



From Naboth's Vineyard

can't get it to market—peaches, nectarines, apricots, all rotting under the trees; milk, butter, in the same plenty, but no market. Is only sixty-seven miles from Johannesburg, where things are at famine prices. Contradictions from top to bottom. The morning I reached Johannesburg three inches of rain fell in four hours; no rain had fallen for three months, the whole country hard as a road; now the whole roads soft as rivers. Twenty-four hours later dust blowing again.

Natal was a pleasant place of residence in the old days before the feverish finance of the mines had upset its mental equilibrium. Home-life now impossible to a young couple; cheaper to send wife and child to England, and to live one's self at the club, or board in an hotel.

Met a man again, who had been transport conductor in the old Zulu war time. The night before Isandulwana "the oxen," he says, "wouldn't eat, kept lowing and pawing all night—knew the Zulu Impis were all round." No one else knew it. "You did the blundering, we did the plundering," another man said of that war. South Africa has a keen wit.

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From the high tableland of N'Gutu the traveller looks far over Zululand. Immediately below, to the east, lies Nondweni, the supposed site of gold and copper deposits. Rich mines were worked there a few years ago—money made and lost—then the reef or the lode was suddenly missed. We descend a long hill and reach the field—ruined shafts, dismantled shanties, holes and rubbish-heaps on every side. It was said that the place is still rich, and that the lodes and reefs were lost only to be found again later on, when Johannesburg thinks that the precise moment has arrived. From Nondweni to the place of our destination there is no track. Adam steers across the undulating veld, as his great ancestor and namesake might have steered when he left Eden.

Numerous dongas cross our course ; but while we descend and climb in and out of them, Adam takes them with his four-in-hand in that quiet, dextrous driving which only South Africa knows. At last, from the crest of a ground-wave, we look into a large, bare, and shallow valley, in the centre of which appears a solitary group

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of dark trees. This speck of tree-life in the bare brown wilderness marks the spot where the Prince Imperial of France was slain by a small band of Zulus seven-and-twenty years ago. That spot has been the object of this journey. Three or four dongas and we are there. The clump of trees fills the sharp angle of ground which two dongas, meeting at this point, make. These dongas are some eight feet in depth, and thirty feet from one bank to the other; both are quite dry. A wall of dry stones encloses the trees, which have now grown to a height of about twenty feet.

To the west and south the view is bounded by two large and long dark hills, a mile or two distant from where we stand; cattle are grazing on the slopes; patches of mealies are dotted about. Yellow grass covers the ground up to the foot of the bare hills; the rounded beehive reed huts of a few Kaffir kraals are visible where the grass ends and the hills begin. A few natives are watching us from near the kraals. All the dongas and watercourses are dry; but further off, to

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the north, a large river-channel, nearly dry, is visible, winding towards the north-east, carrying the drainage of the valley to the White Umfolossi River.

We get over the low wall and enter the enclosure. It is of oval shape, twenty yards in length by ten across. In the centre, at the head of an oblong space filled with loose stones, stands a stone cross. The shadows of the trees make the interior of the enclosure dark in comparison with the ground without. The trees are oleanders, willows, jessamine, and a drooping kind of cypress, which chiefly gives the shade, and in the pendant branches of which many weaver birds have built their little grass, woven, hooded nests, with the opening like that of the wren ; but on the side away from the branch to which it is firmly attached, and from the extreme end of which it swings. Almost every branch of these cypress trees has a swinging nest attached to it.

An inscription cut across the arms of the cross states that the body of the Prince Imperial was found at this spot, on the 2nd of June, 1879. He was killed here on the

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afternoon of the 1st of June. He was twenty-three years of age.

Two other graves marked by small wooden crosses are at the end of the enclosure on the west side.

