had rendered me only too well acquainted with broke on my ear. "It's a fire!" I shouted to my husband, who was half asleep in his tent, and out he rushed. There, true enough, crackling and roaring, with the smoke rising in dense volumes, it came, bearing down upon our little tents. In a few minutes it had spread far and wide, and the whole line beneath the base of the mountain was enveloped in flames. Our first care was to loosen the horses and bring them all together in readiness for instant release, should the fire reach us, and the next was to loosen the tent cords and lower the tents. Our great hope lay in the fact that not twenty yards on our left a deep, broad spruit ran parallel with our camp, which was pitched in a mealie garden; and the wind, blowing from our right, would drive the fire away from us and prevent its jumping the spruit, had it not already done so. To all appearance the flames seemed to be bearing right down upon us, but we knew the deception of fires, and hoped for the best. Though we did not personally stand in long grass, the mealie garden in which we were was very narrow, and long dry grass and brushwood lined it on either side. Putting aside the flames, which would easily reach across, we knew that it would be impossible to bear the volumes

of smoke in which we would find ourselves enveloped. While discussing our unpleasant position we kept close to the *animals*, who were beginning to evince signs of terror. Several loose horses and some small herds of cattle galloped past us, seeking security in headlong flight, and a Kaffir rushed wildly by, pointing towards some kraals which he desired to reach before the fire should overtake them.

It certainly was a magnificent sight; the contrast of the blackness around, lit up by the dancing flames; while the Drakensberg loomed mysteriously above, like some enormous ghost, overshadowing the valley below in its approaching shade. The brushwood on the other side of the spruit had caught fire, and the blaze and roar of its destruction made us tremble for the fate of our own surroundings; but just as it began to assume most threatening proportions, the wind came well round in our favour, and we felt that our position was now one of security. Away dashed the fire, carrying all before it, and, as it seemed to us, pointing for the 15th Hussars' camp; in a few seconds it extended quite a quarter of a mile away, though the tail end still crackled and roared in close proximity to our tents. Suddenly shouts and yells resounded all around; in the

flames of the distant fire appeared hundreds of figures, apparently wildly dancing and flourishing all sorts of things above their heads. They seemed to all appearance to be so many devils, and the red glare of the fire and lurid flames lit them up into many strange and fantastic shapes. While I was wondering if I was dreaming, and was really transported to Hades, a few British hurrahs explained the whole matter. The strange creatures in question were nothing more nor less than the soldiers of the 15th Hussars and 60th, well armed with sacks, who were endeavouring to extinguish some parts of the fire, and turn it from its course and away from their camps. Long and unwearyingly they worked at this task, until the flames, creeping up one of the mountains away to the southward, told them that the danger was past, and the destructive element had wandered onwards, seeking whom else it might devour.

A night of extreme discomfort for us followed the excitement of the fire. It was too dark to make any attempt to pitch the tents again, and we were forced to roll ourselves in our blankets, and seek what shelter we could in the long grass. The wind, blowing with terrific violence off the upper Veldt, enveloped us in dust, which came

along in clouds of such force and thickness that we were soon half-buried and nearly suffocated. We were all very wretched, and never was daylight longed for so ardently. When its slow dawn broke at length, we were up, and busy collecting together the *débris* of the day before's turmoil. Begrimed and black as ink, we were more like chimney sweeps than anything else, and a Kaffir passing at the time might have been excused for mistaking us for half-castes of his kind. When the waggon arrived from the other camp to convey our things across to it, we lost no time in loading up, and forsook our old quarters without a sigh of regret. In a grassy, pleasant little valley we took up our fresh abode, finding a more effective shelter from the winds in the high bank, beneath which we pitched our tents; but it was not till late that afternoon that we were able to arrange the camp in its old form, and restore ourselves to comfort and cleanliness.

In our mountain home the days flew quickly by. They were varied by expeditions after wild duck, long rides, and late dinners. One night we rode into Fort Amiel, a distance of about fifteen miles, to dine with Sir Evelyn Wood, and the following day extended the distance by accepting the hospitality of Sir Hercules Robinson at

Hilldrop Farm. This gave us quite twenty miles going and returning, a distance which in civilised England would hardly be looked upon as in dining distance! Of course we lost our way a good many times in the dark, and, wandering about the Veldt, found ourselves first in one bog, then in another, until despair of ever striking on the right direction would seize us. But such hardships were of slight moment, for were not the reward of a good dinner and the luxury of a real house and its comforts awaiting us? Poor Sir Hercules Robinson! he did not call them comforts,—what to us was luxury was to him the reverse. In his journey later on to Pretoria, when he found himself in a tent, he, however, recalled the Hilldrop Farm with longing, and bitterly began to taste of a fresh, and, to him, unwelcome experience.

One night in the Drakensberg we were honoured by the company of Sir Evelyn Wood and General Buller, who arrived with their aides-de-camp in time for dinner. Invited to meet the generals were Colonel Luck, commanding the 15th Hussars, and several other officers. The entertainment was quite a success, and the cooking did credit to my husband, who combined the two positions of host and *chef de cuisine.* A

very merry evening was pleasantly spent, and the moon was high up in the heavens before the company took their departure. General Buller afterwards informed me that in the homeward ride to Fort Amiel he was the only one of the party who did not come to grief in a donga or spruit or bog, which I thought exceptionally lucky, it being no easy matter to navigate the treacherous Veldt even by the light of a bright moon.

Orders had been issued to the 15th Hussars for two troops to hold themselves in readiness to form part of an escort for the 94th Regiment in its march through the Transvaal to occupy Potchefstroom. We had determined to accompany the expedition, and were busily preparing for the start. One of the troops chosen was that commanded by my cousin, which we thought very opportune and lucky, going on the principle of the more friends the merrier. A change of camp from the Drakensberg to Bennett's Drift, some miles nearer Newcastle, ran us into a busy day, and gave us a kind of insight into the daily life before us during our march up country. Plenty of hard work and some little fatigue; but a day busily employed is never ill spent, and we were glad to think that the monotony of inaction was soon to be replaced by bustle and activity.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPARTURE FOR POTCHEFSTROOM — AN INCAUTIOUS OFFER — ENGLISH PRESTIGE—FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED—A HOT DISCUSSION.

