

CHAPTER XII

THE "ARGUS" HOUSE-WARMING

ARIADNE looked over the gilt and satin *menu* she held in her hand.

"You arrived so late," said the chairman, at whose right she was seated, "I began to fear you were not coming at all."

"I am sorry," she said in a low voice, "but something very sad detained me."

"Don't think of it now," he whispered. "I want you to be very bright, and reflect credit on the staff."

Ariadne smiled, while a faint rosy tinge crept over her face. "I feel dreadfully nervous," she whispered back, "amid all these men."

"Nonsense," answered the chairman. "Now, what are you going to have? we have already reached the fifth course."

"Is it possible," she said, scanning the *menu*, "that you really have all that is written here?"

"Yes, all," he answered. "It does honour to the occasion, does it not?"

"Decidedly it does," she replied, as she read the long array of delicacies.

- * "Hors d'Œuvres Assorti."
- "Mayonnaise of Salmon."
- "Venison Pie. Galantine of Fowl."
- "Fois gras truffee en Bellivue."
- "Ox-tongue en Aspic."
- "Fillet of Beef Piqué."
- "Roast Chicken, York Ham."
- "Turkey au Perigorde."
- "Salade de Saison."

Pine-apple Jelly.
Bavarois à la National.
Punch à la Parisienne.
Patiserie Assorti.

Strawberries and Cream.

WINES.

Amontillado. Niersteiner.
St Julien. Beaune.
Giesler (1st qual.) Irroy.
Old Crusted Port.
Liqueurs.

"How was it possible to make out this wonderful *menu*," she asked, "in these dreadful times, with famine staring us in the face?"

* This *menu* represents dishes composed entirely of tinned edibles—the only food supply at that time in Johannesburg.

"It doesn't look like famine," whispered the chairman, with a chuckle. "Those strawberries are from Pretoria, and Zocallo did the rest."

"What a clever man you are," she said, with a glance of admiration at the powerful face bending towards her, "to curb that bear of an Italian and trim his claws, so to speak; I am sure he would never have taken the trouble to serve such a banquet for anyone but you, not even for Om Paul himself."

"Thank you," he whispered, "but a cleverer woman than I am a man has captured me; and she is as brave as she is clever to face this lot of men—and Boers."

"I expect a nip," answered Ariadne coolly, while looking into the bottom of the glass with which she toyed.

"If anyone dares to nip, I'll——"

"I am here as one of you, you know," she went on, *naïvely*. "If there was but one single Englishman present, I should feel safe; he would not suffer me to be insulted."

"Never," the chairman hastened to answer.

"You must tell me who some of these men are, and anything of interest about them."

"Well," answered the chairman, complacently sipping his champagne, "we have a hundred guests, all representative men of the Rand,

with here and there a prominent Cape man. The gentleman next to you is an ex-Premier and member of the Assembly. Allow me to introduce him."

The ex-Premier returned Ariadne's smile with a dignified bow, while she shot from under her golden lashes a keen glance of scrutiny at the pale intellectual face, framed in iron-grey hair and well-trimmed beard. The firm-cut mouth and deep-set, thoughtful eyes impressed her pleasantly, but the slow, quiet tones of his voice proclaimed the man of determination and patience.

"If he makes up his mind to do a thing," she thought, "he will wait a hundred years, if need be, to accomplish it."

"I like him," she whispered to the chairman, after exchanging a few seasonable remarks with the ex-Premier; "his voice rings true. An honest man has always a sympathetic tone. I have never found it to fail—that is, as far as my experience goes. Now, I should say he was a man who stopped at nothing, when once he believed himself in the right, and would cling to it like grim death."

"You may rely on what you call experience, which is really instinct, and with woman it takes the place of experience in man. You have

summed up in a phrase the whole policy and character of our neighbour: being an Afri-cander, he has the confidence of the inner circle of the colony, is in touch with the vital questions of the hour, and knows the pulse of S.A.; and it would have been well had he been reappointed to the premiership instead of his successor, a man worthy in an official sense, but not a vital one. How, in God's name, can a man who has not lived among us—in fact, been born among us—who is a creature of Downing Street, understand the problems of South African politics? It would be just as reasonable to appoint a Thames bargeman to the captaincy of a Union liner. What could he know of the currents, sub-currents and coast dangers of the southern seas? Every exotic Premier is, and will be, a failure. There are still greater dangers ahead, unless a man of thorough Afrikander build does not soon take the helm.—But there, I am drifting into high politics, and, although I know you will write brilliantly and well, I cannot allow you to touch high politics.”

“And why not?” interrupted Ariadne; “why should you relegate me to the retailing of society gossip, the frothy chronicles of the small beer of fashion, when I possess the in-

stinct, as you have just said, which led me straight to the mark in summing up our neighbour?"

"Because you are a charming, a deucedly charming woman," answered the chairman, filling Ariadne's glass from the bottle of Giesler beside him; "and we value women here too much to let them trouble their pretty heads with dry problems on political and official subjects. We look to you for restful diversion and sweet forgetfulness from the onerous duties of public life."

"But will you not admit that I, with my wide and profound experience as a woman of the world, a traveller and observer of three continents of the civilised globe, am not more capable, more fitted to take up the pen in political work than your sub-editor, who has never seen a London fog, an American blizzard, who knows nothing beyond the endless blue of an African sky?"

"There, there," interrupted the chairman in a low voice, as he smiled, well pleased with the enthusiasm glowing in her eyes and lending a fascinating beauty to her face, "don't allow your pretty enthusiasm to carry you away. I may admit the truth of all you say, but the time is not ripe for such woman-work in Africa.

Remember, we have not reached the epoch of Primrose Dames, yet."

