

fowl rushed across the path from every side, often so close as positively to alarm the horses, whilst that splendid bird here denominated a pheasant (but properly speaking a francclin) ran along the path in front of me in such numerous quantities as an English sportsman would long to see his partridges a few days before the 1st of September.

A stony and very rapid descent, through timber of unusually fine proportions, led down to the Kaminyani village. The sand lying on the path between the stones, which are here scattered in every direction, was one perfect mass of hyænas' spoor, small and large footprints being equally distributed—a plain indication to me that where the carcase lay, there were the animals who fed on it.

As I rode into the village a white man saluted me, and asked me to become his guest.

Dismounting from my horse, he saw that I was "chattering" from fever, and gave me a draught of Bouchue and quinine, strong enough to make any one's hair curl, and to bring an inexperienced dead man to life again.

I swallowed the filthy-tasting mixture, and asked,—

"Where are all the people?"

He answered me in the well-known words of Byron,—

"The angel of Death spread his wings on the blast."

"A fearful epidemic is raging in the place, and a good half of the people are dead!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALONE.

THE approach being so beautiful, it struck me as particularly sad that the village of Kaminyani should have come into such grievous straits through pestilence; moreover, the situation of this station, from its elevation, is such as to have made me believe it healthy in the highest degree.

The troubles of this people have not commenced with this visitation, for within the last two years their station has been attacked by Sycheley's tribe, when the slaughter was considerable; but the defenders' prowess was so great as to drive the enemy out with considerable loss. The chief, who is a young man of about five or six and twenty, distinguished himself by his valour and judgment, being now, as report says, a most popular king in consequence.

The Kaminyani were originally natives of the Transvaal, where they had the character of being a most industrious, hard-working race. Becoming possessed of large herds of cattle, the management of which they understand very thoroughly, they excited the cupidity of the Boers, who took to

enforcing all sorts of illegal taxation upon them—in fact, literally submitting them to a heavy blackmail. So the tribe made an exodus from the land of their fathers, and settled where they now are, Sycheley having invited them to take possession of the adjoining country, of which he claimed to be Suzerain.

It was stipulated that the father of the present ruler should pay annually a tribute for this concession—an ox, a goat, or some other trifle.

Doubtless this would have continued to be paid, but that a demand was made upon the Kaminyani so excessive as to cause a peremptory refusal to grant the imposition.

War was the result, and I am informed that no less than six thousand head of cattle fell into their possession on the occasion of one raid they made into Sycheley's country.

I sent, and made known to the chief that I had arrived; and a few hours after he visited me with a numerous force of attendants, all armed to the teeth.

I did not like their manner; for it impressed me with the idea that I was far from welcome.

As I expected, they at once desired me to tell them all the news of my stay with their hostile neighbours; and I declined to furnish any, for although I had no friendship for the people or chief of the last station I had been at, I considered that under the circumstances I was not justified in acting as spy.

In the course of our interview I learned another reason for their objection to the visit of a white man. During several of the skirmishes in which they had lately been engaged, two white men had assisted their enemies in action, one of whom was known to have shot no less than six of this young chief's people.

However, I explained to him that I, or my Government, ought not to be made to suffer for the misconduct of others, whose residence was beyond the limits of civilization; that here we had no power to control them; and that however much we could not help regretting their conduct, it was quite impossible to prevent or punish it.

Here my difficulties did not end, for a new source of danger arose. Some of the Kaminyani recognized my Hottentot, and swore that he had been with Sycheley's people in one of the late battles. At this my servant turned as white as a black man could, and I felt that his expression and demeanour gave great evidence of guilt. I can quite believe that the fellow had been here, as was surmised; and if so, it shows certainly a great want of judgment in him to come thus into the lion's den.

Words began to run high, and many an angry scowl was directed upon me by the swart visages around; but I took the bull by the horns, and pointed out to them that my after-rider was under my protection, and that any

injury done to him in his present capacity I should most assuredly resent.

The chief immediately inquired what I could do with such odds against me?

In response I tapped the butt of my revolver, and explained that the lives of some of his people would be forfeited ere I could be disabled. My determined manner, I think, must have favourably impressed the chief, for the unpleasant subject was dropped, and he promised to pay me a second visit as soon as he had had time to consult with his headmen.

At midnight the Hottentot awoke me.

"My master," he said, "we are to be killed in the morning. Let us mount our horses and go."

I answered, "No! I will not leave until I have seen the chief again; but you may take the blessing if you fear for your life. Ride towards the junction of the Limpopo and Notawaney. I will follow when my business is done, and there I shall expect to find you."

He refused to ride, because, as he said,—

"They will hear the horse's feet among the stones that lead through the village down to the river."

"Do as you please," I answered; "bring me the other revolver." And he soon placed the weapon in my hands. I laid it with its companion under my pillow, and fell asleep.

At sunrise the fellow had disappeared, so that I was thrown entirely upon my own resources.

When the appointed time arrived for my final meeting with the chief, he did not come, but with a large force of attendants galloped past my halting-place, many of his followers shouting at me in terms of derision when I made my appearance on the roadside.

In consequence of this I saddled, and started for the north-east in anything but a satisfactory state of mind.

Evil fortune seemed to follow me wherever I went, and I believe I felt it more at this place than I had done at any other station I visited, and for this reason. I know this tribe to be very plucky, skilled in cattle management, and nearly every individual of it to be a first-rate driver. Many, moreover, spoke the Boer dialect, which would render communication on the part of the transport officers with them easier than with those who are only acquainted with their native tongue.

I found the path speedily; and after I had crossed the river, and had made the ascent to the veldt beyond and above it, where the road is entirely composed of sand, I hoped to find the spoor of my boy, which I could not fail to recognize on account of the veldt-shoon which he wore.

But no trace of him could I discover.

The Hottentot, doubtless, I surmised, was too wily for this, and fearing that his enemies might spoor him, had in consequence struck out over

the plain. Besides, as I mentioned previously, jackal and hyæna footprints were so numerous that it was more than probable they would have obliterated the impressions left on the ground over night by a solitary pedestrian.

After a long, tiring, and anything but pleasant ride—for I was sick at heart, in mind, and in body—I off-saddled half an hour before sundown, where wood was obtainable in abundance, since it would be necessary to keep up good fires all night. The horses gave me much trouble, and required constant attention to prevent their stampeding.

At last day broke, disclosing the surrounding vegetation covered with a heavy coating of hoar frost. The cold was most bitter, and its intensity told both upon myself and my animals, the latter standing in one and the same position, shivering as though suffering from a fit of ague.

That morning I rode the bless-horse, because he was steadier to be shot off than the others; besides, if you dismounted while hunting, by bringing the reins reversed down over his head and leaving them hanging, he would remain waiting for hours.

After I had started about half an hour, a magnificent koodo came out of some brush growing on the edge of a rocky coppie.

