

## CHAPTER X.

### AGAIN ON THE MARCH.

THE first stage of our arduous journey was over. The first section of the work we had in hand completed. We had had a fair sample of the dangers and difficulties which it was our lot to encounter during the winter months of 1874, and imagined that we could fairly estimate what would be their sum total by the time we returned to warmer and less savage regions. But we had some bitter experiences before us yet which we hardly anticipated. The morning after our return to Cathkin was spent in enclosing the powder-casks in envelopes of green ox-hide, in order to strengthen them against the vicissitudes of the rough travel to which they were about to be exposed. This hide, when dry, becomes as hard and stiff as board, and is besides thoroughly impervious to wet.

About midday we marched, starting at first back upon our old tracks over the already twice-trodden ground, and crossing the Sterk-spruit again, but then striking off upon a fresh line of march, by which we were to reach the Draakensberg at a point many miles beyond the scene of our late labours.

Once upon the new track we felt that we had really made a fresh start, and hoped to make a good first day's march. That, however, was not to be, for, a mile or two farther on, our second waggon was upset in a "mud-hole," and the catastrophe gave us all full employment for at least two hours, in rescuing the contents and getting the waggon out.

The delay was not inspiriting, and somewhat damped the ardour with which we had set out in the morning; and when we encamped upon an open flat, at the end of the hard day's work which had advanced us so little, we were hardly so cheerful a party as usual. Water was plentiful where we camped, but there was no wood to be had at all. It was fortunate that we carried an ample supply with us, or we should have been fireless that night,

than which I can hardly imagine a greater misfortune under the circumstances.

We made an early start next morning (18th) to make up for lost time, and as we were now travelling over a fairly level country, below the great mountain spurs, our march was a tolerably rapid one during the earlier part of the day. It might have continued so until nightfall but for the misbehaviour of one of our drivers, which interfered with our progress in the following manner.

During the afternoon our line of march had lengthened out, owing to the different speed of horsemen, footmen, and heavy vehicles, but we were all sufficiently in sight of each other to know what was happening from front to rear. The Colonel, as usual, rode some little way ahead with his advance guard and a portion of the pioneers, for the special purpose of inspecting the road over which the waggons must pass, and of repairing such places as were unfit for them to cross in safety.

Accordingly, on reaching a small stream running between very high and steep banks, and flowing

right across our track, we found the workmen, superintended by our Chief himself, completing the construction of a good firm causeway of broken stone, with earth and sods beaten down upon them, crossing from bank to bank, and wide enough to give ample passage for the waggons. To make all complete the Colonel had also caused the sides of the causeway to be well defined by poles planted at either edge, with wisps of grass attached to their tops.

The work being completed, and the waggons close at hand, our Chief rode on after leaving strict directions behind him. Each waggon was to be stopped while its driver went forward to examine the place for himself, and see what he had to do. He was then to return to his charge, and drive slowly and carefully over, keeping to the centre of the causeway.

We waited to see the result. Down the steep incline came waggon No. 1, its driver carefully obeying orders, and, crossing in perfect safety, it continued on its way.

Now for No. 2! But the driver of No. 2 is rather a free and independent gentleman, and has more than once earned for himself one of our Chief's quiet but severe reproofs. It was his waggon which delayed us yesterday, and he is always sure to get into difficulties. On this occasion he chooses to disregard his orders altogether, thereby sufficiently proving that he has not long served under his present master. He altogether declined to get down and reconnoitre, or to proceed at a slow pace, but driving recklessly down the incline, came upon one edge of the causeway instead of upon its centre. With a rush and a crash the whole thing went over the side, and fell into the mud and water below, breaking the tilt and shooting all the contents of the waggon into the stream. First a warning cry, and then a general shout from the bystanders announced the event; and then, as the first thing to be done, we sent a mounted man off after the Colonel, to tell him of the catastrophe and to bring him back.

The driver looked foolish enough now, but his face wore a thoroughly alarmed expression when the

Colonel galloped back, and inquired into what had taken place. That it was no mere accident, but the result of wilful disobedience and gross carelessness on the part of the man, was plain enough. The Colonel's face grew stern as he listened to the tale. "Here!" he said, turning to the Basutos; "you four dismount and seize that man."

The order was promptly obeyed.

"Now take off his coat and lay him down,—and give him a dozen with a stirrup-leather." And he turned away to superintend the operations for rescuing the fallen waggon.