We go out into the open again. A few Zulus have come down from the kraals on the hill-sides, and they are gathered round our cart; the horses are grazing along the sides of the donga. One of the Zulus, a man apparently about forty, begins to speak. He was a boy at the time that the young chief was killed here. He was minding cattle out from the kraal there to the west. He saw the party of horsemen come over the "nek" between the two hills, and stop and off-saddle at this spot where we are now standing; other Zulus saw them too. From the kraal on the hill-side to the south, a party of young men crept down through the tall grass till they got into the bed of the river—the Yootchu; then they crept up that donga to a place where there was a patch of mealies, then through the mealies, and then they rushed in a body across the last bit of open ground—fifty yards—to

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the donga at this spot. By this time the Englishmen had saddled up, and were getting on their horses. The Zulus were about sixteen in number, and they had two or three guns among them. As they rushed in, the men who were already in their saddles galloped away in the direction from which they had come; but there was one who had not yet mounted. The men who had guns fired at the men galloping away; one trooper fell from his horse a little way off, another dropped when he had got half way up to the neck; but the young man stopped here fighting.

“And where did the Zulu scout who was with the English party fall?” I asked through a companion, who spoke and understood Zulu, for all the wretched particulars of that fatal day had been painfully familiar to me twenty-seven years earlier, gathered from the lips of men who were in the camp at Kopje Allien at the time, nine miles to the west; and from some who had even belonged to the irregular corps which had given an escort for the reconnoitring officers on that day. The Zulu pointed to a mealie-patch

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five or six hundred yards distant. "The Zulu who was with the English fell there," he said. "Some of our men followed, and killed him with assegais." The man spoke his story straight and without any hesitation, and, comparing it since with the notes made at that time, his relation corresponded in all main particulars with the old narratives. I give these old notes as they were then written.

"June 10th, 1879. Funeral of Prince Imperial winding down the Berea hill at sunset into Durban. The ocean, the Bluff, the ships, the town—in mourning; bands playing the "Dead March;" the old servant (follows the bier); the groom tells me the particulars (as we walk). He saw the body: the sword-hand was clenched; the wounds, very numerous, were all in front. There was a hill near (the scene of the fight), a kraal, a mealie field, a donga—long grass and a spot of bare ground. — rides away (the rest save one follow), the grey horse (the prince's) tries to follow (the others); the prince catches holster as he mounts, the leather breaks (tears like

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paper), and the grey horse gallops with the rest."

"August 11th, 1879. —, of Bettington's Horse, tells me that the prince said to him, as they were leaving camp, 'Are you not coming?' 'No, sir.' 'Won't — be in a fright?'

"The body of the dead Zulu was found more than a mile away, assegaid. He had followed the flying escort that distance across two ridges in open country. Abel, a Dane's, body was found one hundred yards from place of fire; Rogers, the other man killed, two hundred yards away.

"When — meets the four surviving troopers in camp, they tell him that the prince and two troopers and one Zulu are gone.

"'Are you not ashamed to be here?' he asks.

"'Well, sir, the captain legged it, and we followed,' they answer.

"M. and S. both testify to the desperate resistance made by the prince. The boots were full of blood, showing how long a time he had fought standing. The ground where

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he lay was all trampled over. The body was covered with wounds, five of which were mortal."

We go into the enclosure again and examine it closely. There is not a defacement visible anywhere; not a stone in the wall has been upset, not a name cut on a tree or scratched upon the headstone. The Zulus have scrupulously respected this lone monument set in their wilderness. We begin to talk to the Zulu again. He has succeeded the old man who was left in charge of the enclosure when the cross was erected here by Queen Victoria. He is in charge now. He has on an old military great-coat, and he carries in his hand the usual three or four knobkerries. He holds himself erect, looks you full in the face, speaks without the slightest hesitation, and uses action natural and graceful as he speaks.

In the same old note-book in which I had jotted down the rough notes above given, I see other hastily entered memoranda of conversations or occurrences which may fittingly find a place here, for they are not without a touch of that old-world chivalry in war,

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from which we seem to be getting farther away.

