.
Vivamus, let us live by selling Beer.
On donne a boire et a manger ici ;
Come in and try it, whoever you be.”

The inside, however, was as little tempting as the sign, two huge Dutch women presiding over a sloppy counter, across which we got some bad liquor at good prices.

After this, you leave the seashore and drive through a narrow and somewhat picturesque lane, with the mountains of the Cape on your left, until you arrive amidst the trees and dust which make up the greater part of Wyneberg, a pleasant suburb of the town.

To us the change of scene and life was enchantment. We lunched at a comfortable table laden with fresh fruit; we talked to young ladies and their mammas; less often with men in *mufti*,—just as we had done in England, as it seemed to us, weary months ago. Not a red-coat was to be seen; not a military phrase escaped any lips; even bad language, which had become second nature to our ears from the depths under our feet, was unheard. As for war, it was unknown, or ignored so totally that it would appear we had arrived as heralds of the millennium. It was indeed a new life to us. But a few hours before, we were surrounded by soldiers; arms and other deadly machines were our only ornaments; our books, pamphlets on the method of meeting an enemy in the field, and disposing of the slain after the encounter was over; our very thoughts centred in the work cut out for

us. Ladies—their very name a thing of the past; homes all but forgotten in stern reality so imminent.

It was truly a case when those who had shouted, “*Morituri te salutant*,” had come back alive once more out of the arena.

Cape Town itself, on the surface, appeared but little different from what it is in ordinary times. There were offices open, and placarded as places where volunteers for the war in Zululand could enrol themselves, and some of the enrolled ones about the streets, carbines in hand, going off to drill. The photograph-shops had some strange pictures of almost naked and quite hideous savages, labelled Zulus; but beyond this there was little else. As to Natal, it was a foreign country beyond the seas to the Cape Town people. Even its climate was unknown, and opinions were much divided between the wish, common to all colonists, to know all about everything, and the desire to ignore the place altogether. The only topic on which all were unanimous was the final cost of the war, and the shoulders of whom it would fall on. Not on those of Cape Town. Natal was a Crown

colony—the Crown held it as its very own—and the Crown, of course, would pay the piper to the uttermost farthing. This, repeated on every occasion, with not the most pleasant hints thrown in that we and all other soldiers found the war greatly to our profit, grew quite monotonous, and sent us away from Cape Town but little impressed with the loyalty of its inhabitants.

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVAL AT DURBAN—THE “BAR”—WELCOME—THE COLONY
ON ITS DEFENCE—PREPARATIONS FOR THE WORST—
RULES FOR THE CAMPAIGN—OUR KITS—DELAY.

AFTER that, our last holiday, followed two days' buffeting with the waves of the Southern Ocean, and we cast anchor outside the “bar” at Durban. The town itself lies two miles inland, and is not visible from the anchorage, which is an open roadstead, much exposed to the south and east, whence come many of the gales prevalent in these latitudes. Across the whole bay, some two miles in length, stretches the bar, on which are only some five feet of water, compelling all except small vessels to lie outside. Inside is a magnificent bay, fringed with foliage, and bright and sparkling in the sunlight. Across the bar itself, and on the white sand of

the beach beyond, the swells roll and break with a roar eternally. Opposite the beach the land stretches out into the sea in a high promontory called the "Bluff," steep and wooded, supporting a lighthouse on its extremity. General Funk, rampant in these days in the colony, had the assurance to tell us, with every appearance of sincerity, that a few days previously a Zulu was caught lurking near the lighthouse, and on being brought up and questioned, admitted that he was there by Cetewayo's orders, for the purpose of extinguishing the light, and thus make the English ships with the soldiers on board run ashore.

It was eight o'clock on the morning of the 2d April when the ship anchored, and every one was eager to hear the news. Large clumsy tugs were plying about the shipping, H.M.S. Shah amongst the rest; and one of the former, with a post-captain standing on the paddle-box, was soon alongside. The news he brought was not comforting. Moriarty's death and the loss of his detachment on the Intombie river far in the north; the departure of the relief-column for Etshowe, about which nameless

difficulties were predicted, — these were the principal items of news.

A more welcome sound came in the order to disembark at once, and soon the men began to fall in for the last time on the quarter-deck of the *China*. Captain and officers had done all in their power to lighten the monotony of the voyage; and on the previous day, the purser, in a set speech, had announced that the owners of the Cunard Company, Messrs Burns and M'Tvor, wished to present the officers with the wine which they had drunk in no half-hearted way throughout the voyage. No one was sorry to leave the cramped confusion of the ship notwithstanding; and as soon as the accommodation-ladders were slung over the side, the men began swinging down them, passing their rifles first, and following themselves into the arms of a couple of sailors placed to catch them in the much-heaving tug.

