

FROM
NABOTH'S VINEYARD

I

WE crossed the line to-day, the ninth of our voyage. A week ago the English winter was at its worst, to-day the tropic summer is at its hottest. No amount of clothing too heavy then, none light enough now. It has been quick work, but faster than change of sea or climate thought has been moving back into old days, when one came for the first time over this ocean track, more than six-and-forty years ago ; all the living things of that day gone below a bigger sea than even this one—the stars, the grey waves, and the “swish” of them still here.

It was another world. A little three-masted ship rolled along, lay to, tacked, close hauled on one wind, and ran free before another, took thirty-five days to get to this

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ocean spot, then drifted for twenty days a veritable log in the "doldrums." At times we lowered a boat for a row around the motionless vessel, which again drifted a few miles backward as some current from the Gulf of Guinea caught her keel.

Impossible to realize or recall a tithe of it now, and impossible, too, to face even in imagination a repetition of it, but nevertheless the recollection of it holding more of the mystery of the sea, and of the gloom and glory of the big ocean, than one hundred steamship voyages could give to-day.

No dolphins swimming round a becalmed ship now, no whale spouting on the sea-rim; no heaving to at the signal of some homeward bound whaler to Nantucket from a three years' cruise in the Antarctic, and sorely in need of ship's biscuit or limejuice; for that time was just two years before the little *Alabama* came stealing into this South Atlantic to give the whales and the walrus a respite.

It was the great circle then, now it is the short cut. And the great circle had some notable things in it when the little

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canvas-winged speck of life went on into that immense waste of waters, where the waves of the "forties" of south latitude roll around an almost landless globe. What a scene it was! The ship, topsails double-reefed, reeled up a long slope of water, seemed to pause a moment on the crest, and then went staggering down into a valley between two far-apart ridges stretching north and south under lofty leaden clouds. And the birds? No other part of the world holds them in such numbers—petrel, pigeon of Cape and Cape Horn, gull, frigate bird, and albatross—up into the lofty, fleeing clouds, down between the wide following waves, wheeling, poising, screaming, fighting, swooping, they hold their undisputed empire in that gloomy, limitless sea.

The glory was of another kind. Some traveller has said that the grandest sight he had ever seen was the midnight heaven slowly unrolling its stars above the quiet deck of a ship in the Southern tropics.

Life in a sailing ship may have been all that Dr. Johnson thought it, but nevertheless its prison had some wonderful sunrise

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and sunset walls, and its roof could be at times a long shifting scene of suns, worlds, and glittering nebulae. If death was always a couple of feet below the surface, eternity, in star and space, was in sight above. The essence of both gloom and glory lay in one word—detachment. That is impossible now; the word has no meaning—steam killed it. On this steamer of ours there is an amusement committee which gives the law ruling and regulating our time and thought. There are “King’s Treasuries” on board, but the daily sweepstakes, the lottery, and the fancy-dress ball close that bank; the bookmaker is more in request than the bookshelf. Cards, quoits, concerts, cricket, dances, these absorb four-fifths of the short intervals between meals, of which there are five distinct varieties, with a liberal interweavement of beef-teas, fruits, and squashes. Ladies in pretty costumes sit in easy-chairs on the big promenade deck, or pitch quoits into buckets by day, and dance by night on a brilliantly lighted floor. The young men, sleek and well groomed, look older than their years, but they still give you the

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impression that they had not grown up and would never do so ; and this not because of any particular affection borne to them by the gods.

They appear to take the game and amusement part of life very seriously, treating it in a business fashion, holding consultations and giving decisions in writing. Are they reversing the old idea and taking the business of life as a game? I remember that, in 1899, the new arrivals from England were wont to speak of war—which they thought was then impending—as “fun.” They had come to South Africa, they said, “to see some fun.”

Perhaps the two or three hundred passengers, who are now on board, will help us to a forecast—give us a sample of what that new South Africa, of which we have heard so much in the last seven years, will be like.

A bucket of the water through which we are sailing will give us all the constituent elements of this big ocean from Iceland to Tristan d'Acunha. Will the people who are throwing the rope quoits into buckets

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on the deck do a similar service, and enable us to measure the material out of which the new South Africa, from the Zambesi to the Cape, is to be built? That is a question of some moment. The foundations of the proposed edifice have been very costly. About three hundred millions, I believe, more or less—probably more than less—have gone; much life and blood have been also given to it. We have been told thousands of times that the city of Johannesburg and its industry is the cornerstone of the building, and is to be finally its coping-stone. It is, therefore, of interest to ask what is the quality of the emigration material on board.

