

To my excited vision they looked too large to be anything else than buffaloes, but my companion at once correctly put them down to be blue wildebeeste. Throwing the reins over the horses' heads, we dismounted, and cautiously forced our way towards them through the long grass, taking advantage of the thick bush to keep ourselves completely hidden from their view. We advanced thus some two or three hundred yards without venturing to expose ourselves sufficiently to obtain another sight, but suddenly were called to a halt by seeing a troop of quagga in a direct line between us and the blue wildebeeste, and which had until now been concealed by a dip in the ground. This was extremely embarrassing, for we could not proceed a yard further without attracting their attention, and we had no desire to interfere with them when blue wildebeeste were so near at hand. The quagga were already suspicious of danger, although not aware of the quarter from which to expect it, and were pawing the ground, uttering loud cries like a donkey braying, and generally evincing signs of uneasiness. While we were crouching motionless as statues and hesitating what plan to pursue, my companion had his attention arrested by a cloud of dust at the lower end of the valley we were now in.

This cloud gradually increased in volume, and at the same time approached nearer and nearer, coming in a direct line to where we lay concealed. It needed no telling for me to know that it was only an enormous mass of game trekking quickly up the valley that could raise such a huge cloud. My

excitement was increased by Mr. White whispering through his clenched teeth the magic word "buffaloes." All we had to do was to remain still, and the troop must come straight on to us. I pushed back my sight to point-blank range, took an extra cartridge in my left hand, and felt that a dozen more were standing loosely, right end upwards, in my pouch, and then waited for their appearance, feeling very much as if it was a charge of cavalry we were going to meet, but prepared for every emergency. I took a last glance in the direction of the horses, so as to make sure of the quickest way back to them; for as they were not yet accustomed to the large game, it was more than probable that a sudden alarm might seize them, and that they would join in the stampede. Soon the sound of many scudding feet came to us, and then the tall grass in front was dashed asunder, and, to our intense disgust and disappointment, the vanguard of an enormous troop of quagga, numbering many hundreds, burst upon us. Mr. White seized my arm and prevented my putting a bullet into one of the foremost, which stood stock still, too astonished, for an instant, at our unexpected presence, to turn aside. "There may be still buffalo behind," said Mr. White, which showed me how precipitate I had been. Line after line of quagga passed by, only turning aside sufficiently to avoid upsetting us, but at their tail, instead of buffalo, appeared a troop of the wildebeeste. It was now evident that there were no buffalo; so, not to miss such a fine opportunity, we both picked out a bök and fired. Mr. W. laid his low with a bullet through

the heart; but to my intense mortification the bôk I had aimed at went on to all appearances untouched and at redoubled speed, but instead of keeping with the rest of the herd, which at the report turned off over the hill, it kept straight up the valley. I did not wait to get another shot at the others; but made for my horse, which luckily had remained where it had been left.

The wildebeeste I had fired at was now on the open space where the first herd had originally been, and as it made up the side of the hill I perceived it was limping badly. Putting in the spurs, I was very soon almost alongside. I jumped off my horse, but the bôk was covered by the bush before I could fire, so I had to remount. Soon, however, the pace told on it, and I saw that the fore-leg was broken below the shoulder. Beyond the next bush that intervened the bôk lay down, and leaving my horse I was able to creep up close and give it another bullet. Taking the tail as a trophy, I rode back to where I had left my companion; but a shot in the distance told me that he had followed the herd, so I lost no time in doing likewise. It was easy work spooring them, as the grass was beaten down into a broad path, but the bush was too thick for fast riding. I was not long in coming across a small troop of quagga which had separated from the main body. They did not wait to give me a shot, but set off in a straight line for the hill which we had put down as the border of the tsetse fly. I followed them on horseback as long as I dared, and then, leaving my horse on the top of a mound, kept up the pursuit on foot. The

quagga soon pulled up when they heard the sounds of my horse's hoofs cease, and, crawling through the grass, I had a fair shot at the nearest of the herd. It gave one bound forward as the bullet struck it and then fell over quite dead, while the others dashed off and never stopped again until they were far inside the regions of the fly, for I caught sight of them galloping up a bare spot on the opposite hill, which was two miles or more from where I stood. It took me a long time to retrace my steps to where I had left my horse, for the bushes and stones all looked exactly alike, and my own spoor was too faint to afford any assistance. Before I succeeded in finding it, Mr. W. returned from pursuing the large herd in search of me, and when he had come to my answering cooe, lent me his assistance, or I might have vainly hunted about for hours. He had also been successful, and had laid low another blue wildebeeste. The sun now showed us that noon was passed by two or three hours, so we determined to make our way back to camp to give the boys time before dark to bring in the skins and best meat of our game. The horses were panting for water, so we followed down the course of a dry sloop which we knew crossed the pathway from Delagoa Bay, on the chance of coming across a waterhole not yet empty.

The neighbourhood of water is always a likely spot for game, for, besides the attraction of the water itself, there is no more favourite cover during the daytime than the thick tall reeds, and a sharp sword-grass, which is sure to abound wherever the soil contains a particle of moisture.

But it is like looking for a needle in a whole stack of hay to attempt to ride or walk up game in such a spot, and the only means of dislodging it is with a pack of curs, which will run yelping in and out between the tussocks, and cover every yard of ground if left long enough. The more mongrel and cross-bred the dogs are, the more efficacious they will prove. Fighting powers or pluck are not wanted, as it is the noise and worry alone which will drive out a lion, and any bôk is too fleet of foot to run any risk from the teeth of any such dogs as can make their way through the thickets of stiff bristly grass and rushes. We rode along a hundred yards apart, skirting the edges of the reeds, and hoping to find koodoo or perhaps a swart-vitpense feeding on the luxuriant grass growing under the shade of the trees which were especially tall and fine down this valley. The swart-vitpense bôk, sable antelope, Harris bôk, or lion-hitter, as it is variously called, is the most rare, and therefore most coveted antelope in South Africa. In shape it much resembles a donkey, but, as its names imply, has a brilliant black skin, changing into white underneath the belly. Its great glory, however, lies in its horns, which curve back over its head, sometimes growing to a length of between four and five feet, and reach almost down its back. At the point they are sharp as needles, but strong and penetrating as a bayonet. These horns have given the bôk the name of lion-killer, and many are the stories of the valiant defence it has made of itself and its young from the assaults of its hereditary foe. One of the best known hunters in Africa narrated to me an

encounter he once had the good fortune to witness between a swart-vitpense and two lions combined. His attention was attracted by hearing a loud continued roaring, which he at once knew to be lions at no great distance from him. He had only a fowling-piece, so his first thought was to make himself scarce as quickly as possible. Curiosity conquered prudence, and as there were plenty of trees about he always had a way of retreat open by climbing up into the branches.

