

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRIBE IS PARDONED.

AFTER an early breakfast of coffee, eggs, and bread, we started for Jabez's residence, a distance of forty-five miles over a fairly open country, reaching our destination about dusk.

The hamlet was composed of some dozen houses in all, but Jabez was evidently the chief man of the place. He was not, indeed, so great a man as his own chief Hlubi, but he was a much more civilised one, as evinced by the style of his habitation. The house itself was built upon much the same plan as that of Hlubi, but furnished with considerably greater attention to comfort. Besides which, Mrs. Jabez,—and there was only one,—was a Christian native, and talked English perfectly well. She may or may not have been the better for this fact; I did not see

enough of her to judge. But my experience amongst the natives leads me to believe that the wilder and more untaught they are, the greater is their honesty and respectability. Probably this is owing to the fact that a little civilisation immediately brings them into contact with the lowest dregs of the white population.

However, I have not a word to say against Mrs. Jabez, except that she was a "Christian,"—that much ill-used title, alas! being quite one of contempt in Natal when applied to a native. She was a stout pleasant-looking body, who received us with the most respectful cordiality, and took a larger share in our entertainment than did the three savage wives of Hlubi.

The principal room of Jabez's house was entirely papered with pictures from *The Illustrated London News*, the furniture consisting of two couches or settles, a table, a washing-stand, with jug and basin, and a dressing-table, with a looking-glass upon it. Jabez's saddles and bridles hung in order upon racks suitably placed, and a great cupboard, or armoire, stood in one corner of the apartment.

This was the sitting-room, in spite of its oddly-mixed furniture ; for the other chamber, which was next thrown open for our inspection, contained a four-post bedstead, with mattress and pillows complete, a couple of chairs, and a great chest. Mrs. Jabez was evidently very proud of this apartment, and pointed out the bed in which the Colonel was expected to pass the night. He did not wound the good people's feelings by refusing in words, but nevertheless he did not make the experiment, but slept upon one of the sitting-room settles, while I occupied the other.

Much the same entertainment was prepared for us here as at Hlubi's, as notice of our approach had been sent before us. For the pioneers another ox was slaughtered, more fires kindled and *isijingi* made, and sleeping arrangements agreed upon. The same gathering of the heads of families and the same ceremony of "talk" followed the excellent repast set upon the table for us. Again the bottles of gin and brandy accompanied the more solid refreshment, and again the aged grandmother appeared with her special pot of *tshwala*. There was even a little Jabez to be

brought forward for approval, and his mother likewise received the promise of a suit of clothes for him, to be sent from Pietermaritzburg on our arrival there.

It was fully ten o'clock before our tired pioneers arrived after their long day's march. They had been compelled to leave about a dozen of their number behind them at a Kaffir kraal some few miles back. A mounted native, who called at Jabez's house a little after dark, reported that he had passed the party on the road, apparently very much fatigued; but that, when he asked them why they did not halt for the night at a kraal, their reply was, "Our Chief has gone on, and we must follow."

The poor fellows were well fed and cared for; and so anxious were they all to keep together and with the Colonel, that those left behind rejoined us before we started upon the following morning.

Our third day's march was but a short one, as Jabez's home is not more than fifteen miles from Pietermaritzburg. Leaving the pioneers barracked at their old dwelling-place above the town, we rode on to the Colonel's quarters at Fort Napier, where he was

kind enough to make me quite at home for the week during which I remained there.

The 30th of July, the day on which we returned to more civilised life, after our two months' experience of the mountains, was a cold, raw, drizzly day. The roads were slippery with the wet, and our horses slid about a good deal, while I began to think that dry frost and snow were infinitely preferable to damp and mud. We rode through the back streets of the town on our way to the fort, for our cortège was a somewhat conspicuous one, the armed and mounted Basutos, and the pack and led horses, making quite a little procession.

The Colonel talked to me a good deal that day about his intentions with regard to these men; and naturally enough my own enthusiasm took fire from his, and I felt the keenest interest in his complete success.