A few nights ago there was a skurry of first-class feet towards the second-class deck. The band was playing a lively dance tune. What was the excitement about? In the centre of the crowd of both classes three little women were doing a "cake-walk." Despite the aid of extraordinarily high heels, they were much below the average height of ordinary women. Asking who they were, I was informed that they were three young

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persons proceeding to Johannesburg to teach the cake-walk. A day or two later, when passing the second-class saloon, I saw a delicate, sad-eyed little woman with a four-months-old baby in her arms, walking up and down singing a music-hall ditty to the accompaniment of a very depressed and sickly-looking young man—her husband. These also were proceeding from London to Johannesburg. Then I visited the third-class deck; there the people were stouter and better built, but not two in twenty were going to make solid, lasting homes in South Africa. In most cases the wives and families were left at home. It paid better to keep them there and come home for an occasional holiday, than to attempt home life in the Transvaal under the economic conditions existing there.

It is not easy to get at the inner minds of these men. They are cautious. Nevertheless, they will tell you that they prefer the Kaffir "boy" to the Chinese "coolie" as workers under them in the mines. A Cornish miner told a friend of mine on board that the Chinaman remembers a blow,

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the Kaffir quickly forgets one, and he gave instances of this difference between the African and the Asiatic, which any person who has had experience of the two races will easily understand. The black "boy" has as yet at least few, if any, of the secret methods of combination and association which run beneath the social framework of Eastern life.

That, however, is at present outside our subject. What we want to know is: What portion of our human cargo is going to South Africa with the fixed intention of settling there, of living and dying on the land? To fix a precise percentage would be difficult, but it is as certain as anything can be that the percentage is a very small one. Three-fourths of all these people are looking to the time when they shall have made a little money and can get back to England with it, saying "Good-bye" to Table Mountain for ever.

Then another question arises: Suppose it otherwise—suppose all, or nearly all, were going out to stay in the sub-continent, and to live and die in the "illimitable veld"—would

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it be possible to make a going Colony out of this particular shipload of interesting and varied, but somewhat incohesive, human building materials ?

Would these gentlemen and ladies, men and women, through their different grades and callings, from Colonial Ministers to cake-walkers, mine-managers and millionaires, globe-trotters and "Empire" variety entertainers—would they be likely to outbreed and outlast that other stolid race of men and women (of which there is not one single specimen on board)—descendants of that stout stock who sailed those seas two or three hundred years ago from the sand-flats of Friesland, and made homes in South Africa ?

These are questions of considerable importance, for on them depends the entire matter of Colony construction in the future. If this swarm from the parent hive is going South to seek some drops of the golden honey which is said to be in the Rand or Rhodesia, and then to fly back to England, it may be Empire building, but it is not Colony constructing on the old lines familiar

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to us in the past. What was the secret of that age?

Had the stress and storm of the sea—this “detachment”—these months of night and tempest, when the yardarms almost dipped into the sea as the masts swung from one quarter to the other—had that anything to say to it? These old ships had no bridges, no bright lights, their decks danced in another fashion. Why should this swarm stay out in that great lonely veld when they have this bright, cheap, pleasant bridge to come back over?

Our own people won't stay in their own trimmed and garlanded garden-velt at home; they flock into the towns, to the electric light, the music-hall, and the cake-walk. Here they have them all, and no extra charge even for the cake-walk.

They tell me I am to see great changes at Table Bay—the breakwater is so many feet longer, there is a new Town Hall, and there are several new buildings of Chicago type and storey; but they say, too, that the docks are half empty, and that in the big buildings there are fifteen hundred or two

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thousand offices unlet. This vessel of ours has got about a third of her full complement of cargo on board.

Hearing this and a good deal more about things as they are now in South Africa, one began thinking of some men—optimists and pessimists who in former days sailed into Table Bay—first Barthélemy Diaz, navigator, discoverer, and undoubted pessimist. In his little fifty-ton *Caravel*, he didn't like the big seas that roared around the rock which he named the Cape of Storms. It is said that he cut a large cross on one of the root rocks of the Lion, went back to Portugal, and returned a year or two later to find "a wandering grave" off his Cape of Storms. Next there came another great navigator—this time optimist to the core, Vasco di Gama—he renamed the mountain frontlet, calling it the Cape of Good Hope, and going forward he gave the East to Portugal. Years later the Dutchman came. He built and made homes inland, bringing many things with him, among them the Bible; and then for two hundred years many men came along seeking all manner of things good and

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bad. At last, at the end of this crowd, there came a man who amassed vast wealth in a big diamond pit in the interior. He built too; he was an optimist; he had faith in the land which had brought him these great riches, and with this golden key he would unlock the fever-barred gate of Africa. What could stand against gold? On the east side of the Table Mountain a gigantic detached spur faces the sunrise; it is called the Devil's Peak. At the base of this rock the last great optimist set up his sign—the Golden Calf—as four hundred years earlier pessimist Diaz had set his sign—the Cross—on the western buttress of the Lion's Head. Here then, as the nineteenth century closed, we had in South Africa three notable signs or tokens—Cross, Bible, and Golden Calf. Then came war—a desolating, murderous war—and in the ruck of this strife there arrived in Table Bay—a writer with a little of the poet and the seer in him. He looked up at the square mountain and saw in its flat top and snow-white cloud-cover something that reminded him of a coffin and a shroud. He was a pessimist. Both these men

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are gone, and both sleep in South Africa, which sleeps too, exhausted after its long desolating war. Who will waken her next? Will it be a man with a Cross and a Bible, or one with the Golden Calf and a sword?