"Ah! now you misunderstand me," answered Ariadne, a little archly. "I don't aspire to leading African women so high as *that*. But I would be glad to open your eyes to the value of what you call instinctive power in woman. I would make women the counsellors and advisers of men in the arena of state government, as they are in domestic affairs. To whom does a man go more readily and trustfully for advice and counsel, when the world seems to have failed him, than to his wife? Does he not lay all the bearings of the case before her? not that he believes in her wisdom, for wisdom is begotten of experience, but he believes in the "old woman's" instinct, don't you see!"

The chairman nodded approvingly; he highly enjoyed, without yielding to them, the prettily-worded arguments of Ariadne.

"Clever, very clever," he thought. "She is angling for the sub-editorship. By Jove! I'd give it to her if only for the sake of that sweet voice and winning smile. But there would be the devil to pay; they don't appreciate woman in that sense here yet."

Ariadne saw the wavering twinkle in the

dark eyes, and hastened to hit harder on the head of the nail.

"To be brief," she resumed, "the time has come when women must lift some of the burden from men's shoulders and bear it with them. When I think of the Herculean load that thousands, nay, millions of men carry daily, the burden of a household of three, four, or a dozen of souls to support, I wonder that more men don't go mad under the strain. All women cannot be wives and mothers, but they can be co-workers, counsellors, and equals. The time is come when women shall be allowed to be nobly self-supporting, when an over-strained husband and hard-worked brother are no longer expected to bear the pressure alone. We are accepted in America, we are gaining in England and France, and here in Africa we hope to win it. I am sitting here among a lot of hostile men. Oh, don't shake your head!" she said softly, with a smile; "nearly every man is wondering at my 'cheek'; but they don't know that I am mortifying my pride for a principle, trampling under foot my womanly reserve, as they would call it, by being the only lady present at this banquet. I am the wee part of the wedge of woman influence in the Rand. I shall be vilified and stormed at by

the coarse element ; but I don't care ; I am willing to bear anything to become a precedent in such a good cause."

"By the Almighty," muttered the chairman, "I believe she will wheedle me into giving her the sub-editorship after all !"

"Just one word more," she said, as the strawberries appeared, "I feel that awful times are coming for the whole country, unless Afrikanders awake to the sense of the dangers of alien leadership. I heard a man speak in the Cape ; it was in the Council Chamber. He is the coming man for South Africa."

"Who was he ?" queried the chairman, with an amused smile.

"Cecil Rhodes," she answered.

The chairman looked steadily at Ariadne for a moment, then he said quietly, "You shall have the sub-editorship."

Ariadne's eyes sparkled mistily. She said nothing further ; her point had been gained by a stroke of instinctive policy. Surprised at the sudden decision of the chairman, she refrained from following up and perhaps weakening the advantage she had gained, by further talk on the subject. Like a wise woman, she prudently held her tongue.

CHAPTER XIII

EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO SPEAK HIS MIND

AND now the real business of this journalistic banquet began.

The chairman arose and proposed the health of the "President," which was drank amid cheers that deepened to roars of applause as "The Queen" was toasted. No more loyal hip-hip-hurrahs could have resounded at a Lord Mayor's banquet, than those which rolled forth lustily from the throats of her sons and subjects gathered round that festive board in the heart of the Transvaal, and whose Boer leaders joined in with a heartiness that shook the rafters of the fine banqueting-hall, till the very flags and gay-coloured buntings trembled like boughs shaken beneath a summer storm.

Glasses clinked, and wine bubbled afresh, while tears welled up to Ariadne's eyes, touched to the quick by the electric current of the noble enthusiasm which one woman's name, the emblem of purity, goodness, godliness, and the

ruler of the greatest empire of the world, had called forth.

“It is the woman, after all, that they revere,” thought Ariadne, as she sat silent amid the hubbub, quite hidden by the men standing about her. “Thank God!” she murmured, in a sudden burst of thankfulness, “that I am a woman, and that British blood flows in my veins. It is that which makes my heart strong and true.”

There are moments in our lives when the veneer of conventionality and custom melts beneath the fire of enthusiasm like snow before the noonday blaze. Wine is a generous influence, and when combined with the magic of good-fellowship, it is like unto oil cast on troubled waters: whatever lies beneath the surface blends harmoniously. So the pleasant hospitality warmed alike the heart of Boer and Britisher, and for the nonce they were in sympathetic union.

The Landdrost, the Assistant Landdrost, and the other Boer officials quite entered into the spirit of patriotism of their host; and, as they drank of the mellow Giesler, they seconded with downright goodwill the loyal cheers of their companions.

Was it not right and fitting that these men

should overflow with enthusiasm at the name of their great Queen? And the sturdy Boers felt that they were upholding a just and laudable principle in assisting their friends by shouting themselves hoarse; for is not patriotism a sentiment which commands the respect of every one the world over?

When all had quietened down, the ex-Premier, at the invitation of the chairman, arose and proposed the health of the Johannesburg officials. In a neat and smart speech he tickled the ribs of the special Landdrost metaphorically; at which there arose cries of—

“Good old captain!”

—interrupted by ringing cheers, after which the ex-Premier proceeded to compliment the mining commissioner, and wound up with a cleverly - worded tribute to the ability and courtesy with which they performed their official duties, their strict integrity and uprightness. Having said this, he concluded by saying, “He could say no more of any official in any part of the world.”

Again the mellow Giesler flowed, while a copious health was drunk to the reigning powers of the Rand.

Then the Landdrost arose, his kindly, handsome features flushed with pleasure as he

delivered himself of a brief speech in quaint musical English.

“The poor official of Johannesburg,” he said, while nervously twirling his wine-glass, “had so much to do to respond to the kind toasts that, if it was not such a pleasure to be present in their midst, these toasts would be very difficult to answer, because he could only repeat the same words over again. He would say, however, that, without their kind assistance, they would never have won their confidence, and if they gave their confidence and assistance in the future as in the past, all would go right.”