The animal stared at me with amazement, and so afforded me an opportunity of pulling up to dismount, and take a careful shot.

The bullet was placed a little too far back, so the game ran several hundred yards before it fell. I found it to be a noble bull, and I was sorry I had been obliged to destroy it, when I could avail myself of so small a portion of the valuable flesh.

I grilled the kidney over a fire, and took a few pounds of meat along with me.

Already I saw two or three jackals in a most interested manner taking notice of my proceedings. It seemed a tempting of Providence, and an inducement to allow me to be starved, that I left the delicious food for the gratification of these freebooters.

However, soon after I met a man and two women, each of whom carried a load of that yellow bark so much in use in this part of the world for dying the hide-side of carosses. They were fagged out and hungry, so I dismounted, pointed to the back-spoor of my horse's feet, and indicated the direction where the carcass lay, also explaining the nature of the animal by drawing imaginary lines over my horse's back and withers. I then motioned with my hands the shape of the antelope's corkscrew horns. Although neither of them comprehended a word of my dialect, they thoroughly understood the meaning of my pantomimic information, and left me hurriedly without a word of gratitude or thanks, in search of the promised treat.

Resuming my journey, I found the track lent

too much to the east, so I deviated to the northward. Before me, but still far off, were a succession of green hills, upon which timber appeared to grow in considerable luxuriance; and believing them to be the commencement of the high, rolling land that margins the Limpopo, I determined to ride towards them.

This country is totally deserted, for I have not seen a soul except the people I have sent in search of the koodoo, and I surmise this to be a result of the intestine wars that have been raging between the different chiefs of the locality.

About three in the afternoon I dismounted to let my horses feed in proximity to a path which I had decided to follow.

It is very lonely. Not a human creature near me of any sort. Even the Hottentot was a link between myself and my race, however poor a one; but he has gone, and the only sound that speaks of life is the clipping and grinding of my horses' teeth as they snatch a meal from the brown and shrivelled grass.

I am wrong! As I wander about in search of firing for the approaching night, I suddenly come upon a scene far from pleasant.

Human life *has* been here! Lying crouched under a diminutive hedge, erected doubtless as a shelter from the wind, with the remains of a fire close by, are three dead bodies.

Horribly repulsive they are. The whole of each of these is intact, but the skins are dried up

like parchment, and the faces drawn, the lips curled, and exhibiting the perfect white teeth closed tight in the agony of starvation.

Some trifling articles of property they possessed, still cling to the emaciated forms. A few beads and iron ornaments yet deck the ghastly remains. On account of these I come to the conclusion that they are Mashoonas, who are the mechanics, and artisans that work in metals, in this part of the world. Poor wretches! they have doubtlessly come from their far distant home, on the luxuriant banks of the Zambesi, to hire themselves out to the whites at the Diamond Fields.

Although I am accustomed to stranger and wilder scenes than fall to the lot of most men to be the witnesses of, still there is something so touching in this terrible sight, seen in the fast-falling dimness of evening, that I turn hastily from the spot, quickly saddle my horse, and with haste press forward for an hour or two, until change of scenery, and the immediate necessity of finding a camping-ground, stays me at a convenient place, many a mile from where the unburied remains of mortality lie, mummy-like, upon the tufted sand.

Another uncomfortable night. The air bitterly cold, and in spite of large quantities of quinine I suffer severely from fever, that strongest barrier for the prevention of the inroads of the aggressive white man that Africa possesses.

At sunrise, or rather later, while the horses are yet feeding, and I am cooking my morning repast, with more than ordinary satisfaction I see the white tilt of a waggon slowly toiling on towards my resting-place.

Those who have travelled much by sea, know with what pleasure a sail on the distant horizon of a far-off and unfrequented ocean is viewed. Such was the sensation I now experienced.

I hoped it might be the conveyance of a Boer, and desired more fervently still that it might be that of an English-speaking trader. It proved to be the former.

The stranger was going south—for property, and even lives of white people, had become so much endangered, that this man was returning with his belongings to the Transvaal. Fortunately, he spoke English fairly. With him he had several natives, one of whom had been, for some time, employed by a Mr. Solomon, who traded between Lake N'gami and Bamanwatto, and consequently knew a little English.

After much persuasion I induced him to let me hire this boy, the offer of good pay and a speedy return tempting his cupidity.

Thus I obtained another after-rider. The wife and child of the Boer were down with fever; so, my supply of the great necessary, quinine, being abundant, I gave the father about a quarter of an ounce of that valuable medicine, in return for which gift he expressed the most heartfelt grati-

tude, adding that we did not know but that some occasion might occur when he could be of assistance to me. Bidding each other good-bye with all kinds of professions of friendship, my journey was renewed.

A little before nightfall I reached the trysting-place which I made with my Hottentot; but he was not to be seen.

From here I turned north, pursuing my way for several days, the events of each being but a repetition of the other. The kraals I visited were not more favourably disposed than those I have previously mentioned. Learning that a revolution had taken place in Bamanwatto, and that the tribe had become divided against itself, the one portion under Kamani, the other under Kama, and that hostilities were even now occurring between them; also, that they apprehended an immediate attack from the Matabele king, I considered it would be useless for me to visit Soochong.

As the length of time during which I had been absent from Natal was now much longer than I had anticipated, I decided to retrace my steps, and visit several large stations to the westward of the Transvaal, and lying between my former route and the river Limpopo.

My new attendant was a willing and attentive lad, but looked far from strong, doubtless having suffered hard times in his trek down from the interior in company with his last master; there-

fore I was not surprised when he came to me one day, complaining of the most violent pains in his stomach. When dismounted, on several occasions, he twisted and contorted his body into every position, with the hope of obtaining relief; but all appeared to be of no avail, as he became gradually worse and worse, until one afternoon I was obliged to halt at an early hour, as I could not bear witnessing the agony which the poor fellow was going through.

