

## CHAPTER XI.

### AMAPONJWANA PASS AND MABUDHLE.

Two days later found us encamped under the Amaponjwana Pass, and at work again, in spite of falling snow and hard frost. We had got into wintry regions indeed, although we had still worse before us.

Immediately upon our arrival the Colonel had started up the mountain to see how the land lay, accompanied by myself and a guide. A two hours' climb took us on to the mountain-top, passing through a narrow rocky gorge, about ten yards wide and two hundred yards from the mountain-crest. In this gorge the sun never shines. The cold was most intense, and our only road lay over masses of ice and boulders intermixed and frozen together. The numerous frozen waterfalls, which this pass contained, formed huge ice-columns at frequent intervals, and

the scene was as bleak and dreary as could well be imagined. The mountain-top itself at this point is undulating, covered with a short dense grass, and watered by innumerable streams, which rise immediately on the mountain-crest, those bound for Natal running towards the rising, and the others towards the setting sun. The water was deliciously cold and pure, the streams under the mountain running over beds of rock and forming frequent cascades of various dimensions, the banks being clothed with shrubs of kinds unknown to me.

During this climb up the Amaponjwana Pass we experienced the extremes of both heat and cold. The severe exertions which we were making threw us into such a heat that we had not a dry thread left upon us, and were glad to throw off great-coat and patrol-jacket, and hand them over to be carried by our attendants until we reached the top, where we were equally glad to put them on again. At the same time the air was so cold that it froze our breath as it left us, gradually forming icicles upon the moustache and beard.

At this place we worked for two days. The pass was about thirty-eight feet wide at the point where we were engaged, and ran between high perpendicular walls of rock. Across it we built a barrier, at an average height of twelve feet, of the boulders which lay about in every direction—which we banked in securely, and formed into a solid wall with broken stone and turf. This labour was performed under considerable difficulties. We were working in a narrow gorge, whose walls of rock and ice towered above us, shutting out the sunlight, and making the spot like an ice-house. The cold was so excessive in this sunless spot that it would have been unendurable without artificial warmth. Half-an-hour's exposure to it would have numbed and stupefied our half-clad pioneers. Accordingly our Chief caused great fires to be made within the pass, and the men to be divided into two companies, one of which relieved the other every ten minutes, returning to the fires when again off duty. Never before surely had such a scene been witnessed in this frozen rift of the Kathlamba range!

Upon the second day there was no more sunshine without the pass than within it. The weather appeared threatening, and the snow-sprinkled rocks and cloud-covered sky made up a wintry scene indeed. We did not get down to our camp till dark, and this was the severest day that we had yet encountered.

The pioneers, poor fellows ! suffered a good deal, although they were very cheerful on the whole, inspirited doubtless by their hopes of freedom.

One could not but admire the willing zeal and cheerfulness with which these men went through the labours to which they were unaccustomed and the hardships to which they were not inured. The natural life of the wild man in South Africa is not one of hard work ; his wants are simple and easily supplied ; his garden and his cattle are all he needs ; his women till the one,—in which nature with but little assistance produces abundant crops,—his children herd the other. With such a climate as that in which he dwells, why should he bestir himself to unnecessary exertions ? What wonder that

he prefers to pass the long summer days in peaceful idleness, instead of spending it in labour, the only object of which is to supply himself with the luxuries of civilisation which he does not require and half despises! The South African undoubtedly has not the physical strength and endurance of his European brethren, who, however, it must be confessed, soon lose all inclination to exert the same in a country where the poorest labourer soon rides his horse and commands his Kaffir, where the journeyman carpenter disdains to carry his own tools, or the kitchenmaid to clean her own pans.

We finished our work at the Amaonjwana Pass, and got back to the German mission station, near which we had left our standing camp with the waggons and oxen, by the 25th. Glad enough were we to leave the frozen mountain-tops, and to descend into the more temperate atmosphere of the valley beneath, which we had thought excessively cold on first arriving from yet warmer regions, but now felt to be delightfully mild. But we found at the camp men standing who had even greater reason than we to

rejoice at reaching it, namely, Mr. G. Mansel, of the Natal Mounted Police, with half-a-dozen of his men. They had followed the track of our patrol, between Kathlamba and the Little Berg, but had descended into the Zikali valley by a most precipitous break-neck way of their own finding, down which they had had the utmost difficulty in leading their horses. They had also endured considerable privations during their patrol, having been unable to procure food in the uninhabited country between the mountains. Indeed, even when they reached the Zikali valley they could not at first obtain any assistance. The people plainly distrusted them. Knowing nothing of them, except that they were not "*Amasoja*" (soldiers—regulars); they put them down as "*Camp-kettles*" (volunteers), whom they neither feared nor trusted. Possibly they were too much accustomed to being cheated by the few traders and others who had come amongst them to care to deal with them. They would have met with fair dealing from Mr. Mansel, but that they did not know; and consequently the little body of Mounted Police were

nearly starving when at last they reached our camp. There, of course, their wants were immediately supplied by the men left in charge, and we found them already quite at home. Mr. Mansel had paid us several previous visits, one on the 1st of June, when we camped near the Sterk-spruit, and once again on the 15th at our old camping-ground under the Little Berg, but had remained with us each time for one night only. Now, he and his men formed part of our column of route, and kept with us for ten or twelve days.