WHAT a day was that on which the start for Potchefstroom took place! As I opened my eyes on the morning in question, it was upon a scene of unusual bustle and activity; and, though a very early hour, I somehow or other felt that I had overslept myself. Not so, however; and I soon found there was plenty of time to spare, and that I need not hurry. An hour later, nevertheless, we were standing on the ruins of our little home, and half-a-dozen busy hands were engaged in loading our mule waggon, which had rattled up a few minutes before. What a load we appeared to have! and yet our possessions were not great; but the waggons of this country are not so large as they might be, and a few articles soon assume imposing proportions when hoisted aloft. There had been a good many scares in the

officers' quarters as to the amount of luggage that would be allowed to each, and in discussing the matter I had volunteered to take anything which they could not find room for. This offer was made in all the conscious pride of knowledge that I had a mule waggon to myself; but now, as I watched it gradually filling with my own property, I had, I confess, secret misgivings as to where that of others could be stowed. Fortunately, on reaching the other camp, I found that every one had managed to his satisfaction, and that the assistance of my conveyance would not be required. This was lucky.

A hot breakfast awaited us in the mess tent of the 15th; so, starting our waggon on to join the regimental ones, we remained behind to indulge in the good fare. It felt just like a parting, and I could hardly realise that six weeks or a couple of months would probably see us back in our old haunts, with Potchefstroom in the background—a dream of the past. But for the present the future could only be guessed at: the General commanding carried sealed orders; we knew not what a day might bring forth; and many rumours floated here and there of the Boers and of their intentions. By some it was thought we should be attacked on our passage through the Transvaal, and a Boer

gentleman was in consequence chartered to precede the troops, and avert any rising which his countrymen might see fit to stir up. For a long time there appeared to be a doubt whether the guns taken at Potchefstroom would be given up; they were claimed by the English Government, and very unwillingly released by the Boer. We afterwards learned that if they had not met us at Standerton on our way up country, troops from this place would have fallen back on Lange's Nek and seized it. These were the instructions contained in sealed orders, and would have been rigidly adhered to, for there was not a soldier who did not desire to be "up and at them" once more.

Breakfast finished, our two favourite ponies, Nancy and Punch, were brought up, and we bade farewell to the hospitable colonel and the officers of the 15th, who had assembled to see us off. In the distance we could hear the sound of many wheels, the shouts of men, the whir and crack of the waggon whip; while a cloud of dust rose thickly aloft, indicating the line along which the troops of her Majesty were passing on their road to glory and victory in their triumphant march through the Transvaal. Was there a man in all that throng who did not despise the mission on

which he was engaged? Was there a breast which harboured aught but disdain and disgust for those who condemned them to figure in proceedings so ludicrous and humiliating? I think that, in vouching that there was not, I bring the true state of matters most clearly before those in whose breast may lurk a doubt as to the feeling of the army in general in South Africa on the proceedings of her Majesty's Government. Will a great wave some day mercifully sweep across the page of history, obliterating the stain which defaces the story of the doings of Old England? Let us hope so. Ten minutes' ride brought us in sight of the whole convoy of waggons, amidst which, some way ahead, we could distinguish our own. We had to descend a steep hill, and ascend a precipitous incline farther on, which told severely on the powers of the mules. The troops had halted at the bottom of the hill to give time to the long straggling convoy to make up a bit of its way: it extended in a line of over three miles, and this did not include the ox waggons of the commissariat, which generally preceded the troops by some hours—a strange sight and a novel one to onlookers who, like myself, witnessed these scenes for the first time. At the precipitous hill I have already mentioned many a waggon jammed and

stuck fast. What yells resounded! what whirring and cracking of whips was the result! At one time I really thought I must have departed to another world, so unearthly were the cries of the black drivers as they struggled with their mules. Many of these latter were newly imported from America, and this kind of work was new to them. The greater part declined to face their collars; and had it not been for the timely assistance of the soldiers, batches of whom were told off to assist in getting the waggons up, I verily believe that the whole convoy would have suddenly given way, and that an end of all things would have resulted. While waiting for our own waggon to reach the top, I rode to a farmhouse close by to examine it. It proved to be the ruins of one dismantled and burnt by our soldiers during the late war, in retaliation for some offence and depredation committed by the enemy. The situation was a pretty one, and the unusual sight of a few trees surrounding the house gave it a cosy appearance; but no attempts had been made at restoration—the owner was probably dead, or had emigrated to the Transvaal.

As soon as we spied our waggon safely perched on the sky line above, we hastened to rejoin it; and in consequence of the light weight it carried

we soon managed to out-distance the remainder, and made along at a good pace for the Ingogo River, which we crossed, outspanning in front of Mr. Fermeston's hotel, to rest and feed the mules. When the column arrived we had already refreshed ourselves, and got rid of the dust in which our quick passage through the lines had enveloped us. It was lucky we had done so, as the call on Mr. Fermeston's supplies was such that before long a bag of gold could not have bought a piece of bread, while eggs, butter, and other good things of this world, could only be looked back upon with regret that, having been, they no longer existed, save in the longings of the unfortunates who arrived too late to partake of them. As the outspan was only for two hours, the whole thing was a sort of scramble. When the time arrived to continue the journey, our drivers declared that the mules could be found nowhere. A great deal of time passed before they were at length discovered, and the column was well on its way up the long steep hill leading to Mount Prospect before we could get inspanned and make a start of it. Then to our mortification we found that our mules were all in very poor condition, and out of a span of eight, five only made any pretence of pulling. The double exertion sustained thereby

served to knock the remainder up very speedily, and nearly four hours were spent in covering a distance of two miles and a half. On reaching the summit we learned that the column was encamped some five miles farther on, at the base of Lange's Nek; and as the road was of a very severe character, and it was getting dark, we wisely decided to remain at Greville's hotel for the night, in order to give the mules a good rest and feed. As the next day was to be one of rest, we knew that we could easily rejoin the troops in the morning, as the march would be a short one. The stable accommodation was not of the best, but I managed to secure a snug corner, into which I put the horses and mules; and within a short time after our arrival I was gratified to find them all eating heartily, and making a good meal off oats, hay, and Indian corn. While watching them I was somewhat surprised to see a mule-driver lead in six fat, well-to-do mules, and proceed to eject mine. As soon as my astonishment had in a measure subsided, I made a dash for the man, and angrily inquired what he was about. In very broken English he replied that he was making room for President Brand's mules.