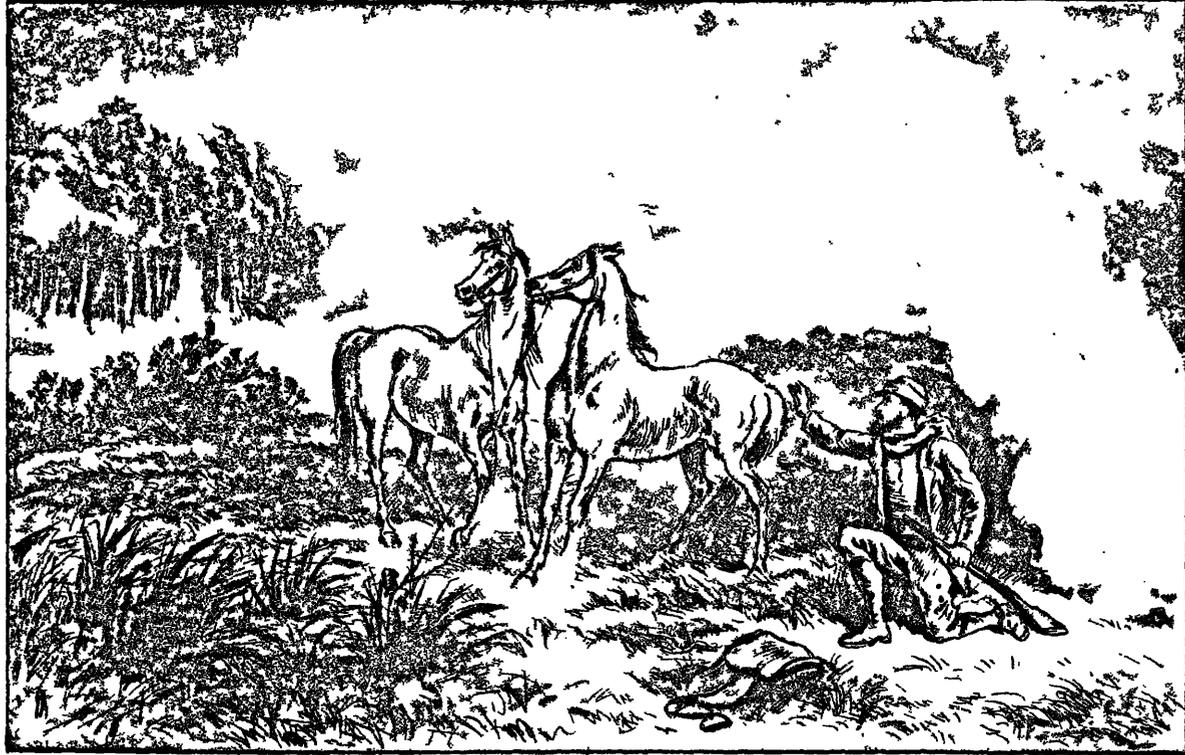
To make haste I knew to be my duty, but I could not desert a human being enduring pain, so I made camp, employing every remedy I could think of to relieve him; but all of no avail.

After dark, when the thermometer had gone almost down to freezing-point, the agony appeared to grow more intense, and I began to fear for the boy's life.

About ten o'clock he died.

Many an adventure in many a land has the writer of these words encountered—old soldier, old hunter, old traveller as he is! But it was now, for the first time, that he adopted a new profession, gained one more fresh experience, and that one of the saddest of a lifetime.

In the dim, misty light of the moon, he went down on his knees, and with his fingers dug, or rather scraped, a grave in the sand—a tedious and painful operation. Then he took up the dead black boy, and with perhaps just a hope that he had now reached the happy hunting-grounds, laid



A Midnight Disturber.

him neatly and tenderly in the hole, and once more scraped the sand together, until it was all filled up again. "He" lay below the ground, wrapped in his skin caross!

Yes! I had turned grave-digger in my old age—and for the last time, I sincerely trust!

While these solemn obsequies were being performed, a lion roared across the river! His voice was deep and sonorous, quite as impressive upon such an occasion as a volley of musketry saluting for the last time the soldier laid in his resting-place, ere his comrades march away to the inspiring strains of a quick-step.

Presently, from the adjacent koppies to the west of my camp, other members of the feline family responded.

Believing them to be in close proximity to me, I was compelled to adjourn to my horses, where, piling fresh fuel on the fire, I sat and thought, the livelong night through, how easy it is to die, and how little a man can do to help himself or another when the sands of life are ebbing away.

The lions came down close to me once; but, either they were not hungry, or feared the fire—or possibly they might have been what the Buschman called "*good lions*" who had not yet learned to kill horses or bullocks," for they left me unmolested.

If they could have been aware how powerless I was to resist them, I question whether I should have got off so easily!

My own health has become so bad, that, although I do not think I fear to die even in this lonely position, yet I cannot help believing that my course is nearly run, and that I never again shall set eyes upon the land of my birth.

It would be but one more added to the lengthy list of the sons of Britain, who have found African soil their last resting-place !

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WANDERING.

It would be impossible for any one to conceive three more miserable days than those which I experienced in my southward course.

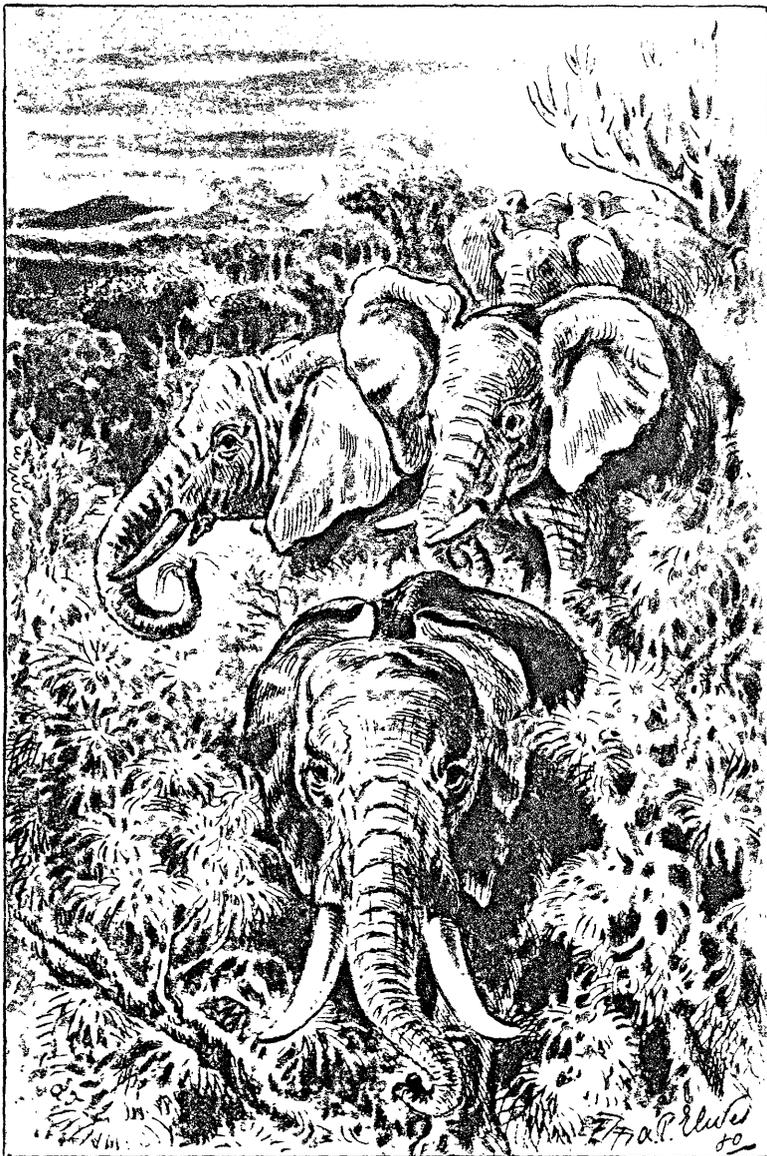
The depression of their rider seemed to affect the horses ; for know, dear reader, that there is a great amount of animal magnetism between the horse-man and the animal he bestrides ; nor is this to be wondered at in the present instance, for their food had been of the scantiest. A tired nag makes a tired man ; but when both are sick at heart, and weary from fatigue and disease, it is no easy matter to get over the ground. If I could have travelled by night I do not think I should have felt the journey so irksome ; but being forced to select day, the power of the sun was so great that the top of my head seemed as though it were covered with coals of fire.