The first thing to do was, evidently, to claim from the governor the freedom promised to the ninety, and then to persuade him to extend his clemency to the whole tribe. But what next? When

they were free what was to become of them without homes, without cattle, food, or clothing, and with no means of procuring such, having in fact been stripped of all their worldly possessions by the Government forces? I put the question to my Chief, and he replied as follows :

“ As far as my ninety young men are concerned, I intend to pay them for the work they have done at the usual rate of wages paid to native labourers upon the roads. I consider that justice demands that they should be so treated ; and I am willing to accept the responsibility myself of my action in this matter. As for the rest of the tribe, I trust that I shall be able to induce his Excellency to see that it is only right, and the bounden duty of Government, to supply the more immediate wants of these unfortunate and innocent people, until they have had time to build new huts for themselves, and to raise fresh crops upon their devastated land. I hope, indeed, that in due time complete restitution may be made to them for all the cattle,—some eight thousand head,—which were taken from the tribe last year and sold by

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Government. But that will certainly not be done at once."

Whether or no the Colonel felt as anxious and excited about the results of his first interview with his Excellency as I did, I cannot tell. His manner was as calm and quiet as usual, and, except that he was evidently thinking incessantly upon the subject, no one would have imagined that the result of his last few months' incessant labour of head and hand, the success or failure of his most cherished plans and hopes for the year, hung on the balance of an undecided mind, and depended upon the comparative influence of those about his Excellency.

Upon the following morning the Colonel went to Government House, and saw his Excellency, reporting his return, and claiming the promised freedom of the pioneers.

For my knowledge of what passed between them I am indebted to the brief account given me by my Chief upon his return to his quarters after a lengthened interview. It appears that, having spoken of the ninety young men, and their excellent behaviour

under trying circumstances, he proceeded to set before the Governor the grounds upon which he desired to obtain the release of the whole tribe. Recapitulated shortly, these were as follows: There was no evidence whatever that the Putini tribe were "in complicity" with that of Langalibalele. They had done absolutely nothing, with the exception of receiving some of their own women, who had married into the other tribe, and who, upon its dispersion, naturally returned to their old homes. On the contrary, the regent of the tribe, during the minority of the young chief,—the little son of Umkosaza,—had been in close communication with the magistrate of his county upon this very point. He had asked the advice of the magistrate as to what line of action he had better adopt, since he saw plainly that trouble was impending for the neighbouring tribe. The magistrate's advice was that all the people should remain quiet, cultivating their gardens as usual, and taking no part with Langalibalele,—which counsel was carefully followed.

But, to the regent's great astonishment, he suddenly received a demand from the magistrate of

another county to supply his white and black contingent with cattle upon the shortest notice. This demand was at once complied with to the best of his ability, although not, apparently, to the satisfaction of the magistrate. According to native custom, when cattle is ordered to be supplied to a force, the acting chief sent round to collect animals from the different kraals or families under his rule, according to their various abilities. It is not difficult to understand that, as the people expected no payment for their cattle, they did not give up the best of their herds to the spoiler. The immediate result of this,—as though the object of Government had been but to pick a quarrel, and to gain an excuse for attacking the tribe,—was an increased demand, or rather a heavy fine, imposed in cattle. The excuse made for this action was that any unwillingness to supply food for the Government forces betrayed a rebellious inclination. The distressed regent, I believe, did all in his power to meet the renewed demand. But the natives are not a prompt people, and are prone to delays and discussions at all times; and, a very limited time

being granted him, he failed to make up the number of cattle required of him. What clearer proof could there be of disaffection than this ?

The result was simple. The tribe suddenly found themselves surrounded by the Government forces ; their stock—consisting of cattle, horses, sheep, and goats—swept off ; their stores of grain annexed, and either wasted or sold ; their huts burnt down ; and themselves,—men, women, and children,—stripped of all they possessed, down to their blankets, skin petticoats, and sleeping-mats, and carried off into captivity.

It seems that antagonistic influences had been at work during the Colonel's absence, for he could not at first induce the Governor to adopt his views. But, although anxious and disappointed, he did not despair, and was determined to do his utmost to bring his Excellency to a sense of what justice demanded at his hands. For five days my Chief went daily backwards and forwards between Fort Napier and Government House, urging, exhorting, warning, and explaining,—leaving the Governor converted to his opinion, and

promising him all he wished,—returning to find that some adverse influence had been at work again, and that he must commence his task once more. Up to the last he knew not what to expect, and the irritating suspense seemed to harass him more than all that had gone before.