"What do I care whose mules they are?" I answered; "mine are not to be moved from here."

"But dese are de President's," gasped the Kaffir, gazing at me in astonishment.

"Well, and if they are, what of that?" said I, defiantly; "mine are as good as the President's any day; so make off at once and find room elsewhere."

A smile stole over the Kaffir's face as he heard me compare his well-fed, sleek, and pampered mules to my thin, wretched-looking animals. The comparison was doubtless hastily made, and in the heat of dispute; as I made the assertion I felt that the strictest truth was not being adhered to, and I could hardly keep from laughing myself. How the matter would have ended I do not know, had not President Brand at this juncture made his appearance, and ordered his man forthwith to obey me. The Free State mules were relegated to other quarters, and my poor tired animals left in peace.

A somewhat mixed society congregated that night round the family board, and before we had been many minutes at table a hot discussion had arisen on the subject of the Boer War. President Brand found many assailants, and when at a loss for a reply warded off the attack by pious ejaculations. Far into the night the arguments were prolonged, and waking about two o'clock I could still hear the murmur of voices, the clink of

glasses; while the odour of inferior tobacco would penetrate beneath the door, obliging me to throw open my window in order to freshen and air the room.

We started off at an early hour the next morning to rejoin the column, and passing along under the shadows of the Inquela and Majuba Mountains, we at length came upon the whole force encamped at the foot of Lange's Nek. As soon as our tents were pitched we went up to the mess tent of the Inniskillings and got some breakfast, the rest of the day being spent busily enough. That night we became the guests of the Inniskillings and 15th Hussars once more, who jointly gave a banquet, at which were present General Buller and his aide-de-camp Captain Browne. As I walked back after dinner to my tents the moon was shining brightly, lighting up the dark, solid mass of the Amajuba Mountain, and flashing its rays on the white, streaked road, which gleamed out like a bar of silver over the Nek. Under the shadow of these scenes of regretful memory slept the soldiers of England. Did they in their dreams behold the faces of their dead comrades, sleeping their last long sleep in the arms of that fatal mountain, where so many lives were sacrificed but a short time before in vain?

CHAPTER X.

EARLY RISING — BLOBBS — A WEARY MARCH — A RASH ATTEMPT—AN ANXIOUS MOMENT—A HOT CORNER.

THE *reveillé* woke me next morning to a sense of what we must daily expect, and I sprang up with the full determination not to be late. The first thing to be done was to rouse my servant and the sleepy Kaffirs, to whom this early rising was most distasteful; and having dressed by artificial light,—for the sun had not yet risen,—I made my way out of my tent, dragging after me my bedding, which had to be shaken out, neatly folded, and rolled up in its waterproof sheet. Then everything about the camp had to be collected and packed together, and laid in a line, in readiness for loading up the waggon. Tom had by this time got a kettle full of water to boil, in which he made some excellent cocoa, which, with a piece of bread or a biscuit, formed our morning meal. The difficulty of the morning was to get my husband to arise, the most

efficacious method being to begin striking the tent in which he lay; and so soon as he felt the sides flapping against him, in self-defence, and doubtless because his common sense would tell him that further sleep was impossible, a struggling movement and a few muttered ejaculations would signify to his tormentors outside that their efforts had proved successful. The next thing to be done was to saddle the horses and tie the spare ones to the back of the waggon, pulling up the line to which they had been attached; and having completed striking the tents, the Kaffirs were ordered to inspan their mules, and the process of loading up commenced. A few days' experience of this kind of work taught us to leave all the heavier articles in the waggon, such as coals, forage, and tinned stores, for on the morning in question they proved very heavy lifting. I had succeeded the day before, on my arrival in camp, in procuring a fresh mule waggon, and an excellent span of ten mules, with which we anticipated getting quickly over the ground. The whole turn-out presented a decidedly better appearance than the sorry vehicle and span of the day before, and such good haste had we made, that though a few commissariat ox waggons got off before us, we were the first of the mule division to which we

belonged to make a start of it. The pull up the steep hill leading to the Nek was somewhat heavy, and the cold blast that met us on gaining the top proved anything but pleasant. However, a good deal of down-hill work was now before us in our descent towards the Transvaal, and the drivers and mules seemed to appreciate the easy bit of road on which they found themselves as they rattled along at a famous pace.

We passed the water-cart a mile or so on the road, with one of its four mules lying on the ground. The poor beast had been seized with sickness but a few minutes before we arrived, and now the thick foam had gathered round its lips; its eye was already glazing, and the last long-drawn respirations were coming to an end. In a few minutes life and its sorrows would be over. In watching the poor beast we had allowed several minutes to slip away, and on turning to look for our waggon perceived in the far distance a cloud of dust, which told us where it was. The departure of the waggon caused the acutest sorrow to a little black-and-tan dog which I had brought with me from England, and which, although three years old, still went by the name of "Puppy." He had other names, one of which was Blobbs; but Puppy was the usual term applied in speaking of

or to this extraordinary little personage. Better runner and stayer never existed, and I have seen him do sixty or seventy miles in a day without showing fatigue, and after a good night's rest evince all the keenness of his elastic nature to be up and on again. On this occasion, as I have already remarked, the disappearance of the waggon caused him a great deal of unhappiness. After giving vent to several prolonged howls, he started off at full speed to rejoin it, and we thought no more about him; but a few minutes later a small cloud of dust advancing towards us made us look out for a hare, as we thought it probably might prove to be, and we were much surprised to behold Puppy's dusty little figure appear instead, his tongue lolling out a long way from his mouth, and his whole appearance denoting the speed with which he had come. We used to calculate that in a day's march he always did double distance at least.