“Catch a houl't of me legs, Barney darlint!” and appeals to “Holy Mother,” or half the saints in the calendar, were frequent, and elicited shouts of laughter from those already down. It seemed as if the stream of struggling

red-coated bodies would never cease. In vain the captain held up his hands and shouted that the boat was full—still down they came, tumbling and sprawling, till there was really no more squeezing room ; and then it was only one company and the moiety of another that were out of the ship, and there were ten in all. The crew gave three cheers, and we pushed off, tossing and rolling quite as deep in the big swells as was pleasant.

We passed some small vessels hard and fast on the bar, the water sucking in and out of the hatchways with a dismal sound. "Swish" came a spray, like a whip, right across our faces, and those who had waterproofs put them on ; the men, crouching under the low bulwarks, grinned, and let off more jokes. Then came a huge roller, sending our boat down into the depths of the green water, and we were introduced to Durban bar. Another and another followed, broad, greasy swells, and with many lurches and splashing of salt spray, we got through into the quiet water inside.

Three ladies who had walked down to a sandy spit to watch our arrival, came in for a hearty

British cheer, which they returned with much waving of parasols; and then we edged alongside the jetty, and were shunted ashore to make confusion more confused.

Here we first made acquaintance with the corduroy trousers worn as uniform under a regulation coat, common in the colony, not indeed from choice, but from necessity—a necessity, alas, we ourselves had to meet ere long! The landing officer—one great in his own way, though unknown to us—had a pair of these garments on underneath his befrogged and bemedalled coat, and came in for much curiosity in consequence.

The “Point,” as our landing-place is named, was crowded with stores. Commissariat officers were hurrying about; streams of newly-arrived troops in bright clothes, and belts snow-white with pipeclay, met other streams of “fatigue parties” in damaged clothes and sprouting beards. The shore was piled high with cases on which the broad arrow sprawled, and the continually departing trains made but little diminution among them. Once, however, outside the Point and its confusion, and we were again marching along between rows of trees, with

patches of grass and wild-flowers thickly strewn. Tiny wooden houses peeped out of the hedges; the greenest of turf stretched in front of them; wild-flowers were everywhere, and butterflies perched on the little mud-heaps which adorned the road here as in England.

Flag-staffs were abundant; every house had one, the object most noticeable to a stranger's eyes in their construction being that each one had been erected with a view to being higher than its neighbours. To an observant mind they suggest that the settlers in this part of the colony have passed a considerable portion of their lives at sea. Miniature flags fluttered from the tops of many of them, denoting the number of the transport just arrived.

Further on a school of small white children turned out and greeted us with a hearty cheer, as heartily responded to by the men. And it is worth recording that it was the only cheer which our countrymen gave us in the colony; they turned out to stare curiously at us, or rode alongside our column to cover us with dust, but welcome us with a cheer they did not. The colonists view the war in a light which

appears strange to those in England, avowing that England got them into the mess, and that they look to her to get them out of it again. Hence they gave our troops no welcome after their long journey out to help them. The local papers teemed with letters and articles ventilating this side of the question, and might have gained a part of what they wished had not the colonists been so eager about the apportioning of Zululand after the war.

“My brave young man,” said a fellow-passenger in the train to me at that time, “you’ll get 20,000 acres of it, of course, as soon as ever that old cuss Cetewayo is kicked out.”

This was the ruling sentiment; and much anger and disappointment were caused by the telegram which stated that England would make her own terms with the Zulus, which would be especially directed against annexation, while the question of the share in the expenses of the war would be settled hereafter.

Covered vans full of people passed each other and us on the road, and were labelled “omnibus;” past some stores, where Huntley & Palmer and Morton were well represented, by the side

of the inevitable russet-brown corduroy trousers and flapping wideawakes, and we turned out of West Street, the principal thoroughfare of Durban, crossed the railway, and reached our camping-ground quite ready for dinner—of which, however, there was little chance.

We were on a low-lying strip of grass, some two miles in length, and half that width, popularly supposed to swarm with ticks, and so to be unfit for cattle, though good enough for soldiers. One side is enclosed by a high bank, sandy and tree-grown, beyond which is the sea ; on the other lies “the Berea,” a hog-backed ridge, prettily covered with trees, from out of which peep the picturesque country villas of the better class in Durban.

The ground we were on, besides the ticks, which were a real and feeling annoyance, has its own history. Here, in 1841, lay the English, beleaguered by the Boers, whom we had followed into this country, then their own. Fighting ensued, as a matter of course ; Durban was retaken by the Dutch ; its garrison reduced to eating their own boots in a “laager” outside the town, built on the site of our present camp ;

and total extinction imminent, till one Dick King swam with two horses across the bay at night, passing the sleepy Dutch sentries in safety, and riding into King William's Town, many miles distant, for succour.

Opposite our camp four Gatling guns were posted, with their artillerymen about them, all waiting for horses to take them to the front. Through the centre of the tents passed a road, then a moving scene of men and carts. One waggon in particular passed a hundred times a-day. It was painted in bright colours, and was drawn by a team of sixteen mules, which ambled along nimbly to the persuasions of a long whip, which a burly Kafir, standing in front on the load, handled like a fishing-rod. It was our introduction to mule-waggons ; from henceforth our lives were to be passed in their continual company.