The Basutos were sturdy fellows, and knew what they were about, and the effect of this well-merited punishment was undoubtedly good. The man who received it drove his waggon with the most exemplary care and attention during the rest of the expedition; and it is possible that the others benefited by his experience, for, with one unavoidable exception, not another waggon was upset from that time until we returned to Pietermaritzburg.

June 19th brought us another early start and fresh delays on the way,—not, however, through anyone's misbehaviour this time, but through the necessity of spending a couple of hours in repairing the road at a shockingly bad drift over the Umlambonga, a stream running into the Tugela; which latter important river takes its rise in the mountain-range.

While halting here we were met by Nyati, chief of the Zikali tribe, which resides in this part of the country. He had an interview with our Chief, who directed him to send supplies of every description to his camp, promising that there should be a market established there, at which everything should be paid for at once, and at proper rates. The Colonel, I soon observed, was always very particular about enforcing strict honesty towards the natives from all serving under himself; and this, not only for the sake of upholding abstract justice, but in order to teach the natives to place that implicit confidence in the perfect good faith of "Government" which is so necessary in ruling a savage nation, and which the native popula-

tion of Natal has lost to a sad extent through bitter experience during a long term of years.

The chief of the Zikali people seemed ready enough to sell, for we had not had time to pitch our tents that evening, near a German mission station, before long strings of women and boys were to be seen approaching from every side, bearing upon their heads loads of firewood, large baskets of mealies, pumpkins, and Kaffir corn, pots of *tshwala*, milk, eggs, and fowls, etc., which were all welcome articles as a change in diet. The troops, as well as ourselves, were glad to make their purchases after the everlasting rations of fresh beef on which they had lived of late, and our camp soon presented a busy scene. Nearly all the articles offered for sale were disposed of before the merchants departed, evidently half-frightened, half-admiring, but wholly wondering at the sight of so many white faces, and, still more, so many scarlet coats.

Our poor pioneers were not forgotten, for, although they had no money to spend, yet the free natives, with the liberality common amongst the Kaffirs,



presented them with huge messes of mealie-meal and Kaffir corn mixed with pumpkin, prepared according to the native taste. They called the mixture *isijingi*, and appeared to enjoy it immensely.

We did not march next day, but spent it in making preparations for the ascent of the Amaponjwana Pass, which was situated about eighteen miles from our present camp. This day's routine was diversified by a visit which we, or rather I should say, which the Colonel received, from a lady of distinction in this part of the world, although her fortunes were temporarily in the shade. About sundown, while we were seated round the camp-fire waiting for our dinner, our attention was attracted by a considerable commotion in the line of the pioneers. Sounds of rejoicing were borne upon the wind, and a perfect babel of tongues. Presently we observed the men falling into line as they had been taught to do during the last six months by the corporal in charge of them, and a minute later they were marching towards the camp-fire, round which the Colonel, Captain —, I, and others were seated. As they

advanced, singing some dirge-like chant of their own, we saw that they were accompanied by several women and old men, strangers to the camp, whom they were evidently conducting to the Colonel's presence. They halted opposite the fire, drew up in order and saluted, crying with one voice "Bayete!" a salute properly given to royalty alone by the Zulus, but with which they occasionally greet an *Inkos* whom they are particularly anxious to propitiate.

After paying this mark of respect a dead silence fell upon the party, while one, advancing to the front, accompanied by the strangers, presented to the Colonel the chief personage of the newly-arrived party.

She,—for it was a lady,—was a slight, good-looking young woman, attired in the ordinary costume of the Zulu matron, yet with a singularly prepossessing and dignified bearing, and possessing that charm in woman, a soft voice. Of course she did not know a word of English, nor could we address her in her own language. But amongst the pioneers was one who had once been taken to England by a former master, and who spoke English fairly well. This man came forward as

N

interpreter, and informed our Chief that this lady was *Unkosaza*, the widow of the late chief of the Putini tribe, to which they all belonged, and with her little son, a child of about two years of age, was at present living under the protection of her brother Nyati, chief of the Zikali tribe. She had now brought her little boy to see and be seen by these captive members of the tribe to the chieftainship of which he was heir.

Unkosaza, explained the interpreter, now desired to pay her respects to the Colonel, and to implore his protection for herself and her young son; and then the little fellow was brought forward, carried upon the hip of Unkosaza's female attendant. As far as one could judge from tone and gesture, and from the interpreter's version of her words, the exiled lady expressed herself in the most becoming manner, and altogether she impressed us all with her self-possessed and well-bred demeanour.