It was not long before we came upon the Coldstream River,—that which marks the Natal boundary from the Transvaal. A long row of outspanned commissariat waggons pointed out the place where the troops would outspan and off-saddle for breakfast; so, drawing up our waggon on Transvaal ground, we released the mules and horses for a short graze. By the time the column

came up we had almost finished our meal, and had begun to think about getting on our way once more. General Buller's waggon had passed us, so we knew that we should be pretty safe in pitching our camp in the right place if we followed it, and took up our quarters close by. We had a good long distance to go before we reached the General's camp and got our own pitched. We found him at luncheon, and being very hungry I was not sorry to avail myself of the invitation which he at once gave us to join in. Refreshed and invigorated, we returned to our own quarters, where my husband set to work to prepare the soup and dinner for that night; and having finished my own duties, I was able to indulge in a hot bath, the luxury of which can be only duly appreciated after a day spent amidst clouds of dust, for the wind had been blowing with great force. It was late that afternoon before the column hove in sight. It had been a weary march both for man and beast; and the long line of waggons continued to rumble and rattle into camp long after the sun had gone down. The foot soldiers —two companies of the 94th—and a few artillerymen limped in, very footsore and weary. Poor fellows! Many of the former were mere boys, and appeared in no way fitted for the hardships

of a long day's march under a hot sun, with the wind blowing clouds of dust into their faces. Many of them too would have but short time for any proper repose, as, for instance, those chosen for picket duty, who would have to fall into their posts around the camp. This precaution was necessary, for were we not travelling through a hostile country, infested with Boers? Vain farce! What havoc and confusion could not fifty Boers have made in those long, straggling lines of waggons, without which the British soldier cannot march! (?) On the night in question a careless cook of the Inniskillings set fire to the grass around the spot he had chosen for culinary purposes. In a second the Veldt was blazing fiercely, and some hundred men of that regiment had to be despatched to beat out the flames. For over two hours they laboured at it in vain; the fire crept up some hills on the left, and defied their every effort to extinguish it. For a long time a village of kraals was placed in terrible jeopardy; but the efforts of the natives themselves, assisted by the soldiers, managed to turn the devastating element from its destructive course; and the wind coming to their help drove it away over vast tracts of land to the eastward, which in a short time became barren, burnt-up wastes.

We had some rough ground to get over the next day, and the first obstacle presented itself not a hundred yards from camp. A deep, boggy spruit had to be crossed; the mud was thick, deep, and tenacious, and the holding on the other side anything but good. As bad luck would have it, we had followed some waggons which had taken the worse of two roads converging towards the same point, and although we got safely through the first spruit mentioned above, there lay ahead, unwittingly unknown to us, a very untempting bottom. The first to try it were ourselves, the mule waggons of the commissariat being drawn up in line on the bank, and our movements were watched with anxiety and expectation. Putting their heads boldly at the place, Josef, our driver, aided by Ridley, who carried the whip and was the more important of the two, gave vent to the most unearthly shrieks that it has been my lot ever to have heard, and, answering to the weird summons, the mules made a dash forward, and were soon over their shoulders in mud and mire. Through this they gamely struggled, and themselves reached the opposite bank in safety; but a span of ten mules extends over a good bit of ground, and as they attacked a steep hill on the other side, the waggon, with its four hinder-

most mules, was still in the deep, muddy bottom. It was in vain that the poor beasts bent their necks well into their collars and struggled to make further way; every effort was unavailing, and the waggon, coming suddenly into contact with a large rock at the bottom, stuck fast. The commissariat, finding the way barred, made a similar attempt a little farther down; but the same hill which had made pulling so difficult for our mules proved their enemy also, and their waggon likewise stuck fast. The one in the rear sent their mules to assist in getting them out of their dilemma, but twenty animals were as powerless to move the lumbering vehicle as one span had been. As for us, after long and useless urging, we outspanned our mules, and, inspanning them to the back of the waggon, pulled it out on the side we had before quitted. A conductor at this moment came up and volunteered to show us another place, over which, with very careful and accurate driving, he thought we might manage to get across. With renewed hope we followed him round to the spot in question, but the aspect of the drift did not reassure us. Here the mud was deeper and more treacherously sticky than ever; but as there was nothing for it but to try, we called to Josef and Ridley to send them at it. As the mules entered the water I held my

breath, and watched the proceeding with the greatest excitement. For a few seconds they seemed to have good, fair footing, and I began to breathe, when suddenly the two foremost mules disappeared, and the remainder, unable to stop, followed suit, and for a few seconds nothing could be seen but a swirling of the water, a hoof or two, and a struggling mass of drowning animals. To get at them was impossible, and we were obliged to leave them to their own devices, our consternation getting the best of us. Not so with the mules, for these sagacious animals managed to get their heads above water after a good deal of struggling, and, blowing their nostrils like so many hippopotami, calmly awaited any assistance which we might be able to afford them. For over three-quarters of an hour they remained in this uncomfortable position, when several of the commissariat mules, which had received help from some oxen, and got their waggons over, were sent to our assistance. By sinking himself deep in the water, one of the men managed to feel the hook in front of the foremost of our span, and to this he attached the mules on the bank. Then half a dozen whips were set going at once—everybody shouted and yelled—dogs barked and howled—and a donkey hard by began to bray.

What a scene it was! Full of anxiety as I was for the fate of our mules and waggon, I could not for the life of me help laughing, and when our mules began to show their entangled and rat-like bodies as they were drawn out two by two on to the bank with the waggon following behind, the scene was indeed ludicrous in the extreme. However, we were very thankful that everything had ended so luckily, and, with many willing hands to help, we soon had the harness disentangled, and the animals inspanned once more. They appeared none the worse for their long soaking,—a mule is a very stolid animal, and not easily put about,—and we set forward merrily again as if nothing had happened.