“So much to do, so little done.” Did ever a passing soul repeat a more mournful message—all things remembered?

CAPE TOWN,
31st *January*, 1906.

II

A THICK morning mist hung over land and sea when we reached Table Bay at daybreak and groped our way slowly towards the Dock Pier.

On deck I found a fellow-passenger, the Premier of the Cape Government, who had already received a communication from the shore. He courteously gave it to me, remarking, "This will interest you." It was the result of the General Election in the United Kingdom cabled up to date, January 22nd, 1906. The little piece of paper handed to me by the courteous passenger held England's verdict.

Meanwhile, the mists had been rising. The Lion's Head first shook its shaggy frontlet free of cloud, then the old Table crumpled up its snow-white cover and rolled it on to the Devil's Peak, and even he, too, began to shovel it farther away into the bay that is called "False."

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Six and a half years had passed since I had last looked at these matchless mountains, and these intervening years had done a good deal for Cape Town. It would have been strange if they had not done so. Of the two or three hundred millions of British gold poured out in the cause of whatever the long-expected official history of the war will finally decide for us, an immense amount had fallen upon Cape Town. The vast incoming flood of the precious metal had met at this point the outgoing tide from Johannesburg, and a great and immediate prosperity had arisen. It was, of course, fictitious, and it has now wholly disappeared, carrying away in the final ebb not a little of the natural normal growth of peace that the place had known previous to the war.

Traces of the abnormal prosperity, however, were still to be seen. The small tin-roofed, single-storied, khaki-coloured houses had doubled in number, and had spread out along the base of Table Mountain east and west, making on one side havoc in that beautiful forest of southern oak tree and stone pine which the old settlers had

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planted by Rondebosch and Wynberg more than a century earlier. The great commercial house-blocks were to be seen in the principal streets; but those many-piled flats were empty—like the docks, out of which the trade that would support them must come. “These great buildings,” said an eminent banking authority to me, “if sold to-day, would not realize a fourth part of what they cost to build four years ago.”

And the lesser things are as the greater. “Before the war,” said the secretary of a charitable employment organization, “if a tailor applied to me for work I could get him employment as a bootmaker—now nobody will have him.” But there must be the silver lining even to the cloud of the tailor's trouble, and doubtless, under such depressed economic conditions as those described by my informant, the bootmakers were sticking closer to their lasts than in the pre-war days, and misfits in clothes and boots were fewer.

One high authority on trade took a more hopeful view of matters. There was a marked increase, he said, in the newspaper and

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magazine literature received by the mail from England, but it seemed to me that even the advantages of the London daily press and the monthly magazines might be paid for at too high a price; and with customs receipts and railway returns at their present depressed state, the bookstall business could not be relied on as a measure of economic improvement.

And as it was in the larger lines, so was it in smaller matters. The four-horse coach that used to run daily around the mountain, covering its five and twenty or thirty miles over the Victoria Road, through scenery not easily to be paralleled in the world, no longer exists. The traveller who would now see the back of Table Mountain, the Twelve Apostle Mountains, and the secluded bays, whose waters come cold from the Southern Ocean, must make the journey in the humble Cape cart.

And the worst of it is that the gas seems to be still escaping from the balloon. The bed-rock of depression has not yet been reached.

That it will be reached some day I have little doubt. The glory of South Africa's

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chief city cannot have permanently departed. No other site in the entire African continent compares with this one, either in scenery, climate, verdure, wood, water, salubrity, or association. South Africa has a good deal of the "weary land" about it; but the Cape Peninsula is always soft, beautiful, restful. For fifty years man has been doing much to spoil it, but it defies him. This giant rock does not throw his ever-changing shadows upon a weary land; they fall upon trees, flowers, odorous plants, oak groves and pine-woods, heathy hills and arum-lilied vales, and around the Peninsula the Indian and Atlantic Oceans stretch out clasping arms of blue water to freshen and cool the atmosphere when the sun in December is at zenith power, and man's shadow falls short upon the ground. Seventy inches of rain fall annually upon the forehead of the giant, and it is that rainfall which gives all this verdure to his knees, ankles, and feet, and enables a couple of hundred thousand human beings to dwell upon them.

He is a noble-looking giant as well as a beneficent one. It is worth coming all

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these miles to see him. They tell you he is at his best at sunrise and sunset, but I doubt whether his midnight aspect is not grander still. You may sometimes see him then crowned with the Southern Cross, or having a crescent moon over his forehead, and once from the gardens of the big hotel which is at his feet, I saw him under a lustrous moon, unrolling a gigantic and never-ending mantle of whitest snow-cloud from his head and shoulders, a robe too pure to touch the baser earth below, for it continually dissolved, or frayed itself into nothing among the boulders at the base.