When the cheers and libations following the Landdrost’s speech had subsided, the Mining Commissioner was called upon to respond.

When he arose, he disclosed a pale, thoughtful face, and a slight, delicate physique; but the eyes under the light lashes were deep and keen, proclaiming intellectual strength; and in a voice quiet and self-composed in the extreme, he responded—

“In the discharge of his duties he had to contend with many difficulties; but, through the assistance of the public, he was able to perform his duties in the most satisfactory manner; and he was very glad to see that.

they had appreciated his services. He was sure that as long as they had such a public as they had, he might say, *as one of the first public officials in the South Africa Republic, they might always, with public kind assistance and co-operation*, be able to do their duty. For the second time he thanked them for their kind feelings."

The Mining Commissioner resumed his seat after delivering this modest and rather non-committal speech, amid cheers and cries of "hear, hear."

He was followed by the Assistant Landdrost, an unassuming type of the Boer, who nevertheless was listened to with profound attention as he briefly reiterated the thanks of his brother official. The short, dark, bronzed little man sat down amid a tempest of clinking glasses and cheers.

"He is decidedly dull," said Ariadne to the chairman, "but popular nevertheless."

"He is a very good fellow indeed," answered the chairman. "You may put his dulness down to the fact of his speaking English. If he responded in his beloved Dutch, we would have had a long and eloquent one, depend on it."

"How polite they are for Boers!" she

whispered. "Each of them acknowledged my presence with a courteous bow as they drank the toast. I have always been under the impression that Boers were so rude to women."

"It is a mistake," said the chairman, "to suppose that Boers are discourteous to ladies. Women have nothing to complain of as far as the Boers are concerned in the Transvaal. It is the miserable scum of Australian and English ne'er-do-wells that invade the Rand, whose cowardly smut-begrimed consciences hold no reverence for womankind. There is another class of men that we may justly term the freebooters of the press. A woman's good name is to them as the red rag to the bull. They delight in plunging at her with the horns of ridicule and slander. Why, there is even now on the list of applicants for a post in my paper, one man, whose shameless life drove him from Australia, where he had flourished for awhile, the root and stem of a capital paper; but drink, that curse of many a gifted journalist, ruined him; and now he has turned up at the Rand. He has the editorship of a morning paper at present, but it is a poverty-stricken rag, run on the profits made by the proprietor's wife, who keeps a flourishing bar. No one buys the paper; and the staff, of one member

only, is raiding the town for tit-bits of scandal and other unsavoury material. There is good material in this applicant, but I fear I cannot avail myself of it. I might make a man of him after all; but only this morning I learned that he had joined forces with the owner and editor of a weekly whose scurrilous illustrations anent the Government and private individuals will eventually pull him up, for high treason, at all events."

"You quite frighten me," said Ariadne with a little shiver. "Is it possible that the pen can be so debased?"

"Yes, it is, alas! However, you must not allow these bogie-men of the press to frighten you; they will never assail you."

"Pray God they may not. I do nothing to merit it. My pen is a virtual necessity to me at present."

"The first thing they will say is that I am in love with you."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Ariadne.

"And that is the reason I have made you sub-editor."

"Oh! I would rather never write a line than such a thing should be insinuated."

"But they will all the same, and you must be prepared. Jealousy will drive those ink-

slinging scalawags who hate me to any abuse ; but don't you mind ; just follow the even tenor of your way and give such good work that I shall be proud of my sub-editor."

"I'll do my best," said Ariadne, firmly ; but a tear fell into and mingled with the golden wine in her glass, as she put it to her lips in acknowledgment of the toast being drunk.

A heavy-set man of medium height, broad-shouldered and erect, stood up smiling in response to the toast. His neatly-trimmed beard was slightly sprinkled with grey. The fair skin was just touched with that bronzed tinge which always marks the complexion of the Englishman of African breed.

"Lady and gentlemen," he began, "I am sorry that I cannot say ladies."

Ariadne's face flushed crimson at the implied insult, while the Boers shot amused glances at the speaker, and one and all looked sympathisingly towards the graceful figure at the head of the table.

"He does not understand," whispered the chairman to Ariadne.

"Nip number one," she whispered back, drawing in her breath and placing the glass down as she settled herself in her chair, with

compressed lips and burning cheeks, waiting for what was to follow.

But nothing further followed in that strain. The speaker realised that he had committed a *faux-pas*; and taking a gulp of champagne, he launched into a panegyric of the occasion, the chairman, and the new journal.

Gradually Ariadne forgot the unpleasant introduction of the speech as she listened to the eloquent words of the sturdy member from the Cape. Even the Boers forgot their admiration for the violet-eyed woman in their midst, and hearkened spell-bound to his ringing tones.

Ariadne felt that she could forgive him anything, even his coarse snub, as she heard him deliver sentiments which her quick instinctive power told her were just the view she would have presented herself in the interests of the Rand, had she been offered the courtesy of speech.

“Gentlemen,” said the Cape Assembly member, “there is room and requirement for able and fearless newspapers in this community. I do not think they need head the first column, ‘War or Peace, or Reform on Revolution.’ As far as I can see, no one wishes to disturb republican institutions, — *qua* such in this

country; and if I were a resident here, I would not only accept the form of your institution, but I should do what is in my power to uphold the form.

“It is, however, one thing to accept the form and another to acquiesce in administrative acts, more especially in their effect on a peculiar and sensitive industry. Your industry requires not only to have fair-play, but, to become what Nature in her providence has given, requires to be encouraged, fostered, almost pampered.

“In other States, in other Republics, as soon as a rich mineral field has been discovered, the Government come to the aid of the industry.