A few miles farther on we came upon the troops off-saddled for breakfast—an example which we did not follow; and General Buller's waggon coming up at that moment, we went straight on for our final encampment that night. This was at Franklin's Store, by the Parde Kop, and we found a charming little spring just suited to our wants, where we soon had a comfortable and cosy little camp laid out, with the commissariat—important article!—not fifty or sixty yards away.

The butcher of that corps shot his ox that

night just behind our tents. The first shot missed, and passed in closer proximity to where I was standing than I exactly liked. I hastened to take refuge in my tent, forgetting the fact that canvas was not exactly bullet-proof; but no matter —it was the story over again of the ostrich hiding its head and thinking itself safe from detection! It was a matter of wonder to me how no accident occurred in these daily butcheries. A small head of oxen are driven up by a Kaffir, who has charge of them, and the butcher picks his beast with very little regard as to what lies behind it. Ping goes the bullet. If it hits the exact centre of the forehead above the eyes, the animal falls at once; but an inch too much to the right or the left seems very little to affect the beast, and fails to kill. One of these oxen galloped by me one day, his face streaming with blood, and the foam rushing from his mouth. Three times had he been shot at, and unsuccessfully hit; and the poor brute, maddened by pain and rage, had escaped from his would-be executioners and taken refuge in flight. He was, however, captured and brought back, when a fourth bullet ended his sufferings. As a rule, however, I was told our butcher did for them at the first shot, and the task—a by no means easy one—was always very efficiently executed.

On the night in question we dined with General Buller, who gave us a very choice little dinner and some excellent champagne. With such delicacies doubtless my readers will think we had not many hardships to endure. Hardships! No; such things were unknown; we had some rough work sometimes, but hardship never showed its grim features during our march through the Transvaal. It was a land of milk and honey—or rather, I should say of eggs.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by a confused medley of tongues, all talking together. Angry voices were raised in dispute, and a great deal of menace and brag seemed to be going on. The noise and dispute lasted some time, and was caused, I afterwards learned, by an altercation which had arisen between two conductors, both probably the worse for drink. One man had tried to stab the other, who had thereupon knocked his teeth down his throat. They were still quarrelling when I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MONOTONY OF TREKKING — A TRIUMPHANT ENTRY — PLAYING AT SOLDIERS — DISAPPOINTMENT — AN EXCITING RIDE — THE LAWS OF SPORT.

A FEW days on the march soon wearied us with their dry monotony. We were riding through a country whose resources of amusement were small, and the unceasing roll of the treeless Veldt was dry and uninteresting in the extreme. Some of the officers would spend their spare time after springbôk and blesbôk, making thereby a pleasant addition to the pot, and a change in the everyday diet of hard ox-trek or stringy mutton; but the sport to be found in securing these animals was not very exciting, and gun shooting appeared to be the favourite pastime. Snipe could occasionally be found in abundance, and the corān and pow frequently showed themselves in fair numbers, the former proving an especially delicious dish. The corān might be termed the grouse of South Africa, which they resemble in

size, though in plumage and shape they are more like our common green plover in England. The cock bird rises, like the grouse, with a hoarse cackle that brings home to the listener vivid recollections of Scotland and its moors, whereon dwells that unrivalled bird; but its flight is slower, and it settles quicker than the other, and is not such good shooting. However, by us all it was an eagerly-sought-for and welcome bird, and no one was slow to appreciate the delicacy of flavour which the gourmets at once proclaimed it to possess. Pow constituted a more noble dish, being of the bustard species and as large as a turkey; it was, I think, universally appreciated, though I cannot say that I shared that taste, the flesh of the bird appearing to me to possess a strong flavour, which I did not like. It was not often that we were fortunate enough to get a hare, and hare-soup was in consequence not a frequent occurrence. But on the few occasions when we proved lucky in that way, there were great rejoicings, and proportionate invitations sent out to different tents to one's friends to come and partake of the delicacy. Such invitations seldom found any refusal. Altogether these Veldt banquets were quite in vogue, and decidedly the pleasantest part of the day. Whist would follow,

and late hours proved the result, so that the sound of the half-past five *reveillé* was not always welcomed with such joy as it should have been by the drowsy ears that it awoke to hearing.

On Thursday, 2nd of June, we marched into Standerton. This announcement sounds grand, and my reader is thereby probably deeply impressed with the size and importance of the place. What a deal we read of the size of Standerton! and I had so often heard of the place that I had pictured it to myself in a very different light to what I at length beheld when I came in sight of this famous town. A few stores, and two or three stone buildings, looking painfully new, were all that met the eye; while across the river, on a barren, dusty-looking hill, were pitched the tents of the regiments who had garrisoned the fort during the war. The only refreshing object that showed itself in or around this dreary-looking hole was the river Vaal, into whose deep, clear waters the thirsty mules and horses buried their dusty nostrils, drinking long and eagerly of the delicious draught. Beyond some muddy pools, we had been very short of water that day; and as the horses had been very inefficiently watered in consequence, their delight may be well imagined when they came in sight of the Vaal.

On a dreary, dusty, dried-up corner of this barren waste we once more pitched our tents close to the General's. It was a spot which had no recommendation, inasmuch as it was a long way distant from the commissariat, still farther from the troops, and a great distance removed from the river. True, a muddy pool lay not far off, which even the horses and mules, who wandered about disconsolately, looking for grass and water, refused to look at; while the cheerful view of three graves immediately facing our tents was all that presented itself to distract the wandering gaze.