Scarcely ever have I seen game in such abundance as in this part of the country, spoor of every description being discernible in all directions ; among which I distinguished the

immense circular impression made by the elephant, the slipper-like foot-track of the giraffe, and the deep indentation of the cloven hoof of the eland, and, more noticeable still, of the water-bok. Nor was feathered game wanting, for frequently, on rapid wings, the bush-koran would flash almost under my chargers' hoofs, often causing both them and me to start, from the suddenness with which they would break into view, and the loud whirr made by their strong pinions. "Pauw" were also numerous; of this, noblest among winged fowl, I have distinctly recognized two species in South Africa, but neither is identical with the bustard of Europe and North Africa, although currently supposed so to be.

In the afternoon, when a trifling halt had been made, having heard a rustling in the bush, and the apparent sound of breaking of branches—being aware of the description of animal I might expect from these indications, I turned my sight in that direction, and was rewarded with a view of over a dozen male elephants, several of which had splendid tusks. How many were in the drove is quite impossible for me to say, for when feeding, which they were then doing, they scatter out widely through the woodland.

Near sundown, when I had selected my camping-ground for the night, some giraffes came down and had a quiet stare at me, appearing to be actuated entirely by curiosity; for they twisted their long necks from side to side, the better to



An Intelligent Family Party.

obtain a view of my proceedings, whilst their large luminous and intelligent eyes appeared to express the thoughts that extreme wonderment was floating through their minds. To destroy so much meat, for I could only take a few pounds away, I was very loth; and shortly after I received a reward for sparing the giants, for a little steinbok, an animal not larger than the roe-deer of Scotland, peered through a mapani bush. I discovered his presence by the horses turning round and looking anxiously in the direction of the creature. My hands trembled so, that to fire anything but a resting shot would have been a miss. However, fortunately I did not, and soon had some venison, the sweetest flesh of all the South African antelope, broiling on the fire.

The only chance, I can see, of getting out of all my difficulties, is to hurry on as rapidly as possible to the southward. The nearest Kaffir station that I am aware of must still be sixty or seventy miles distant; and how very easily may I not manage to miss it by an ever so slight a deviation to the right or left! And the natural characteristics of the features of the country here are so exactly similar, that there is scarcely anything in the shape of landmark to show you the error of your ways.

Again, as you leave the Limpopo, facing towards the colony, grass and vegetation become more scarce, game grows less abundant, and human population almost disappears.

The existence of water I am quite unacquainted with, until a spruit in the neighbourhood of Matchaping's is reached ; and if report speaks truly, his station itself is hardly pressed for a supply of the invaluable fluid

I entered into a waste of wild, barren, and unfruitful land. It was covered with a few scattered thorn bushes, and neither could I discover a sign of animal or human life in any direction.

Before me lay extended this immense steppe, and looking in front I scarcely appeared to have made any progress at all, for the view bore the same uninviting characteristics as the country I was leaving behind. Moreover, that day and the previous one, not a drop of water had passed my horses' lips. I, too, was in the same predicament, for I left the colony too hurriedly to remember the advantages that a flask would bring upon occasions such as the present.

A wild stillness hung upon all sides, not even a vulture or eagle soared into the pitiless sky. A deathly calm reigned. Was this then to be the end of my travels ? Was this to be the finish of a life full of excitement and adventure ? and was this arid plain to be my unknown burial-ground ?

I could hardly believe so, and am consoled by the old, but unexploded adage,—

"While there is life there is hope,"

"Hold up, Bob, old man !" I spoke sharply

that time, for the big horse had stumbled heavily, almost sending me to mother earth. Little use was it to shout "hold up" however, for the cream-colour was thoroughly worn out, so I replaced the saddle on Tommy, and led the others slowly and toilsomely along.

Poor brute! I could see that it was no want of inclination that made him lag, but want of physical power. His big frame had suffered fearfully. His once well-rounded barrel had entirely disappeared, while the powerful limbs, once so full of muscle, looked twice as large as was necessary to support so emaciated a carcass.

But the little horse was still all right, comparatively speaking. He was a wonderful "plucked one," with a heart as large as an ox. Dear old Tommy! If I live for five times the ordinary span allotted to man's life, I assuredly promise, and faithfully too, never to forget your gallant, brave self. I have often said to myself, and meant it, "if in me the power lies, you shall yet feed on some of the green pasture-lands of my native country."

Future travellers in Africa would do well carefully to read and remember the piece of advice I am about to give them.

An African horse under fifteen hands in height, will do much more work, and stand far more "bucketting about" and exposure, than one that measures higher.

The sun had just commenced to go down, when

a rapid change in the face of the country made its appearance, bushes and trees becoming much more numerous.

After proceeding about a mile or two, I found myself upon the margin of a dry river-bed. In its sandy bottom I saw the traces of bullock and goat spoor. These I followed some way, when I found a foetid pool of stinkingly putrid water. Its edges were a mass of mud, but my animals rushed into it all the same, perfectly regardless of the probability of becoming mired.

In truth, such an accident nearly happened, but a judicious use of spur and bridle enabled me to prevent the casualty.

Shortly after I came to a mealie field, in which I saw several kraals; but although I asked most solicitously for the desired "metsea" (water), the unfeeling people refused to give me any, for I can scarcely imagine them to have been totally without this necessary to existence.

With feelings much opposed to the showering of blessings on their heads, although I said nought, but thought a great deal (for nothing depreciates a white man in the eyes of a native more than to give way to petulance or anger in his presence), I turned my horses' heads eastward, and luckily came across the fresh spoor of a waggon.

That it was but a ricketty conveyance I at once saw, for the wheels had wobbled to such an extent as to make the indentations on the sand

most irregular. Believing that a white would not trust himself so far inland with such an anti-diluvian conveyance, I did not hesitate in my decision that it was the property of a Kaffir. Following this God-sent, tell-tale track, I soon passed in between several rocky koppies, where the road became more clearly defined. In and out, and round the base of these numerous hillocks I wended my way, ultimately coming out upon a large plateau, thickly packed with Kaffir dwellings.

I rode at once to the kotla. Old Matchaping was sitting, in a garb almost approaching to nudity, cowering over a small fire, with half-a-dozen of his headmen in attendance upon him. All of them looked at me with surprise—one in particular, whom I had not seen for years. It was Secomi, once king of Bamanwatto, now a refugee, sheltered by his old friend, to whose staff he is attached.