“Telegraphs are made, railways are constructed, and local taxation is kept at a minimum. That is not the case here.”

The speaker looked almost defiantly at the Boer officials. The Landdrost's eyes were riveted on his glass, while his companions preserved a stolid placidity. Had a pin been dropped on the banqueting-table it would have echoed like a crash, so absolute was the breathless silence; every one felt it was critical ground on which the speaker had stepped. The chairman moved not, but his twinkling black eyes flashed a look of encouragement at the Cape member, who went on—

“Your taxation is the heaviest in the world, and you have no railways!”

Again the speaker paused; but not a pulse stirred, not a sound betrayed that he had touched the most vital part of the cancer that was eating into the very life of the Transvaal. The silence goaded him, and he continued with burning words that fell like blazing coals on the hearts around him—

“In my opinion it is the first duty of the true patriot of the South African Republic to see that in these respects you get redress without delay.

“And why?”

“All know the position this State was in before the discovery of the gold. The treasury was empty. The people were poor and discontented through no fault of theirs. The place the Republic then occupied in the congeries of South African States was not even second-rate.

“To-day, how different! The difference was caused by the discovery of precious metals, and the influx of a population which knew how to turn to value the great discovery. But, gentlemen, notwithstanding the richness of your fields, I doubt if you can avoid serious difficulties and troubles in which the Government of the State

will share, unless you secure a reduction of taxation, and the entrance of a railway into Johannesburg.”

A burst of prolonged and vigorous cheers followed the speaker's words. The crust of astonishment had been broken; and men intensely interested in the vital concerns on which the speaker had so fearlessly spoken, woke up to the fact that the function at which they assisted was not one of mere social gratification.

They realised that the † Giesler and *paté-de-fois-gras* bait meant more than a mere tickling of their palates, and they hesitated not to lend themselves to the accomplishment of his hospitable snare, as they commented one to the other on the justice and truth of the speaker's words, that Johannesburg should have a railway. It was the only way out of the difficulties that were accumulating around them.

“In looking over the revenue returns of this country,” continued the Cape member boldly, as he noted the effect of his previous words, “published in the *Gazette* just now, I find that practically the whole revenue comes from the different gold-fields. I find also that almost an amount equal in taxation in the output of gold is paid; and I find further that the revenue is not spent on reproductive works or local wants

but is deposited in the Standard Bank. Besides this heavy direct taxation, you are heavily taxed on all supplies, machinery, and necessaries that come from the coast.

“Now, except perhaps to the man who is content to make and sell bits of papers on which the name of a gold company is printed, it is clear that the industry cannot thrive without the two great desiderata of which I have spoken being granted; if not, the time will come, in my opinion, when the digger and the claim-holder will be unable to pay the heavy taxation which now weighs upon them: this would be a calamity in the interests of this community I wish to see avoided.

“All South Africa is concerned in your industry, and in the well-being of this State. We in the Colony don't grudge the Transvaal the Delagoa railway; we only regret its tortoise pace. Let it come with all speed, but don't delay the Cape and Natal, who are ready and anxious to come to your aid at once; and the Executive in Pretoria would be wise, having only regard to the welfare of this State, if they were to say to the Cape and Natal this day—

“‘Come with your railways as fast as you can.’”

A profound sensation followed the close of

this daring speech. The Cape member knew what he was about. He sat down, secure in the enjoyment of having said his say, and to good effect.

“It will be many such that will come to teach them ere then, ere they heed,” thought Ariadne, looking at the Boer leaders, as they quaffed their Giesler as tranquilly as though the words of the speaker had been chaff, instead of the blunt facts hurled at their heads.

Then arose the chairman, who was received with the cheers and *éclat* befitting the giver of the feast.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, smilingly, holding a glass of foaming Giesler in hand, “when I say ladies I am sure that you will agree with me that the lady present amongst us to-day is a host in herself; and I beg to propose her health, as a member of the staff of the *Star* you have so kindly honoured with your presence on this occasion, and as the pioneer woman-journalist of the South African Republic.”

A succession of roaring cheers followed the toast of the chairman.

Ariadne had not the courage to respond by a bow to the genial calls of the men around her. She felt suddenly alone, intimidated by

the effusive demonstration, which was in reality called forth as a sort of demonstrative protest against the rudeness of the blunt but eloquent Cape member.

She realised in that moment that it was not altogether fitting that she should be alone there. She longed for a woman's hand in hers; but where was the woman to be found, she thought, who could have supported her in that hour? Surely not from the bars or the shops. No, no! She was alone, she felt, and she must bear it bravely alone, by shielding herself in the mantle of modesty which every man present would instinctively revere, so she sat silent, while the toast went round.

"A plump and pretty woman," was the verdict of the Boers.

"A deucedly clever one," said the Englishmen to one another, as they swallowed draughts of champagne served by the ready hand of the watchful Zocallo.

After firing back a volley of compliments and thanks at the Cape member who had so loudly sounded his praises and pedigree, the chairman went on to say many things interesting to the company on the history of his paper.

"But a few words I should like to have the opportunity of saying with reference to the *Argus*

Company, for which this, in my judgment, is a great day indeed ; for reasons of state of which I shall not say anything to-day, as we did not choose to afford any of our numerous friends the opportunity of saying kind things about the enterprise before it was actually ushered into existence. That we were wise in so doing was afterwards apparent ; because every one whose leave had not been asked, predicted for us a short life if not a merry one. These predictions were falsified, because I was able to surround myself with good men and true, who believed that, human infirmities apart, I was not the worst of chiefs for any man, who did his duty, to work with and work under.