I spent a couple of hours recently with one of South Africa's most gifted sons.* We went to the western side of the Lion's Head, where the waves that daunted Diaz are still at work, and my friend explained the foundations upon which the superstructure of the mountain rests. When the tide is low these granite foundations can be traced, and the wearing away of the waves followed through "intrusions" of felspar and sandstone. What has been done can be seen

* Dr. Kolbe, D.D.

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aloft on the sky-line. How it was done can be read below in the sea, for the immense mass of mountain was once underneath the ocean, perhaps many times below it. The waves are at their work below still, and so are the sun and the winds above ; but it is such slow work that the birds can beat it by berries, and the pine cones build more earth below than the table-top aloft loses from storm and sun.

I fear that this excellent hostel in which I stay has fallen upon less propitious times than were those of its early days. It was opened shortly before the war. The conflict brought crowds to it. Magnates abandoning the golden city found here a genial shelter. Although it had been named after a great naval hero, it became familiarly designated as "the Helots' Home." To this delightful abode there came a corresponding crowd of ladies from England. They were intent, it was said, upon sharing and alleviating some at least of the horrors of war. Under conflicting conditions of this nature, amusement becomes a duty. "The sounds of revelry by night" were unceasing ; there

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were visits to hospitals and convalescent homes by day. Cynical people set themselves in opposition to these mixed revels and reliefs; they wrote and spoke hard things about "a plague of women."

It was unfair to the fair. In describing the departed glories of the establishment to me, a denizen of the time said "there were seven widows at one time in the house." The number of the less severely bereaved ones known as "grass widows" is not recorded, but it is certain they were very numerous represented, and that they must have shared in some degree at least the sorrows of their real sisterhood can be surmised from an undisputed manifestation of grief, which was said to have occurred on more than one occasion when the hair of some mourner was observed to have become the colour of straw in a single night.

This, too, became subject of cavil. A sailor visiting one of these assemblies during the war, is reported to have remarked that "he didn't see anything of our great admiral, but there seemed to be a good deal of Lady Hamilton about." After all, these things

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are merely matters of convention. In Asia the bereaved one sprinkles ashes upon her head, and longs to take her place in the suttee. Why should a Western widow have anything cynical said about her if she elects to establish herself on a settee, with the halo of a golden sorrow glittering around her head?

I miss some old friends that used to be in the streets here. There was a double row of old stone-pines, bordering the market-place outside the gate of the castle. They were cut down a few years since by order of the municipal authorities, I am told. I ask why these nice old things were destroyed. It is true they were not progressive; they had been one hundred years there; they had become, after the manner of stone-pines, a bit ragged in the stems, but their dark umbrella-tops were still full of life. At all events, it has since been discovered by reference to the Colonial archives that they had been planted immediately after the British occupation, and that a grant of English money had been made for the purpose.

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Somebody might have put in a word for them under the plea of their being a "ragged - school," children, black, brown, and white, used to sit and play in their shade—and the wind often held an evening class of music in their "ragged" branches.

"The Devil has great power in South Africa," was the remark of a high ecclesiastic to me many years ago. But be that as it may, the Devil is very sick to-day. He has had his feast, and even he could not digest it. And the public are in the same plight too. The best are puzzled, the worst are less aggressive. Thousands who never thought, or thought but little, in the old times, think now—they think because they saw, and they see—they saw the land reduced to desolation and, death, and they see now that it hasn't paid—no, not even the undertakers.

Retrenchment, not expenditure, has now to be practised; places are abolished, wages lowered, staffs reduced. The pressure of what the leading progressive journal calls the "the unparelled depression" now existing is felt everywhere.

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The seamy side of what is called "Imperialism" is exposed to view, and those who, six years ago, were loudest in their demands for the immediate and unconditional destruction of the gold-laying goose, now speak of "the inefficient conduct of the war," of "the untoward events that followed its close," of "the appalling increase in the birth-rate of the coloured population," and of "the terrible decrease in that of the European population."

As for the reduction in wages, it seems to me that it would have caused less heart-burning had it been a levy *en masse*, running from top to bottom of the social and official ladder. Then some of the abolitions strike one as being unfortunate—one particularly so. It was that of the historiographer of South Africa, a writer whose careful research, just judgment, and absolute impartiality of treatment had made his name well known in the literary world.

What a world of contradiction is this South Africa! At the same moment that this distinguished historian is removed from his official position—not a highly paid one,

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either—we have before us the prolonged delays that have arisen in the publication of the official “History of the War in South Africa,” the cost of the preparation of which is said to amount, even in its incomplete state, to an immense sum of money. Surely this was a subject upon which the services of this trained and practised writer might have been utilized with advantage, if it be not inevitable in this case that the celebrated definition of the master-maker of history is to be realized once again.

CAPETOWN,
14th February, 1906.