Matchaping is a slightly built man of about five feet ten, with a well-formed, but small head, and a face ornamented by the most ridiculous turn-up nose, that makes a person feel inclined to laugh on first seeing his features.

Secomi, on the other hand, is stouter, but not so tall; and age having much enfeebled him, the once dreaded and powerful chief is now become a worn-out and puny man. He had a peculiar ornament, and one which I have never seen in use before, fastened to the wool on the

apex of his crown, namely, the "scut" of a hare, which by some means or other he had managed to make stand up perpendicularly, and which gave his appearance a most fantastic look.

But that I knew the habits of these people, I should have supposed myself a very unwelcome guest, for no one addressed me, no one rose to acknowledge my advent—all remained cowering over the fire, merely raising an eye occasionally as if to inspect me, with that expression on their countenances which may be often noticed in the face of a sly child. I asked for "metsea."

A gourd that stood by was handed me, which must have held a pint, yet I drained it to the bottom.

In trying to dismount I fell, my strength seeming to leave me all on a sudden.

With difficulty I regained a sitting position, while my horses stood looking at me, with grief depicted in their eyes at seeing their travelling-companion in such a plight.

At length the old king and one of his people helped me to rise, and as he put his arm under my shoulder he whispered in my ear the word "dumela" (welcome).

That single intonation told me that I should be treated as a friend. The two old men led me to a thing that looked like a waggon-house. It had only three sides and no roof. The material it was constructed of was wattle and daub; however it was sufficient to shelter me from the cold

wind which was beginning to rise at the approach of darkness.

In a corner were some "green" bullock hides, and on these I seated myself, when, leaning back against some old waggon gear, I suppose I fainted.

How long I remained in this state I cannot say, for night soon followed.

When I became conscious, however, there sat the old chief on a stool, and in addition to his former attendant he had now a fine-looking, well-grown young man by his side.

As soon as my host saw I had recovered from the stupor, he said something to his son—for I afterwards learnt that the new comer was such—who at once disappeared, but soon returned with a cartle from a waggon.

Upon this they spread the hides and my blankets, one of my own saddles being put under my head for a pillow.

Beside me, and within reach of my hand, were laid my revolvers, rifle, and bandolier, whilst the other saddle, bridle, girths, and the loose paraphernalia of my horse-gear, were between my couch and the hut wall.

Soon after, the youngster was despatched upon another errand, and when he came back he bore sticks and a lighted faggot, with which in a few moments he made a good fire.

As I was shivering at that time with ague that takes its intermediate turn in African fever, the warmth was most grateful.

At length the chief himself went out, but returned after a short absence, bringing with him a gourd holding about two quarts of Kaffir beer. This nauseous draught I would have refused, for it looks murky, and is sour foul stuff; but patting me on the head, he took a little himself, and indicated by speech and gestures that it would please him if I would drink it all.

I did so, lay down, and felt as if I should burst.

At length I could stand the oppression no longer; so I struggled to my feet, gained the entrance of the place, and was as sick as man could well be.

This relieved me; and on returning to my resting-place, feeling very faint, old Matchaping was again equal to the occasion.

His son was once more despatched upon an errand.

When he came back he took from under his carosse a bottle of Hollands gin.

From it the chief made over a pint of hot toddy, in it put some stuff—I found out later that it was composed of honey, grease, and bird-peppers.

I struggled through the compound, which, in point of fact, was far from bad, fell asleep almost immediately, and woke in the morning free from fever.

When I opened my eyes, soon after break of day, there still sat the old chief upon the stool he

had occupied in the evening, with his carosse wrapped around him, while his head nodded with an inclination to sleep which his tired nature almost failed to oppose.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN OLD FOX.

I ASKED Matchaping about my horses, and received his assurance that they were all right.

Thus I had nothing to do but to rest where I was, until my strength was sufficiently restored for me to broach the object of my mission to him.

To my surprise, who should present himself early in the day but my Hottentot.

His return was most acceptable, for now I should have some one who would attend to my wants and look after my animals.

I knew he was a sad rogue, and knew that he would lose no opportunity of extorting money from my funds; a specimen of which I began to believe he was now attempting, for he stated that each horse required two buckets of water, and that he could not obtain it at less than a shilling a bucket.

I believe had I been strong enough I should have launched something at his ugly head. Afterwards, however, I was glad I had not done so, for I

learnt with astonishment that all the water drunk at Matchaping's station had to be carried several miles, and to be ladled out of a pit sixty or seventy feet deep. Even then, by paying such an exorbitant price, it was by no means sure I could obtain a sufficient quantity for myself and my horses; for you cannot bribe a Kaffir woman to do a single act of service for you unless she has the permission of her lord and master, for she never is actuated by feelings of cupidity.

However, Matchaping would not allow his guest to be treated with any want of courtesy, so he gave a peremptory order that the quantity I needed should at once be forthcoming.

After it had been deposited in several broken Kaffir crocks, it was discovered that the horses were nowhere to be found, although it was reported that they were observed an hour or two previously feeding on a koppie side. But the chief's son, with several young men started, in pursuit, ultimately finding the spoor, and by sunset the truants were brought back. Poor brutes! it was no wish on their part to leave their master, but simply that the unquenchable desire to drink had caused them to wander in search of a place where the longing might be gratified.

My after-rider had some wonderful tales to tell about his escape from the Kaminyani. He had been followed, he stated, many miles, which had compelled him to leave the track, and sleep

the first night in a small knoll of brushwood; thence he made his way to the Notawani River, where he was sorely frightened by the lions, which, he said, were so saucy that they totally disregarded his fire, which he feared to make too large lest it should attract the notice of his enemies; so he watched his chance for the beasts being out of the way, when stealing down to the river bed, and standing in a pool of water, he passed the night in that position. The big cats evidently missed him, for they trekked him to the stream and kept purring up and down its banks until the day broke. As there are a good many crocodiles in this river, it appears marvellous that he should have adopted such a course, and still more wonderful that one of these most objectionable of the amphibizæ had not seized him.

My attendant did not seem a bit depressed in spirit by the hardships he had so lately encountered, and appeared quite as much delighted to see me as I was to see his ungainly form again.

A Boer came into the station that evening, and as I had only been able to obtain some boiled mealies for my noonday feed, I was too happy to accept some stewed antelope which he brought me. He was a very good fellow in his way, knew of me by reputation, and kindly expressed grief at my worn-out appearance. In the most simple form he stated that he had no objection to

be of what assistance he could to me individually, but that he declined to countenance the taking of the Transvaal by my countrymen.

“We’ll have a fight for it,” he continued; “and if I should fall into British hands, probably you will be able to do me a good turn.”