Very cautiously he made his way in the direction from which the roars proceeded, examining the bushes carefully in front of him before venturing on an open space, as the noise was now so close and so deafening that he could not tell at what moment he might come face to face with a troop of lions, and, to judge by their tones, exceedingly angry ones into the bargain. At last, on a bare space, appeared the authors of the turmoil, and, protected from view by the bushes, he was able to observe all that took place. A swart-vitpense lay crouched up in a heap, with what he recognized after a time as its young one folded in a close embrace between its fore-legs, its horns were thrown back and protecting its haunches. On either side of it stood a full-grown male lion furiously enraged, its mane almost erect, and foaming at the mouth with impatient wrath. As either one or the other crouched down to spring the bök inclined its head so that the long deadly horns must transfix the lion in its fall. If one of them moved round in front, the bök veered its neck in the same direction, but always contriving to keep a look-out on the other at

the same time, and on the first sign of a spring lowering his horns, but having them up again before the other dared to make an attack. For ten minutes the same positions were maintained, neither of the lions being willing to sacrifice himself for the other's benefit; and while thus waiting, the spectator perceived that the bôk had already repulsed one attack, for the lion farthest away from him was bleeding from a wound between the breast and shoulder. At length the pair seemed to recognize that one must be wounded if they meant to kill the bôk at all, for both crouched down ready to spring at once, one at each side. The antelope remained motionless, with his horns almost straight up in the air. Both the lions moved a few feet further in, and then crouched down again, as if collecting all their strength for a spring, and then, at the same instant, they launched themselves on their prey. For a few seconds all was one confused struggling heap, from which proceeded such fearful roars and agonizing moans as in the course of all his experience the hunter had never heard before. At last, with a convulsive struggle, the bôk rolled half over on its back, and from between its legs the young one darted out apparently unhurt, and disappeared in the bush. To the hunter's intense amazement he then perceived that the lion which had been nearest to him was transfixed on the bôk's horn, which, entering between the fore-legs, protruded just to one side of the backbone. The other lion lay alongside roaring horribly, but not attempting to touch the bôk, which was evidently at its last gasp. The excitement of the on-looker was now roused to such a pitch

that, careless of the danger, he determined to try and square accounts with the surviving lion, although he only had shot in his gun. Taking the shot out of the cartridges without destroying the cases, he wrapped round the charges two or three thicknesses of his handkerchief, and then bound it round with string, so that for some distance the shot would have the force of a bullet. Thus prepared he boldly stepped out, and advanced to within thirty yards before the lion perceived him. It appeared to have some difficulty in rising to its feet, and instead of springing forward remained where it was, but crouched down ready to spring. Although this would have been a favourable opportunity for a bullet, the hunter feared that the shot might not at that distance enter the skull, so moved slowly to one side, but never removed his eyes from the lion's gaze.

Thus he approached to within fifteen yards, and within springing distance. He dared not advance further, but levelling his gun between the beast's eyes fired, and instantly jumped aside to avoid its expected dying spring; but to his surprise and relief the lion fell over motionless. And no wonder, for the charge, penetrating like a bullet, had broken up and expanded inside the skull, and scattered the brains all over the neck.

To skin two lions and a bôk, unassisted, was beyond his power. His encampment was too far off to obtain help that night, so he emptied the powder out of several more cartridges, and exploded it in a circle round the heap of slain, forming a magic line which no jackal, lion, or other nightly prowler, would

pass over. A few branches stuck upright in the middle made it safe from vultures, and he then left his spoil till next day. The horns of this lion-killer measured four feet five inches from the tips to where they joined the skull, and were at the base eight inches in diameter.

This is the only account of an actual fight between a swart-vitpense and lions that I ever heard from an eye-witness; but it is not a very uncommon occurrence, I have been assured, to find the skeletons of the two mixed up in one heap, the only testimony left of what has, without doubt, been a duel fatal to both combatants.

The bush grew so thick as we followed down the slope, that it was only by repeatedly whistling we kept near each other. Every water-hole we passed was dryer than the preceding one, so we soon gave up the quest of water as hopeless, and turned our attention to looking for game, and getting back to camp as quickly as possible.

For some few minutes I had not heard my signal repeated, and although I rode hither and thither was unable to get any response to my cries. It did not cause me any uneasiness, however, as I knew that the sloop would bring me to the footpath if I only followed it long enough, and then I had a straight ride home. If my companion had been in any difficulty or danger, he would have fired his rifle to attract my attention, and there was no need of anxiety about him finding the way back to the wag-gons. I was longer than I had expected in finding the footpath, and when I did the position of the Long

Kop showed me that it was still a longish ride back ; so as the sun was low in the heavens I quickened up the pace, and arrived back in camp just as Mr. W., who had been back some time, was beginning to feel nervous about my having lost the way, and was preparing to set out again to find me.

The others had returned early in the afternoon. They had been over miles of country in the opposite direction, but had not come across quagga or blue wildebeeste, although they had seen spoor of them in abundance. Their bag consisted of a stein-bôk and a sarsapi, so at all events there was enough meat in camp to victual a small army. The sarsapi is a hybrid between the hems-bôk and the blue wildebeeste. It is the size of a red deer, and of a brownish red colour. The meat is excellent, and it has a pretty head, but the horns are not worth keeping as a trophy.

We despatched the boys at once with spare horses to bring in the meat. Nothing surprised me more than the way in which Kaffirs will find out dead game, from the very loosest description of its whereabouts, even in country quite strange to them. Often I have left a dead bôk in a place to which it would have more than puzzled me to retrace my steps ; but, nevertheless, from the vague directions I was able to give, the boys have returned in a very short space of time with the skin, meat, and horns.

The savoury odours issuing from our largest stew-pot, simmering over the fire, were not necessary to give us all the proverbial hunger. By the time I had enjoyed a wash in the larger of the two water-

holes, which we set apart for that purpose, our dinner was ready. While we had been away the boys had baked a plentiful supply of damper, and also made some very good cakes in the frying-pan. Before we dined the boys returned, laden with the carcasses of the first two wildebeeste we had shot, and they were just in time for us to put the marrow-bones in the ashes, and to let them be cooked in time to form our second course. After we had finished, and were lazily lying about, enjoying our pipes, and talking over our various adventures, the boys suddenly pointed out to us a flock of more than a hundred guinea-fowl, running almost within range, in a long line, and evidently making for the trees just beyond the camp. A. and myself snatched up our fowling-pieces, and started off at once. He ran round them to come up behind, while I ensconced myself behind a bush in their line.

The first of the line were within five yards of me, when A. came upon the rear files, and laid low a brace as they rose to fly. The whole line flew straight over my head, and I was able to knock over a brace and a half before they were out of shot. They settled in a clump of trees close by; but as we had sufficient for the time being, we did not disturb them again, as the boys, who knew their habits, assured us that they would return, night after night, to the same roosting-place, and we determined to attack them in force another night. As the large quantity of fresh meat about the waggons was sure to draw lions and other beasts from all parts round us, we made up three fires, instead of two as usual. One

we placed at the rear of the waggons, and another at either side of them, forming a triangle.

The extra precautions were not needless, for we had only just turned in when the boys first announced to us, in rather an anxious manner, that an "incon-yama," (lion) was near. A. and myself were very sceptical, as we could hear nothing unusual; but our more experienced companions at once heard it; and soon there was no room to doubt its presence, for the growling seemed to come from right under our feet.

A lion never roars, unless he is either standing at bay or wishes to strike terror into the hearts of the game he is pursuing. When prowling round of a night, or retiring to his lair of a morning, he keeps up a sound between a pig's grunt and a dog's growl, but louder than any fifty of the latter in chorus. He can be distinctly heard several miles away, and nothing is more difficult than to distinguish whether he is close by or far off. When very close the whole air seems to be filled with muttered thunder; and it was some time before I could sleep with it booming in my ears.

The horses and oxen were very uneasy, and we feared that the kraal would not prove strong enough to restrain the oxen, as they rushed backwards and forwards charging into the barricades. The drivers' voices soothed them after a time; and the second night they did not appear to mind at all, even when the lions were very much closer.

There was no necessity for us to trouble ourselves about keeping up the fires, as the boys took care that they were never allowed to grow dim.