When she appeared to have uttered all she wished to say, the Colonel offered her and her attendants refreshment in the shape of Cape port, or pontac; "the white man's tshwala," as the interpreter ex-



Van der Eerds Deur & Son, Ltd.

UNKOSAZA AND HER ATTENDANT.

plained to them. They gave it as their opinion that it was extremely good, but confined themselves, nevertheless, to tasting the merest sip of it; and I fancy that the biscuits, sugar, and finally the joint of beef which followed were more highly acceptable presents. This last, a truly barbaric but perfectly suitable gift, was not, of course, for immediate consumption, but was handed over to an attendant to be carried away when the party left us.

The Colonel then made a little speech to the pioneers through the interpreter, telling them that he was pleased to see their young chief and his mother, that they must all be very good and obedient to "Government," and some day who knew what might not happen? etc. He then dismissed them all to the pioneers' quarters, from whence issued sounds of rejoicing which lasted until the bugle sounded "Out lights," when a profound silence and darkness fell upon the whole camp, with the exception only of the head-quarters' tents.

Next morning, before we had made a start, Unkosaza appeared again, attended by her maid,

but carrying upon her own head a pot of *tshwala*, which she presented with great respect to the Colonel, thanking him at the same time for his goodness to her people. With his usual kindness he accepted her gift, and then made her another himself, in the shape of a brilliant scarlet blanket, in which he arrayed her and sent her to show herself to her people. I was glad to see great masses of pumpkins and mealies sent over to the pioneers from the kraal where she resided, which showed that she had a heart for "her own."\*

The Colonel had sent for a fresh supply of pack-oxen the day before, and some twenty appeared in the course of the morning, each with a rider on his back. Wild-looking riders they were too. They formed part of our line of march for some time. What with white men and Basutos on horseback,

\* I observed that from this time forward the Colonel not infrequently received the royal salute, "Bayete!" from his grateful pioneers. He, however, checked the utterance whenever he heard it; and made a point of explaining to them, and to all his other road-parties, that that particular salute was due to the governor of the colony alone, and that neither to himself nor to any other official was it ever to be given.

soldiers and pioneers on foot, pack horses and oxen with their burdens, and the newly-arrived animals with their savage riders, our party looked a very mixed one indeed.

We started again at about 11 A.M. upon the 21st, the day of Unkosaza's second visit. Leaving the waggons behind us, and our tents standing, we marched up the fertile valley inhabited by the Zikali tribe. It is thickly populated, with kraals on every rising ground, and large mealie and *amabele* (Kaffir corn) gardens lying in every direction. The day's march was uneventful, and we camped for the night close under some high cliffs in a beautiful spot covered with "sugar-bush" of a large growth.

At ten o'clock that night, when all were asleep in camp, the sentry gave the alarm of fire. The whole camp was instantly alive; and, hurrying into our clothes, we all turned out to find a tremendous grass-fire rapidly approaching. As I left my tent the high ground right above us seemed suddenly to burst into one roaring sheet of flame, which extended for a considerable distance. The sight was indeed

a terrible one. The wall of fire was close above us, sending up heavy volumes of smoke into the black night, both flame and smoke caught and tossed away into the darkness by the gusts of a violent gale of wind which was blowing at the time. A lurid light shone down upon us, making all as distinct as by day, but with a redder, more unnatural glow. Our greatest danger was from the violence of the wind. Should some of the patches of flame, which were driven off from the cliff and scattered far and wide, fall amongst our tents, we should save but little from the conflagration that would ensue. Every now and then the wind fell a little, and, as its howl died away, the loud and steady roar of the flames above took its place, and filled the night with sound, until its terrible voice was once more drowned in the renewed fury of the storm.

I had not much time given me to receive my impressions of the scene, for our Chief was amongst us instantly, and no man might be idle long. His orders were given with promptness and decision, and obeyed by us with equal alacrity. In another



minute every man had a green branch in his hand, and the next they were all along the edge of the fire, beating it out with the boughs they held. A few men were posted below to extinguish in the same manner any flame that might be blown amongst the tents, and I was selected to superintend this party. There was not much for us to do, and I had ample leisure to continue my observation of the picturesque scene before, or rather above me. It was a doubly strange one now, for the two hundred figures, black against the flames, and all working vigorously at beating them down, had no small resemblance to Dante's demons dancing round their unhallowed fires, and thrusting their struggling victims back with forks.

An hour's hard work, however, thoroughly conquered the fire, and all returned to camp, very smoked and grimy, and glad enough to get back to the beds which had been left upon the first alarm, and which had had so narrow an escape of being more smoked and grimy even than their owners.