Matchaping visited me in the evening. His life has been a strange one, and full of adventure. Popular opinion amongst his people in his early days was so much opposed to him, that he was obliged to fly with a minority of the tribe, and seek shelter with Sycheley.

This old fox he accused of being the cause of these difficulties; however, Matchaping remained under his protection for several years, when his people had become sufficiently numerous to assert their independence and to depart, but Sycheley insisted upon their remaining, and threatened to attack them did they attempt to go; however, Matchaping told his oppressor, “We are going, and if you try to stop us, although the odds are against us, we will fight like brave men.”

His former home was in the Transvaal, from whence he was driven by the Boers; and up to this day, although many years have passed since that took place, he never ceases to regret the green hills and abundance of water which was found in the land where he had spent his childhood.

His family is numerous, and I never saw finer specimens of the Kaffir than are his sons.

He expressed a great desire to be allowed to return to his old home; and it is, in my opinion, a great pity that he could not be reinstated in the lands of his fathers, for I am convinced he would be a true and a strong ally of the Government; moreover, his tribe is industrious and frugal, and possessed of considerable herds of cattle, the management of which they thoroughly understand.

Secomi told me that he had correct information that a revolution had taken place at Soochong, and that Kama had retired to a watering-place twenty or thirty miles from his late capital. This old gentleman devoutly prayed for the success of his son Kamani; for, added he, with considerable feeling, "Then I shall be able to go back to my own country once more."

During the night there was a great amount of excitement, caused by a hungry hyena attempting to steal a child from the side of its mother.

My Hottentot, followed by myself, rushed to the rescue. He vowed he had seen the intruder and hit it with a stick; although close to him, I saw nothing.

The child, nevertheless, was severely bitten.

Next morning I had my interview with Matchaping and his head-men.

It resulted in my hearing the old story told over again.

"If I send my young men away, to help you in Natal, Sycheley will eat me up."

I spent over a couple of hours arguing with him that his best policy would be to gain our friendship by proving himself favourable towards the Imperial Government, and that, as allies, we would soon put a stop to any acts of enmity that a hostile chief might meditate. However, my eloquence was of no avail; every one of his councillors supported him in his resolve; therefore I was well aware that anything I could say further would fail to alter the verdict they had arrived at. In consequence I determined to depart in the morning for Makose, a long ride, the principal station of which is situated on the edge of the Transvaal. The chief there is one of the most powerful in far Kaffirland, and now a very old man. He is reported in his younger days to have been one of the most aspiring and brave warriors that existed within a long distance of his country.

At daybreak, much to my annoyance, I found that the horses had been turned out, and could not be found.

Matchaping again aided me, but it was ten o'clock before I was in the saddle.

Leaving the town, through which the chief walked as an evidence of his good fellowship, so that, as he expressed it, "his people might know me again when I returned to visit him," we passed through a large extent of mealie country stretching as far as the eye could see in either direction.

On gaining its southern limits my old friend halted, clapped me on the back, shook hands, and bid me a cordial adieu.

With the exception of Hashesheba, I found this old gentleman one of the most thoughtful and kind I had encountered in my travels, and I believe that under this black skin beats as noble and good a heart as is ever encountered in civilized England.

Good-bye, Matchaping! I may never see you again, but I wish you every prosperity and happiness.

On leaving my late host, we entered a thickly-wooded land, in many places the timber being not only large but handsome; and in many parts of it, had the season been a less dry one, doubtless water would have been found.

The spoor of game also became abundant; none of it, however, came into view, except a *koodoo* and some *harte beast*.

The unsettled state of the country prevents the people from hunting as much as of yore; and there is a second reason for game having been so much more numerous than in former years, viz. the sale and importation of gunpowder having been prohibited through the Transvaal.

At night we crossed a small stream and slept close to a Kaffir kraal, standing in a mealie garden, the only occupants of which were eight or ten girls, the senior of the party appearing not to exceed twelve years of age.

Why they should be left in such an unprotected position I know not, but believe that it had something to do with some of their religious ceremonies.

These poor little waifs of humanity lent me a cooking-pot, and sold me several pumpkins, which, with the aid of a piece of beltung brought by the Tottie from our last resting-place, I was enabled to make a fairly good meal.

The juvenile women appeared to be excessively timorous, evincing more dread of my servant than of myself; so I forbid him to go near their hut—a command I felt convinced he would violate if opportunity occurred. In fact, from the glance he gave me, I imagined that I saw in his eye an inclination to dispute my authority. This insubordination doubtless resulted from his knowledge of the weak state of health I was in.

As soon as the sun was an hour high—for neither horses nor cattle will drink at break of day—we resumed our course to the southward, and passed through a large extent of savannah land, which had the appearance of having been once under cultivation. A splendid leopard crossed our path, not fifty yards ahead. For upwards of several seconds he stopped and surveyed us; and I do not think, in all my hunting experience, I have witnessed an animal with such a splendid coat. He was long in the body and short in the legs, with limbs almost as powerful as those of a lioness, and his stomach hung so

low that there could scarcely be a doubt that the previous night's hunting had been very successful.

Quietly, and evidently totally unconscious of harm, he stood watching us, whilst his tail in graceful bends swayed to and fro. Halting to get my rifle, he seemed to reconsider his position and circumstances, so bounded over the high grass in front of him to the side of an adjoining koppie, where he was instantly chevied and jeered at by a most patriarchal family of baboons.

Soon after mid-day we entered mealie gardens, now apparently disused for some time; and when we had traversed these, passing through a kloof, a most beautiful view opened before us—thousands and thousands of acres of mealie fields, from which the ripe crops had just been harvested. Still not a human being was in sight.

I dismounted, ascended some elevated ground, and strained my eyes in every direction; yet no indication of man's presence could I see. It appeared to me that every step I took flushed turtle-doves, partridges, koran, and quail; while hares, as thickly as rabbits in a well-stocked warren, scuttled about in every direction.

Never was there a country more specially adapted for the use of pointers and setters; for you could see them ranging uninterruptedly for upwards of half a mile in front of you. After resting for an hour we resaddled, I frequently demanding from the boy where this station of Makosie was, and he as often assuring me that we should be there in ten minutes or a quarter of

an hour. Incessant disappointment made me give way to temper, and I sulkily resolved to make no further inquiries.

It might have been four o'clock, or perhaps later, when, in the far-off distance, I perceived the white tilt of a waggon.

Shaking up my horses, I sharpened my pace, and overtook it in half an hour.

From the Kaffir who owned it I learnt that the station was still nine or ten miles off.

This was exceedingly disappointing, for I was almost dead from thirst, although I had carried a bullet in my mouth for two or three hours. As we were about to move forwards, to my astonishment the elder of the Kaffirs, who appeared chief amongst them, brought me, in a most gracious manner, a large melon.

I know it was all but destitute of flavour, but the coolness and moisture made it a perfect treasure, more particularly as it had been so unexpectedly produced.