III

G OING from Cape Town to Johannesburg, the traveller will not have traversed the first hundred of the round thousand miles between the two cities before he realizes the truth of the old Dutch saying, "If you are wise, settle within sight of Table Mountain." Thirty or forty miles inland you are still in the region of the dark stone-pine, the bright southern oak, the green vineyard, thick with black-grape bunches; peach and nectarine orchards spread around; old gabled farmhouses with snow-white walls and dark-brown thatched roofs dot the landscape, while beyond these bits of old Holland set in the sunshine splendour of Southern France one sees, rising in wonderful and fantastic shapes, the Drackenstein Mountains, with peaks and precipices so sharp and jagged that for once Nature seems to have made a mistake, building the buttress rocks so abrupt and pitching peaks

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so straight that they must fall before the storms of winter.

Placed in the fairest spot of this fair district is the Paarl (the Pearl) of the early settlers, an old Dutch and Huguenot gem set in a frame of opal-coloured mountains, and kept ever bright and fresh by the waters of the Berg River, flowing from the Drackenstein to the sea.

But the lesson of all South Africa is soon taught on this journey; no stage shifts its scenes so rapidly. Table Mountain is below the horizon, we are climbing higher every mile, the houses almost disappear, treeless spaces open out on either side, until at a distance of one hundred miles, as the crow flies, from Cape Town we are three thousand feet above sea-level, and all the waste of the Karroo lies around us, and then for three hundred miles more it is sullen, blazing desert. The sun strikes fiercely upon a treeless world of cindery rock and baked clay and spiky aloe, while hot breaths of air are puffed at intervals from the mouths of ironstone glens.

Some astronomical guesser recently published an illustrated article showing how the

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moon was originally formed. It was first, he said, a sort of superfluous tag to the earth, to which it was tied by a string-like isthmus, which at last became so attenuated from twizzling that the link broke and the moon sailed away into space. The Karroo certainly supports this idea. It looks as though it must have been the veritable umbilical cord through which the infant tag derived a precarious sustenance before she was cast adrift, without food or water, to wander on her own account ; and this conception of the primal function of the Karroo grows upon us, when the moon, coming up over the eastern rim of this desert, looks again upon the old dry "mummy" of its earlier self, for then the dead earth wakes into strange forms of beauty, the heat and dust are gone, the iron rocks glisten into gold, the low bushes become spikes of silver, and the rugged koppies send cool breathings and cast long shadows over the weary face of Mother Karroo.

Some thirty hours after leaving Cape Town the train crosses the Orange River and enters the territory which is now called

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the Orange Colony. The scene changes gradually, there is more green in the landscape. A thunderstorm broke as we passed the long bridge at Norval's Pont, the wide river-bed was full, and the current, almost the colour of the Nile in flood, ran strong between banks of rock and thorn-bush; but though passing thunderstorms had filled the beds of rivulets and flung rainbows across the table-topped hills, there is a deep sense of loneliness over the land; many of the far-apart farmhouses are still ruins, some have been partly rebuilt; the block-houses and the wire entanglements are dismantled; the small villages, which appear at long intervals, stand out bare upon the veldt; few sheep, and still fewer cattle, are visible.

Now and again a large vulture bird, or a pair of them, flap away from the train to a neighbouring koppie.

The engine is panting up that long slope of one thousand feet which leads inland for seventy miles from the Orange River. The guard comes along the corridor carriages; he is a foreigner, and likes to tell of his experience in the past. He tells of tens of

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thousands of sheep and lambs driven in from the surrounding country against the railway lines, and left to die along the fences on either side. "It was terrible to see them dropping dead in thousands," he says, "not a blade of grass to eat or drop of water to drink."

After an hour's run we got to Springfontein, the usual little bare village on the green and red veldt. The small town has a big cemetery. The sun is now in the West, and in its level light the white gravestones and wooden crosses stand out very clear upon a green slope east of the station. The cemetery looks so big for the village that we ask the guard about it. "Yes, there was a concentration camp of women and children here," he says, "close by the station." We consult a book. No wonder the graves are numerous. There were between two and three thousand women and children gathered in here from east and west; like the sheep, except that they had food and water, they died plentifully all the same.

In the month of October, 1901, the death-rate among the children, the book says, was

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480 per thousand per annum. But that was nothing. A hundred miles further north, at a place called Brandfort, the children died in this same month of October at the rate of 1951 per thousand per annum, which in plain unstatistical English means that the whole of the child-population would have been exterminated in six months if that rate of mortality continued. This camp at Springfontein was only a sort of "East End" opening on the long path of the Boer Via Dolorosa.

In Brandfort, further north, more than one thousand women and children perished in a few months, but it will be black night when the train reaches there, and we shall not have even an old moon to show us the thousand and one white stones which mark that "Queen's Gate" on the Boer woman's road to heaven. "Stagger humanity" indeed! What did old Kruger know about such a thing? He was only a poor lion-hunter, who could cut off half his own hand, when a gunshot had shattered it. We are of sterner stuff.