Queerly - dressed volunteers swaggered past, distinguished by a bit of red rag wound round their hats, or even round their heads, if they were "off-coloured" and dispensed with such luxuries. Their particular swagger was to stick a riding-whip in their boots. As a rule, they

had at least a pint of bloodshed in each eye, with an unmistakable preference for drink, which had in many cases militated against their success in other walks of life.

Everywhere was bustle, noise, and confusion. The sleepy little town had woke up to find itself famous. Until the war developed, its inhabitants divided their time between selling Hollands gin and slop-clothes, dining at one of the two clubs which they have established, and doing an occasional deal in ponies. Then came Isandlwana and panic. A defence committee was formed, barricades erected, the post-office and market-house pierced with loop-holes and surrounded with sandbags, the Point cut off by a stout palisade of huge timbers and sheet-iron. Country people flocked into the "laager," as any temporary enclosed spot was called, and every one looked for the worst, and hoped for the aid which had been asked for with such urgency from England. Nor was the panic to be laughed at. The Zulus had proved themselves a terrible foe; murder and fire were their only arguments; in a few hours they could overrun the colony, and that was defenceless.

Two months thus passed—months to be remembered with sorrow and bitterness ; and on a given day the Pretoria steamed into the harbour with the 91st, the first of the long-expected reinforcements, followed quickly by the 60th Rifles. The fine old soldiers of the 57th had already arrived from Ceylon ; Mauritius and St Helena had both sent their all. A few days later the Tamar put ashore the 21st ; the China brought the 94th ; the Russia the 58th. Artillery and Engineers filled up the intervals. The great horses which the Army Service Corps landed were special objects of admiration among people who looked to purchasing bargains when the war was over. Lastly came in the great four-masted steamers of the National Line, with the much-believed-in cavalry. The King's Dragoon Guards and 17th Lancers landed their horses as bright and well as if they had not been a day from Aldershot, and the people for once cheered them,—the horses, not the men—so it was said at the time.

So Durban cheered and woke up. The “scare” was over ; merchants made money faster than their best dreams ever hoped

for; the clubs made all military men members, to the discomfort of their own, who were elbowed out of doors, and from their own particular places, by the eager, hungry new-comers; ponies went up to fabulous prices; every one had a wonder in horse-flesh to sell; in the rare event of one not being a seller, he had a friend, or more, ready to oblige. Things went on swimmingly, and telegrams from the front with accounts of further fighting only served to strengthen the hope that the war might last for ever.

At the club "shandy-gaff" is a popular drink. If you wish for champagne, "dry Monopole" is the only brand admitted into society in Natal. After a meal, small bits of paper are handed round, on which you write what you have had; and the custom obtains all over the colony. The members appeared to have tried other modes of life previous to their present occupations: most of them are retired something or other; nearly all have been in fights somewhere with natives, so the conversation round the table is warlike. Lord Chelmsford came in for praise and blame pretty equally. The vol-

unteers, as was only natural, had done great things. About the future of the war, opinions were mixed. We should walk through Zululand like a hot knife through butter; nothing is easier if we make our waggons into a laager every night, and drive right through. As a matter of fact, the warrior who made so light of the Zulus was suspected of having sold them many guns; he was, besides, much too fat to move far from the club, so his assertions were not likely to be tested personally. Another shook his head, and prophesied that Cetewayo would let us into the country, and then burn the grass. On our still looking for further details, it was explained that when the grass is burnt we might consider ourselves as dead men, the oxen would die, and—there you are.

But whatever the hopes or fears of our friends, all were unanimous in the wish that we should exterminate the Zulu nation. Nothing else but total annihilation would satisfy their thirst for vengeance, and enable them to annex the country. The conversation was thus rather blood-thirsty, and it was a relief to turn to sixpenny whist and another glass of shandy-gaff.

But though panic had subsided, General Funk was abroad, and knocking at many hearts, even in so distant a spot as Durban.

The defences at the Point and post-office were kept in a state of readiness ; arms were in every house ; drunken natives caught about the camp were invariably accused of being Zulu spies, and collected large crowds interested in glimpses of the enemy, even when in liquor.

“And do you say that you do not post pickets at night round your camp ?” said one colonist. “Why, the Zulus can be here in sixteen hours, and that wood over there can hold 20,000 men and you not see one of them.”

Nor were our own people a bit better. One of the first orders we received was to dye our white helmets the colour of the ground, so as to afford no marks to the Zulu sharpshooters. Elephant-hunters, we heard from another source, were to be particularly shunned on account of their deadly aim ; while from a semi-official intimation we were advised to assimilate our dress as much as possible with that of the men, the Zulus knowing accurately the number of officers in each corps, and having ten Indunas