Kaffirs have a superstition that a lion prefers a black man to a white, and will always make for the Kaffir in preference. This belief we never lost an opportunity of impressing upon them, for it proved far more efficacious in keeping them watchful and alert during the night, than any threats or promises on our part would have been. During the whole time we were in the neighbourhood of lions, it was never necessary to tell the boys to make up the fires after dusk ; and our only care was to prevent them putting on all our stock of firewood in the early part of the night, and so being left with none during the later and more dangerous part of it.

Later in the night the first lion we had heard was joined by a second, and the two prowled round and round till just before the first streak of dawn appeared above the hills, when their growls gradually became less and less distinct as they retreated down the course of the vley. The jackals and wild dogs stayed much later ; and one of the former afforded us a capital chase with the dogs when we turned out to begin the new day ; but we were not successful in running him down.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Rumours of Danger — Precautions — Sarsapi — Vultures—The Camp-pot—Delagoa Bay Boys—Boers' churlishness—A Battue—A Novel Hunt—Stalking Oxen—Pig—New Boys—Our Party breaks up—A Melancholy Sunday.

WHILE we had all been hunting the previous day, a party of boys returning to Delagoa Bay from the Pilgrims' Rest Gold Fields had passed our camp, and from them our own boys had obtained news of grave importance to the safety of our small party, namely, that the strangers had come across a large armed party of Moreeps Kaffirs, not far off, on the other side of Pretorius Kop. They also said that all were well armed, and evidently out upon some marauding expedition. As near as they could judge the numbers, there were about 500 in all.

If this statement was absolutely true, there was a great chance that an attack would be made on us; but as our only authority for such a belief was a second-hand report from a very unreliable source, we determined to stay on where we were until we received more authentic intelligence. As a precautionary measure, we resolved that for the remainder of our stay we would never all be absent from our waggons at the same time. This step answered several purposes. First, and most important, was the

fact that if any attack was made the presence of one of ourselves would encourage and greatly assist the boys to make a resistance which would, at all events, serve to keep off even a large body of Kaffirs until the firing would bring up the absent ones to the rescue. Secondly, in case of any fresh news being brought by passing boys, there would be more chance of hearing a true and less exaggerated account, and so we should be better able to judge of its importance and veracity. Lastly, the work of the camp, such as cooking our meals, curing the skins, drying the meat, cleaning the guns, &c., would be far more efficiently carried on, and there would be less risk run of either cattle or horses straying into the regions of the tsetse fly, or too far away to be readily brought back when wanted.

The first expedition under our new arrangement consisted of Mr. White, A., and myself. We took the direction of the kop, known to us by the name of Stony, as a broad belt round the base, as well as its sides, was covered closely with pieces of rock and stones, which made riding a slow process, besides being difficult and dangerous.

Soon after leaving the camp a fine sarsapi crossed an open space in front of us, but went on apparently unhurt by the volley with which we saluted it without dismounting from our horses. The thorns and reeds were here too thick to enable us to proceed faster than at a walk, so we could not follow up the bôk, and it disappeared. Half-an-hour's up-hill ride brought us to the top of an open ridge, running for a considerable distance from the side of the mountain,

and dividing one side of the plain from the other. From this elevation we took a careful survey of the surrounding country, but were unable to sight game of any kind. As we were preparing to descend the other side, a flock of vultures circling in the air, and quickly being reinforced from every quarter of the heavens, attracted our attention. Lower and lower they swooped down, and the bolder spirits settled upon the topmost branches of a decayed tree, not a quarter of a mile from where we stood. We turned our horses' heads, and galloped up to the spot. While we were approaching, one by one the vultures took wing, and circled round and round our heads, casting great shadows on the ground.

Our curiosity was rewarded, for close to the tree from which we had disturbed the loathsome birds, lay a dying sarsapi. As we rode up it made one desperate effort to rise, but fell back dead in the attempt. On examination it proved to be the one we had fired at, for one of our bullets had entered its ribs and passed through the hind leg on the other side. The poor beast had just strength to escape us in the dense bush, but would soon have furnished a meal for the vultures. We were not long in skinning the body and cutting off the best meat, which we wrapped up in the skin, and "planted" in a crevice of the rocks until our return.

Before we had moved a hundred yards away, the vultures, who had been watching our every movement, had set to work devouring the remains; and by the time we regained the top of the ridge, long lines of them, departing in every direction, showed us that

every scrap of the feast had been picked up, and not a sign of meat left on a bone.

At the foot of the hill we came upon a pool with a little water still left in; but it was too putrid and fetid for ourselves, although the horses drank it eagerly. On its edges we found the spoor of lion, quagga, blue wildebeeste, giraffe, sarsapi, and many other kinds of bôk. One lion had only just left, for the moisture was still damp in the prints of his paws by the water's edge. This fellow must have had a night of severe dissipation, as no ordinary thirst would tempt him out of his lair in the broiling sun and glaring light.

Following down the dry bed of the stream for some distance, we came to a broad tract of lately burnt grass, on which the green shoots were springing up. On the far side of this, underneath the shade of some unusually large trees, we sighted a fine lot of blue wildebeeste and quagga. As the country was open on all sides we were in doubt as to what means we should use to get within shot. Our deliberations, however, were soon put to an end. From almost under our feet out started a reed-bôk, with a dash and crash through the brittle thorns and twigs, which instantly attracted the attention of the herd of wildebeeste.

Off they started in two long lines at their clumsy awkward sort of trot, which looks slow but will try the metal of even a good horse to keep up with. I stopped an instant to take a vindictive but unsuccessful shot at the reed-bok which had betrayed our presence, but the other two lost no time in pursuing

the nearest line of the flying bôk. Seeing that they were making for the end of the valley, where some boggy ground would force them to turn to the left, I made my way as fast as the nature of the ground would allow me straight across the opposite ridge, and then down its length, so as to cut them off. When I had reached the spot I calculated they would have to pass, I dismounted, tied my horse behind a clump of bush, and, concealing myself, waited their approach. Several shots from the others told me that the herd were coming in my direction, and presently the leader came, trotting quite leisurely over the open space in front of me, and closely followed by a long line. I picked out the fellow with the best horns, for they were not more than fifty yards from me, got a fine sight, and fired. I did not wait to see if I had killed, but loaded again at once. The smoke, however, hung so long that all the bôk had disappeared before I could get another shot. Within twenty yards of where I had fired at him lay my bôk, quite dead.

The other two, I concluded, must have followed another part of the herd, for I could see no traces of them when I remounted, with my spoils behind the saddle.

As the sun was getting low, and I was not very certain of my way back, I made for the top of the nearest eminence, and from there was able to pick out my return road to Stony Kop. Once at the foot of that, I could make our camp to within a few hundred yards by several prominent, and now, to us all, well-known landmarks. The other two had already

returned when I arrived, and had also been successful. A. had shot two quagga, the meat of which the boys prefer to any other game; and Mr. White had laid low another blue wildebeeste.

Woodward had devoted his attention during our absence to preparing a capital dinner, from our well-stocked larder. We kept the coffee-pot in constant requisition, for none of us had drunk since the early morning, and twelve hours in the heat of a South African sun makes a man feel that a river will hardly suffice to quench his thirst. The best food we found by experience, after a long day's work, was very thick glutinous soup, which really consisted of the very essence of the meat.