We continue north ; some stations appear

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to be nothing but a platform and a name-board. They would seem to have been making new stopping-places recently, or changing the names of old ones. We pass a big board with "Highbury" painted large upon it. The name sets us thinking. Why "Highbury" here? What is the link? Are "the sands in the hour-glass running low"? Is the Orange Colony "a squeezed sponge"? Is there to be "another way of loosening the knot"? It can't have anything to do with "three acres and a cow," because that useful animal may be said to have, since the war, thirty thousand acres allotted in these parts to its pasturage. Then another thought comes: perhaps this big board was set up as a sort of buoy or landmark in the veldt, to mark the precise spot where the thirty millions disappeared—the "Hidden Treasure" of that great land of promise, Johannesburg. We give up guessing as the sun goes down, and the gloaming begins to darken the lower landscape, and what an after-glow it is! pink and purple, rose and gold, sapphire and opal, all mixed with bits of broken rainbows, shafts, and blades

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of light. Thunder-clouds, lightning flashes, and rain sweeps ; the big vulture birds here and there still flapping over a darkening land.

Another hour and we are at Bloemfontein. The station is garish with electric light. We look out in the night at the lights and the people ; beyond the town the outline of a hill can be traced against what is left of an afterglow. It is enough. A very slight tinkle of the brain-bell sent through the eye or the ear is sufficient to ring up a whole vanished world of recollection. Thirty years ago I went up that little eminence at the back of the then village of Bloemfontein, in company with the then President of the then Orange Free State—graduate of Cambridge, member of the English Bar, later on Sir John Brand, Knight Commander of some British Order.

Twenty-four years later I was here again, President Brand was in his grave, the village had become a town, the farm-houses had doubled in numbers, the wild animals were gone. The Free State had grown into a very prosperous little community—too prosperous perhaps. Now I was back here

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again. The people on the platform were speaking Dutch and English, but it didn't matter. I was straining my eyes into the darkness to see what my brain was seeing and hearing. It was the old President who was speaking. "I had gone from Bloemfontein to London," he had said (that time when we stood together on the koppie), "to see about some matters in which I had thought we had not been treated fairly by the British Government. I had an interview with the Secretary of State, in which I endeavoured to put the subject before him as fully as I could. He listened with the greatest attention. When I had ceased speaking he rose from his chair, unfolded a pocket-map of South Africa, and begged that I would point out to him on it where the Orange Free State was." Such a thing could not occur now, of course; it was only old memory; we know more about our colonies and their neighbours. The geographical distribution of Empire is better understood; moreover the Board School system had been established since that day, and wall maps are now numerous.

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The train moved north again, and the lights soon vanished, but the ghosts did not go out with them; later ones came running through the brain ten thousand times faster than the train was moving through the night. It was a memory of Bloemfontein again.

I had gone there a second time in 1899. It was a period of great national elation; a new secret had been found; the march of the men of Empire was about to begin. Everything was henceforward to be sold at the cannon's mouth. You had only to fire off so many thousand tons of lyddite, and shoot so many million rounds of shell and bullets into rocks and koppies, and then the new era would open, all our enemies would run away, we would be rich at home, powerful abroad, and happy everywhere. Anybody who had the misfortune to doubt this simple programme of national progress was an imbecile, or worse.

Six months from the date of that second sight of Bloemfontein I was in London; events had moved rapidly. I called upon a high official. I endeavoured to explain to him the position in South Africa as it had struck

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me in a rapid survey of the sub-continent. I spoke of a hardy race of men, of determined women, of an immense land, of many things which I had been writing with persistent reiteration to people in England during the six preceding months. He did not listen to the finish. "You may say what you like," he broke in, "and very possibly your views may be those which the future will hold about this war, if it is to be war; but as to the cost and the difficulties, and the opposition upon which you are laying such stress, you may take it from me, as a matter of absolute certainty, that the whole affair won't cost ten millions, and that the Union Jack will be flying over—over—over—What do you call that town beginning with a B?—before Christmas." It was then mid-September.

Forty-three hours out from Cape Town the train crossed the Vaal river and began to ascend the long incline which leads from Vereeniging to Johannesburg. Rain had fallen heavily in the night, day broke over the red saturated soil as we passed the river. After an hour the clouds began to lift, and

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under them one could see the ridge of the Witwatersrand and the long line of tall black chimneys pouring volumes of blacker smoke into the rain clouds.

It was summer in South Africa, but the city of Birmingham could not have loomed darker in mid-November than this hill of the White Waters under combined thunder-cloud and coal-smoke.