“ We had a paper in Cape Town and Kimberley ; and it seemed to me that we should have a larger place in the world if we had an office of our own in London. And so to London I went, and we set up our own standard in the heart of the City, in a great thoroughfare, where our light cannot possibly be hid ; that made me late in coming to Johannesburg, for one thing at a time is my motto. Three years ago I was in the Rand—you know what it was in those days. I went on to the Kaap, and when Barberton collapsed, I was not the only one who said—

“‘As Barberton has been, so also will be Johannesburg.’

“Last year, in July, I came up again to spy out the land. I was not tempted to stay. In the early spring of this year I came for the third time ; and I saw enough then to tempt an angel out of heaven to come and settle in your midst. Perhaps I am not a very good specimen of an angel.”

Laughter and chaffing cries of “hear, hear,” provoked a good-humoured smile from the speaker as he continued—

“And Cape Town is not exactly heaven, but I resolved to come. I saw an opening, and I met with such kind encouragement on all sides—and more especially from some of you who are with us to-day—that I could not refrain from taking advantage of it ; and now I want to take you into confidence. I have been asked a good many times during the past few weeks—

“‘Why don’t you establish a morning paper?’

“The reason can soon be told. I have been guilty—according to some who have the advantage of knowing infinitely more about me than I know myself—of every act forbidden in the decalogue ; but I have never established,

aided, or abetted in the establishment of any newspaper in my life. I have contributed something towards the death of five or six of the species, and I take much credit to myself for having rendered the State that service."

Shouts of laughter followed this sally, expressed with a world of comical concern by the chairman; in the midst of which a friend called from the other end of the table—

"Then why are you here?"

"That is just what I am coming to," he replied.

"John Bright, who was a shrewd man, said the newspaper of the future was an evening paper. I did not want to establish a newspaper where there were far too many already; and I resolved, with the entire concurrence of those who were acting with me, to acquire for the company we had formed the only evening newspaper existing in the Rand. 'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,' but I must say that I did not expect to be flattered to the extent of seeing a second evening paper taking the field before we were fairly at work, and still less to witness a morning journal, which has presumably found it impossible to 'reform,' subject itself to the revolutionary powers of coming out in the evening. There are far too

many newspapers in Johannesburg to be good for the people who run them, or the people who read. I put it to you if one good newspaper is not worth half-a-dozen bad ones?"

Loud cries of "hear, hear," accompanied by spirited remarks on the part of the company, enabled the chairman to partake of another glass of Giesler, to refresh his throat, as he continued—

"Are you aware that there are eight publications in Johannesburg now, and that the place is threatened not only with a ninth, but with a tenth as well? The other day we had a noble distinguished visitor to this country, and when he got home he wrote an article in the *New Review*, in which he compared the newspapers of South Africa—this to their disadvantage, of course—with the newspaper of English, American, and Australian towns. I do not call in question the fact of our infirmity; but I have given you what I know to be the true explanation and only answer of which the circumstances will admit—if you want to have good newspaper work and plenty of it, you will have to pay for it.

"I am sure you will be surprised that here in Johannesburg, where the cost of production is extremely high, the fever of competition has

brought things to such a pass, that you can get newspaper space by the square mile, at about the price you would pay for the open veld. It is no state secret to say that these buildings of the *Argus* Company whose opening we celebrate to-day, the lands they have been erected upon, the plant and the stock we are putting down here—for everything is not yet completed—represent an outlay of nearly five thousand pounds. According to South African notions the figure may seem large ; but I may tell you that a paper in Brisbane, where the public are not quite so catholic in their affections as we are here, paid not long since twice as much for a site alone. It has been uphill work doing what we have done with bricks and mortar, wood and iron, all around us ; but the sales of our paper have more than quadrupled since it was acquired by the *Argus* Company. I think we may be allowed to say that we are not exactly a one-horse show, and these fine buildings will be regarded as the outward and visible sign, not only of our having come, but of our having come, aided by your kind encouragement and support, with the fixed determination to stay.”

The close of the banquet was ushered in by a general jubilation of songs, witty toasts, and

copious libations ; after which the company, in a body, under the leadership of the chairman, proceeded to view the new premises of his very progressive enterprising journal.

A glance at the commodious and elegantly-fitted rooms of the managing director, secretary, editor, and sub-editor, in close connection with a roomy library and file-room, impressed everyone with the fact that the fortunate staff was housed to much better advantage than the corps of many a first-class London journal.

“ And now let us adjourn to the works,” said the smiling chairman, as he led the way direct from the editorial rooms across an ingeniously constructed bridge connecting the main building with the works in the rear.

Here the company were amused and interested by inspecting the fine plant and watching the printing of the evening edition of the paper, which contained an account of the details of the lunch banquet.

“ Thanks, I shall treasure this indeed,” said Ariadne, as the foreman presented her with the first copy.

A facetious guest began an impromptu speech, on which the company assailed him with a volley of chaff.

“ There is enough steam here without turn-

ing on yours!" cried a voice. Upon which the company laughingly dispersed, and the installation of the *Star*, the first evening paper of Johannesburg, in the *Argus* Buildings, was happily concluded.

CHAPTER XIV

A SATURDAY NIGHT'S DEBAUCH

It was Saturday evening. The hour of sundown, with its thousand weird shadows, crisp chilly breezes, and pale ghost-like vapours, had come. Along the line of the horizon a narrow gleam of faint rosy-tinged light still hovered. Above, the heavens hung like a dome of invisible sapphire, flecked here and there by scarcely perceptible glistening forerunners of the tide of stars that soon would flood with glorified beauty the moonless night. The air was filled with a deep calm, the calm of suspended labour. No longer the thud of stamp or boom of battery was heard. A week's output had been dug and gleaned from the mine, round which huge mounds of quartz could be seen faintly outlined in the rising starlight. It shone mistily on blackened shaft, the huts of the native diggers, and reflected its pearl-like radiance on the zinc-roofed cottages of the mining officials.

