

# South African Memories eBook

## South African Memories

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## CHAPTER I

*First voyage to south Africa—Cape town.*

“Oh that mine adversary had written a book!”—*Job xxxi. 35.*

The above words, written by one of the greatest philosophers of olden time, have often impressed me, and I have frequently quoted them when asked why I did not write an account of the interesting travels and adventures I have had in my life. It has therefore required a great deal of courage to take up my pen and record a few recollections of South Africa. I felt that, were they ever to be written at all, it must be before the rapidly passing years diminish the interest in that land, which in the past has been the object of such engrossing attention; and that at the present time, when the impending Federation of South Africa has at length crowned the hopes of those patriots who have laboured patiently and hopefully to bring about this great result, it might be appropriate to recall those days when Englishmen, who had made South Africa their home, had much to contend with, even before the fierce struggle to keep “the flag flying” in the years of 1899-1902.

During that period, which commenced after the disaster at Majuba Hill, “equal rights” were a golden dream which only the most optimistic ever hoped to see realized. From then onwards, as old colonists have so often told me, the Boers brought up the younger generation in the belief that the “Roinek”[1] was a coward, and in consequence their arrogance in the country districts became wellnigh intolerable, while at the Cape the Bond party grew so strong it bid fair to elbow out the English altogether. Now, while the country is still young, the fair prospect opens out of Briton and Boer living in amity and peace together, and mutually supplying, in the government of their vast inheritance, such elements as are wanting in the character of each.

My first visit to South Africa was a short one, and took place at the end of 1895. During the foregoing summer everyone’s attention had been directed to the Transvaal, and more especially towards the Rand, by reason of the unprecedented and, as it turned out, totally unwarranted rise in the gold-mining shares of that district; in this boom, people both at home and in Johannesburg madly gambled, and large fortunes were quickly made by those who had foresight enough not to hold on too long. For already the political horizon was darkening, and the wrongs of the “Uitlanders,” real and apparent as they were, became a parrot-cry, which waxed and waned, but never died away, till the ultimatum of President Kruger, in October, 1899, brought matters to a climax.

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We sailed from Southampton in December, 1895, in the *Tantallon Castle*, then one of the most modern and up-to-date of the Castle liners. The ship was crowded to its utmost capacity, and among the passengers, as I afterwards learned, were many deeply concerned in the plotting which was known to be going on at Johannesburg, either to extort concessions from President Kruger, or, failing this, to remove him altogether. I knew very little about all this then, but before I had been many days on board it was not difficult to discover that much mystery filled the air, and I was greatly excited at arriving in South Africa in such stirring times. There is no such place for getting to know people well as on a sea-voyage of eighteen days. Somehow the sea inspires confidence, and one knows that information imparted cannot, anyway, be posted off by the same day's mail. So those who were helping to pull the strings of this ill-fated rebellion talked pretty freely of their hopes and fears during the long, dark tropical evenings.

I became familiar with their grievances—their unfair taxation; no education for their children except in Dutch; no representation in Parliament—and this in a population in which, at that time, the English and Afrikanders at Johannesburg and in the surrounding districts outnumbered the Dutch in the proportion of about 6 to 1. They laid stress on the fact that neither the Boers nor their children were, or desired to become, miners, and, further, that for the enormous sums spent on developing and working the mines no proper security existed. I must admit it was the fiery-headed followers who talked the loudest—those who had nothing to lose and much to gain. The financiers, while directing and encouraging their zeal, seemed almost with the same hand to wish to put on the brake and damp their martial ardour. In any case, all were so eloquent that by the time our voyage was ended I felt as great a rebel against “Oom Paul” and his Government as any one of them.

Before leaving the *Tantallon Castle*, however, I must pass in review some of those whose home it had been with ourselves for the best part of three weeks. First I remember the late Mr. Alfred Beit, interesting as the man who had made the most colossal fortune of all the South African magnates, and who was then already said to be the most generous of philanthropists and the kindest of friends; this reputation he fully sustained in the subsequent years of his life and in the generous disposition of his vast wealth. I have often been told that Mr. Cecil Rhodes owed the inspiration of some of his colossal ideas to his friend Mr. Beit, and when it came to financing the same, the latter was always ready to assist in carrying out projects to extend and consolidate the Empire. In these latter years, and since his comparatively early death, I have heard those who still bear the brunt of the battle lament his loss, and remark, when a railway was to be built or a new part of the country opened up, how much more expeditiously it would be done were Mr. Beit still alive.

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Other names that occur to me are Mr. Abe Bailey, well known in racing circles to-day, and then reputed a millionaire, the foundation of whose fortune consisted in a ten-pound note borrowed from a friend. Mr. Wools Sampson,[2] who subsequently so greatly distinguished himself at Ladysmith, where he was dangerously wounded, had an individuality all his own; he had seen every side of life as a soldier of fortune, attached to different regiments, during all the fighting in South Africa of the preceding years. He was then a mining expert, associated with Mr. Bailey in Lydenburg, but his heart evidently lay in fighting and in pursuing the different kinds of wild animals that make their home on the African veldt. Dr. Rutherford Harris, then the Secretary of the Chartered Company; Mr. Henry Milner, an old friend; Mr. Geoffrey Glyn and Mr. F. Guest, are others whom I specially remember; besides many more, some of whom have joined the vast majority, and others whom I have altogether lost sight of, but who helped to make the voyage a very pleasant one.

We landed at Cape Town shortly before Christmas Day. As I have since learnt by the experience of many voyages, it is nearly always at dawn that a liner is brought alongside the quay at the conclusion of a long voyage; in consequence, sleep is almost out of the question the last night at sea, owing to the noisy manipulations of the mail-bags and luggage. However, one is always so glad to get on shore that it is of very little import, and on this occasion we were all anxious to glean the latest news after being cut off from the world for so many days. The papers contained gloomy accounts of the markets. "King Slump" still held his sway, and things abroad looked very unsettled; so most of our friends appeared, when we met later, with very long faces. After breakfast, leaving our luggage to the tender mercies of some officious agent, who professed to see it "through the Customs," we took a hansom and drove to the Grand Hotel, *en route* to the hotel, in the suburb of Newlands, where we had taken rooms. My first impressions of Cape Town certainly were not prepossessing, and well I remember them, even after all these years. The dust was blowing in clouds, stirred up by the "south-easter" one hears so much about—an icy blast which appears to come straight from the South Pole, and which often makes its appearance in the height of summer, which season it then was. The hansom, of the oldest-fashioned type, shook and jolted beyond belief, and threatened every moment to fall to pieces. The streets from the docks to the town were unfinished, untidy, and vilely paved, and I remember comparing them very unfavourably with Melbourne or Sydney. However, I soon modified my somewhat hasty judgment. We had seen the town's worst aspects, and later I noticed some attractive-looking shops; the imposing Houses of Parliament, in their enclosed grounds, standing out sharply defined against the hazy background of Table Mountain; and the Standard

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Bank and Railway-station, which would hold their own in any city. At the same time, as a place of residence in the summer months, I can well understand Cape Town being wellnigh deserted. Those who can boast of even the most moderate means have their residences in the attractive suburbs of Rondebosch, Newlands, or Wynberg, and innumerable are the pretty little villas and gardens one sees in these vicinities. There the country is beautifully wooded, thick arching avenues of oak extending for miles, interspersed with tracts of Scotch firs and pines, the latter exhaling a delicious perfume under the sun's powerful rays. Everywhere green foliage and abundant vegetation, which, combined with the setting of the bluest sky that can be imagined, make the drives round Cape Town some of the most beautiful in the world. At Newlands, the Governor's summer residence, a pretty but unpretentious abode, Sir Hercules and Lady Robinson then dispensed generous hospitality, only regretting their house was too small to accommodate visitors, besides their married daughters. We stayed at the Vineyard Hotel in the immediate neighbourhood—a funny old-fashioned hostelry, standing in its own grounds, and not in the least like an hotel as we understand the word. There whole families seemed to reside for months, and very comfortable it was, if somewhat primitive, appearing to keep itself far apart from the rush of modern improvements, and allowing the world to go by it unheeded. Only half a mile away, at Rondebosch, was situated then, as now, on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, the princely domain of the late Mr. Cecil Rhodes. At the moment of which I write the house itself was only approaching completion, and I must now record a few particulars of our introduction to this great Englishman and his world-famed home. We drove to Groot Schuur, or "Great Barn," one afternoon with Mr. Beit. The house is approached by a long avenue of enormously high Scotch firs, which almost meet aloft, and remind one of the nave of some mighty cathedral, such is the subdued effect produced by the sunlight even on the brightest summer day. A slight rise in the road, a serpentine sweep, and the house itself comes into view, white, low, and rambling, with many gables and a thatched roof. The right wing was then hidden by scaffolding, and workmen were also busy putting in a new front-door, of which more anon; for a tall, burly gentleman in a homely costume of flannels and a slouch hat emerged from the unfinished room, where he would seem to have been directing the workmen, and we were introduced to Cecil John Rhodes, the Prime Minister of Cape Colony.