Several empty waggons had been left along with the column to pick up the footsore and weary soldiers, and many were the footsore and weary men whom they did pick up. A great deal has been said and written about the efficiency of the army; and it seems to me a good deal of fuss and expense is incurred in the altering of uniforms and changing of bonnets, and I wot not how many other useless reforms. Would it not be better to think about the stuff these men are made of before so much detail is gone into about their dress? We want men, proved and tried, to bring honour and prestige to England's dying name; we want bone, stamina, and muscle to fight

her battles for her, and stay the long race out. What have we done to allow weeds and weaklings to don the uniform which should carry honour and victory before it, and to whom we trust the settlement of our quarrels with certainty and confidence? Can we run a yearling in the Derby, and expect him to win and bring our colours triumphantly to the front? I think not; it is the same with man as with the beast. If we give boys men's work to do, disaster will ever befall us, which all the linking of regiments, changing of names, and abolishing of good old customs, will neither patch nor mend. In the afternoon a party of us, consisting of several officers of the 15th Hussars and Inniskillings, rode up to the fort to inspect the two little guns taken by the Boers at Potchefstroom, and which had been brought into Standerton and delivered up to the officer in command a few days before our arrival. We had heard a good deal about these guns, and examined them with no little interest, for had they not afforded help to the gallant little garrison of Potchefstroom, whose deeds illumine the few bright pages which occur in the story of the Boer War? The Boer who had brought them in is said to have demanded *£200* for so doing. I never heard whether this

request was submitted to the home authorities, and refused or granted; but if it was I should imagine the old principle of giving in to the Dutchmen was in this case as usual adhered to. The big fort at Standerton was duly inspected, as well as the smaller ones scattered about in different directions; but as the fighting which had taken place in these parts during the war had chiefly been at long range, they were spots which, I fear, did not interest us so much as perhaps they should have done. More to our taste was the inspection of the few stores in the town, and some money was here laid out to advantage in the purchase of many useful articles, whereby we replenished our diminished store of eatables and luxuries, such as jams, potted meats, tinned vegetables, coffee, chocolate, and milk. One storekeeper was found to possess several barrels of Golden Cape Sherry, which were quickly secured and relegated to the mess stores,—one barrel, regardless of expense, finding its way into the bell tent, in which all our own private treasures were secreted. Altogether we took care to seize the last opportunity which lay before us of making ourselves comfortable during the remainder of the march to Potchefstroom.

Military plans now began to eke out. The

company of the 94th which had marched up from Newcastle was ordered to remain at Standerton; another company of the same regiment being told off to get itself in readiness to take the former's place. A troop of cavalry was also under orders to remain behind; and although we had with us four Inniskilling troops and only two of the 15th Hussars, it was decided by Colonel Curtis of the Inniskillings, who commanded the column, to leave one of the latter. As bad luck would have it, this troop was commanded by my cousin, whose chagrin and disappointment was great on finding he would not be one of the party to visit Potchefstroom. The prospect of three weeks' or a month's sojourn in so dreary a locality as Standerton was certainly not pleasing, and we commiserated his fate very much, and endeavoured by every means in our power to soften the severity of his disappointment. But all efforts were unavailing, and looking round on the dreary scene which everywhere presented itself, we felt how useless must be all human comfort.

On the march next day we saw large herds of blesbôk in every direction. In the hopes of getting a shot General Buller started off on a fast-galloping pony, followed by his servant carrying the rifle. The last thing we saw of him was

his figure disappearing over the sky line, with the herd he was after in full flight in front of him. While riding along I came across a trek-ox but recently dead. On and around his carcase were congregated thousands of asvögels or vultures. These immense and disgusting looking animals treated me with supreme contempt as I rode in amidst them cracking my whip, those who had gorged themselves merely waddling heavily on one side, while the more empty ones rose lazily a few feet from the ground, and flapped along to secure posts of observation a very little distance removed from their prey. Calling Blobbs, I sent him at them; but their numbers confused him, and no sooner had he driven one away and returned to assault a second, than his former enemy would return and take up a position of still greater proximity to the dead ox. The large herds of blesbôk seemed to increase in number as we rode along. One especially which I noticed must have numbered three thousand strong at the least, and showed a very bold front. It was moving about a quarter of a mile away in front of us, and the leading bulls were making for a point which would force them to cross the line of road up which we were advancing. The horse on which I was mounted happened to be my best

and fleetest, so, starting him at a gallop, and regardless of holes or ant-bear heaps, which in the excitement of the race I quite overlooked, I pointed his head towards that part of the Veldt for which they seemed to be making. Catching sight of me at once, the leaders of the herd broke into a trot, and in a few seconds later they were going their fastest, but never once offering to whirl round and make for any other point than that towards which they had first turned their heads. To ride a single blesbôk down unwounded on a horse is an impossibility, but it is different with a herd whose movements are hampered by numbers, and the pace in consequence is much slower. I doubt very much, however, whether it would be possible to catch a herd up if one started in pursuit behind it,—I do not think so; but as I have never tried, I will not venture to express any further opinion in the matter.

The leaders of the flying blesbôks had already passed the point to which I was pressing forward; but there were many to follow, and the battle that had to be decided was, whether I could succeed in turning half the herd from its course, or whether, in spite of the very object from which they were flying, they would still press steadily on in the wake of their companions. As I neared the herd

I could see their bright eyes glancing with terror, their heads thrown back, and their whole speed put forward to pass me before I could reach them. But their numbers were too many, and, amidst a cloud of dust, a trampling of feet, and a general scurry, I found myself suddenly in the midst of them. Quick as lightning my horse brought his head round in the same direction as the blesbôks were moving, otherwise I believe the pressure of numbers would have carried him off his legs. What a chance mine would have been had I carried gun, rifle, or revolver: there would have been no lack of butcher's meat had I so willed it. But to observe, not to kill, was my object; and probably no one has ever had a better chance than on this occasion, and during that stirring gallop I had to take good stock of animals which, up till then, I had only seen dead, or moving at a distance. How I longed for some of these graceful animals, as I galloped in their midst, to ornament the park at home.