How statesmanlike the Colonel's views were, and how true his warnings, was proved a few months later by the arrival of a despatch from the Earl of Carnarvon to the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal. I was then no longer in the colony. I copy, however, an extract from the despatch in question.

“With respect to the Putini tribe, I have in their case also expressed my opinion that no sufficient cause has been shown for removing them from their location. I can discover no indication of their conspiracy or combination with Langalibalele, beyond the vague and uncorroborated apprehension of some possible movement on their part in connection with the supposed tendencies of his tribe; and therefore I can see no good reason for any punishment on this

ground. Indeed, on the facts before me, I am bound to express a grave doubt whether the heavy losses and confiscations to which the tribe has been subjected were warranted by their want of readiness to afford assistance to the colonial forces. Those losses cannot, I fear, now be entirely replaced or repaired; but as far as reparation can be made without lowering the influence and endangering the authority of the local Government, it must be done.

“If this tribe has not been already restored, in conformity with the statements contained in your despatch, etc., I have now to direct you to reinstate them without delay, in such manner, and under such precautions as will attract as little as possible the attention of the natives generally to the proceedings, and will be the least calculated to produce any excitement or apprehension on their part.”

This despatch (dated December 3rd, 1874) is identical in spirit with the views expressed by the Colonel eight months earlier, and again insisted upon

now in his interviews with his Excellency, and needs no further comment of mine, as it must be plain to all that he anticipated the wishes of the Imperial Government by obtaining the freedom of this innocent tribe many months earlier than their release could be effected by the interference of the Secretary of State.

At last, upon the morning of the fifth day, his Excellency appeared to have given in completely, and the Colonel hastened to summon his men that the matter might be clenched before those about the Governor,—those whose interest it was to support oppression,—had had time to persuade him to change his mind. We had received orders from our Chief, before he left us that morning, to parade our men at a certain hour, to march them down, and to have them drawn up within a short distance of Government House, that they might appear immediately when summoned. We waited some time before we were sent for, and marching our men through the gates, drew them up on the lawn before the house. From thence at last issued forth a company of dignitaries,—his Excellency,

supported by the acting head of the native department, various other officials, a few native chiefs, and last, but not least in my eyes, my Chief, in uniform, with the fire of excited determination in his look, but bearing himself with his usual calm self-possession.

The Governor now made an oration to the pioneers, with the acting secretary for native affairs as interpreter. He told them that he had heard with great satisfaction the report which had been made to him of their excellent conduct, and that he appreciated the services which they had rendered to the Government under circumstances of exceptional hardship, difficulty, and danger, on account of which he now pronounced their pardon,—that is to say, the pardon of the ninety pioneers.

His Excellency hesitated at this point, and appeared uncertain whether he should allow his clemency to go any farther or not; and it was not until the Colonel had made another earnest appeal, urging him to release the whole tribe, and recapitulating the reasons already given for this act of justice

in which he was supported by the acting head of the native department, that he at last consented unreservedly. His speech, pardoning the whole Putini tribe, and granting them permission to return to their own location, was carefully translated and explained by the acting head of the native department to the listening pioneers; and so my Colonel's cause was won, and his exertions rewarded in the way which he desired.

Upon clearly understanding that their whole tribe was free, and might safely go back to their own homes, with one accord the ninety pioneers lifted up their voices in the royal salute, "Bayete!" Then they marched up to the fort, where every man received from the Colonel the sum of money for their wages of which he had previously spoken to me.

But before my Chief rode up to the fort himself, he dashed down the town, calling to me to follow him. As I came up with him, far down the street, he said: "I have not a moment to spare, but I must get my friend Brooks to send out word to the bishop of what is done."

I knew nothing of the town, nor of where we might be going, until we drew rein at a pretty little house quite at the lower end of Pietermaritzburg. Through its gate, held open by a native servant, the Colonel rode, calling to a friend within, while I remained in the street, from whence, however, I could distinctly hear what passed.