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I looked at the man, of whom I had heard so much, with a great deal of curiosity. Shy and diffident with strangers, his manner even somewhat abrupt, one could not fail to be impressed with the expression of power, resolution, and kindness, on the rugged countenance, and with the keen, piercing glance of the blue eyes, which seemed to read one through in an instant. He greeted us, as he did every newcomer, most warmly, and under his guidance we passed into the completed portion of the house, the rooms of which were not only most comfortable, but also perfect in every detail as regards the model he wished to copy—viz., a Dutch house of 200 years ago, even down to the massive door aforementioned, which he had just purchased for L200 from a colonial family mansion, and which seemed to afford him immense pleasure. As a first fleeting memory of the interior of Groot Schuur, I call to mind Dutch armoires, all incontestably old and of lovely designs, Dutch chests, inlaid high-backed chairs, costly Oriental rugs, and everywhere teak panelling—the whole producing a vision of perfect taste and old-world repose. It was then Mr. Rhodes's intention to have no electric light, or even lamps, and burn nothing but tallow candles, so as to keep up the illusion of antiquity; but whether he would have adhered to this determination it is impossible to say, as the house we saw was burnt to the ground later on, and is now rebuilt on exactly the same lines, but with electric light, every modern comfort, and lovely old red tiles to replace the quaint thatched roof.

Passing through the rooms, we came to the wide verandah, or stoep, on the other or eastern side. This ran the whole length of the edifice, and was used as a delightful lounge, being provided with luxurious settees and armchairs. From here Mr. Rhodes pointed out the view he loved so well, and which comes vividly to my mind to-day. In front three terraces rise immediately beyond the gravel courtyard, which is enclosed on three sides by the stoep. These, bright with flowers, lead to a great grass plateau, on which some more splendid specimens of Scotch firs rear their lofty heads; while behind, covered with trees and vegetation, its brilliant green veiled by misty heat, Table Mountain forms a glorious background, in striking contrast to the cobalt of the heavens. To the right of the terraces is a glade, entirely covered with vivid blue hydrangeas in full bloom, giving the appearance of a tract of azure ground. Lower down the hillside, in little valleys, amidst oak and other English forest trees, a carpet is formed of cannas of many hues, interspersed with masses of gleaming white arum lilies, which grow here wild in very great profusion.



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Our time was too short on this occasion to see any portion of Mr. Rhodes's estate or the animals—antelope of many kinds, wildebeestes, elands, and zebras—which roamed through his woods. We lunched with him two days later on Christmas Eve, and then the weather was so hot that we only lazily enjoyed the shade and breezes on the stoep. Well do I remember on that occasion how preoccupied was our host, and how incessantly the talk turned to Johannesburg and the raging discontent there. In truth, Mr. Rhodes's position was then a very difficult one: he was Prime Minister of Cape Colony, and therefore officially neutral; but in his heart he remained the keen champion of the oppressed Uitlanders, having nominated his brother, Frank Rhodes, to be one of the leaders of the Reform Committee at Johannesburg. No wonder he was graver than was his wont, with many complications overshadowing him, as one afterwards so fully realized. His kindness as a host, however, suffered no diminution, and I remember how warmly he pressed us to stay with him when we returned from the north, though he did add, "My plans are a little unsettled." This suggested visit, however, was never paid; Mr. Rhodes a few weeks afterwards was starting for England, to, as he termed it, "face the music." I shall have occasion to describe him in his home, and the life at Groot Schuur, more fully later on, when I passed many happy and never-to-be-forgotten weeks beneath his hospitable roof. As years went on, his kindness to both friends and political foes grew almost proverbial, but even in 1895 Groot Schuur, barely finished, was already known to be one of the pleasantest places near Cape Town—a meeting-place for all the men of the colony either on their way to and from England, or on the occasion of their flying visits to the capital.

### FOOTNOTES:

[1] Red neck, or Englishman.

[2] Now Sir A. Wools Sampson, K.C.B.

## CHAPTER II

### *Kimberley and the Jameson Raid*

"Ex Africa semper aliquid novi."

In the last week of the old year we started on our journey to Kimberley, then a matter of thirty-six hours. The whole of one day we dawdled over the Great Karroo in pelting rain and mist, which reminded one of Scotland. This sandy desert was at that season covered with brown scrub, for it was yet too early for the rains to have made it green, and the only signs of life were a few ostriches, wild white goats, and, very rarely, a waggon piled with wood, drawn along the sandy road by ten or twelve donkeys. As to vegetation, there were huge clumps of mimosa-bushes, just shedding their yellow



blossoms, through which the branches showed up with their long white thorns, giving them a weird and withered appearance. It must indeed have required great courage on behalf of the old Voor-trekker Boers, when they and their

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families left Cape Colony, at the time of the Great Trek, in long lines of white-tented waggons, to have penetrated through that dreary-waste in search of the promised land, of green veldt and running streams, which they had heard of, as lying away to the north, and eventually found in the Transvaal. I have been told that President Kruger was on this historical trek, a Voor-looper, or little boy who guides the leading oxen.

Round Kimberley the country presented a very different appearance, and here we saw the real veldt covered with short grass, just beginning to get burnt up by the summer's heat. Our host, Mr. J. B. Currey, a name well known in Diamond-Field circles, met us at the station. This is a good old South African custom, and always seems to me to be the acme of welcoming hospitality, and the climax to the kindness of inviting people to stay, merely on the recommendation of friends—quite a common occurrence in the colonies, and one which, I think, is never sufficiently appreciated, the entertainers themselves thinking it so natural a proceeding.

Kimberley itself and the diamond industry have both been so often and so well described that I shall beware of saying much of either, and I will only note a few things I remarked about this town, once humming with speculation, business, and movement, but now the essence of a sleepy respectability and visible prosperity. For the uninitiated it is better to state that the cause of this change was the gradual amalgamation of the diamond-mines and conflicting interests, which was absolutely necessary to limit the output of diamonds. As a result the stranger soon perceives that the whole community revolves on one axis, and is centred, so to speak, in one authority. "De Beers" is the moving spirit, the generous employer, and the universal benefactor. At that time there were 7,000 men employed in the mines, white and black, the skilled mechanics receiving as much as L6 a week. Evidence of the generosity of this company was seen in the model village built for the white workmen; in the orchard containing 7,000 fruit-trees, then one of Mr. Rhodes's favourite hobbies; and in the stud-farm for improving the breed of horses in South Africa. If I asked the profession of any of the smart young men who frequented the house where we were staying, for games of croquet, it amused me always to receive the same answer, "He is something in De Beers." The town itself boasts of many commodious public buildings, a great number of churches of all denominations, an excellent and well-known club; but whatever the edifice, the roofing is always corrugated iron, imported, I was told, from Wolverhampton. This roofing, indeed, prevails over the whole of new South Africa; and although it appears a very unsuitable protection from the burning rays of the African sun, no doubt its comparative cheapness and the quickness of its erection are the reasons why this style was introduced, and has been adhered to. By dint of superhuman efforts, in spite of locust-plagues, drought, and heavy thunderstorms, the inhabitants have contrived to surround their little one-storied villas with gardens bright with flowers, many creepers of vivid hues covering all the trellis-work of the verandahs.

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The interest of Kimberley, however, soon paled and waned as the all-engrossing events of the Uitlander rebellion in Johannesburg rapidly succeeded each other. One sultry evening our host brought us news of tangible trouble on the Rand: some ladies who were about to leave for that locality had received wires to defer their departure. Instantly, I recollect, my thoughts flew back to the *Tantallon Castle* and the dark words we had heard whispered, so it was not as much of a surprise to me as to the residents at Kimberley; to them it came as a perfect bombshell, so well had the secret been kept. The next day the text of the Manifesto, issued by Mr. Leonard, a lawyer, in the name of the Uitlanders, to protest against their grievances, appeared in all the morning papers, and its eloquent language aroused the greatest enthusiasm in the town. Thus was the gauntlet thrown down with a vengeance, and an ominous chord was struck by the statement, also in the papers, that Mr. Leonard had immediately left for Cape Town, "lest he should be arrested." It must be remembered that any barrister, English or Afrikaner, holding an official position in the Transvaal, had at that time to take the oath of allegiance to the Boer Government before being free to practise his calling. The explanation of the exceedingly acute feeling at Kimberley in those anxious days lay in the fact that nearly everyone had relations or friends in the Golden City. Our hosts themselves had two sons pursuing their professions there, and, of course, in the event of trouble with England, these young men would have been commandeered to fight for the Boer Government they served. One possibility, however, I noticed, was never entertained—viz., that, if fighting occurred, the English community might get the worst of it. Such a contingency was literally laughed to scorn. "The Boers were unprepared and lazy; they took weeks to mobilize; they had given up shooting game, hence their marksmen had deteriorated; and 200 men ought to be able to take possession of Johannesburg and Kruger into the bargain." This was what one heard on all sides, and in view of more recent events it is rather significant; but I remember then the thought flashed across my mind that these possible foes were the sons of the men who had annihilated us at Majuba and Laing's Nek, and I wondered whether another black page were going to be added to the country's history.

The next day, December 29, Kruger was reported in the papers to be listening to reason; but this hopeful news was short-lived, for on Monday, the 30th—as usual, a fiercely hot day—we received the astounding intelligence that Dr. Jameson, administrator of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, had entered the Transvaal at the head of the Chartered Company's Police, 600 strong, with several Maxim and Gardner guns. No upheaval of Nature could have created greater amazement, combined with a good deal of admiration and some dismay, than this sensational news. The dismay, indeed,



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increased as the facts were more fully examined. Nearly all the officers of the corps held Imperial commissions, and one heard perfect strangers asking each other how these officers could justify their action of entering a friendly territory, armed to the teeth; while the fact of Dr. Jameson himself being at their head heightened the intense interest. I did not know that gentleman then, but I must say he occupied in the hearts of the people at Kimberley, and, indeed, of the whole country, quite a unique position.