Though my horse was, as I have said, a fast one, he lost ground very quickly, as the great herd flashed by him at full speed, and before long the last blesbôk wheeled and darted by me, and I was left behind to watch the great black mass move onwards. In the days when countless thousands

roamed at will over these plains, the sight must have been one of wonder. But that the sport could have been good I deny, for the stalk is the only pleasurable and legitimate manner in which man can approach the wild denizens of any country, be it forest, prairie, or veldt. On the hills of Scotland, on the prairies or pampas of America, or on the plains of Africa, it is all the same. Without that law in which skill is required, what true sportsman cares for the mere fact of killing? The bleaching skulls of innumerable wildebeeste heads strewed the Veldt in every direction, showing where once vast numbers of these grand buffalo-like antelopes had roamed. A few were still to be seen, but the great herds, of which doubtless they once formed a part, have wandered onwards, seeking refuge from advancing civilisation, and penetrating further into distant countries as yet so much unexplored. Their flight is vain —whither they have penetrated, thither will man follow them; it is but a question of time. . . . My horse being very hot, I walked him back quietly to the waggon road, and as soon as the others came up called a halt to change my saddle on to a fresh pony. We then got our rifles out, and passed the rest of that day's march pleasantly enough in stalking small herds of blesbôks, and

making fancy shots at flying beasts well out of range. Needless to say that we in consequence made no bag; but General Buller, coming up as we were pitching our tents by Bushman's River that afternoon, showed us a fine fat blesbôk which he had managed to stalk and secure. Some of it transferred to the pot made us a very excellent dinner that night, and we drank the health of the successful stalker and provider of that day's dinner in a glass each of the Golden Cape Sherry, the cask containing it being tapped in honour of the occasion. The further announcement that a halt would be called on the morrow to rest the men and give them an opportunity to wash their things, was received with general satisfaction, and couches were sought that night with the pleasant feeling that no half-past five *reveillé* would disturb the slumbers of the brave.

CHAPTER XII.

A GENERAL HOLIDAY — A BAD SHOT — AN INNOCENT ENJOYMENT — AN ALARM — HEIDELBERG — A BOER LEADER — KLIP RIVER.

LEAVE had been given to nearly all the officers and a great many of the men to go out shooting. This permission very few seemed inclined to neglect, and small parties of twos and threes might have been seen leaving the camp all the morning. General Buller started off with his servant to look for wildebeeste, which rumour asserted had been seen the day before, and his aide-de-camp Captain Browne departed in an opposite direction; the ambition of this latter not soaring so high as that of his chief, he professed himself contented if he could secure a blesbôk. With such numbers of sportsmen anxious to get a shot, the anticipations of sport were not very brilliant; we, however, fell into the general snare, and, more to pass the time than anything else, a party of three of us, taking with us our rifles, rode

forth to see what luck would befall our fortunes. For some time we rode without seeing anything, the frequent report of guns and rifles sounding in our ears. A heavy mirage trembled and glittered around, turning rocks into living shapes, and deceiving us with its innumerable lakes, covered with wild-fowl. So often were we misled by these glittering deceptions, that when at length we did suddenly come upon some antelope, we for several minutes doubted our own sight. Then away went Mr. Holland and my husband galloping to encircle them, while I rode quietly on to the brow of a little hill that lay ahead, hoping to come upon a herd of blesbôk. My hopes were verified; not fifty yards in front of where I stood some springbôk, with swift, graceful bounds, placed distance and safety between my rifle and themselves, disturbing in their flight a small herd of two or three hundred of the antelope, for which I was searching. A herd it evidently was which had been already startled, for, without pausing to give the customary stare of inquiry and curiosity, the whole lot set off at full speed in search of a more secure spot. After them at full gallop went I, and as soon as I had made out the point for which they were making I altered my course, and made towards it also in a crosswise direction. But quick as went

my horse, so quickly went the blesbôks. By the time I had reached the spot towards which I had been making, nearly the whole herd had passed at a distance of over 150 yards, and I had only time to slip from my horse, throw the bridle over my arm, and, with trembling, unsteady hand, take aim at one of the tail-end bulls. The weapon that I carried was a twelve repeating Winchester, loaded with six or seven rounds. My first shot struck the ground close to the animal I had aimed at, and I found that I had sighted too low; quickly repairing the error, my second shot was more successful, but as the animal was going away from me at the time I only managed to wound him. It was with regret that I saw his leg was broken, and I hastened to remount and follow them in order to put the poor beast out of his sorrow by a more certain shot. But as ill luck would have it, the mirage closed in very thick, and in spite of every endeavour to get on the right spoor, amidst the many fresh ones which kept crossing and recrossing each other, I was entirely unsuccessful; and when I endeavoured to find my companions, having relinquished the chase in despair, I found this a by no means easy matter either. The distant report of a rifle put me a bit on the right scent;

so galloping in that direction and trusting to luck was about all I could do. Presently through the mist came a sound of voices; I shouted, and my shout was returned; in a few minutes I came upon them, dismounted and seated on the ground, awaiting me. Mr. Holland had had a shot, but, like myself, had proved unsuccessful. Soon after this the mirage cleared off, and we were able to make out in which direction our camp lay. In a valley not far distant, and along the ridge of a low hill, we could see numerous sportsmen in hot pursuit after flying herds. One horseman was engaged in riding down a wounded bôk, which, I conjectured, might be mine; and in this conjecture I was doubtless right, as one of the officers succeeded in securing one, and by his description, later in the day, of the wound and the place where he had come upon the animal, little doubt remained in my mind that it was the same beast.

The situation of affairs began soon after this to assume a ludicrous aspect. In whichever direction we looked or turned, armed men mounted and armed men on foot might be seen hurrying hither and thither in their wild search for game. One private was observed stalking a goat; another fancied he had found a peculiar kind of antelope

in a wandering sheep; but whether they slew these peaceful denizens of the Veldt or not we did not wait to see, and history has not yet divulged. One species of amusement we found much to our taste, and that was, whenever we saw a very earnest-looking sportsman in the distance, to let off our rifles and then gallop as hard as ever we could towards some imaginary object. On several occasions the ruse was successful. Up would gallop the earnest sportsman, shouting, "What is it? Where is it? Have you wounded it?" "Yes," we would reply, still galloping on, and pointing ahead of us, "don't you see it? There it goes!" and on would press our duped friend. Then suddenly we would pull up and call out to him, "Oh! we see we have made a mistake; it's only a mole hill;" and the earnest sportsman would retire discomfited amidst our mocking laughter and jeers. It was a childish pastime certainly, but it helped to keep us amused, and passed away the time pleasantly enough. Soon the Veldt began to grow a positively dangerous position; bullets were flying right and left, and as we valued our lives in a kind of way, we judged it safer to beat a retreat back to camp.