A large pot was constantly kept over a slow fire. Into this we continually placed large strips of fresh meat, potatoes, rice, salt, pepper, and various game birds to give it flavour. The slices of meat were taken out every few hours and fresh ones put in, and at the same time the pot was filled up with water. The boys would eat the meat which was removed, but all its strength remained in the soup, which became so thick that a spoon would almost stand up in it. Sometimes we were all too tired to eat solid meat, but yet were able to take any quantity of the liquid essence, which was more easily eaten, and probably more restorative, than the actual meat.

Next day I remained behind in charge of the camp, and devoted the time to thoroughly cleaning and oiling all the spare guns, looking over the stores, making a fresh supply of beltong, seeing that the skins of the animals we had killed were properly

stretched out to dry, and many other small matters round and about the waggons, which we had neglected for the hunting. During the day a party of about thirty boys appeared, who were on their way home to Delagoa Bay from the Diamond Fields. They were almost starved, and literally danced and sung with delight when I told them that they might have almost the whole of a blue wildebeeste, which would only have gone bad if we had kept it. Jantze did not at all approve of what he considered my quite uncalled-for liberality. He first wished me to make them buy it from me ; but when he found that I was determined to lose the chance of turning an honest penny, he made up his mind to do a deal on his own account. I noticed that he was taking a great deal of most unusual trouble in cutting up the meat into portions for each one of the Delagoa Bay boys, and on approaching nearer I discovered that each one was paying him some small coin before receiving his allowance. I very soon stopped his trading, however, and, to his intense disappointment and annoyance, made him refund all the money he had already received, amounting in all to some eight or nine shillings. Jantze was only following out the system he had seen pursued by the Boers, and from which he had himself suffered on more than one occasion.

While we were on our road to the Berg, and had run short of meat, we one day came upon a party of Boers who had that day killed four eland, and had the carcasses strewed round their waggon, and having in all some two tons of meat.

We naturally asked them to give us enough for

our party, with every intention of giving them powder, caps, sugar, coffee, or whatever they might be short of, in exchange; but to our intense disgust the miserly cur replied, "That we might have as much as ever we liked at sixpence a pound, that being the price of the best meat in the towns."

Although it was in a degree cutting off our nose to spite our face, we would not let the Boer have the satisfaction of making anything out of us, and allowed the pleasing vision of smoking eland steaks, and savoury stew, to fade away, rather than let him boast of having "done" the "verdomed Englishers."

I was glad of the chance of making friends with these boys, in the hope of inducing some of them to stay with us. We were so shorthanded that at present any expedition into the fly, which entailed having boys to carry stores, was out of the question. If, therefore, I could have induced these boys, either to stay themselves, or send us others from some kraals only about seventy miles away, on the banks of the Crocodile, we could have started off, without further waiting for the boys who had been promised to us. The boys themselves would not stay, although I held out heavy inducements, in the shape of unlimited quantities of meat to eat, and presents to each of blankets, beads, knives, or whatever they might fancy, at the end of their time. They gave us for their reason that they had already been away from their kraals for more than a year, and were very anxious to get back to their wives and families. They had also come such a long weary tramp from the Diamond Fields, that they were not up to the

fatigue of a hunting excursion. However, they made the most earnest promises that they would send back boys from the very next kraal they came to— which promises like most other pledges by the ordinary Kaffir, were probably never thought of again when they were once out of sight. These boys had no fresh news of any importance. They had heard that Cetchwayo had been attacked, and that war had been declared, but this we gave no importance to, as the same had been reported regularly four or five times a month for the last half-year. Even if it were true, it would have affected us but little, as the friendly Amaswazi were between us and Zululand; and the smaller chiefs around us would not pluck up courage to harm us until they were assured that the Zulus had a chance of success. Naturally to an Englishman, it seems absurd that a Kaffir should have the presumption to even doubt about the ultimate result of any hostilities between a Kaffir chief and the English nation. But to the Kaffir, and to the Boers also in a less degree, the might of Britain is only so much moonshine. They are quite ready to admit that the regiments in the country are most dangerous enemies, and will perform prodigies of valour, and will undergo any dangers and successfully overcome enormous odds; and they possibly even over-estimate what these men who are present before their eyes are capable of; but beyond what they see they do not believe. I have often seen, first an expression of mild incredulity, and finally one of scornful disbelief, overspread the countenance of a Boer when I have tried to explain to him how utterly

futile any attempt would be to gain anything from our Government by force of arms. The unlimited men, arms, and money that England could and would bring against rebellion, whether of Boers or Kaffirs, they regard as mere scare-crows, and do not hesitate to so express themselves.

The Boer will always bring up the same question as his argument. "If, as you say, England is so mighty, and has such vast power, why is it that you cannot conquer Secocoeni, who has been at open warfare, in the heart of the country you annexed with the express purpose of protecting and keeping in order? Why, also, did it take you so long to put down the risings in the south?" Occasionally, too, a Boer will ask "Why, if you are so great, did you ally yourselves with Cetchwayo when you took our country from us, and hold over us threats, not that your troops would compel us to submit, but that Cetchwayo's regiments should be let loose on our land." Whether there is any truth in the latter supposition or not, I do not know, but the impression is so deeply rooted in the Boers' minds that it will never be entirely eradicated.

An hour before sunset the hunters returned with a quagga, a blue wildebeeste, and a klip-springer.

In the evening we again attacked the guinea fowl, with great slaughter. The boys had marked a long line of them going up to roost in the same clump of trees that we had before killed them in. After our dinner, and just as the sun went down, we surrounded a clump of some half-dozen trees, the boughs of which we could see were crowded with the birds. As

we wanted a quantity, and were essentially shooting for the pot, we did not disdain the poaching plan of having our first shots at them as they sat all huddled up together. We fired almost simultaneously, and never shall I forget the noise which arose. There must have been several hundred of the birds; and as they rose, the flapping and screaming of the unhurt, but terrified portion, added to the crashing through the thick branches of the bodies of the ignobly slain, and cries and flutterings of the wounded, made a far more confusing and exciting battue than any pheasants at the hottest corner of the keeper's coppice ever afforded.

For over a minute we fired as quickly as we could load, before the whole flock had flown off. It was too dark to find all the dead birds, for many had fallen into the thick and prickly thorns, and many more had lodged in the lower branches of the trees; but we took back with us to camp as many as we could carry, and left the remainder for the boys to gather and bring in next day. Guinea fowls, salted, and dried in the sun, make most excellent beltong; and when grilled, or even uncooked, form a very relishing change from the never-varying *menu* of bôk or mealie pap.

During the next week or so we hunted the country round our camp for many miles on either side; but although we rarely failed to come across and kill blue wildebeeste, also many other kinds of the smaller bôk, including sarsapi, reed-bôk, and stein-bôk, we could never find any signs of buffalo, giraffe, or rhinoceros; and it at last became evident to us that

none of the big game had yet left the regions of the tsetse fly, to seek the young fresh grass along the base of the Berg, where our present hunting-grounds were situated.

One day, while out after game, I witnessed a very novel hunting scene. From the top of a ridge I saw a large troop of blue wildebeeste rapidly making their way down the side of an opposite rise towards the end of the ridge I was on. I hurried down to get a shot as they passed. The quagga came first, dashing along so fast that I thought some hunter must be pursuing them, and I took shelter behind a rock, lest a stray bullet might reach me. Close behind the quagga were the blue wildebeeste, evidently hard pressed; but still I could see no one after them. What was my surprise, however, when, following on their heels, came a huge troop of hideously ugly, vicious-looking baboons, jumping, jabbering, waving their arms, and evidently greatly enjoying the sport. I could hardly believe my eyes at first, but the whole troop passed within a hundred yards of me. I had let the blue wildebeeste pass out of shot while I looked on at the baboons; and not caring to bring the devilish-looking beasts all after me, I let them pass on too, without molesting them. There must have been nearly a thousand of them, many as large as a boy, and far stronger.