The shades of night had long fallen, and lights illuminated the numerous kraals, which are situated in tiers upon the hillside, when we entered Makosie.

“ And all the night a solemn stillness holds,
Save when the moping owl does to the moon complain.”

These lines floated through my brain, the difference being only that here the jackals bayed the dogs, and from the neighbouring heights the dogs answered from the town.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DANISH LADY.

WITH most extraordinary good luck I distinguished a square-built cabin.

Now, as every Bechuana lives in a round hut, from the chief to his lowest subordinates, I concluded that a European dwelt here.

Nor was I mistaken in my surmise; for, on pulling up at the door, a little Danish woman, whose language I could not speak a word of, presented herself. She was the wife of the Lutheran missionary; but her husband was from home, he having undertaken a distant journey to no less a personage than my friend Mr. Jansen, to obtain a supply of the necessaries of life. Poor, good soul! she unhesitatingly asked me to enter, which I did, in no way loth; and furnished me with a simple meal, no doubt of the best viands her establishment possessed.

It was a bitter cold night—so cold, indeed, that my three horses refused to feed, but stood and shivered, first resting one leg and then the other; for no shelter was to be obtained for them anywhere.

I slept on a truckle bed; but my slumber was far from sound, as my poor beasts without indicated by their restlessness that they felt their treatment to be anything but what they deserved.

In the morning my servant was despatched to make my arrival known to the chief; and before going he asked me for a sovereign; for, said he, "I have any number of relatives residing here."

After an absence of three hours the beast returned, so drunk that he could not articulate; but, squatting on the ground, looked up into my face, grinning like a hyæna. I kicked him into an upright position; and if I had had a jambok, he would have felt its lithe sting upon his dirty yellow hide! I hurried up to the kotla, where I found the old chief among a perfect throng of his people.

My presence was evidently very objectionable, yet I insisted upon having a hearing.

I was aware, too, that I could but very imperfectly express myself. However, after a few minutes one of the sable crew came forward to my assistance.

Failure again I saw staring me in the face; so I departed, promising to renew my visit on the following morning, when I should be able to avail myself of the services of the Hottentot.

A couple of days more were absolutely necessary to rest my animals, and I was obliged to be satisfied; for, even if no benefit should accrue to myself, the quadrupeds at all events would

obtain plenty of grass and water. With the blessing I began to think it was all up; for he lay down, and no manner of inducement could get him to rise. However, in the afternoon, having had his nostrils and mouth sponged out with warm water, and some soaked mealies having been given to him, he was able to get on his legs and rejoin his companions.

I think that much of the poor animal's powers of endurance becoming exhausted was due to his back being severely galled, the reason being that the after-rider possesses one of the most villainous seats upon a saddle that it is possible to imagine. A second cause I cannot fail to lay great stress upon—viz., that General Clifford supplied me with such accoutrements as would be a disgrace to any one! I called the storekeeper's attention to the circumstance, and he at once condoled with me, the General did not.

The success of my journey was deemed by the authorities to be one of great importance, yet no attention was paid by the chief in command to the minutiae of detail, the need for which might have ruined the whole undertaking.

My second interview took place with the chief, and was a very stormy one.

The king is, in my opinion, an imbecile old fool, and permits himself to be controlled by any one who has pluck enough to contradict him. However, he feared so much for my personal safety that he sent an escort with me to where I had slept,

who had instructions to see me safe off the premises.

The enmity here is caused by the want of success on the part of our troops in the commencement of the Zulu war; and this has been made use of, and exaggerated by the Boers on the Western Frontier; and the Kaffirs, in their ignorance, I am disposed to think, believe the Transvaal will be retaken by its former owners, when they will be certain to feel the resentment of the descendants of Holland in far from a pleasant manner, should they show the slightest mark of amity towards us.

I said farewell to my lonely little hostess. She looked very sad and troubled in mind. Her daughter, about six or seven years of age, I presented with half a sovereign, and she flew with it at once to her mother, who made pantomimic signals for her to restore it. I did not take it back; and the last words I heard the kind soul utter were probably her only stock of English—“*Too mooch! too mooch!*”

The first eight or ten miles was travelled over gaily by my steeds; but soon the sun grew powerfully warm, and water, which we failed to find, was evidently needful.

Winding along, at a slackened pace, around the edges of numerous rock-covered kloofs and ravines, suddenly a noble view presented itself. It was a valley, twenty-five miles in width, for the opposite hills were scarcely discernible. I could

scarcely help exclaiming to myself, “If this were well-watered, it might be the great granary for half the people in England!” But only one stream flows through it, and I strongly surmise that in some portions of the year that is quite dry.

After some search, and following the spoor of a quantity of oxen, I found a good pool of water.

While resting I requested the after-rider to point out Mahoshe. He called my attention to a gap in the hill.

“The station is just through there,” he said.

“My God!” I exclaimed, “have we to go that far to-night?”

We got to the gap, which was a rugged kloof, and giant timber clothed its sides.

None of your trees of yesterday’s growth, but veritable monarchs of the forest, gnarled and twisted, veterans who had fought the battles with storm, rain, and hail from time immemorial. Talk of Burnham oaks and beeches! Speak of the auld, auld trees of Cadzo Forest! None of them have more strange fantastic forms than those I beheld in the fading light now rapidly quickening into deep gloom, from the precipitous rocks and cliffs that formed the edge of the kloof shutting out the last vestiges of the daylight long before its time.

Onwards we pressed through this corrie. Deeper and deeper became the shadows, until all seemed to be blended in one gigantic mass of opaque darkness.

The trail was rough, even more than that, almost a jumble of boulders of every size and shape; yet still no end appeared to this dismal path.

The sundry night animals and nocturnal birds commenced to express their delight that the day was over, and that the time was come in which their deeds of ill would be unobserved.

The only sound that brought relief to my mind—for remember, reader, that I was weak, and still a sufferer from fever—was the deep-toned, honest bark of some sentry baboon up in the crags over my head.

Five miles, at least, we traversed in this gloomy ravine, doubtless grand and sublime by daylight, but at night it might be the entrance to Hades. Then once more we came upon the plain.

In half an hour we were among fields of Kaffir corn, but as yet no signs of the station appeared.

At length the boy points out against the sky five huge peaks, one almost as steep as the monument, or Cleopatra's needle, which looked like the work of the Titans, so stupendous are they in structure.

“But where is the station?”

“Here it should be, my master. This is where Sycheley once lived, and it was then called Kolo-beng.”

In the gloom he pointed out the ruins of a house.

"That's where Dr. Livingstone once lived, but the Boers burnt it down."

It was a grim monument to the memory of a son of my country whom the nation has loved to honour!

We had to dismount. My boy in front led the horses. I, following in the rear, held on to Tommy's tail, for I was a long way from being firm upon my legs. A sorry lot I felt, and I heard the night-bird's shrill ill-omened cry, as though jeering at the solitary white man, who believed he could traverse the wilds of Africa without change of clothes, and without carrying food; for I take this opportunity to mention that I never changed my habiliments from the time I left Maritzburg until I returned to it. Why should such be the case, may be asked? The answer is simply I could not carry more than was actually upon my back.