It was in the diamond-fields he had worked as a young doctor, usurping gradually almost the entire medical practice by his great skill as well as by his charm of manner. Then, as Mr. Rhodes's nominee, he had dramatically abandoned medicine and surgery, and had gone to the great unknown Northern Territory almost at a moment's notice. He had obtained concessions from the black tyrant, Lobengula, when all other emissaries had failed; backwards and forwards many times across the vast stretch of country between Bulawayo and Kimberley he had carried on negotiations which had finally culminated, five years previously, in his leading a column of 500 hardy pioneers to the promising country of Mashonaland, which up to that time had lain in darkness under the cruel rule of the dusky monarch. During three strenuous years Dr. Jameson, with no military or legal education, had laboured to establish the nucleus of a civilized government in that remote country; and during the first part of that period the nearest point of civilization, from whence they could derive their supplies, was Kimberley, a thousand miles away, across a practically trackless country. Added to this difficulty, the administrator found himself confronted with the wants and rights of the different mining communities into which the pioneers had gradually split themselves up, and which were being daily augmented by the arrival of "wasters" and others, who had begun to filter in as the country was written about, and its great mining and agricultural possibilities enlarged upon. Finally, goaded thereto and justified therein by Lobengula's continued cruelties, his raids on the defenceless Mashonas, and his threats to the English, Dr. Jameson had led another expedition against the King himself in his stronghold of Bulawayo. On that occasion sharp fighting ensued, but he at length brought peace, and the dawning of a new era to a vast native population in the country, which, with Mashonaland, was to be known as Rhodesia. In fact, up to then his luck had been almost supernatural and his achievements simply colossal. Added to all this was his capacity for attaching people to himself, and his absolutely fearless disposition; so it is easy to understand that Kimberley hardly dared breathe during the next momentous days, when the fate of "the Doctor," as he was universally called, and of his men, who were nearly all locally known, was in suspense.



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During many an evening of that eventful week we used to sit out after dinner under the rays of a glorious full moon, in the most perfect climatic conditions, and hear heated discussions of the pros and cons of this occurrence, which savoured more of medieval times than of our own. The moon all the while looked down so calmly, and the Southern Cross stood out clear and bright. One wondered what they might not have told us of scenes being enacted on the mysterious veldt, not 300 miles away. It was not till Saturday, January 4, that we knew what had happened, and any hopes we had entertained that the freebooters had either joined forces with their friends in Johannesburg, or else had made good their escape, were dashed to the ground as the fulness of the catastrophe became known. For hours, however, the aghast Kimberleyites refused to believe that Dr. Jameson and his entire corps had been taken prisoners, having been hopelessly outnumbered and outmanoeuvred after several hours' fighting at Krugersdorp; and, when doubt was no longer possible, loud and deep were the execrations levelled at the Johannesburgers, who, it was strenuously reiterated, had invited the Raiders to come to their succour, and who, when the pinch came, never even left the town to go to their assistance. If the real history of the Raid is ever written, when the march of time renders such a thing possible, it will be interesting reading; but, as matters stand now, it is better to say as little as possible of such a deplorable fiasco, wherein the only points which stood out clearly appeared to be that Englishmen were as brave, and perhaps also as foolhardy, as ever; that President Kruger, while pretending to shut his eyes, had known exactly all that was going forward; that the Boers had lost nothing of their old skill in shooting and ambushing, while the rapid rising and massing of their despised forces was as remarkable in its way as Jameson's forced march.

It was said at the time that the proclamation issued by the Government at home, repudiating the rebels, was the factor which prevented the Johannesburgers from joining forces with the Raiders when they arrived at Krugersdorp, as no doubt had been arranged, and that this step of the Home Government had, curiously enough, not been foreseen by the organizers of this deeply-laid plot. There is no doubt that there were two forces at work in Johannesburg, as, indeed, I had surmised during our voyage out: the one comprising the financiers, which strove to attain its ends by manifesto and public meeting, with the hint of sterner measures to follow; and the other impatient of delay, and thus impelled to seek the help of those who undoubtedly became freebooters the moment they crossed the Transvaal border. Certainly Dr. Jameson's reported words seemed to echo with reproach and disappointment—the reproach of a man who has been deceived; but whatever his feelings were at that moment of despair, when his lucky star seemed at length to have deserted him with a vengeance, I happen to know he never bore any lasting grudge against his Johannesburg friends, and that he remained on terms of perfect friendship even with the five members of the Reform Committee, with whom all the negotiations had gone forward. These included Colonel Frank Rhodes,[3] always one of his favourite companions.

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As an instance of how acute was the feeling suddenly roused respecting Englishmen, I remember that Mr. Harry Lawson, who was staying in the same house as ourselves, and had decided to leave for Johannesburg as special correspondent to his father's paper, the *Daily Telegraph*, was actually obliged to travel under a foreign name; and even then, if my memory serves me right, he did not succeed in reaching the Rand. In the meantime, as the daily papers received fuller details, harrowing accounts came to hand of the exodus from Johannesburg of men, women, and children travelling twenty in a compartment meant for eight, while others, not so fortunate, had to put up with cattle-trucks. The Boers were said to have shown themselves humane and magnanimous. Mr. Chamberlain, the papers wrote, was strengthening the hands of the President, to avert civil war, which must have been dangerously near; but the most important man of the moment in South Africa was grudgingly admitted to be "Oom Paul." His personal influence alone, it was stated, had restrained his wild bands of armed burghers, with which the land was simply bristling, and he was then in close confabulation with Her Majesty's High Commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson, whom he had summoned to Pretoria to deal with such refractory Englishmen. The journals also took advantage of the occasion to bid Kruger remember this was the opportunity to show himself forgiving, and to strengthen his corrupt Government, thereby earning the gratitude of those Afrikanders, for whom, indeed, he was not expected to have any affection, but to whom he was indebted for the present flourishing financial state of his republic, which, it was called to mind, was next door to bankrupt when England declared its independence in 1884. If such articles were translated and read out to that wily old President, as he sipped his coffee on his stoep, with his bland and inscrutable smile, it must have added zest to his evening pipe. I read in Mr. Seymour Fort's "Life of Dr. Jameson" that the Raid cost the Chartered Company L75,000 worth of material, most of which passed into the hands of the Boer Government, while the confiscated arms at Johannesburg amounted to several thousand rifles and a great deal of ammunition. Respecting the guns taken from Jameson's force, curiously enough, we surmised during the siege of Mafeking, four years later, that some of these were being used against us. Their shells fired into the town, many of which did not explode, and of which I possess a specimen, were the old seven-pound studded M.L. type, with the Woolwich mark on them.

### FOOTNOTES:

[3] Died at Groot Schuur in September, 1905.

### CHAPTER III

*The immediate results of the Raid—the raiders themselves*

“The fly sat on the axle-tree of the chariot-wheel, and said, ‘What a dust do I raise!’”—Aesop.



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Oom Paul was in the proud position of this fly in the weeks immediately following the Raid, as well as during many years to come. When we returned to Cape Town early in January, 1896, we found everything in a turmoil. Mr. Rhodes had resigned the premiership and had left for Kimberley, where he had met with a most enthusiastic reception, and Mr. Beit had been left in possession at Groot Schuur. The latter gentleman appeared quite crushed at the turn events had taken—not so much on account of his own business affairs, which must have been in a critical state, as in regard to the fate of Mr. Lionel Philips, his partner; this gentleman, as well as the other four members of the Reform Committee,[4] and a few lesser lights besides, had all been arrested during the past week at Johannesburg, and charged with high treason. Even at Cape Town, Captain Bettelheim and Mr. S. Joel, who had left the Transvaal, had one forenoon been requested to accompany some mysterious gentleman, and, very much to their surprise, had found themselves lodged in Her Majesty's gaol before lunch. This occurrence came as a bombshell to the Cape Town community, it having been assumed that there was no extradition for political offences. Johannesburg was known to be disarming almost unconditionally "in consequence of a personal appeal from the Governor," and another telegram informed the world that the men in so doing were broken-hearted, but were making the sacrifice in order to save Dr. Jameson's life. Some unkind friends remarked that their grief must have been tempered with relief, in ridding themselves of the weapons that they had talked so much about, and yet did not use when the time for action came. However, the ways of Providence are wonderful, and this inglorious finale was probably the means of averting a terrible civil war. Sir Hercules Robinson was still at Pretoria, conferring with the President, who, it was opined, was playing with him, as nothing either regarding the fate of Dr. Jameson and his officers, or of the political prisoners, had been settled. It was even rumoured that there was a serious hitch in the negotiations, and that Lord Salisbury had presented an ultimatum to the effect that, unless the President ratified the Convention of 1884, and ceased intriguing with Germany, war with England would ensue. This story was never confirmed, and I think the wish was father to the thought. I remember, during those eventful days, attending with Mrs. Harry Lawson a garden-party at Newlands, given by Lady Robinson, who was quite a remarkable personality, and an old friend and admirer of the ex-Prime Minister's. The gardens showed to their greatest advantage in the brilliant sunshine, and an excellent band played charming tunes under the trees; but everyone was so preoccupied—and no one more than the hostess—that it was rather a depressing entertainment.

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At last events began to shape themselves. We learnt that the Governor had left Pretoria on January 15, and that the military prisoners, including most of the troopers, were to be sent home to England immediately, for the leaders to stand their trial. The same morning I heard privately that Mr. Rhodes meant to leave by that very evening's mail-steamer for England, to face the inquiry which would certainly ensue, and, if possible, to save the Charter of that Company with which he had so indissolubly connected himself, and which was, so to speak, his favourite child. I remember everyone thought then that this Charter would surely be confiscated, on account of the illegal proceedings of its forces.