Mr. Mansel was, I knew, a favourite with my Chief. I had often heard him speak of him as "a right good man for his work," "full of energy," "no day too long for him," and "always ready." He was a good-looking fellow, with an upright, well-made figure, and rode as though he had lived in the saddle all his life. He was besides a capital companion, full of quaint humour, and with a never-failing flow of conversation, jokes, and anecdotes.

Nevertheless, though I should like to have made a companion of a man of my own age and standing,—

one with whom I was disposed to fraternise, and whom my Chief commended,—yet I kept aloof from him from first to last, and avoided all chances of making his further acquaintance. Why I did so I can hardly say, except that I had sometimes still my sombre and *farouche* fits of regret for the place I had lost in the world.

Upon the 27th June we found ourselves once more at Cathkin, where we were received with enthusiasm by old Mr. Gray. The sentiments of this worthy gentleman appeared to have undergone a considerable change since we saw him first. Then he was certainly all that could be desired so far as hospitality was concerned; but he evidently had not the slightest faith in us, and was firmly convinced that the Putini men would desert, and ravage the country as bands of marauders. Now, learning his mistake by experience, and appreciating at last what must have been the influence of the unwonted presence of the soldiery in these secluded districts, he changed from grim distrust to enthusiastic partisanship of our Chief. He greeted us most warmly, and, hastening up to the Colonel,



stood beside his horse's head with his hand upon the mane, saying in his broad Scotch accent: "Colonel, I had heard a great deal about you before I saw you, and when you first came I did not believe in you. But now! By G——, I see you're just a man, and I'll stand by you through thick and thin."

Our Chief received the acknowledgment in his usual quiet manner, but I suspect that he was not more above taking pleasure in the simple tribute of respect paid him by the blunt sturdy Scotchman than others would have been in his place.

At Cathkin we remained for a day or two awaiting the arrival of fresh pack-oxen and slaughter-cattle, for which the Colonel had sent to Zikali. Some of these duly arrived, but not the whole number of pack-oxen ordered, which the chief found himself unable to supply. Those that we received were accompanied by a messenger, bearing humble apologies from his chief that his supply fell short of the Colonel's demand. With him came a small troop of cattle *as a present*,—"smart money," in short,—to turn away the supposed wrath of our Chief! The ambassador was excessively

surprised when he found his excuses quietly accepted, and the "present" returned as quite unnecessary. What effect must not the late reign of terror have had upon the native mind when they think it necessary to come in fear and trembling to *buy off* the anger of a white Inkos because they cannot sell him what they have not got!

I saw much during our expedition which showed me that it will take many years, nay, a lifetime, to restore things to their old footing in this country; and even then the memory of cruelty and injustice will remain, causing distrust and hatred to the British name.

Amongst the purchases which we made from the natives of Zikali's tribe there were, as I have previously mentioned, many fowls. Of these some were daily killed and eaten, the gradually decreasing stock following us with our other provisions wherever we went. When we were on the march I am afraid that our feathered companions had no very easy time of it, as we could procure no baskets for their transport, and they were there-

fore obliged to perform their journey tied together by the legs and put upon a pack-horse. At night they were set loose and well fed; but, poor things! they were generally too fatigued by the shakings and joltings they had received during the day to be very lively or active. There was, however, one exception to the general languor that prevailed amongst our fowls in the person of a fine red cock whose spirit appeared indomitable. Every night, the moment he was released, he sprang to his feet, shook himself, and crowed with as much vigour as though he stood upon his own dunghill! Nothing would induce him to show the slightest sign of fatigue, and whenever fresh fowls were purchased he made a point of seizing the earliest opportunity of asserting his supremacy by beating all the cocks of the party in turn. In fact his conduct was so plucky and singular that general attention was drawn to his superiority, and the Colonel gave orders that he should on no account be put to death and eaten. He was at once raised to the post of favourite, and received a name,

being called by the Colonel *Mabudhle*, after the *Induna* who had commanded Langalibalele's men at the Bushman's River Pass, whom the Colonel looks upon as a brave man and one worthy of his steel. From this time forth *Mabudhle*, the cock, performed his travels mounted upon his own pack-horse, no longer dangling helplessly by the feet from its back, but perched upon it in his natural position, and merely attached by a loose cord to one claw. In this manner he accompanied us through the rest of our expedition, either proudly sitting his steed, or, when the waggons were with us, perched upon one of them. He took kindly to his position of favourite, would soon feed out of our hands, and, when we were encamped, was usually to be found pecking round our kitchen-fire, as much at home as any one of us. *Mabudhle* will probably end his days in peace and contentment, for, upon our return to Pietermaritzburg, the Colonel gave him to some friends of his in the country, with strict injunctions that he was to be allowed to die a natural death, and was to be well cared for in the meantime.