The great reef, in whose bosom hundreds of hands had burrowed through all the day for the treasures of gold therein, was as calm as the sleeping breast of a mother.

As the last halo of the sunset disappeared, the swift-falling darkness revealed many a cheery cottage-glow, interspersed with patches of ruddy light marking the evening fires of the Kafirs, where their sundown repast was in brisk preparation. A very poor repast it was, indeed, at that particular time the great scarcity of provisions affording little more than a pot of mealies or a meagre supply of dried meat.

The majority of the Kafirs squatted contentedly round the fires outside their huts and ate heartily of the steaming mealies, to which they helped themselves by the aid of long wooden spoons, thrust into the iron pot suspended over the blaze. A merry, chattering, laughing crew, full of jest and quibble, perfectly content in the assurance that money was plentiful if mealies were not. The weekly Saturday night's pay had been doled out to them. They were at liberty to hide it away in old trouser pocket, or hang it round their necks in the little sheepskin bag, for the wife and little ones in the far-away kraal. Many carried it to the nearest canteen-keeper, perched like an aasvogel on

the outskirts of the mine. They received in exchange Disease, Madness, Destruction and Death, in the vile poison yclept whisky and brandy, but in reality a spurious and villainous concoction known as 'Cape-smoke.'

The many nameless outrages, the quick and awful murders, the terrible atrocities, prompted by the maddening fumes of Cape-smoke that eat like fiery virus into the very brain and heart of the drunken native, no eye hath seen, save that great Eye looking down through the millions of quiet stars in the calm and solemn night—the unsleeping eye of God.

Their simple meal ended, the Kafirs set to work to put things in order in their various huts. A certain respect for the laws of cleanliness was rigorously enforced by the mine officials. Saturday evening usually witnessed a setting to rights and clearing up of things generally. After this by no means enjoyable half-hour, for the boys were lazy beyond description, and thought any work not done in the mine entirely a waste of time, they prepared to amuse themselves, each after his own fashion.

A few turned in for the night, others donned their best blanket and set out towards the camp, calling at the adjoining mines on the way. A number sought the grimy bar of

some canteen, losing their money as a rule while drinking heavily or dice-throwing.

The most sensibly-disposed remained in the compound peacefully smoking their pipes, joking and chaffing, singing and telling stories, a pastime in which the native takes extreme pleasure. Vivid in imagination, rich in humour, and full of a savage kind of poetical power of description, their tales and legends abound in beauty.

Quite an attentive group were squatting round one spokesman, listening to his narrative in rapt silence, their shining eyes following every motion of his body as he strode up and down, emphasising his words by highly dramatic gestures. The firelight cast his figure into grotesque relief on the canvas walls of the hut near by; but his listeners had eyes and ears for nothing else as they followed breathlessly the recital of the triumphs of a great Zulu chief and his brave warriors. When the story was ended, the actor in this imaginary drama sank down by the side of the blaze, and proceeded to light his pipe amid deep silence, more significant than applause, and highly complimentary to the efforts of the story-teller.

Presently a skinny young Kafir sprang into

the middle of the circle. His appearance was the signal for roars of merriment.

“Show us the singing missis!” screamed one of the group.

At which the young Kafir ceased his grimaces, and, snatching a gay-coloured blanket from the one nearest to him, proceeded to fasten it round his middle, letting the ends trail behind him. Throwing out his chest until his back was almost a curve, he ambled on tiptoe towards the centre of the circle, going through a series of bows and grins in imitation of a lady's manner, comical in the extreme. His audience gravely watching him the while, evidently reserving their mirth for an expected *coup*. Then followed a pantomimic talk, interlarded with gestures and grimaces in clever imitation of a well-known Transvaal prima-donna's style. Suddenly the boy stretched out his arms to their fullest extent, and, standing on his toes, rolling up his eyes, opening his mouth to its very widest, gave vent to a prolonged quivering yell which sent the group into paroxysms of laughter so violent that they rolled over one another in their glee; the boy meanwhile ambling back and forth with a succession of yells and shrill trills that would have made the fortune of a London costermonger.

“Show how Bass kiss missis,” shouted a voice.

Whereupon the young Kafir ceased his yells, and, divesting himself of the blanket, proceeded to fasten it round a long knob-kerrie. Having arranged it to his satisfaction, he stuck the stick in the ground; and, retreating to a short distance, began to coyly advance in imitation of a young man stealing up behind his sweetheart, repeating this manoeuvre several times to the breathless satisfaction of those awaiting the *dénouement*. This was to seize the blanket-covered stick in his arms, pressing it frantically, and bestowing on the part meant for the head a succession of jerky kisses, each osculation accompanied by a sound like the snap of a whip. This little comedy at the expense of their newly-married manager opened the way, after replenishing their pipes and regaining their breath, to fragments of facetious gossip.

“My old Baas in Barberton,” said one, “jumped another Baas’ missis. The Baas, dat my Baas jump his missis, come round the compound, blazing mad. My old Bass, he say to me, ‘Jim, you up-saddle the two greys, mighty quick. Take the missis away quick to Heidelberg.’”

"We rode all night. Dat was a brave missis. My old Bass caught up with us the next day, and we rode all the way to Kimberley. My old Bass bought all the horses we rode. He'd buy fresh ones every place we stopped, and sell ours. My old Bass give me the last we rode, and the missis give me three ten-pound notes."

This recital seemed to tickle the Kafirs immensely, to whom the lawless capture of another man's missis seemed a capital joke.

"I had a missis in Pretoria," began another, with a good-humoured face and round Bushman head, "who would not leave me work alone. She was always looking in the kitchen. I could not even smoke a pipe. She talked, talked, like this," moving his jaws spasmodically, to the amusement of his listeners.