One morning, just as we were starting off for the day, we were met by a party of four white men on horseback, who were at once recognized as three officers of the 13th Regiment, quartered at Leydenburg, and a well-known farmer from the same

neighbourhood. We went back to the waggons together, and over a bottle of square face exchanged our different news and hunting adventures.

The new arrivals informed us their camp was only some five miles to the south of ours, and that they were on the way back to Leydenburg, as their leave had expired. They intended pushing on with the waggons next day as far as possible, and then riding in the remainder of the distance. By these means they obtained the very utmost time possible for hunting, and were not obliged to waste any on the slow process of ox trekking.

For the sake of company more than of sport we all set off together, taking the direction of the Long Kop, which we regarded as a sure ground for wildebeeste. They had found our camp in a rather disappointing manner to themselves. One of the boys, who had been viewing the country from the high ground, came into their camp with the news that a herd of buffalo were feeding in a valley close by. Off the whole party started at once, and were not long in sighting their game. They made a long *détour* round, so as to have the wind in their faces, and then cautiously approaching the "bront" on which the buffalo were feeding. Bush hid them until they were nearly within shot, and then they dismounted, and stalked the herd. But what was their disgust when they came within shot to find that, instead of buffalo, they had wasted all their time on our span of black bullocks, which in the distance much resembled the nobler species!

While trotting quietly along the side of a dry sloop, out from the reeds at the side bustled a herd of some

twenty pigs. They scattered in all directions, and we did the same ; so in a very few moments all were separated, and the cracks of the rifles on every side made me expect every instant to have a bullet in unpleasantly close proximity to myself or horse. The pig I was pursuing very soon gave me the slip in some long grass, so I turned my horse's head, and proceeded in the same direction we were taking before the porkers appeared. I was soon overtaken by two of the others, one of whom had been successful in slaying a fine boar, with tusks ten inches long, but so firmly fixed in that no amount of cutting could extract them ; and as the wild pigs are all of them coated with vermin, he preferred leaving behind the trophies of his skill to carrying the whole head along with him. As the entire country had now been disturbed, it was of no use expecting to find any other game about, so we made our way to their camp, and presently the rest of the party joined us there, and we had a capital dinner off a calf wildebeeste, shot a day or two previously, which had acquired the gamey flavour of venison.

With their waggons were some twenty boys, who had come out for the sake of the supplies of meat they were allowed to take home in consideration of their services as hewers of wood, drawers of water, and making themselves of general utility. As these were no longer wanted, we were only too glad to take the whole of them off their hands, for we were assured that they were excellent boys, and thoroughly acquainted with all the details of hunting life.

When I reached our own camp, I found that Mr.

White and A. were engaged in discussing the advisability of taking the opportunity of travelling in company, and so being able to bid defiance to any chance party of marauding Kaffirs they might encounter on the road back to Leydenburg; and they finally made up their minds to join the homeward-bound party next day; and much as we mutually regretted parting, there could be no two opinions as to the wisdom of their decision, considering the very unsettled state of the country, the reports of hostile Kaffirs being in the neighbourhood, and the small party they would otherwise form, although it cut short the time they might otherwise have stayed by some ten days or a fortnight.

A. was going back home to Scotland without any delay whatever; Mr. White had business in Natal which needed his immediate attention.

It was a very late hour before we turned in, for there were many incidents of our past life together that we talked over again, and many messages to be taken back for anxious friends and relatives in the old country.

Next day happened to be Sunday, and a very melancholy day it was for me. When I had said the last Good-bye, and seen the figures of my departing friends disappear round a clump of mimosa, I wished very keenly for a time that I too was on my way back home.

Later on in the day the new boys arrived, sent back from their last masters, and very soon were on the best of terms with those who had been with us from the beginning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Into the Tsetse Belt—Zulus—Moreep—Preparations for the Start
—Giraffe—An exciting Run—Marrow Bones—Jacob—
Stores for the Journey—Last Instructions—A parting Salute
—Kaffir Laziness—A Boa-Constrictor.

EVER since we had ascertained that the big game had not yet come out of the fly district, Woodward and I had been discussing a scheme for going after them into their securest haunts, as they would not come to us. Now that the other two were departed, and we had only ourselves to consider, one of the chief objections to our contemplated journey was removed in the fact that we should not now be in any way breaking up our party, for we had known that the limited time Mr. White had at his disposal would have prevented him going. Another obstacle had been the deficiency of boys to accompany us, as bearers of provisions and hunters; but with our recent reinforcement we had an abundant supply at our service.

Later in the day four more boys, on their road to Delagoa Bay came up, and hearing from our boys of the proposed expedition, they petitioned to be allowed to join in consideration of the unlimited indulgence in "skof" (meat) they were sure to enjoy.

We now had enough boys to go with us, and yet leave a sufficient number to take care of the waggons,

oxen, and horses, and to protect them against any pilfering by stray Kaffirs on their way either to or from the Fields.

Our drivers and foreloupers had already given us so many proofs of their fidelity and honesty, that we felt no doubts at all as to their being tempted by our absence to steal liquor, powder, caps, lead, or any other articles, which become almost priceless marketable valuables in such a far-away country as we were in; and we were just as confident that they would allow no strangers to do so. The mere fact of our boys being pure-bred Zulus was almost a sufficient guarantee of their behaving as well, or probably better, when left on their honour in charge of our possessions, as they would when we were present to personally keep them to their duties. If a man is lucky enough to get pure Zulus as his servants, he is freed from many of the minor annoyances and inconveniences of South African Life. The ordinary Kaffir, whether he be Basuto, Macatee, or any of the other numerous tribes inhabiting those parts, is always on the look-out to steal. He is utterly untrustworthy, and unreliable. He does not know what it means to tell the truth; and looks upon his master's absence as a godsend thrown in his way, in which he may steal, eat, drink, and be lazy, to his heart's content, without any fear of immediate retribution. He is quick to a degree in taking advantage of any ignorance or soft-heartedness on his master's part, and will always desert him in the hour of need or danger. A Zulu, on the other hand, is almost invariably an honest, truthful, and reliable

servant. He will always stand by his master if an occasion comes for blows and hard knocks, neither will he ever run away and leave him in the hour of sickness and helplessness. On the other hand, a Zulu has, with very good reason, a far higher opinion of himself than of his fellow-blacks, and is much more likely to forcibly resent any chastisement or ill-treatment, unless well deserved, in which case he will suffer his punishment in silence, be none the worse servant for it, and certainly bear no malice against his master. Zulus are, as a rule, far finer men physically, as well as morally, than any other Kaffirs, and will do double the work, and bear twice the hardship, without complaining. During the whole of my stay in South Africa I never heard the fact even called in question, that Zulus are in every capacity by far the most superior race of South Africa; and all my own personal experience pointed the same way.

Notwithstanding the reliance we were happily able to place in the boys we contemplated leaving in charge of our camp, we could not shut our eyes to the risks we ran in leaving it ourselves. The whole country was so unsettled, and so many rumours of wars were flying about, that at any moment the final crash might come, and either the Zulus break out themselves or have hostilities thrust upon them. The instant this happened all the petty chiefs would take the opportunity of sending out impeys in every direction, who, under the pretence of being Zulus, would scour the whole country, and rob, plunder, and murder, wherever they saw their chance of falling

upon an unprotected homestead or upon a party of waggons trekking.