Marching was the order for the next few days, and we got over a fair amount of ground. Eggs

and chickens began to grow plentiful, and General Buller and ourselves would make foraging expeditions ahead of the troops. This was a source of great annoyance to the mess president of the Inniskillings, who complained that wherever we went we swept the board clean! That we got first choice was decidedly the case, but that we swept the board clean was a slander which we duly resented. Huge must have been the appetite that could have negotiated all the supplies which now began to grow so plentiful all along the way; and though we supplied our wants liberally, we always left enough over and above for those behind. Of the Boers we saw little; their farm-houses lay away from the waggon track, and the occupants were either too sulky or too *insouciant* to favour us with their presence. Occasionally one or two would visit the General in his camp; but this occurrence was very rare, and then the visitors in question generally consisted of loyal Boers. On the march the precaution to keep scouts on the look-out in every direction was duly observed, and on nearing a pass or nek which had the appearance of a good defence position, extra care was taken to guard against surprise. But I fear the gravity of the position could never be duly impressed upon the minds of either

officers or men. A farce they felt it to be, and a farce no doubt it was, and we treated it in our thoughts accordingly. I heard of one scare taking place, though, as I was riding some way on ahead, I did not witness it myself. It appears that a young dragoon, posted on the pinnacle of a high hill, descried in the far distance a black moving mass, which to him had doubtless the appearance of mounted men. Descending hastily from his post of observation, he came galloping back to the advancing column with the intelligence that some hundreds of mounted Boers would shortly be upon us. Instantly all was excitement and expectation; orders were given to hurry up the long straggling line of waggons which were toiling miles in the rear, only a few belonging to the commissariat, General Buller, and ourselves, being on ahead. These were not recalled; probably the officer in command thought, and rightly, that we were some distance off, and therefore proportionately safe. A reconnoitring party was next sent out to ascertain the numbers of the enemy, and returned shortly with the intelligence that the advancing mass was nothing but a large herd of cattle being driven along by two Kaffirs! . . . I have recounted this story as it was afterwards told to me by a gentleman attached to the column at the

time, and who was an eyewitness of the scene; beyond this I cannot be responsible for any unfounded assertion which I may have made on hearsay evidence alone. That the scare in question did take place I was informed by several officers was the case, but the error was detected long before the advanced and rear guards could be called up.

On Tuesday, the 7th June, we arrived on the outskirts of Heidelberg. The General decided to encamp at some five miles distance from that town, so that no opportunity might be afforded to the soldiers to get the poisonous drinks sold at all the stores. The farm on which they took up their quarters was one inhabited by a hostile Boer, who refused all kinds of friendly overtures, and declined to supply any one with chickens, milk, or eggs, which he possessed in abundance. As for ourselves, we took our waggon on, pitching our little camp about a mile outside the town, in order to be nearer fresh stores and provisions, of which we intended to lay in a stock. Our tents became the half-way house between the column and Heidelberg, the officers dropping in by twos and threes on their way to and from the town. As usual, as was the case with all these Dutch towns, I was disappointed

with Heidelberg. The memory of its grand old namesake had haunted my imagination, and I expected to find something in keeping with the place from which it derived its name. But nothing of the sort: a low range of hills, through which ran the road to Pretoria, was all that attracted the eye; while a few scattered houses could be distinguished at its base, indicating where Heidelberg was situated.

Having pitched our tents we rode on into the town, our first invasion being the hotel. Here we managed to secure a few dozen eggs, and completed our bargain with the hotel-keeper under the admiring gaze of some half-dozen Kaffirs, and the sulky glances of an equal number of dirty-looking Boers. A great deal of singing seemed to be going on inside, and the fumes of tobacco and strong smell of that disgusting concoction, Natal rum, pervaded the air. Refusing the invitation of the landlady to come in and have some tea, I was glad to ride away from the stuffy atmosphere, and take refuge in that portion of Heidelberg dignified under the name of The Market Square. Here we found several of the Boer tents pitched, and armed men patrolling up and down on guard. Dirtier tents I have seldom seen, and the whole appearance

presented by these warriors was the reverse of cleanly.

Several boys were busily engaged in preparing a supply of food. It consisted of long strips of raw meat, cut from the most fleshy parts of the trek-ox, and attached to a line of string, which encircled the camp altogether. At a distance of a few inches apart hung these long, thin strips, presenting the appearance of so many serpents or skinned eels. They are left so suspended until the hot sun has dried them up to a hard shrivelled substance, when they are declared in an eatable state, and, under the name of biltong, constitute the principal food of the Boers. On this they thrive, and in time of war find it especially adapted to their requirements. It is light and easy to carry; few waggons corresponding to the commissariat of our army are wanted; it requires no cooking, so that fires, if undesirable, can be dispensed with; and on this the Boer can live contentedly and flourish, retaining his health and his strength in no way impaired. Such were our foes.

Cronje, the besieger of Potchefstroom, was pointed out to me, and it was with some curiosity that I looked at the man whose behaviour to the dying women and children shut up in that fort

during the siege must ever reflect shame on himself and on the bearers of his name. It was a pleasanter face to look at than I had pictured to myself; but his eyes had a bad expression, and the cunning, cruel look in them overbalanced any other redeeming points which might have been traced in his rugged features. When first pointed out to me he was stretched at full length outside one of the tents, basking in the sun, and indulging in a pipe of tobacco, lazily puffing large clouds of smoke from his lips, and evidently greatly enjoying himself. My prolonged stare partaking more of curiosity than any desire to be rude, however, appeared to discomfit him, for, with one or two grunts, much resembling those made by a pig, he shuffled on to his legs, and took refuge in one of the aforementioned dirty and greasy-looking tents. We saw a good many of our waggons which had fallen into the enemy's hands during the war still in possession of the Boers. The chief commissariat officer of our expedition vowed that he was going to claim them all, and was very anxious to consult General Buller on the subject. He might claim the waggons, but the spans of oxen,—alas! where were they? Probably long ago converted into biltong.