The fact of Mr. Rhodes's departure was kept a profound secret, as he wished to avoid any demonstration. The mail-steamer was the even then antiquated *Moor* of the Union Line, and she was lying a quarter of a mile away from the docks, awaiting her mail-bags and her important passengers. Besides Mrs. Harry Lawson and ourselves, Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Beit, and Dr. Rutherford Harris, the two latter of whom were also going to England, embarked quite unnoticed on a small launch, ostensibly to make a tour of the harbour, which as a matter of fact we did, whilst waiting for the belated mail. An object of interest was the chartered P. and O. transport *Victoria*, which had only the day before arrived from Bombay, with the Lancashire Regiment, 1,000 strong, on board, having been suddenly stopped here on her way home, pessimists at once declaring the reason to be possible trouble with Germany. A very noble appearance she presented that afternoon, with her lower decks and portholes simply swarming with red-coats, who appeared to take a deep interest in our movements. At last we boarded the mail-steamer, and then I had the chance of a few words with the travellers, and of judging how past events had affected them. Mr. Beit looked ill and worried; Mr. Rhodes, on the other hand, seemed to be in robust health, and as calm as the proverbial cucumber. I had an interesting talk to him before we left the ship; he said frankly that, for the first time in his life, during six nights of the late crisis he had not been able to sleep, and that he had been worried to death.

"Now," he added, "I have thought the whole matter out, I have decided what is best to be done, so I am all right again, and I do not consider at forty-three that my career is ended."

"I am quite sure it is not, Mr. Rhodes," was my reply; "and, what is more, I have a small bet with Mr. Lawson that in a year's time you will be in office again, or, if not absolutely in office, as great a factor in South African politics as you have been up to now."

He thought a minute, and then said:

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"It will take ten years; better cancel your bet." [5] was careful not to ask him any questions which might be embarrassing for him to answer, but he volunteered that the objects of his visit to England were, first, to do the best he could for his friends at Johannesburg, including his brother Frank, who were now political prisoners, practically at the mercy of the Boers, unless the Imperial Government bestirred itself on their behalf; and, secondly, to save his Charter, if by any means it could be saved. This doubt seemed to haunt him. "My argument is," I remember he said, "they may take away the Charter or leave it, but there is one fact that no man can alter—viz., that a vast and valuable territory has been opened up by that Company in about half the time, and at about a quarter the cost, which the Imperial Government would have required for a like task; so that whether, in consequence of one bad blunder, and partly in order to snub me, Cecil Rhodes, the Company is to cease, or whether it is allowed to go on with its work, its achievements and their results must and will speak for themselves." With reference to the political prisoners, I recollect he repeated more than once:

"You see, I stand in so much stronger a position than they do, in that I am not encumbered with wife and children; so I am resolved to strain every nerve on their behalf." About six o'clock the last bell rang, and, cutting short our conversation, I hurriedly wished him good-bye and good luck, and from the deck of our little steamer we watched the big ship pass out into the night.

We had now been a month in South Africa, and had seen very little of the country, and it appeared that we had chosen a very unfavourable moment for our visit. We were determined, however, not to return home without seeing the Transvaal, peaceful or the reverse. The question was, how to get there. By train one had to allow three days and four nights, and, since the rebellion, to put up with insults into the bargain at the frontier, where luggage and even wearing apparel were subjected to a minute search, involving sometimes a delay of five hours. Our projected departure by sea via Natal was postponed indefinitely, by the non-arrival of the incoming mail-steamer from England, the old *Roslin Castle*, which was living up to her reputation of breaking down, by being days overdue, so that it was impossible to say when she would be able to leave for Durban. Under these circumstances Sir Hercules Robinson proved a friend in need; and, having admonished us to secrecy, he told us that the P. and O. *Victoria*, the troopship we had noticed in the harbour, was under orders to leave at once for Durban to pick up Dr. Jameson and the other Raiders at that port; and convey them to England; therefore, as we only wanted to go as far as Durban, he would manage, by permission of the Admiral at Cape Town, to get us passages on board this ship. Of course we were delighted, and early next morning

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we embarked. It was the first time I had ever been on a troopship, and every moment was of interest. As spick and span as a man-of-war, with her wide, roomy decks, it was difficult to imagine there were 2,000 souls on board the *Victoria*, and only in the morning, when the regiment paraded, appearing like ants from below, and stretching in unbroken lines all down both sides of the ship, did one realize how large was the floating population, and how strict must be the discipline necessary to keep so many men healthy, contented, and efficient. There were a few other civilians going home on leave, but we were the only so-called “indulgence passengers.” The time passed all too quickly, the monotonous hours of all shipboard life, between the six-thirty dinner and bedtime, being whiled away by listening to an excellent military band.

We were told to be dressed and ready to disembark by 6 a.m. on the morning we were due at Durban, as the Admiral had given stringent instructions not to delay there any longer than was necessary. I was therefore horrified, on awaking at five o'clock, to find the engines had already stopped, and, on looking out of the porthole, to see a large tender approaching from the shore, apparently full of people. I scrambled into my clothes, but long before I was dressed the tug was alongside, or as nearly alongside as the heavy swell and consequent deep rolls of our ship would allow. Durban boasts of no harbour for large ships. These have to lie outside the bar, and a smooth sea being the exception on this part of the coast, disembarking is in consequence almost always effected in a sort of basket cage, worked by a crane, and holding three or four people. When I got on deck, the prisoners were still on the tender, being mercilessly rolled about, and they must indeed have been glad when, at six o'clock, the signal to disembark was given.

I shall never forget that striking and melancholy scene. The dull grey morning, of which the dawn had scarcely broken; the huge rollers of the leaden sea, which were lifting our mighty ship as if she had been but a cockleshell; and the tiny steamer, at a safe distance, her deck crowded with sunburnt men, many of whose faces were familiar to us, and who were picturesquely attired, for the most part, in the very same clothes they had worn on their ill-fated march—flannel shirts, khaki breeches, high boots, and the large felt hats of the Bechuanaland Border Police, which they were wearing probably for the last time. As soon as they came on board we were able to have a few hasty words with those we knew, and their faces seem to pass in front of me as I write: Sir John Willoughby and Captain C. Villiers, both in the Royal Horse Guards, apparently nonchalant and without a care in the world; Colonel Harry White—alas! dead—and his brother Bobby, who were as fit as possible and as cheery as ever, but inclined to be mutinous with their unwilling gaolers; Major Stracey,[6] Scots Guards, with his genial and courtly



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manners, apparently still dazed at finding himself a prisoner and amongst rebels; Mr. Cyril Foley, one of the few civilians, and Mr. Harold Grenfell,[7] 1st Life Guards, like boys who expect a good scolding when they get home; and last, but not least, Dr. Jameson, to whom we were introduced. "What will they do with us?" was the universal question, and on this point we could give them no information; but it can be imagined they were enchanted to see some friendly faces after a fortnight's incarceration in a Boer prison, during the first part of which time they daily expected to be led out and shot. I remember asking Dr. Jameson what I think must have been a very embarrassing question, although he did not seem to resent it. It was whether an express messenger from Johannesburg, telling him not to start, as the town was not unanimous and the movement not ripe, had reached him the day before he left Mafeking. He gave no direct answer, but remarked: "I received so many messages from day to day, now telling me to come, then to delay starting, that I thought it best to make up their minds for them, before the Boers had time to get together."

We were soon hurried on shore, as Mr. Beresford,[8] the 7th Hussars, who had brought the prisoners on board, had to return to the town to make some necessary purchases for them, in the way of clothes, for they possessed nothing but what they stood up in.

We left Durban immediately by train for Pietermaritzburg, where we were the guests of Sir Walter and Lady Hely Hutchinson, at Government House, a very small but picturesque residence where Lady Hely Hutchinson received us most kindly in the absence of her husband, who was in the Transvaal, superintending the departure of the remaining prisoners. Here we seemed to have left warlike conditions behind us, for the town was agog with the excitement of a cricket-match, between Lord Hawke's eleven and a Natal fifteen. On the cricket-field we met again two of our *Tantallon Castle* fellow-passengers, Mr. Guest and Mr. H. Milner, who had come down from Johannesburg with the cricketers. We were interested to compare notes and to hear Mr. Milner's adventures, which really made us smile, though they could hardly have been a laughing matter to him at the time. He told us that, after twice visiting Captain C. Coventry, who was wounded in the Raid, at the Krugersdorp Hospital without molestation, on the third occasion, when returning by train to Johannesburg, he was roughly pulled out of his carriage at ten o'clock at night, and told that, since he had no passport, he was to be arrested on the charge of being a spy. In vain did he tell them that only at the last station his passport had been demanded in such peremptory terms that he had been forced to give it up. They either would not or could not understand him. In consequence the poor man tasted the delights of a Boer gaol for a whole night, and, worst indignity of all, had for companions two criminals and a crowd of dirty Kaffirs.

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The following morning, he said, his best friend would not have known him, so swollen and distorted was his face from the visitations of the inseparable little companions of the Kaffir native. He was liberated on bail next day, and finally set free, with a scanty apology of mistaken identity. At any other time such an insult to an Englishman would have made some stir; as it was, everyone was so harassed that he was hardly pitied.

The Governor returned two days before our departure, and we had a gay time, between entertainments for the cricketers and festivities given by the 7th Hussars. Feeling in Durban, with regard to the Raiders, was then running high, and for hours did a vast crowd wait at the station merely in order to give the troopers of the Chartered Forces some hearty cheers, albeit they passed at midnight in special trains without stopping. Very loyal, too, were these colonists, and no German would have had a pleasant time of it there just then, with the Kaiser's famous telegram to Kruger fresh in everyone's memory.

From Pietermaritzburg to Johannesburg the railway journey was a very interesting one. North of Newcastle we saw a station bearing the name of Ingogo; later on the train wound round the base of Majuba Hill, and when that was felt behind it plunged into a long rocky tunnel which pierces the grassy slope on which the tragedy of Laing's Nek was enacted—all names, alas! too well known in the annals of our disasters. After leaving the Majuba district, we came to the Transvaal frontier, where we had been told we might meet with scanty courtesy. However, we had no disagreeable experiences, and then the train emerged on the endless rolling green plains which extend right up to and beyond the mining district of the Rand.