In the fastnesses of the hills, within a day's journey of where we were encamped, lay the kraal of Moreep, a relative of Secocoeni, a chief of a small tribe, an off-shoot of the Amaswazis. This chief we knew to be very evilly disposed towards the English, and to be only awaiting any decided and sufficiently powerful movement against the troops to openly range himself on the side of Secocoeni.

Our presence in the valley had of course been made known to this rascal by his scouts almost before we had ourselves arrived there, and he was equally sure to possess pretty accurate descriptions of our numbers and strength, as well as of the quantity of cattle, oxen, stores, and ammunition we had in our possession. Although a petty chief, he could easily muster some thousand men, all of whom would be fairly well armed, and most of them with fire-arms. Now, if while we were away after the big game, any very reassuring reports of British reverses or Kaffir successes were brought to this chief, or if reported negotiations between him and Secocoeni were concluded, there was not much doubt but that he would think it a glorious opportunity of refilling his magazine with ammunition, acquiring a fine addition to his herds of cattle, and providing himself, not only with horses and rifles, but also many such luxuries as spirits, coffee, meal, &c., by sending down an impey to attack our camp. If we were there ourselves to defend it, the boys, encouraged by our presence, would prove most formidable antagonists ; and with

our superior arms, unlimited ammunition, and advantageous position, we might fairly hope to inflict such severe slaughter upon the attackers that they would give it up as not being worth the candle, and so we might save our possessions. Supposing, however, that while we were away (the mere fact of which being reported to Moreep would make him all the more inclined to indulge his plundering propensities), an armed force was to attack the camp, we could not even expect the six boys left in charge to attempt any defence, and indeed they would be fools to think of it in the face of such odds. Our boys would take to their heels on the first sign of the enemy, and we should never again see a vestige of our belongings, and not even have the satisfaction of making them pay dearly for them. This was the most serious risk we ran in making any long stay away from the waggons, and we could not calculate on being absent less than a fortnight at our lowest estimate, supposing everything indeed went well, and we came upon game upon the road we intended pursuing, without spending any time in searching for it. We were also slightly nervous about our boys keeping up their vigilance in preventing the cattle straying too near the borders of the fly. Our only other fear was lest a sudden fire should sweep over the country and drive the cattle before it, scattering them abroad, or else destroy the waggons themselves. This last apprehension was very soon removed, for while we were in the afternoon discussing the pros and cons we perceived a fire coming towards us, but so slowly, owing to the scantiness of

grass, that we had plenty of time to secure ourselves against any inconvenient amount of heat by firing ourselves for some distance all round about, and so leaving nothing for it to approach us by; but it swept all the surrounding country bare for many miles round.

Before the evening of the day on which we were left alone we had quite made up our minds to run what risks there might be, and start off after the big game as soon as we could get our stores together. We lost no time when we had once made up our minds, as every day was of importance, both as bringing nearer the likelihood of Kaffir risings, and also of the unhealthy season coming on before we could get out of the low-lying, and therefore fever-stricken, country. All the next day we spent in deciding upon what things were absolutely necessary for us to take, and in apportioning all that we found needful into ten equal loads. In the afternoon, while we were still busy, some of the boys whom we had sent out to look round for game, came running back to camp with the intelligence that they had come across a herd of seven kameel leopards, as the giraffe are invariably called by Boers and Kaffirs. In far less time than it takes to write, Woodward and myself had thrown down whatever work we were engaged upon, had seized our rifles and ammunition-belts, which were never far from our hands, and were following the boys as quickly as the thick bush they led us through would permit. For two or three miles we proceeded at a jog-trot, which at last began to tell upon our wind, and as I gathered that we were

somewhere in the vicinity of the giraffe I insisted on pulling up for a few moments to recover my coolness, as nothing so unsteadies the hand and eye as too rapid travelling over the ground; and many an animal has been missed, many an accident occurred, and occasionally a life been lost, solely through a hunter being too hot, and having his nerves all throbbing from exertion, to such an extent that he could not hold his rifle steady when it came to the point. While halted we had time to hear from the boys that the kameel were moving slowly along when they saw them, and that by the direction we had taken they expected to cut them off before they reached a clump of short green thorn, towards which the boys' instinct told them they were making. They had miscalculated the distance and time however, for on nearing the clump we suddenly perceived the tall heads of the herd, moving about exactly like huge serpents, right above the tops of the highest thorn bushes. The same instant that we sighted them, they perceived us; and twisting and turning their long necks from side to side in and out of the branches, they proceeded at an apparently leisurely trot towards a thickly wooded ridge to the right. By running as fast as I could put one leg before the other, and utterly regardless of tearing thorns and slashing branches, I managed to come up within a hundred yards of the hindmost of the herd just as it was disappearing within the thick cover, where it would have been hopeless to follow them. Falling on one knee I took a hurried aim, and fired, hardly even expecting to hit; but to my

great delight the tall head fell forward, then down almost between the forelegs, and the giraffe toppled over on to its side, quite dead, with my bullet through its head. It was a very lucky fluke, as I had aimed at the shoulder. On looking at my rifle I found the sight had slipped up to 400 yards, which accounted for the elevation. The giraffe was only three-quarters grown, and not nearly as fine as several which escaped; but still we were quite content with our spoil, as we returned to camp with the skin and marrow-bones. The skin of a full-sized giraffe will weigh considerably over one hundredweight, and the hide is worth from 2*l.* to 4*l.*, according to its size, weight, and the manner in which it has been dressed. Its enormous length makes it extremely useful for whip-thongs; from its thickness, toughness, and durability it makes the very best sole-leather that can be procured. The marrow-bones are splendid eating. The marrow is more consistent and meat-like than in any other animal, and one leg gives a dinner for even a big man, as there is over a yard. The flesh of the giraffe is seldom eaten by whites, but the Kaffirs do not object to it when there is no other. In appearance it reminded me of a bad-conditioned salmon, for it had much the same pinky-red colour, and had streaks which divided it into flakes just like the fish. It was a lucky shot in a way that I did not discover until afterwards, for during the evening we heard the boys talking very excitedly to each other; and upon W. approaching and joining in, he discovered that they were all talking with amazement of what they considered my marvellous

display of skill ; for Jantze the driver, and Jacob my especial boy, both insisted that I had aimed at the head, and that I could hit anything at any distance just where I chose—which impressed the new boys so thoroughly, that they ever after gave me credit for superhuman prowess with the rifle.

Jacob was one of the new boys, whom I had taken as my own particular body-servant, and whose duty was never to leave me under any circumstances, to carry my spare gun, and always accompany me hunting. He was a perfect specimen of the *genus homo*. Two-and-twenty years old, over six feet in height, and with arms and legs which would satisfy a sculptor, he had a fine, open, and even handsome, face, he was strong as a horse, and agile as a panther. Even when I was riding along at a gallop he would keep up, either in front of me to lead the way, or close behind when I wished him to follow ; and at the end of a long day's work he would be as fresh as at starting, although he had been carrying a heavy gun, ammunition, and assegais, the whole time.