“After Ulundi, Cetewayo said to his people, ‘You have thrown your last assegai for me; go, now, and do the best for yourselves.’ He sent word to his chief Somapo, ‘Give up to the white man all the cattle in your possession which belong to me—keep not back a single one. Let the white man know that Cetewayo was once a king.’ — and —, who were present at the capture of Cetewayo, in the N’Gome forest, say that the king came forth with dignity and majesty. —, who was also there, describes his bearing as ‘noble,’ ‘full of dignity,’ ‘a magnificent-looking man.’ The tears rolled down his cheeks when he beheld Ulundi in ashes. He waved the spectators aside, those who had crowded too close upon him. At times it would seem as though his feelings would overcome him, and then he would bend down his head. Then by a great effort he would raise it again, and look around with calm and quiet dignity.”

And now for a glimpse at the other side.

D. L. tells me that he never saw a more

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disgusting sight than at Ulundi after the fighting was over. The volunteers (irregulars) killed all the men who surrendered. A Zulu would spring from the grass and throw his hands up in token of surrender. Ten or a dozen shots would be fired at him. At last he would drop; then, if the man was wounded, they would fire at him as he lay. —, the correspondent of the London — deliberately got off his pony and battered in the skull of a wounded Zulu with his carbine clubbed. This is the scoundrel who was with —'s column. G. saw this deed, as did L., and 'both of us abused the rascal for it.' At least one hundred and fifty Zulus were killed in this manner by the irregulars, after the cavalry had made a circuit and cut off the Zulus." "L. says the English and colonial cut-throats were worse than the Basuto allies."

Colonial wars are murder at the front and robbery at the base.

And here is a little comment which the experience of another generation has not done much to contradict or change. "A curse seems to be over this land and over

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the rest of South Africa, seeming to forbid peace and civilization in it. Even the Church of England clergymen are quarrelling among themselves." I met a clergyman lately who said that if Bishop — died he would refuse to bury him !

We drove back to Nondweni and N'Gutu. The store at the first-named place is kept by a Frenchman, and in a Basuto hut on the site of an old gold-mine we found three mining engineers—a Swede, a Norwegian, and an Englishman—all living in perfect amity and friendship with the surrounding natives, not a dread about a Zulu rising. It is at Maritzburg, Durban, or at Dundee that you find scares existing. Here everything is peaceful. "But surely you won't go into Zululand at this crisis!" said one of the ministers to me six days ago in Maritzburg.

We are fifty miles into the country now, and there is profound peace everywhere. Strange land of paradox and contradictions. A week ago I was at the estate near Richmond, to which some of the twelve Zulus who were shot by sentence of Court Martial three days earlier, had come. The

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owner of that estate was entirely satisfied with the conduct of his natives. "A month ago," he said to me, "when the affray between the police and a party of natives occurred, and the panic and excitement was at its height, many of the farmers left their homes and sought refuge in the towns. Well, all the work upon their farms went on just as usual in their absence. Not a stick was stolen. The cows were milked, and the milk sent in to the creamery, as had been done when the masters and their families were present. Even the Madrassee servants were not alarmed, although the wildest rumours of murders and massacres were flying around. On one occasion two Madrassee servants, living by themselves in an out-of-the-way place, asked that they might be allowed to take a hay-fork with them for protection at night! That was the extent of their defensive precautions." "Why was Martial Law rushed into?" I asked a high official. He gave one or two reasons in reply. "But," I said, "the Courts were sitting—the King's writ ran, special commissions were possible. There

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was no Martial Law during the old Zulu War. Even Judge Jeffrey's Bloody Assize was a Civil Court." Then the real answer came. "It would have been difficult to have brought home the killing of the police officers to any particular man."

In all the sad history of South Africa few things are sadder than this Zulu question. Where the Zulu came no lock or key were necessary. No man who knew the Zulu—not even the white colonist, whose rage was largely the result of his being unable to get servile labour from him—could say that he had not found the Zulu honest, truthful, faithful; that the white wife and child had not been entirely safe from insult or harm at the hands of this black man, or that money and property were not immeasurably more secure in Zulu charge than in that of Europeans or Asiatics.

Here we had a people whose moral goodness—scrupulous regard for honest dealing—and natural habits of restraint and discipline fitted them for civilized teaching and training in every branch of citizen and workman's handicraft.