"I tell the Baas, the Baas shake his head and laugh ; he was afraid of the missis himself. I think and think. The missis give me a nice pair of trousers and shirt ; she say I must always wear them. I think. Next time the missis come in the kitchen I was polishing the knives and forks, and I had nothing on. The missis yell like this," giving vent to a shrill shriek, thereby sending his hearers into fits of laughter, "and run away. That night the Baas look in

the kitchen door, when I was frying steak, put his finger on his nose, and say—

“ ‘ Han, you clever dog, what’s you done with your trousers? Hurry up supper.’ Then he wink and go away, but the missis never come to the kitchen again.”

After this story had been commented on and laughed over, the group began to break up, as the night, which had fairly settled down, began to grow chilly. A few remained by the fire chatting and laughing, the remainder dispersed, some to their huts, and a few started off in the direction of a canteen situate on the road just outside the boundaries of the great mining estate.

Among these stragglers was a little party of four, who kept together. They were all Zulus, fine-built fellows ; they tramped with the long stride born of perfect freedom of limb and muscle. Keeping close together, they walked in pairs, the two older men taking the lead ; they were very intimate, occupying the same hut, sharing everything with each other like brothers. Another companion, a stalwart Matabele, formed the fifth.

A more peaceable, inoffensive little party was not to be found on the reef that night. The two younger men were laughing softly as they

discussed the stories they had just heard. The details seemed very piquant to their bachelor ideas ; they did not yet possess wives of their own. In fact this was the reason they had treked to the great mine, where wages were high and sure to good workers. They had already saved between them the price of two bullocks, which was to furnish the purchase-money to buy a wife for each.

It had been arranged that on the following Monday morning the five were to obtain passes, and start at once on their long trek homewards to the kraals.

The two older men, followed by the others, made straight for the canteen. On entering they found the bar quite full. Not a white man was present save the owner of the canteen.

He was a burly, red-visaged fellow, clad in knickerbockers and white flannel shirt, low shoes and brown hose. A broad-brimmed digger's hat was set well on the back of his head. The small watchful eyes, brutal mouth and bull-dog neck, betokened a man of low instincts but resolute courage. He eyed the four Zulus, as they entered, with complacence. They were rarely seen at his bar, and he judged rightly that it was their last if their first visit ; it being a custom with the most frugal Kafirs to indulge

in a final jubilation, which meant a drunken spree, before leaving the mine.

“What is it to be?” he said, coming forward as the oldest of the Zulus edged his way to the counter.

“A bottle of three star,” replied the Zulu, laying down a sovereign.

The canteen-keeper picked up the gold piece and turned slowly from the bar. Running his eye over the array of bottles on the shelves against the wall, he took down several, but replaced them.

“The beggars have plenty of money, I know,” he muttered to himself. “They have not spent any of it here. No—I won’t give them ‘three star.’ I’ll give them a bottle of my special brand—that will make their throats burn and send them back for more. I’ll get the best part of their little pile before Monday morning.”

Selecting a bottle, he carefully dusted it, then he said, suavely—

“Shall I uncork it?”

At a nod from the Zulu he drew the cork, and replacing it, handed the bottle, together with five shillings change, to the Zulu, who thanked him, and departed, followed by his companions.

And thus the deed was done, the evil, *evil* deed, and no pitying God stretched forth a hand.

After loitering a short time about the stoop of the canteen, the Zulus set out for a saunter along the reef.

The night, which to European eyes seemed very dark, was to them full of the radiance of the stars; every object, even the most distant, being clearly defined in the darkness by the mellow light from those wonderful stars, suspended like a myriad silver lamps in the cloudless heavens.

A short trudge brought them to the foot of a low stony kopje. Here they seated themselves amidst the karroo bushes growing thickly around. The old Zulu drew the cork from the bottle, and took a long drink; after which he passed it to his companions, who promptly followed his example. The last to drink balanced the half empty bottle between a couple of boulders. Pipes were re-lit. While they puffed and placidly stared before them, the old Zulu, warmed by the brandy, began to chat for the benefit of the others.

“The camp looks well to-night, with all its lights shining. There, a team of bullocks is coming up the Natal road. It's a fine night to

lead a team. Perhaps that's a bonus driver bringing that big team to camp."

The last observation seemed to interest the Zulus greatly. They started up and gazed in the direction pointed out by the old man. There, far away, but to a practised eye distinctly visible against the starlit horizon, appeared a moving mass of shadow.

"There will be lots of mealies next week," cried one of the young men.

"I heard the Baas telling one of the white boys about the bonus." Stretching his hand out for the bottle, he took another long drink, the others again following his lead. The last drinker cast away the empty bottle.

"The Baas said the Landdrost offered fifty pounds bonus to the carriers to bring mealies, quick, from the Free State and Natal."

This statement of the Zulu was not exactly correct, as the bonus offered was twenty pounds.

"That's not much!" resumed the Zulu, contemptuously; "I could give more if I sold my oxen. But I buy wives; they can grow mealies without any bonus, ha ha!"

The old Zulu's laugh was re-echoed by his companions, until the kopje rang. The bright-eyed lizards scampered deeper into the

crannies of the rocks, frightened by the harsh sound.

"I have enough here," he went on to say, stroking his breast, where hung the little sheep-skin bag containing his hoard of many months' savings, "to buy three strong fat wives."

"Three fat wives!" they repeated admiringly.

"Yes, you must hurry up, youngsters," he said patronisingly to the two young bachelors, as he rose from the stone on which he had been sitting. "Work hard and get many wives; the more wives, the more mealies!"

The young men followed meekly in the steps of the old Zulu and his companions as they treked back to the mine.

"Lohia, how many bullocks can we buy?"