We felt the heat more trying during the night than we had hitherto experienced it. Until the stars were about to disappear we sat outside upon the waggons, with nothing on but our shirts, exposed to the little air there was, and even in that light attire were uncomfortably warm and close. Before we turned in, we again went over all the articles we had decided on taking, and saw that they were in their respective places and divisions, and that each boy knew his proper package. As we had plenty of

boys to carry, there was no reason for us to leave anything behind which would materially affect our comfort, so we were rather luxurious in our supplies of provisions, and also took more bedding than was absolutely needful. Our ten packages were made up as follows: The first boy had the most bulky burden, containing our blankets, wrapped up in a small tent, seven feet long by three feet high, which, when tied between two branches, racks, sticks, or anything handy, and with its sides pegged out, just afforded cover for two men lying at full length underneath it. This I insisted on taking, rather against Woodward's wishes, so that in case of rain we might have shelter both for our guns and ourselves, if we did happen to be so unfortunate in our weather as to have wet. As a general rule it was more pleasant to sleep without any covering at all, except the boughs of a tree overhead, which quite efficiently kept off the little dew that ever fell. Number two was our sapper and miner as well as scullion, and carried a hatchet, spade, bucket, frying-pan, and a couple of billies. Numbers three and four were loaded with six pots of preserved milk, coffee, sugar, and rice, a bottle of square-face, two cups, two plates, two knives and forks, salt and pepper, and a small bag of preserved peaches. The latter are an almost indispensable article of diet, for without any vegetable at all, one is apt to get out of health from the large quantity of meat, which of course forms the sole sustenance. Numbers five and six carried about twenty pounds of mealie meal apiece; this we intended more for the boys' food than

our own, in case of not killing any meat our first day out. Numbers seven and eight had the same weight apiece of crushed mealies for my horse, as the probabilities were that we should come upon no grass for several days that it could eat. Number nine had the most important load of all—our supply of cartridges, powder, and other shooting gear. Number ten carried two large water-gourds, which when we had opportunity were filled; but as we seldom were able to keep them long full, he assisted number nine with the ammunition, which, from its heavy weight in a small compass, proved the most wearisome and difficult to carry of all the different packages. Jacob had only my field-glasses, a large supply of matches, my spare rifle, and some tobacco to carry, as he might be wanted at any time to leave the trek and accompany me after game.

Two boys were also left out of the reckoning, who could give a hand to any of the others who grew tired, take the place of any one who might fall sick, and be ready for any odd jobs which might crop up. I had decided to take one horse into the fly with me, but I should not have felt at all easy in my mind about conveying it to a certain and painful death, if it had not happened that the horse had already been taken in by accident and the mischief done, so it made very little difference what became of it, as nothing could save its life.

The sun next morning rose upon us already up and making ready for our start. As soon as we had finished a hearty breakfast, at which we indulged plentifully in jam and biscuits, as we should not have

the chance of eating them again for some time ; we saw each boy take up his right bundle, and then under charge of Woodward they all started off in file. I stayed behind with Jacob, to see if they had forgotten anything, or if anything more struck me as necessary when a clearance was made, and if there was, to bring it on afterwards with us, and also to give Jantze and the other boys who were left behind their final instructions. They none of them at all liked being, as they thought, deserted, and were full of the most gloomy apprehensions of the dangers likely to beset them. They repeatedly asked when we should be back, and begged that we would not be any longer than the fourteen days we told them we should probably be absent from the waggons. They all promised to attend constantly to the oxen and horses, and not ever allow them out of their sight long enough to enter the fly, or be carried off by Kaffirs. I held out as a bribe some present such as a belt or blanket for each boy left behind, if when we returned all was well, and they had behaved properly.

I had a thorough search throughout the camp, but found nothing which we had forgotten to put in the sacks, and after repeating all the instructions and directions for the last time to the drivers who were left in command, I mounted my horse and rode off, with Jacob leading the way on the trek of Woodward and the rest of the party. As I disappeared over the hill-side, the boys gave me a parting shout, and one or two of them fired off their guns as a farewell salute. It was a waste of powder which I did not

much approve of, but as I daresay it helped to revive their spirits, it was not thrown away entirely. For nearly eight miles we followed the trek towards Delagoa Bay, and were soon at the far end of the Long Kop. The bush from this point became much thicker, and the general aspect of the country grew wilder and more densely wooded. The path curved and wound backwards and forwards and from one side to the other, in the most vague and extraordinary manner, and in itself gave an excellent demonstration of the naturally lazy and indolent character of the Kaffir. Whenever a small tree or bush, or even clump of grass, had either grown up in the path or had stretched out a thorny twig across it, there the path would take a sharp turn round in a half-circle to avoid it, and the branch was left in undisputed possession of the whole road. One blow with a stick, or a cut with an assegai, would have cleared away the incumbrance and left the road free; but no,—that would be quite an uncalled for display of energy on the part of a Kaffir; and although in the course of the year many hundreds are constantly passing to and fro, yet not one of them ever thinks of attempting to clear an obstacle out of his own and his successors' way.

Passing through a space thickly covered with rocks and lumps of decaying granite, we saw a large boa-constrictor coiled against a ledge of rock, and sunning itself in the fierce rays which were reflected back on its glistening scales from the sides of the rock. It was the largest snake I had ever seen, and I hardly knew how to attack it to the best advantage,

and was not quite sure whether or no to expect an attack from it. Jacob soon settled the question of how to kill the beast, which did not seem at all afraid of us, but just lay still, slowly moving his wicked-looking head backwards and forwards, taking in our every movement with his cruel cunning eyes. The boy took up a big stone and walking up to within a yard of the snake, which began to raise its body at his approach, he dashed it down on its head, and before it had recovered from the shock, dealt it a blow with his assegai across the neck, which completely severed the head from the body. The long coils of body seemed, instead of being deprived of life, to have suddenly become endowed with some mad spirit, for the headless trunk wound itself round and round the rock, gave convulsive bounds into the air, and dashed itself against the ground and stones. As the head was gone I did not care about the skin, so we left the body where it was, still turning and twisting in a thousand coils. Its length was about eighteen feet, but the muscles were so powerful that we could not pull it out straight to measure, and we had not the spare time to wait for its death-throes to subside, when it would have become limp and flexible. Jacob carefully preserved the head. As "mootie" (medicine) it is much prized by all Kaffirs, and they attribute different sovereign virtues to its various parts. The brains will give the man who eats them great cunning in the arts of war and the chase, and he will always get the better of his enemies in strategy and craftiness. If he eats the eyes he will be able to see in the night if ever an enemy

or a beast of prey is lying in wait to destroy him. The snake's tongue stretched out and dried is the most renowned love amulet of the witch-doctors, and will fetch a very high price from any love-sick Kaffir boy. Jacob regarded this as rather a dangerous sort of love-charm, and he firmly believed that if ever he gave it as a token of unalterable affection for his dusky sweetheart, the king of the snakes would thenceforth take the girl under his protection, and kill the giver if he proved unfaithful. The head of the boa itself, when these specific charms have been taken out, is still very valuable worn round the neck as a charm against sickness or calamity of any kind. Soon after having killed the snake we came upon the boys, who were resting awhile under the shade of some thick kameel-thorns, so called because they are taller than any of the other varieties of the mimosa, and also have a shoot which the long-necked animals are especially partial too. I roused the boys, and we went along the path for another five miles before we caught up W., who was waiting for us at a place known far and near as Hart's Station; once a small but comfortable log-hut, with its little garden around it, but now only a few broken-down walls, and a mass of cinders. The place had a very gruesome appearance, which the tragic tale connected with it helped to foster.