Now and then one perceived a trek waggon and oxen with a Boer and his family, either preceded or followed by a herd of cattle, winding their slow way along the dusty red track they call road. At the stations wild-looking Kaffir women, half naked and anything but attractive in appearance, came and stared at the train and its passengers. It is in this desolate country that Johannesburg, the Golden City, sprang up, as it were, like a fungus, almost in a night. Nine years previously the Rand—since the theatre of so much excitement and disappointment—the source of a great part of the wealth of London at the present day, was as innocent of buildings and as peaceful in appearance as those lonely plains over which we had travelled. As we approached Johannesburg, little white landmarks like milestones made their appearance, and these, we were told, were new claims pegged out. The thought suggested itself that this part of South Africa is in some respects a wicked country, with, it would almost seem, a blight resting on it: sickness, to both man and beast, is always stalking round; drought is a constant scourge to agriculture; the locust plagues ruin those crops and fruit that hailstones and scarcity of water have spared; and all the while men vie with and tread upon one another in their rush and eagerness after the gold which the land keeps hidden. Small wonder this district has proved such a whirlpool of evil influences, where everyone is

always striving for himself, and where disillusion and bitter experiences have caused each man to distrust his neighbour.



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### FOOTNOTES:

[4] Colonel Frank Rhodes, Mr. G. Farrar, Mr. Hammond, and Mr. C. Leonard.

[5] Mr. Rhodes died in the spring of 1902.

[6] Now Colonel Stracey Clitheroe.

[7] Now Colonel Grenfell, 3rd Dragoon Guards.

[8] Now Major Beresford.

### CHAPTER IV

#### JOHANNESBURG AND PRETORIA IN 1896

“Little white mice of chance,  
Coats of wool and corduroy pants,  
Gold and wine, women and sin,  
I’ll give to you, if you let me in  
To the glittering house of chance.”

*American Dice Incantation.*

At Johannesburg we were the guests of Mr. Abe Bailey at Clewer Lodge. Our host, however, was unfortunately absent, “detained” in the precincts of the gaol at Pretoria, although allowed out on bail. In the same house he had entertained in 1891 my brother Randolph<sup>[9]</sup> and his friend Captain G. Williams, Royal Horse Guards, on their way to Mashonaland. One of my first visitors was another fellow-traveller of theirs, Mr. H.C. Perkins, the celebrated American mining expert. This gentleman was a great friend of Randolph’s, and he spoke most touchingly of his great attachment to the latter, and of his grief at his death. For five years Mr. and Mrs. Perkins had lived in Johannesburg, where they both enjoyed universal respect, and their approaching departure, to settle once more in America, was deplored by all. Considered to be the highest mining expert of the day, Mr. Perkins had seen the rise of the Rand since its infancy, and he had been shrewd enough to keep out of the late agitation and its disturbances. Under his guidance we saw the sights of the towns: the far-famed Rand Club; the Market Square, crammed, almost for the first time since the so-called “revolution,” with trek-waggons and their Boer drivers; the much-talked-of “Gold-fields” offices, barred and barricaded, which had been the headquarters of the Reform Committee; the Standard Bank, where the smuggled arms had been kept; and finally the Exchange and the street enclosed by iron chains, where the stock markets were principally carried on. We were also shown the interior of the Stock Exchange itself, though we were warned that it was scarcely



worth a visit at that time of depression. We heard the “call of the shares,” which operation only took twenty minutes, against nearly two hours during the time of the recent boom. Instead of the listless, bored-looking individuals below us, who only assumed a little excitement when the revolving, clock-like machine denoted any popular share, we were told that a few months ago every available space had been crowded by excited buyers and sellers—some without hats, others in their shirt-sleeves, almost knocking one another over in their desire to do business. Those must indeed have been palmy days, when the money so lightly made was correspondingly lightly spent; when champagne replaced the usual whisky-split at the Rand Club, and on all sides was to be heard the old and well-known formula, “Here’s luck,” as the successful speculator toasted an old friend or a newcomer.

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However, to return to Johannesburg as we found it, after the 1895 boom. Even then it seemed to me that for the first time in South Africa I saw life. Cape Town, with its pathetic dullness and palpable efforts to keep up a show of business; Kimberley, with its deadly respectability—both paled in interest beside their younger sister, so light-hearted, reckless, and enterprising. Before long, in spite of gloomy reflections on the evils of gold-seeking, I fell under the fascination of what was then a wonderful town, especially wonderful from its youth. The ever-moving crowds which thronged the streets, every man of which appeared to be full of important business and in a desperate hurry, reminded one of the City in London. Smart carriages with well-dressed ladies drove rapidly past, the shops were cunningly arranged with tempting wares, and all this bustle and traffic was restored in little over a week. A fortnight previously a revolution was impending and a siege was looming ahead. Business had been at a complete standstill, the shops and houses barred and barricaded, and many of the inhabitants were taking a hurried departure; while bitterness, discord, and racial feeling were rampant. Now, after a few days, that cosmopolitan and rapidly changing population appeared to have buried their differences, and the uninitiated would never have guessed the town had passed, and was, indeed, still passing, through troublous times. Mr. Perkins, however, was pessimistic, and told us appearances were misleading. He rightly foresaw many lean years for those interested in the immediate future of the Rand, though even he, perhaps, hardly realized how lean those would become. Since those days much water has flown under the bridge, and the trade of the town, not to speak of the mining industry, has gone from bad to worse. Recently Federation, the dream of many a statesman connected with South Africa, has opened a new vista of political peace and prosperity to its chastened citizens. Many of these, in affluent circumstances in 1896, have since gone under financially; but some of the original inhabitants still remain to show in the future that they have learned wisdom from their past troubles, brought on principally by their mad haste to get rich too quickly.

During our stay at Johannesburg we made an expedition to Pretoria in order to see our host and other friends, who were still on bail there, awaiting their trial, and also to visit the seat of the Boer Government. By these remarkable State railways the short journey of thirty-two miles occupied three hours. We passed one very large Boer laager, or military camp, on the line, which looked imposing enough in the bright sunlight, with its shining array of white-tarpaulin-covered waggons; companies of mounted burghers, armed to the teeth, and sitting their ragged but well-bred ponies as if glued to the saddle, were to be seen galloping to and fro. Although the teeth of the enemy had been drawn for the present, the Boers were evidently



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determined to keep up a martial display. As Pretoria was approached the country became very pretty: low hills and many trees, including lovely weeping-willows, appeared on the landscape, and away towards the horizon was situated many a snug little farm; running streams caught the rays of the sun, and really rich herbage supplied the pasture for herds of fat cattle. The town itself did not prove specially interesting. An imposing space called Church Square was pointed out to us with great pride by the Dutch gentleman who kindly did cicerone. There we saw the little primitive “dopper” church where the President always worshipped, overshadowed and dwarfed by the magnificent Houses of Parliament, built since the Transvaal acquired riches, and by the no less grand Government Offices. As we were standing before the latter, after the fashion of tourists, our guide suddenly became very excited, and told us we were really in good luck, for the President was just about to leave his office on his return home for his midday meal. In a few minutes the old gentleman emerged, guarded by four armed burghers, and passed rapidly into his carriage. We took a good look at this remarkable personage. Stout in figure, with a venerable white beard, in a somewhat worn frock-coat and a rusty old black silk hat, President Kruger did not look the stern dictator of his little kingdom which in truth he was. Our Dutch friend told us Oom Paul was in the habit of commencing work at 5 a.m., and that he transacted business, either at his house or in the Government Offices, with short intermissions, until 5 p.m. Simply worshipped by his burghers, he was on a small scale, and in his ignorant fashion, a man of iron like Bismarck, notably in his strong will and in the way in which he imposed the same on his countrymen. The extent of his personal influence could be gauged when one considered that his mere orders had restrained his undisciplined soldier-burghers, who, irritated by being called away from their peaceful existences, maddened by the loss of some of their number who fell in the fighting, and elated by their easy victory, were thirsting to shoot down the leaders of the Raid, as they stood, in the market-square at Krugersdorp. The state of the Boer Government at that time added to the President’s difficulties. He was hampered by the narrowest—minded Volksraad (Parliament) imaginable, who resented tooth and nail even the most necessary concessions to the Uitlanders; he was surrounded by corrupt officials, most of whom were said to be implicated in the late rebellion; he was the head of a community which was known to be split up into several sections, owing to acute religious disputes; and yet he contrived, at seventy-one years of age, to outwit the 60,000 Uitlanders at Johannesburg, and to present his rotten republic as a model of all that was excellent and high-minded to the world at large. At the same time he compelled his burghers to forget their own differences, as they hurled defiance at the common



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foe. It seems to be a truism that it requires a Boer to rule a Boer; and in some ways the mantle of President Kruger would appear to have descended in our days upon General Louis Botha. According to all accounts, his will is now law to the ignorant backveld Boers, although his guiding principles savour more of the big stick than of the spoon-feeding system. Undoubtedly loyal to England, he bids fair in the future to help found a nation, based upon the union of British and Boer, inheriting their traditions, cultivating their ideals, and pursuing their common ends.