A traveller came into these parts many years ago, and he wrote a book about the country, its present, and its possible future. He spoke of the deer on the hill-top, the sun setting through smoke of a far-off grass fire, the great stretches of plain where no sound broke the stillness but the wind in the long grass, and the dripping of water down a stony donga ; then he looked forward into the future. A native had shown him that day a dark streak or seam of coal laid bare in one of the dongas, and his mind going ahead saw visions of "great factories and tall chimneys, pouring forth dark streams of smoke, blurring sunlight and blotting out sky," and many other things which would happen when men followed that black streak

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into the ground. I have been told that that man lost money afterwards in South Africa. It was said that he was behind his time, and that he missed his opportunity, which I can readily believe. There are so many opportunities in South Africa that a man might easily get confused there, and miss them all. A man may sometimes equal Boyle Roches' bird, for he can be before his time, and behind his time, and the people who stand in the middle will abuse him equally in both positions. At best it is only a case of legs, for if the legs be weak their owner will lag behind, and if they be long he will see over the heads of the other people. But he had need to be cautious about telling those who may be near him what he sees, or thinks he sees. Let him content himself with telling them what they see. That information will always be pleasant to them and harmless to him. Meanwhile we are at Johannesburg.

JOHANNESBURG,
28th February, 1906.

IV

“**T**HERE is always something strange out of Africa,” we are told. But it is only in our time that the full “strangeness of Africa” is apparent. And it is in the southern portion of the Continent that the tree of strangeness attains its fullest growth. The sun and his shadows go in wrong directions. He is away in the north; they seek the south. The moon is stranger still. She lights her evening lamp at the off side of her face to that which she first illumines for the benefit of Europeans. The winds are all strange, too. The breath from the north is hot—that of the south cold. The east blesses and the west blights. Rain—when it falls at all—falls mostly in summer. Many of the rivers never reach the sea, and the sea only gets into the rivers across shifting sand-bars, which makes them hopeless to commerce.

Is it surprising, then, that under these

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strange skies, and on this stranger stage, the players should sometimes play strange parts? Is it surprising that names should lose their meanings, and persons change their natures, or that most undeniable and undiluted statements of fact and truth, when put in at one end of the ocean cable, should sometimes come out at the other end, like the moon, with the light all on one cheek?

Seventy or eighty years ago it was our custom to send as Governor to South Africa some old soldier of the wars. Lowry Cole, George Napier, Harry Smith, George Grey, etc. What did these veterans do when they found themselves ruling this strange land? They turned their swords into pick-axes and spades. The victor of Albuera made roads across the mountains. He of Aliwal made friends with the Dutch Boers. (They built dorps and named them after him and after his wife.) Even in our own day you will find the last of our soldier heroes—Charles Gordon—writing a year before his death: "I declare I like the Boers."

Then we tried a different plan. We

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stopped the tap of the drum and turned on that of the shop-keeper. We sent out our most peace-loving people. Statesmen of Scinde, righteous-minded men, academic men, men versed in the knowledge of the Egyptian, men of the Exchange, the Gazette, and the commerce of the Thames. What did they do? They went to war at once. They flung peace to the winds. They were consumed by a sort of Napoleonic delirium. They scattered tens of millions of money over the veldt. They burnt everything and belaboured every one. They were all for performing a sort of Cæsarian operation upon the womb of the future South Africa. Do not imagine I am criticizing them on their actions. No. It was not they who did all these curious things. It was the moon, working out in her own slim way, the "strangeness" of Africa.

I first came to South Africa more than thirty years ago on the staff of the only soldier who, in the course of nearly half a century of service, impressed me as having in him those qualities of mind and method

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of which Clarendon has left us a word-picture. "He was of an industry and vigilance not to be tired out or wearied by the most laborious—of parts not to be imposed on by the most subtle—and of a personal courage equal to his best parts." We travelled extensively through the land. It was horse, waggon, or mule-cart in that day. The "strangeness" of Africa was one long delight to us. A year before we had been toiling in the most pestilential region of tropical Africa. Some of us had all but left our bones in that dreary equatorial forest. What a change it was to the lofty plateaux with the blue Drakensberg, the snow-covered Malutis, and the endless uplands of the interior!

One evening we reached a village in the northern part of a Colony. Everybody said of this village that it had a vast future before it, and there was certainly room for the largest future that the mind could conceive. The town itself—I have wrongly called it a village—consisted of about a dozen houses, mostly built of tin, but an enormous area of hill, vale, and plain spread

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around it on every side. There was the usual address of loyalty and devotion to the Throne presented by the mayor and corporation, and at the end of the address, or in the discussion that followed it, there was a request that the Governor and High Commissioner might be pleased to sanction an allotment from the revenue of the Colony of some thousands sterling for the purpose of carrying out a complete system of municipal drainage. One among the ten or twenty houses composing the town stood on a broad eminence ; the remaining structures occupied detached points in a rather swampy valley. When the time came for the High Commissioner's reply, I wondered what he would say. A town with a great future before it could not be lightly gainsaid. While the mayor and leading citizens were speaking, I saw the Governor's eye taking stock of the surrounding situation. "Gentlemen," he said, after thanking the municipality, "I entirely sympathize with you in your natural desire to have your promising town placed in a position in regard to its drainage and sanitary conditions which will

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enable it to fulfil the requirements of its undoubted future, but the scheme you propose would be a costly one, and the finances of the Colony are not for the moment too redundant. Would it not be less expensive if we were to move the town up to the top of that hill where the single house now stands? It would then practically drain itself." Everybody was satisfied.