At length a twinkling light is detected. It marks a cattle kraal.

Long we tried to bargain for one of the people to show us the station.

One, two, three, up to ten shillings was offered, and then even to a pound. Nobody seemed to care for the money, or perhaps they dreaded the indignation of their chief.

At length the Hottentot asked if a white man lived there. There was one.

"Then take us to him."

Sulkily, and with every indication that our

guide disliked the stranger and the task, he walked slowly in front, muttering all the time to himself what doubtless were curses and anathemas against the employment so obviously distasteful to him.

How slowly the miles dragged on the reader will scarcely be able to imagine; but when he is aware that every step was painful in the highest degree, and that a few more may probably bring me to a permanent halt, some idea, although a trifling one, can be formed.

The bless-horse here gave out, and resisted going further, although dragged along by main force and shoved. He staggered like a drunken man, several times swaying so far to the right and left, that it appeared as if he must have fallen. There was nothing for it but to leave him, so I carefully knee-haltered him myself, and resumed my forward progress.

It must have been midnight, for a silver thread of moon had gained considerable elevation, the first glimpse of which I deemed a good omen; and, after the manner of superstitious people, turned over the loose coins I had in my pocket, to induce that fickle jade Fortune not yet to desert me.

When we came in front of a large circular house, built in the shape of a Bechuana hut, under the protecting shadow of a big banyan-tree, the sulky guide stopped and pointed to it.

His *douceur* was faithfully administered, and he bounded away into the surrounding darkness.

I knocked at the door, and it was opened. A

grey-haired, elderly man bade me enter, and to my astonishment recognized me.

In former years he had been an elephant hunter, and I had met him on the lower waters of the Limpopo. To say I was welcome is not a strong enough expression. He placed his house and all its belongings at my disposal, and this is by no means a form of speech, as when heard in Spain, but intended to be taken literally.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN ESCAPE.

THE first thing in the morning the Hottentot was despatched to announce my arrival. When my host heard me give him his instructions, he told me he feared I had reached a nest of hornets, and only hoped I should be able to get out of it in safety.

Soon after a Boer waggon arrived. It was the property of the man I had assisted a couple of weeks before on my journey up the country. He expressed great delight at having a chance to renew my acquaintance.

My servant returned, after an absence of about an hour.

He had been severely catechised and threatened for daring to show me the way to this station. He had seen the chief at his own village, and therefore knew him.

To his surprise a stranger was pointed out to him as "King," while behind him lay the monarch himself enveloped in a carosse, his head so covered up in its folds as to make recognition almost impossible.

However, when argument and language waxed high, the disguised chief forgot his discretion, and thoughtlessly raised himself from his recumbent position, when the imposture was immediately discovered.

The Hottentot had sufficient diplomacy, however, not to indicate that he saw through the deception that had been practised.

While this interview was going on, several strangers entered the kotla, but not before they were also recognized as a party of rebels who had openly defied our Government in Griqualand West.

"These men will wait for you, and your life will be no more in their hands than that of a dog's," said my after-rider at the end of his account.

However, I interviewed the chief twice, and when I discovered that he had no objection to displaying his hostility to myself and nation, I without hesitation told him what the result would be.

With an assumption of braggadocio, he would like to be informed by what right I entered his country, and told me that he had only to raise his hand, when a hundred assegais would assure my quitting it on the spot.

"If you raise your hand, or attempt to make any gesture, your death will be on your own shoulders," said I, calmly producing my revolver. Then I left him in a towering passion, and quietly went down to the house of my host.

The second interview was less angry, and there was a semblance of a disposition to pacify me in his manner of address.

Placing little stress upon the question, he inquired, as though casually, by what route I intended proceeding after leaving his town. I told him by Asphoe-kloop and Fountian. This was no untruth, for such was my intention.

The next morning the Boer told me that I was to be waylaid upon the road, and he obtained this information from one of his people, who happened to be a native of the place.

I told my host what I had learnt, and he agreed with me that my position was eminently hazardous.

After a short consultation he spoke as follows:—

“They will never do such a thing near the village, but fifteen or twenty miles from here, where there will be no one to know what takes place. A course remains open, however, which you can adopt, but one which will necessitate an alteration in your plans.

“Ride through the kotla as if you intended to carry out your original intention; salute the king as you pass him. You will reach a road half a mile further on which leads directly west, and passes through a kloof at the end of that hill. From here you can see where the gap is,” said he, pointing to it; “it is barely more than a trail made by the women when they bring in wood and water. After you have traversed it, this trail

even disappears; but if you keep travelling due west, with the sun on your right hand at mid-day, and in your face towards evening, you cannot fail to find the hills on which Karnia stands, probably on the middle of the second day.

“Don’t say a word to your Hottentot, for I doubt his sincerity; keep your intention to yourself, and should he refuse to follow you, shoot him down without hesitation. If you have recourse to this step, stick the muzzle of your rifle into the sand, and then fire it; it will burst it half-way from the breech, so if you have to leave it behind it will be useless to any one.

“To possess such a rifle as that they would take any man’s life. They may attempt to overhaul you, but they have not got a horse within miles of the station; and with ordinary luck, before any can be brought in, you can have placed such a distance between yourself and your foes, that you will have little fear of danger to entertain. If the worst comes to the worst, and your horses break down, turn up one of the adjoining hills, and hide among the rocks; with a pair of revolvers, and your knowledge of their use, I would back you against two dozen of such scoundrels.”

I saw my girths carefully tightened, and paid unusual attention to all my accoutrements. I replaced my old cartridges with new ones, and made the smallest possible roll of my blankets, fastening them taut with a fresh rhcim to the cantle of the

saddle. My great-coat I made into a neat roll, and secured it to the tree. When, having seen my servant mounted, I bid my friend and the Boer good-bye.

Slowly I rode through the kotla.

There was the chief, with all his minions, assembled. I touched my cap and quietly said a word of farewell; then, unhurriedly, rode through the station.

When I reached the turning-place, my follower, who was close at my heels, called,—

“Baas! you are going wrong!”

I checked my horses, and told him firmly that that was the route I intended to take.

He hesitated. It might have been the result of his ignorance of the course. It might have been treachery.

I did not wait to consider which, but simply said, “Follow me. If you do not, you must take the consequence,” and I unbuttoned my holster.

I believe the lad was faithful; and if my previous suspicions do him an injustice, I am sorry; only, my life depended upon the issue, and therefore my language was, of necessity, rather explicit than courteous.

He remained close at my heels without a moment of hesitation, and I jammed my spurs into Tommy; and at a good swinging canter we went at least ten or eleven miles in the first hour.

Here we found water, of which the nags were