But this Utopia seemed far away in 1896, and it was, alas! destined that many lives should be laid down, and much treasure expended, before its advent. For the moment lamentations were rife in Johannesburg, and at many a dinner-party unprofitable discussions raged as to what would have happened had Dr. Jameson entered the city. On this point no one could agree. Some people said the town could have been starved out in a few days, and the water-supply cut off immediately; others asserted that the Boers were in reality overawed by Dr. Jameson's name and prestige, and would have been glad to make terms. The practical spirits opined that the only thing which would have saved the inhabitants in any case was the tame ending which actually came about—namely, the High Commissioner's intervention coupled with President Kruger's moderation and wisdom in allowing England to punish her own irregular soldiers. The more one heard of the whole affair, the more it seemed to resemble a scene out of a comic opera. The only people at Johannesburg who had derived any advantage from the confusion were several hitherto unknown military commanders, who had proudly acquired the title of Colonel, and had promptly named a body of horse after themselves. During the days before the final fiasco these leaders used to make short detours round the town in full regimentals, and finally fill up the time by being photographed in groups. Mercifully, as it turned out, they were not ready for active service when Dr. Jameson was reported at Krugersdorp.

We made an excursion to the so-called battle-field before leaving for the South. We started in a covered waggonette with no springs to speak of, drawn by six mules, and a pair of horses as leaders. Two Kaffirs acted as charioteers, and kept up an incessant jabber in Dutch. The one who held the reins looked good-natured enough, but the other, whose duty it was to wield the enormously long whip, had a most diabolical cast of countenance, in which cruelty and doggedness were both clearly depicted. We found his face a true indication of his character before the end of the day. Bumping gaily along, we soon left the well-built houses behind, and after passing the Malay quarter of the town, remarkable by reason of the quaint houses these blacks make out of paraffin tins, flattened out and nailed together with wonderful neatness, we emerged on the open veldt. Of course the road



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was of the roughest description, and sometimes we had to hold on with all our might to avoid the concussion of our heads with the wooden roof. In spite of this, as soon as the Kaffirs saw an open space before them, the huge whip was cracked, and away went our team at full gallop, seemingly quite out of control, the driver leaning back in his seat with a contented grin, while his colleague manipulated the unwieldy whip. The tract ran parallel to the Rand for some distance, and we got a splendid view of Johannesburg and the row of chimney-shafts that so clearly define the reef.

On passing Langlaate village, we were stopped by a party of Boers, who had off-saddled by the side of the road. As they were fully armed and their appearance was not prepossessing, we expected to be ordered to alight while our conveyance was being searched. However, our fears were unfounded, and they were most polite. The driver muttered something in Dutch, whereupon the leader came to the door, and said in broken English: "Peeck neeck—I see all right." I am sorry to say one of the gentlemen of our party muttered "Brute" in an audible whisper; but, then, he had undergone a short, but a very unpleasant term of imprisonment, with no sort of excuse, at the instance of a Boer *Veldtcornet*, so no wonder he had vowed eternal vengeance. Luckily, this officer did not hear, or else did not understand, the ejaculation, so after a civil interchange of good-days we drove on.

After about three hours we reached a shallow ford over a wide stream, and our driver informed us that this was our destination. Leaving the carriage, we walked up to some rocks overlooking the stream, which seemed an inviting place for luncheon; but we were quickly driven away, as thereon were lying seven or eight carcasses of dead horses and mules. Curiously enough, the vultures, or "aas-vogels," had left the skins on these poor beasts, for I remember noticing how their coats glistened in the sunshine. This sight was not very conducive to a good appetite, and a little farther on we saw another pathetic spectacle: a very deep trench, made in the past by some gold-pro prospector, had been filled in with rocky boulders, and was covered with withered ferns. Here lay those who had fallen of the Chartered Company's Forces. No doubt by now the space is enclosed as a tiny part of God's acre, but at that time the rough stones in the deep grave, and the faded flowers, seemed to enhance the dreariness of the scene.[10] As to the locality of the final encounter and surrender of the Raiders, there was not much to interest any but military men. Standing on the top of the eminence before alluded to, one could see the Boer position and the sore strait of their foes. Whether the column had come purposely towards this drift, as being the only possible ford for many miles, or whether they had been guided thereto by a treacherous guide, no one knew. One thing was certain: destruction or surrender must have



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stared them in the face. The kopjes on the farther side of the stream were bristling with Boers, and away on the veldt beyond was drawn up the Staats artillery. And then one realized a most awful blunder of the Reform Committee, from their point of view. The Boer forces, arriving hereabouts in hot haste, from a rapid mobilization, had been almost entirely without ammunition. We were told on good authority that each burgher had but six rounds, and that the field-guns were without any shells at all. During the night the necessary supply was brought by rail from Pretoria, actually right through Johannesburg. Either by accident or mature reflection on the part of the conspirators in that city, this train was allowed to pass to its destination unmolested. It proved to be one of those small happenings that completely alter the course of events. If the burghers had not stopped the Raiders there, nothing could have prevented them from entering Johannesburg, for after another three miles the long-sought-for chimneys—the overhanging cloud of smoke—would have come into view. The very stars in their courses seemed to have fought for the Boers, and justified President Kruger's belief that his people were specially under the protection of Providence.[11] Neither will anyone ever determine the number of Boers killed at Krugersdorp. One *Veldtcoronet* inserted in all the papers that he defied anyone to prove that more than four burghers were shot, and of these two were killed accidentally by their own rifles. Residents on the spot, however, averred that many more fell; but I think the point was not disputed in view of President Kruger's famous claim for "moral and intellectual damages," which was then already beginning to be mooted.

The lengthening shadows at last reminded us that we had to return to town for a dinner-party given in our honour. It usually takes some time to catch a team of six mules and two horses turned out to graze on the veldt; it is endless, however, when they are as frightened of their drivers as ours appeared to be. At length they were collected and we made a start, and then our adventures began. First the leader, a white horse, jibbed. Off jumped the Kaffir coachman, and commenced hammering the poor brute unmercifully over head, ears, and body, with what they called in Africa the *shambok*. [12] In consequence the team suddenly started off, but the long whip, left on the carriage roof, slipped down, and was broken in two by the wheel passing over it. Anyone who has driven behind mules knows how absolutely powerless the Jehu is without a long whip; so here we were face to face with a real misfortune: increasing darkness, jibbing leaders, no whip, and fifteen sandy miles to traverse before dinner-time. With every sort of ejaculation and yell, and a perfect rain of blows with the *shambok* from the Kaffir still on foot, we lurched forward at a gallop, escaping by a hair's-breadth another gold-pro prospector's



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trench. But the same leader jibbed again after another mile. I must admit he was a most irritating brute, whose obstinacy had been increased by the cruelty of the driver. It was now decided to put him in the "wheel," where he would be obliged to do his work. We crawled on again till our white friend literally threw himself down. I have related this incident to show how cruel Kaffirs can be, for now the rage of the evil-looking driver burst forth. He not only hammered the prostrate horse to any extent, but then made the rest of the team pull on, so as to drag him along on his side. Of course this could not be allowed, and Major —— jumped out and commanded him to desist, take out the useless horse, and tie him behind. At first the Kaffir was very mutinous, and it was only when a stick was laid threateningly across his back that he sulkily complied, looking the while as if he would like to murder the man he was forced to obey. One hears so much nowadays of the black population having equal rights with the white inhabitants, that it is well to remember how ferociously their lack of civilization occasionally comes out. Doubtless there are cruel men both white and black, but for downright brutality the nigger is hard to beat, and it is also quite certain that whom the latter does not fear he will not love. I have personally experienced great devotion and most attentive service on the part of natives, and they are deserving of the kindest and most considerate treatment; but it has often made me indignant to hear people, who have had little or no experience of living in the midst of a native population, prate of the rights of our "black brothers," and argue as if the latter thought, judged, amused themselves, or, in short, behaved, as the white men do, who have the advantage of hundreds of years of culture.

The day following our drive to Krugersdorp we left for Cape Town and England. We made the voyage on the old *Roslin Castle*. Always a slow boat, she had on this occasion, in sporting parlance, a "wing down," having broken a piston-rod on her way out from England, when we had vainly awaited her at Cape Town, and I think it was nearly three weeks before we landed at Plymouth. Again Randolph's African journey was brought back to my recollection. The captain of the *Roslin Castle*, Travers by name, had commanded the *Scot*, which brought his party home from Mashonaland, and he had very agreeable recollections of many an interesting conversation and of quiet rubbers of whist.

Numerous and exciting events had been crowded into the past six weeks, and in spite of revolutions and strife we had found our South African visit a very pleasant one. A curious thing about that continent is: you may dislike it or fall under its charm, but in any case it nearly always calls you back. It certainly did in my case; and while recalling the people we had met and the information we had acquired it was impossible not to think a little of the Boers



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themselves, their characteristics and their failings. At Johannesburg I had been specially struck by men, who knew them from long experience, telling me how fully they appreciated the good points of the burghers—for instance, their bravery, their love of their country, and their simple, unquestioning, if unattractive faith, which savoured of that of the old Puritans. Against these attributes their pig-headedness, narrow-mindedness, laziness, and slovenliness had to be admitted. All these defects militated against their living in harmony with a large, increasing, and up-to-date community like the Johannesburg Uitlanders. Still, one could not forget that the Transvaal was their country, ceded to them by the English nation. They left Cape Colony years ago, to escape our laws, which they considered unjust. It is certain we should never have followed them into the Transvaal but for the sudden discovery of the gold industry; it is equally true they had not the power or the wish to develop this for themselves, and yet without it they were a bankrupt nation. There is no doubt that the men who made the most mischief, and who for years embarrassed the President, were the “Hollanders,” or officials sent out from the mother-country of the Dutch. They looked on the Transvaal only as a means for getting rich. Hence the fearful state of bribery and corruption among them, from the highest official downwards. But this very bribery and corruption were sometimes exceedingly convenient, and I remember well, when I revisited Johannesburg in 1902, at the conclusion of the war, hearing people inveigh against the hard bargains driven by the English Government; they even went so far as to sigh again for the good old days of Kruger’s rule. Now all is changed once more, after another turn of the kaleidoscope of time, and yet it is well to remember that such things have indeed been.