The secret of success in South African administration has been not to take the burthen of Government too seriously. Unfortunately for England, and still more for South Africa, we have been in the habit, for the last ten or fifteen years, of regarding the ordinary occurrences inevitable to life in the sub-continent with a terrible seriousness, but still more have we erred in treating lightly things that all men have regarded as serious since the beginning of recorded history. On the whole, it may be said that if we accept the sun as he is and not as he ought to be, and allow the moon to light her face as she pleases, and live as much as possible out of doors, and keep as far as we can from a telegraph station (particularly

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when Parliament is sitting), then the white man's burthen of Government in South Africa could be carried on with a fair measure of success, even despite the unseemly attitudes of the heavenly bodies. I have heard knowledgeable persons aver that if Mr. Dooley and his able lieutenants, Hennesey and Hogan, could be induced to take up their residence on the Rand for a few months, the knowledge that England would possess of the state of affairs in Johannesburg would be much more accurate and extensive than it is now. I will not enter into that question, but I think it safe to say that if we had continued the old methods of Government of the Coles, the Greys and the Smiths, we would have been quite as near Cairo at the Cape as we are at present, and in addition have kept a couple of hundred millions of money in our own pockets.

But among the strange things in or out of Africa, Johannesburg is unquestionably the strangest. Twenty years ago a man found a chunk of rock which had gold in it where the city now stands. Everybody knew that South Africa was full of gold for

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more than twenty years before that find, but nobody had struck the metal in quantities such as this discovery was destined to produce. At first the experts would have none of it. "It was not the sort of rock that ought to bear gold," they said. But they came, tapped, and debated. There could be no doubt about the gold, no matter how the rock could be called or classed. A Boer was equal to the occasion. He named the rock in which the metal was mixed "Banket." The word solved the difficulty if it did not explain the formation. "Banket" is a sweet condiment which has small luscious substances scattered through it. The conglomerate rock represented the sugar-plums of the Boer lollipop. There were three "reefs" of this substance running at irregular intervals through larger encasements of rock in which there were no gold pebbles or sugar specks. The three rich reefs thus sandwiched between useless encompassing rocks were not only of varying thickness, but also of varying richness—the thinnest sandwich being by far the best in quality—as though Nature when forming

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this curious cake compound put the best of her goods into the smallest parcel. One of the reef condiments is some feet in thickness—another, the rich one, is only a few inches through. The three reefs dip from the surface into the bowels of the earth, southwards, at a gradual angle of about 45° , and the descent of man in pursuit of these gold-bearing layers has to be followed into the mine at that angle. Thus, when the miner has bored and blasted his way to a depth of, say, three thousand feet, he is nearly one thousand yards horizontally to the south of the surface-hole where he started.

Now this underground bore work has to be done, with few exceptions, by man, and man does it in this way:—He squats in a low gallery, or “stope,” in the rock, and drives a drill into its flinty face. With one hand he holds the drill against the rock. With the other he hammers, hammers, hammers, all day long. When the drill has been driven sufficiently deep into the blanket rock, the holes are filled with dynamite, and the fuzes fired at midnight, for the mine is then empty. At daybreak

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the fumes and gases are gone—fresh air is driven down the shafts—the men enter the mine, load the débris into little iron trucks, wheel them to the lifting-places, where the contents are drawn to the surface, and again, and still again, the hammers go on against the ever-deepening face of the blanket rock.

Let us go aloft with our loads of shattered stone. They are quickly put through the gigantic mills, which are howling and stamping for them overhead. We need not follow them much farther. Crushed to minutest powder, drenched with water, sifted over sheets of copper and mercury the white powder gives up at once fifty per cent. of its precious deposit. Another forty-seven per cent. is extracted in three subsequent processes, where the "slime," as it is called, is treated with cyanide, which precipitates the remaining gold to the bottom of enormous tanks. Then follow various treatments by means of zinc shavings, until at last the final stage of the smelting furnace is reached, and the pure gold emerges into brick shape for the banks.

All these processes represent three great

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forces. Flesh and blood underground; water and fire working through machinery above. It takes about seven days from the primal stage in the banket below until the brick of gold is ready to be carted to the bank above. Such is the process by which this strange triple reef of the Witwatersrand is made to give up the gold it has hoarded since the water, and the fires, and the rocks were all one.

But it is with the flesh and blood part of the work that we have to deal—the human labour which is necessary to hammer and drive below in order to feed the enormous array of stamps, cyanide tanks, and furnaces above. We are here face to face with a question which has wrecked Cabinets, smashed reputations, and convulsed the Empire in all the relations of its political life.

Until about a year and a half ago this underground 'rock-boring' business was carried on along the Witwatersrand by the black men of South Africa. In 1899, immediately before the war, when the "industry," as it is called, was at its highest pitch of development, some 90,000 black men