“Well, I’ve done it!” exclaimed my Chief, speaking through an open window, with an eager excitement taking the place of his usual calm.

“I’m glad to hear it!” replied a pleasant hearty voice from within, the owner of which I could not see. “But what have you done with your rebels?”

“They are all free! and I want you to tell the bishop, for I have not time to go out myself.”

“Have you their freedom in writing?” inquired the invisible voice.

“No; but it has been promised me for the whole tribe, in the presence of several important witnesses. Shall you be going or sending out to Bishopstowe to-day?”

“Yes; one or the other. But won't you come in and tell us all about it?”

“Thanks; not now. I have not a moment to spare; but I will come down again this evening. Good-bye.” And he rode out again, and we galloped away through the streets up to his quarters and the expectant pioneers.

After receiving their money they were dismissed into the town to make their purchases. As I rode through Church Street that afternoon I saw parties of our men at every turn, five or six together, and all easily to be recognised by a certain uniformity of costume. Each party, apparently, was escorted by native friends and acquaintances, who must have been either servants in the town, or else have come in from the adjacent country upon business. Our people were all very busy, providing themselves with such necessaries and comforts as they could afford. Their purchases appeared to consist chiefly of blankets and cooking vessels; and they seemed to have too much good sense to expend their little stock of money upon anything not strictly necessary. The men appeared

to be thoroughly cheerful and hopeful, yet most of them must have felt very uncertain as to where they should find their women and children, or what was to become of them all when found. Probably their faith in our Chief, and in his power and willingness to aid them, had something to do with their happy looks.

I had my orders already, and was directed by the Colonel to hold myself in readiness to start up-country, taking with me our ninety, as soon as ever they were ready to go. I was to march them back by the same way as that by which we had just come down. We were to strike across country, and to avoid the main-roads, as my Chief did not wish the return of the pioneers to their own location to attract general attention until they should be completely and quietly settled. Indeed we were quite aware that the colonists would be violently opposed to the proceeding, and might even create some disturbance.

The Colonel had already sent off his Basuto after-rider, with a note from the acting head of the native department to the magistrate who had been especially

appointed to look after the deserted locations, informing him that the whole tribe had been released and permitted to return to their homes. I was directed to hand over my men to this magistrate, as it was advisable that a register should be kept of their number, and also that it should be quite plain that my Chief was doing all in order.

The Colonel had also been requested to take upon himself the business of collecting the remainder of the scattered tribe from the different white men's farms and houses, where they had been "given out" to service, as also from the kraals of some of the native chiefs, and to make proper arrangements for their return home. Indeed he offered to undertake the management of the whole, thinking, and thinking rightly, that the faith which these people had in him would enable him the more easily to carry out the matter in the quiet and orderly way which was so particularly desirable under the circumstances.

At daylight upon the morning of the 6th July, the pioneers were duly paraded at the Colonel's quarters. Not a man was missing from the number,

and all were fully equipped for their return to their desolate homes. Each man carried a blanket, rolled and worn in true soldier fashion, over one shoulder and under the other, and bore besides a huge bundle, consisting of his sleeping-mat and blankets, his cooking-pot, and other necessaries, purchased upon the previous day.

The Colonel addressed them through an interpreter, telling them that on their return to their location they must at once busy themselves in erecting huts, and cultivating mealie-gardens, and must settle down immediately as a quiet and industrious people. They must always, he said, pay the greatest attention and respect to the magistrate set over them, whom they were to regard for the present in the light of their chief, to whom they were to refer every matter for decision and advice. To this address they replied, in spite of the Colonel's repeated admonitions, by one simultaneous shout of "Bayete!" and then the party moved off with cries and exclamations in honour of my Chief, all denoting their great respect, but the translations of which sound

odd to English ears. "Inkos! Baba! (Lord and Father!) oh! great wild beast! oh! great black one! oh! lion! oh! tiger! oh! great snake! oh! chief, your face is white, but your heart is very black!" (an especial compliment);—all, except the reference to the *white face*, being terms commonly applied to the Zulu king by his warriors.