## CHAPTER V

THREE YEARS AFTER—LORD MILNER AT CAPE TOWN BEFORE THE  
WAR—MR. CECIL RHODES AT GROOT SCHUUR—OTHER INTERESTING  
PERSONAGES

“There are many echoes in the world, but few voices.”

GOETHE.

On May 6, 1899, we sailed from Southampton on the S.S. *Norman*. We purposed to spend a few months in Rhodesia, but such is the frailty of human plans that eventually we stayed in South Africa for one year and three months.

Dr. Jameson was our fellow-passenger to Cape Town, and with him we travelled up to Bulawayo, and passed five weeks there as the guests of Major Maurice Heaney.[13] Part of this time we spent on the veldt, far from civilization, sleeping in tents, and using



riding ponies and mule waggons as transport. I can recommend this life as a splendid cure for any who are run down or overworked. The climate of Rhodesia in the month of June is perfection; rain is unknown, except as the accompaniment of occasional thunderstorms;

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and it is never too hot to be pleasant. Game was even then practically non-existent in Matabeleland, but our object was to inspect the mines of Major Heaney's various companies. The country was pretty and well wooded, and we crossed many river-beds, amongst them the wide Umzingwani. This stream is a mighty torrent during the rains, but, like many others in South Africa, it becomes perfectly dry during the winter season, a peculiarity of the continent, which caused a disappointed man to write that South Africa produced "birds without song, flowers without smell, and rivers without water."

While camped on the banks of this vanished river, we used to hear lions roaring as evening fell, and could distinguish their soft pads in the dry sand next morning; but they were so shy that we never caught a glimpse of one, nor could they be tempted into any ambush.

During these weeks the abortive Bloemfontein Conference had been holding its useless sessions; the political world seemed so unsettled, and war appeared so exceedingly likely, that we decided to return to Cape Town, especially as Mr. Rhodes, who was expected out from England almost immediately, had cabled asking us to stay at Groot Schuur, where we arrived early in July. A few days afterwards I had a ticket given me to witness the opening of the Legislative Council, or Upper House, by Sir Alfred Milner. It was an imposing ceremony, and carried out with great solemnity. The centre of the fine hall was filled with ladies—in fact, on first arriving, it gave one the idea of a ladies' parliament; but in a few minutes the members filed in, shortly before the state entry of His Excellency the Governor. Then, for the first time, I saw the man of the hour; dignified without being stiff, and looking every inch his part, he went through his role to perfection. The speech was, as usual, utterly devoid of interest, and, contrary to the hope of excited partisans, Transvaal affairs were studiously avoided. A few days later we went to Government House to be introduced to Sir Alfred; he at once impressed a stranger as a man of intense strength of mind and purpose, underlying a somewhat delicate physique, which was at that time, perhaps, enhanced by a decidedly worn and worried expression of countenance. Later on I had many conversations with Mr. Rhodes about the Governor. He used to say—and no one was better qualified to judge—that Sir Alfred Milner was one of the strongest men he had ever met. "In the business I am constantly having to transact with him, connected with the Chartered Company," he remarked, "I find him, his mind once made up, unmovable—so much so that we tacitly agree to drop at once any subject that we do not agree on, for nothing could be gained by discussing it. I allow he makes his decisions slowly, but once made they are irrevocable."

Mr. Rhodes used also to say he admired beyond words Sir Alfred's behaviour and the line he adopted in that most difficult crisis before the war. "He assumes," said his appreciator, "an attitude of perfect frankness with all parties; he denies himself to no one

who may give him any information or throw fresh light on the situation; to all he expresses his views, and repeats his unalterable opinions of what is required.”

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Other people told me how true these words were, and how ingeniously and yet ingenuously Sir Alfred Milner contrived to treat a unique position. Standing alone, the central isolated figure, surrounded by a young and inexperienced staff, his political advisers men for whom he could have but little sympathy, and whose opinions he knew to be in reality diametrically opposed to his and to the present policy at home, the Governor steered clear of intrigue and personal quarrels by his intensely straightforward and able conduct. He was in the habit of almost daily seeing Mr. Rhodes, financiers from Johannesburg, military men thirsting for war, who were commencing to arrive from England, as well as his Cabinet Ministers. To these latter he probably volunteered information about the other interviews he had had, thereby disarming their criticisms.

From one great man I must pass to another. A few days after our arrival at Groot Schuur, Mr. Rhodes and Sir Charles Metcalfe arrived from England. Incidentally I may mention the former's marvellous reception, and the fact that nearly five miles of road between Cape Town and Groot Schuur were decorated with flags and triumphal arches, while the day was observed as a general holiday. This had happened to him in a minor degree so often before that it did not arouse much comment. The same evening we attended a monster meeting at the Drill Hall, where thousands of faces were turned simultaneously towards the platform to welcome back their distinguished citizen. The cheering went on for ten minutes, and was again and again renewed, till the enthusiasm brought a lump to many throats, and certainly deeply affected the central figure of the evening. This meeting, at which no less than a hundred addresses were presented from every part of Africa—from the far-off Zambesi to the fruit-growing district of the Paarl, almost entirely populated by Dutch—even this great demonstration that one great man was capable of inspiring quickly faded from my memory in view of the insight which three weeks as his guest gave me of the many sides of his life, occupations, and character. The extraordinary strength of will and tenacity of purpose, points always insisted on in connection with him, seemed on nearer acquaintance to be merely but a small part of a marvellous whole.

It often used to occur to me, when with Mr. Rhodes, how desirable it would be to induce our sons and young men in general to imitate some of the characteristics which were the motive power of his life, and therefore of his success. I noticed especially the wonderful power of concentration of thought he possessed, and which he applied to any subject, no matter how trivial. The variety and scope of his many projects did not lessen his interest in any one of them. At that time he was building four railways in Rhodesia, which country was also pinning its faith to him for its development, its prosperity, and, indeed, its *modus vivendi*. Apart from this, Cape politics, although

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he then held no official position, were occupying a great deal of his time and thoughts in view of future Federation. It was, therefore, marvellous to see him putting his whole mind to such matters as his prize poultry and beasts at the home farm, to the disposing of the same in what he termed "my country," or to the arranging of his priceless collection of glass—even to the question of a domicile for the baby lioness lately presented to him. Again, one moment he might be talking of De Beers business, involving huge sums of money, the next discussing the progress of his thirty fruit-farms in the Drakenstein district, where he had no fewer than 100,000 fruit-trees; another time his horse-breeding establishment at Kimberley was engaging his attention, or, nearer home, the road-making and improvements at Groot Schuur, where he even knew the wages paid to the 200 Cape boys he was then employing. Mr. Rhodes was always in favour of doing things on a large scale, made easy, certainly, by his millionaire's purse. Sometimes a gardener or bailiff would ask for two or three dozen rose or fruit trees. "There is no use," he would exclaim impatiently, "in two dozen of anything. My good man, you should count in hundreds and thousands, not dozens. That is the only way to produce any effect or to make any profit." Another of his theories was that people who dwelt in or near towns never had sufficient fresh air. During one of our morning rides I remember his stopping a telegraph-boy, and asking him where he lived. When the lad had told him, he said: "I suppose there are no windows in your cottage; you had better go to Rhodesia, where you will find space, and where you won't get cramped ideas." Then he rode on, leaving the boy staring at him with open eyes. An attractive attribute was his love of his early associations, his father especially being often the theme of his conversation. He used freely to express his admiration for the type the latter represented, now almost extinct, of the old-fashioned country clergyman-squire. He held with tenacity to the traditions of his childhood in having always a cold supper on Sunday evenings, instead of the usual elaborate dinner, also in having the cloth removed for dessert, to display the mahogany, of which, alas! few of our tables are now made. With stupidity, or anything thereto approaching, he was apt to be impatient; neither could he stand young men who affected indifference to, or boredom with, the events and sights of the day. I often used to think, however, he frightened people, and that they did not show to their best advantage, nor was their intelligence at its brightest when talking with him. I now refer especially to those in his employ.



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To his opponents in the political world he was generous when discussing them in private, however bitter and stinging his remarks were in public. I remember one evening, on Mr. Merriman's name being mentioned, how Mr. Rhodes dilated for some time on his charms as a friend and as a colleague; he told me I should certainly take an opportunity of making his acquaintance. "I am so fond of Merriman," he added; "he is one of the most cultivated of men and the most charming of companions that I know. We shall come together again some day." And this of the man who was supposed then to hate Cecil John Rhodes with such a deadly hatred that he, an Englishman born, was said to have been persuaded to Dutch sympathies by his vindictive feelings against one great fellow-countryman. Before leaving the subject of Mr. Rhodes, I must note his intense kindness of heart and genuine hospitality. Groot Schuur was a rendezvous for people of all classes, denominations, and politics; they were all welcome, and they certainly all came. From morn till eve they passed in and out, very often to proffer a request, or, again, simply to pay their respects and have the pleasure of a few minutes' chat. After his morning ride, Mr. Rhodes, if nothing called him to town, usually walked about his beautiful house, the doors and windows of which stood open to admit the brilliant sunshine and to enable him to enjoy glimpses of his beloved Table Mountain, or the brilliant colours of the salvia and plumbago planted in beds above the stoep. I often call to mind that tall figure, probably in the same costume in which he had ridden—white flannel trousers and tweed coat—his hair rather rough, from a habit he had of passing his hand through it when talking or thinking. He would wander through the rooms, enjoying the pleasure of looking at his many beautiful pieces of furniture and curiosities of all sorts, nearly all of which had a history. Occasionally shifting a piece of rare old glass or blue Delft china, he would the while talk to anyone who chanced to come in, greeting heartily his old friends, and remembering every detail of their circumstances, opinions, and conduct. Concerning the latter, he did not fail to remind them of any failings he had taken note of. Those who were frauds, incompetent, or lazy, he never spared, and often such conversations were a source of much amusement to me. On the other hand, those who had been true to him, and had not veered round with the tide of public opinion after 1896, were ever remembered and rewarded. It was remarkable to note the various Dutch members of the Assembly who dropped in, sometimes stealthily in the early morning hours, or, like Nicodemus, by night. One such gentleman came to breakfast one day, bringing as a gift two curious antique pipes and a pouch of Boer tobacco. The pipes were awarded a place in a glass cabinet, and the giver most heartily thanked; he finally departed, well pleased with himself. Now comes a curious trait in the man's character.