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What a material was this to have worked upon! What natural qualities upon which to engraft our higher knowledge! Courage, truthfulness, brain power, honesty, and physical strength. What future hope for all black Africa lay in this tribe, placed at our doors, right in the path along which civilization might have been carried into the interior! And all cast to the winds, trampled out, and destroyed, for the benefit, or at the bidding, of a mere handful of white settlers, consumed with an endless craving for the possession of the land and property of others.

Of all the unnatural lusts and cravings which lie at the root of human misery, the thing we call "land hunger" is the worst. No other lust eats so deep into human welfare; for the other inordinate cravings of man there would seem to be some compensating advantages, but this fiend of land possession blights all human nature. It strangles the unborn; steals the air of heaven from the able-bodied. It robs God and man alike, for it waylays the best gifts of the Creator to His creatures. It fills the

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towns with moral and physical decrepitude ; saps the strength of nations. All the other robberies of man upon man are but petty larcenies in comparison. And the wars undertaken at the behests of this hunger are all so barren and worthless in the end !

Descending the ridge into Nondweni, we crossed the line of Lord Chelmsford's advance upon Ulundi in 1879. The gentleman who had come with me from N'Gutu pointed to the sites of some of the ruined forts of that war ; but the names which they had originally borne had disappeared. Then they bore the name of some prominent general of the war. Now they were simply Forts Funk. There was Fort Funk Nos. 1, 2, and 3. This was what an expenditure of seven or eight millions had led to ! Better even the names which an old soldier-servant of that day had given to one of these forts, as told me at the time by the man's master, a transport officer.

"Who is that box for, Dempsey?" asked the officer.

"It's for one of them forts up country, sir."

"Which fort, Dempsey?"

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"Fort Num, sir."

"There's no such place, Dempsey."

"Begor, it's on the box, sir ; Fort Num."

So it was ; but the words "and Mason" were also there.

Is South Africa gradually drying up? That is a question of much moment. There were springs dry and wells without water this year that had never been dry in the memory of man before. The Karroo seems to be slowly moving northwards over the Orange River. The old Kaffirs will tell you that the land is drying up. They point to the sites of former kraals on high ground, where no native would or could build his dwelling now ; it is too dry. Men have many explanations for this physical change—of old, the vast herds of game trampled down the long grass upon the surface, and the matted vegetation preserved the moisture and prevented denudation of the soil, which under the existing conditions is washed away in innumerable dongas by deluges following upon prolonged droughts. The old forests of ebony and yellow wood have been destroyed—the growth of many

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centuries—and their place has been taken by the quick-growing eucalyptus, the roots of which drain and dry up the land.

Back over the long road again by N'Gutu to the Buffalo River, and over Talanna Hill into Dundee as the sun is going down, then to Glencoe for the night to catch the up-country train to-morrow at dawn.

A crowded conveyance it proved, for the time was Easter, and football teams and holiday-seekers were moving. As the train wound its slow way round the base of Majuba Hill, climbing to the higher levels of the Transvaal plateaux, above Lang's Nek, an old-timer in Natal, already known to me, asked questions about that day twenty-five years ago, from which so much history had come. I pointed out to him from the carriage window the lines of the Boer advances up the steep hill. Some of the holiday-seekers, hearing our conversation, looked out at the mountain too. It was the first time they had ever heard of Majuba, they said! We soon passed out of Natal and entered the Transvaal. The Biggarsberg and Indumeni were below the horizon, but

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Majuba remained for some time in sight as we rolled over the bleak plains of the new possession. It was the last we saw of the Garden Colony.

I remember having read a book many years ago in which it was stated that the earliest white inhabitant of the Terra Natalis was "a penitent pirate, who in the beginning of the eighteenth century had sequestered himself from his abominable community, and retired there out of harm's way."

Natal is still, I believe, looking for colonists. It has charms of scenery and climate not surpassed in the compass of the empire. Perhaps some member of the late Administration—of old Norse lineage—might feel disposed in these days of his superannuation, to repeat the penitential programme of the earliest inhabitant, and spend the remainder of his life looking at Naboth's Vineyard.

THE END

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VINEYARD

LIEUT.-GEN.
SIR WILLIAM
BUTLER, GCB.

CHAPMAN & HALL