"Twelve," answered Lohia.

"How many wives will that buy?"

"Two."

"Just one a-piece."

After this brief summing-up of their prospects, the young Zulus trudged on in silence.

"That was good brandy," said the old Zulu, as they came in sight of the red glow in the single window of the canteen.

"Yah," grunted his companion.

The old Zulu strode into the canteen, and

laid the price of another bottle on the bar. No need for the villainous canteen-keeper to make a selection this time; a smirk of satisfaction overspread his evil face as he produced the brandy.

"Have a throw, gentlemen," he said, insinuatingly poisoning the dice-box in his hand; "only a sixpence, cheap, for a good drink if you win."

The Zulu glared at him. The brandy he had already drunk began to heat his brain. The warrior spirit within him was stung by something in the man's manner. Although only a native digger, the men who employed him were infinitely superior to a man of the canteen-keeper's stamp, and the Zulu knew it. His great eyes flashed as he retorted—

"We want no bones; throw them to the white dogs." And, turning on his heel, the old Zulu left the canteen-keeper standing, dice-box in hand, petrified with astonishment.

"Well! I am blowed," he cried; "what cheek! The old nigger is boozed already. That second bottle will settle them. If they are not crazy drunk by to-morrow, and do not come begging for more, I'll never believe in that special brand of mine again."

Just then the little brown clock over the door struck the hour of twelve.

"Here you, Jake," he called to his native assistant, "turn down the light, kick out those drunken niggers, and lock up."

The niggers were one too many for the boy. He fought and pushed, but in vain; the half-dazed poor tipsy wretches would not budge an inch from their places on the floor and benches.

"Wait a minute, I'll settle them," the canteen-keeper roared, as he caught up a sjambok.

The sound of his voice seemed to sober some of the Kafirs, who made for the door as fast as their legs would carry them. The remainder, too drunk to heed any danger, and too helpless to move if they did, were subjected to blows and kicks until they staggered away, or were thrown bodily out of the door by the merciless brute, whose vile wares had brought them to their pitiable condition.

The door made fast, window closed, and all secure for the night, the canteen-keeper proceeded to count up his profits.

"Good business," he muttered, as he spread his gains on the grimy bar.

Pouring out a glass of brandy (not his special brand this time) he drank it off. He then threw a shilling to his little attendant, and pocketing the coin, turned out the light. Wrap-

ping a karros round him, he rolled under the bar and was soon fast asleep.

Outside, the Kafirs were steeped in drunken slumber. One poor wretch lay with his head in a pool of blood oozing from a wound in his scalp, inflicted by the heavy boot of the canteen-keeper. Another lay doubled up under the stoop. A Kafir dog had found his helpless master and crouched by him, gently licking a wound in his face.

Over all, dog and Kafir, canteen and mine, the midnight stars shone peacefully.—Over the hut of the old Zulu, tossing restlessly in his drunken sleep, muttering and gnashing his teeth.—Over the dreaming Lohia and his companions, empty brandy bottle still in hand;—over all, the horror of that Saturday night's debauch.—As they would again shine, bright, serene and calm, over still greater depths of drunken crime to follow.

CHAPTER XV

SUNDAY DOINGS ON THE REEF

SUNDAY morning dawned bright and warm. A great rush of wind swept the horizon clear of every vestige of cloud, whirling in its course the red dust of the road into cone-like vapoury shapes, as far as the eye could see.

As an African night is full of the indescribable glory of darkness, so also is the day one blaze of blinding golden splendour. The long drought had swallowed up every trace of green on the veld. The very stones of the kopjes had lost their greyness, and were red as the sand-covered plain and road. Cattle, horses, men and their very abodes, were grimy with the red soil, until the whole land seemed washed in the colour of the gold for which they toiled and fought.

“Will the rain ever come?” was the burden of the hour, the cry upon every lip, the prayer of every heart.

About nine o'clock, a neat, comfortable Cape cart with well-groomed horses stood before one

of the cottages of the compound. It was the cosy little home of the newly-married mine-manager.

He stood on the white-painted lattice stoop, talking with the director. The weather was the subject of their talk, as they looked across the broad acres of the mine, over the gently swelling plateau to the distant horizon.

"I see no hopes of a let-up in this beastly drought," the director was saying.

"The rain may come at any minute," answered the manager, as he tugged at the glove he was putting on.

"If it does not, then we shall be obliged to shut up the works next week," groaned the director.

"Oh, it is coming," said the manager, cheerfully. "I feel it in the freshness of the air. There is rain somewhere near by. Ah! at last," he exclaimed with satisfaction as he conquered a refractory button on his glove.

The director smiled on seeing the almost dandified care with which the manager was arrayed. A few months back he scorned a glove, and delighted in the comfort of flannel blouses and knickers fastened only with a scarf of red silk, a battered felt hat, and shoes of the broadest, heaviest make.

A few weeks passed somewhere in beautiful Devonshire had transformed this Transvaal rake, born and bred in the Republic, but of good old Devonshire stock.

A pair of lovely eyes had completely vanquished him the first time he gazed into their blue depths; and their owner, a shy English maiden, was brave enough to cross the world to be the bride of a digger.

The manager actually blushed as he saw the look of amusement in the director's eyes; for there is nothing the Afrikander dreads more than to be the subject of the chaff he loves to inflict on another.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, dear," said a soft voice at that critical moment, as a dainty figure appeared in the low doorway. She extended one neatly-gloved hand in greeting to the director, while the other held a handsome little case containing hymn and prayer book. Simply and tastefully dressed as only an English girl understands how to do, she was as fair and sweet as one of her native daisies.

"Will you not come with us?" she said, giving the director a smile of appeal. "The music at St Mary's is very fine indeed, and Mr Darragh is such a good speaker."