Here was the first water we had come across, but no one unacquainted with the place would have been able to find it. The little stream itself was quite dried up; but by following it down some distance

and then turning up another smaller stream also dried up, which led into it, one of the boys brought us to a pool of water left in a deep hole worn into the rock, and shaded from the sun by another large overhanging ledge which prevented its evaporation. Here we made a halt for a couple of hours, as our twelve miles march in the hot sun made the cool shade of the trees and the clear cold water look a very inviting place for us to halt at. While stretched out on the long soft grass and enjoying our pipes, Woodward gave me the history connected with Hart's Station, from its very commencement.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Transport and Railroads—Empty Coffers—Assassination—
Friends in Need—The Ruined Hut—Our Line of March
—No Supper—An Impromptu Stable—Lions about—Water
scarce—Hard up for Food.

THE greatest obstacle in the way of the Transvaal's progress and prosperity has been, and always will be, the almost unsurmountable difficulties it has to contend with in transporting its produce to the coast and obtaining its own imported articles. As it is at present, there is no other means of transportation than by the slow and uncertain ox-waggon. The distance from Pretoria to Durban is about four hundred miles; goods can never be brought up or taken down under at least five weeks, and very frequently they are twice or three times as long on the journey. The rate of carriage, it naturally follows, has to be enormous to repay the transport rider for his capital laid out in oxen and waggons, for the same spans can only make the trips backwards and forwards twice in the year at most. Many oxen die on the journey, and waggons constantly need repairing. Drivers and foreloupers have to be paid high wages, all which causes make a high rate absolutely needful to induce men to invest their capital in such a risky occupation as transport-riding. The rate runs up

and down from as low as 1*l.* per cwt. up to even 4*l.* In the months of October, November, December, and January, when the grass is good and travelling is easy, the rates will fall very low, as there is so much the less chance of oxen dying on the road from starvation, and the journey can be completed in much quicker time. At other times of the year, however, when the grass is bad, the rates will go up and up, until only fancy prices will induce a transport-rider to risk his span at all; and then of course, as the supplies of the country run short, every imported commodity or article of consumption increases proportionately in price.

The Dutch Government, before the annexation by the British, quite realized how impossible it would be for their country ever to attain any high degree of prosperity, or even of civilization, under these conditions. A railway was naturally their first and most eagerly sought for improvement.

Surveyors were engaged to report upon the possibility of a line down to Natal; but this was soon found to be, for the present, impracticable on two accounts: the unwillingness of the Natal Government to coalesce with that of the Transvaal, or to render them assistance in any way, and the nature of the country through which the line would have to run. The surveyors declared that, although possible to construct this railway, yet it would cost an enormous sum of money and be a labour of years.

Mr. Bergers, the energetic president of the Zuid-Afrikan Republic, although unlucky in his first attempt, was not to be beaten, and at once turned

his attention to the possibility of running a line to Delagoa Bay. The surveyors were again set to work, and after a lengthened survey the line was not only declared feasible, but to be very easy of construction.

The only difficulties which seemed to be in its way were the two precipitous Bergs, the difficulty of obtaining labour, and the impossibility of taking oxen or horses into the country below the Berg on account of the tsetse fly. These difficulties, however, were smoothed away, as it was found that by taking the line away to the south, the Berg could be avoided to a great extent; several tribes round about would send gangs of labourers; and to do away with the necessity for horses or oxen the line could be roughly laid and all the building materials carried along on it as they proceeded.

Mr. Bergers was jubilant, and at once set to work to have the contracts made and so lose no time in setting to work. A large portion of the railway plant arrived, and all the arrangements for its speedy construction were concluded.

Unluckily, the contractor one day suggested that an instalment of money would be advisable; and lo! it was found that the coffers of the Republic were absolutely empty. In vain the Boers were entreated to pay their taxes and so save their country; but not a dollar could the unhappy President raise, and offers of every description in the way of grants of land, mortgages of revenue, and future taxation were made instead; but the constructors of the railway would take nothing but actual hard cash

down ; and so the Delagoa Bay and Transvaal Railway subsided more suddenly than it had sprung up.

Mr. Bergers was not yet beaten. As he could not have his railway, he offered to grant the whole of the low country below the Berg to any man who should start a regular carrying service between the Gold Fields or Leydenburg and Delagoa Bay, either by Kaffir carriers, ox-waggons, pack-oxen, or donkeys, or with any combination of these methods. For some time no one was found bold enough for the undertaking; but at last a man came forward, and being helped in every way by the Government, started a line of waggons to run from the Gold Fields to below Pretorius Kop. From Pretorius Kop to Delagoa Bay, nearly the entire length of which lay in the region of the fly, he organized a line of boys to carry the loads to and from the waggons. A station was started below the Kop, another 15 miles further on, in charge of which a man named Hart was placed, and several others further on towards Delagoa. For some months the waggons went regularly enough, and all the storekeepers in the Eastern Transvaal began to feel the benefit of such a quick mode of carriage; but gradually all regularity ceased, and from a service of two waggons a week it gradually fell away to only one occasionally. Oxen died, or were stolen; waggons came to grief over the rock-covered precipitous road; the land and farms granted by the Government were absolutely valueless and unsaleable, and the proprietor soon found himself almost bankrupt.

Meanwhile, there had been constant disturbances

with the Kaffirs. At the station below the Kop a large party had come down and destroyed the house, stolen anything of value it contained, and driven away the occupants, who refused to go back there. The men at the other stations followed their example and deserted, with the exception of Hart, who refused to leave his post until he was regularly recalled. The man was a universal favourite with all who knew him, and was ever kind and hospitable to whites and blacks alike who might need his assistance. He spent his time in hunting, collecting plants, and taming various birds and animals; and he had a collection of various kinds of pets, among them bôk of various kinds, parrots, jays, monkeys, and snakes. He was on friendly terms with whatever Kaffirs he ever came across, and apprehended no danger from his solitary and defenceless situation; and in all probability, if others had followed his example in dealing with the Kaffirs, no harm would ever have befallen him.

One day a party of armed Macatees came up to his door, and in angry terms told him that a few days previously some white men by Pretorius Kop had met a Macatee of their tribe who was in possession of a gun. The whites had taken this gun away from him in the most unjustifiable manner. The boy had returned to the head kraal and told his story. Instantly the present party had set out in pursuit of the offenders, but had been unable to come up with them. However, they were convinced that they were in some way connected with Hart, and at all events Hart was a white man, even if not con-

nected with the actual robbers of the gun ; and they speedily gave him to understand that he must give them his rifle in exchange for the one they had been deprived of. If he did this they promised to go away and leave him in peace. Hart naturally objected to this disposal of his property, and argued long against it, and indeed refused to part with his rifle at any hazard. This conversation had taken place while he had been standing in his doorway. He then stepped outside altogether, to try and persuade the whole band to go away and leave him in peace, for he probably saw that some of them were his friends and inclined to be guided by his words. While, however, he was haranguing them, one murderous wretch going behind him put up his rifle, and shot him through the head, blowing off the top of his skull.

As the band had nothing to gain by remaining, they stripped his little hut of everything of any value, killed all his pets, set fire to the roof and to the outhouses, and then departed in possession of the disputed gun, leaving the murdered man where he had fallen, but stripped of his clothes, which they divided among themselves.

It so happened that two white men, friends of Hart, were then staying amongst the Amaswazi across the Crocodile River. News of the assassination was brought to the Swazi king, who communicated it to these two, and to their lasting honour be it said they at once took means to have the body properly buried, by paying a party of Swazis very heavily to go to the ruined hut, and put their friend