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Before leaving he whispered to a friend the request that the fact of his visit should not be mentioned in Cape Town circles. This request was naturally repeated at once to Mr. Rhodes, much to the latter's amusement. As ill-luck would have it, the cautious gentleman left his umbrella behind, with his name in full on the handle; this remained a prominent object on the hall table till, when evening fell, a trusted emissary came to recover it.

I often used to visit the House of Assembly or Lower House during that session, and it was instructive to note the faces of the Opposition when Rhodesia and its undoubted progress were subjects of discussion, and especially when Mr. Rhodes was on his feet, claiming the undivided attention of the House. It was not his eloquence that kept people so attentive, for no one could call him eloquent; it was the singularly expressive voice, the (at times) persuasive manner, and, above all, the interesting things his big ideas gave him to say, that preserved that complete silence. But, as I said before, the faces of his then antagonists—albeit quondam friends—hardly disguised their thoughts sufficiently. They were forced to consider the country of the man they feared—the country to which he had given his name—as a factor in their colony; they had to admit it to their financial calculations, and all the time they would fain have crushed the great pioneer under their feet. They had, indeed, hoped to see him humbled and abashed after his one fatal mistake, instead of which he had gone calmly on his way—a Colossus indeed—with the set purpose, as a guiding star ever before his eyes, to retrieve the error which they had fondly imagined would have delivered him into their hands. Truly an impressive and curious study was that House of Assembly in the session of 1899.

The number of people, more or less interesting, whom we met at Groot Schuur, seemed to pass as actors on a stage, sometimes almost too rapidly to distinguish or individualize. But one or two stand out specially in my recollection. Among them, a type of a fine old gentleman, was Colonel Schermbrucker. A German by birth, and over seventy years of age, he had served originally in the Papal Guard, and had accompanied Pio Nono on the occasion of his famous flight from Rome. Somewhere in the fifties, at the time of the arrival of the German Legion, he had settled at the Cape, and had been a figure in politics ever since. His opinions were distinctly English and progressive, but it was more as an almost extinct type of the courtly old gentleman that he impressed me. His extreme activity for his years, his old-world manners, and his bright intelligence, were combinations one does not often meet, and would have made him an interesting figure in any assembly or country. Another day came Judge Coetzee, erstwhile Kruger's confidant and right hand, but then of a very different way of thinking to his old master. His remark on the warlike situation was as follows: "Kruger is only a white Kaffir chief, and as such respects force, and force only. Send sufficient soldiers, and there will be no fighting." This was also Mr. Rhodes's view, but, as it turned out,

both were wrong. In the meantime the sands were running out, and the troops were almost on the water, and yet the old man remained obdurate.



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Outside the hospitable haven of Groot Schuur I one day met Mr. Merriman at lunch as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Solomon.[14] Considerably above the average height, with a slight stoop and grey hair, Mr. Merriman was a man whose appearance from the first claimed interest. It was a few days after his Budget speech, which, from various innovations, had aroused a storm of criticism, as Budgets are wont to do. Whatever his private feelings were about the English, to me the Finance Minister was very pleasant and friendly. We talked of fruit-farming, in which he takes a great interest, of England, and even of his Budget, and never did he show any excitement or irritation till someone happened to mention the word "Imperialist." Then he burst out with, "That word and 'Empire' have been so done to death by every wretched little Jew stockbroker in this country that I am fairly sick of them." "But surely you are not a Little Englander, Mr. Merriman," I said, "or a follower of Mr. Labouchere?" To this he gave an evasive reply, and the topic dropped. I must relate another incident of our sojourn at Cape Town. Introduced by Mr. Rhodes's architect, Mr. Baker, we went one day to see a Mrs. Koopman, then a well-known personage in Cape Town Dutch society, but who, I believe, is now dead. Her collection of Delft china was supposed to be very remarkable. She lived in a quaint old house with diamond-paned windows, in one of the back streets, the whole edifice looking as if it had not been touched for a hundred years. Mrs. Koopman was an elderly lady, most suitably dressed in black, with a widow's cap, and she greeted us very kindly and showed us all her treasured possessions. I was disappointed in the contents of the rooms, which were certainly mixed, some very beautiful things rubbing shoulders with modern specimens of clumsy early Victorian furniture. A room at the back was given up to the Delft china, but even this was spoilt by ordinary yellow arabesque wall-paper, on which were hung the rare plates and dishes, and by some gaudy window curtains, evidently recently added. The collection itself, made by Mrs. Koopman at very moderate prices, before experts bought up all the Dutch relics, was then supposed to be of great value. Our hostess conversed in good English with a foreign accent, and was evidently a person of much intelligence and culture. She had been, and still was, a factor in Cape politics, formerly as a great admirer of Mr. Rhodes, but after 1896 as one of his bitterest opponents, who used all her considerable influence—her house being a meeting-place for the Bond party—against him and his schemes. We had, in fact, been told she held a sort of political salon, though hardly in the same way we think of it in England as connected with Lady Palmerston, her guests being entirely confined to one party—viz., the Dutch. This accounted for a blunder on my part. Having heard that Mrs. Koopman had been greatly perturbed by the young Queen of Holland's representations to President



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Kruger in favour of the Uitlanders, and seeing many photographs of this charming-looking girl in the room, I thought I should be right in alluding to her as “your little Queen.” “She is not my Queen,” was the indignant reply; “Queen Victoria is my Queen.” And then, quickly turning to Mr. Baker, she continued: “What have you been telling Lady Sarah to make her think I am not loyal?” Of course I had to disclaim and apologize, but, in view of her well-known political opinions and sympathies, I could not help thinking her extreme indignation a little unnecessary.

### FOOTNOTES:

[9] Lord Randolph Churchill died in January, 1895.

[10] The soldiers' graves in South Africa have since then been carefully tended by the Loyal Women's Guild.

[11] The President's favourite psalm was said to be the 144th, which he always believed was written to apply specially to the Boers.

[12] Short whip.

[13] Major Heaney is an American, and was one of the pioneers who accompanied Dr. Jameson to Mashonaland in 1891.

[14] Mr. Richard Solomon, then Attorney-General, now Sir Richard Solomon.

## CHAPTER VI

### PREPARATIONS FOR WAR—MAFEKING, AND DEPARTURE THEREFROM

“War seldom enters, but where wealth allures.”  
DRYDEN.

In August we left Cape Town, and I went to Bulawayo, where I spent two months. Gordon<sup>[15]</sup> had been appointed A.D.C. to Colonel Baden-Powell, and during this time was with his chief on the western borders. The latter was engaged in raising two regiments of irregular horse, which were later known as the Protectorate Regiments, and were recruited principally from the district between Mafeking and Bulawayo. At the latter town was also another English lady, Mrs. Godley, whose husband was second in command of one of these regiments. It can easily be imagined that there was little else discussed then but warlike subjects, and these were two dreary and anxious months. We had little reliable news; the local newspapers had no special cables, and only



published rumours that were current in the town. Mr. Rochfort Maguire, who was then staying with Mr. Rhodes at Cape Town, used frequently to telegraph us news from there. One day he would report President Kruger was climbing down; the next, that he had once more hardened his heart. And so this modern Pharaoh kept us all on tenterhooks. The drilling and exercising of the newly recruited troops were the excitements of the day. Soon Colonel Plumer<sup>[16]</sup> arrived, and assumed command of one of the regiments, which was encamped on the racecourse just outside the town; the other regiment had its headquarters at Mafeking. Colonel Baden-Powell and his Staff used to dash up and down between the two towns. Nearly all the business men in Bulawayo enlisted, and amongst the officers were some experienced soldiers, who had seen



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all the Matabeleland fighting, and some of whom had even participated in the Raid. Others who used to drop in for a game of bridge were Lord Timmy Paulet,[17] Mr. Geoffrey Glyn, and Dr. Jameson. To while away the time, I took a course of ambulance lessons, learning how to bandage by experiments on the lanky arms and legs of a little black boy. We also made expeditions to the various mining districts. I was always struck with the hospitality shown us in these out-of-the-way localities, and with the cosiness of the houses belonging to the married mine-managers. Only Kaffirs were available as servants, but, in spite of this, an excellent repast was always produced, and the dwellings were full of their home treasures. Prints of the present King and Queen abounded, and among the portraits of beautiful Englishwomen, either photographs or merely reproductions cut out of an illustrated newspaper, I found those of Lady de Grey, [18] Georgiana, Lady Dudley, and Mrs. Langtry,[19] most frequently adorning the walls of those lonely homes.

At last, at the end of September, a wire informed us that hostilities were expected to begin in Natal the following week, and I left for Mafeking, intending to proceed to Cape Town and home. On arrival at Mafeking everyone told us an attack on the town was imminent, and we found the inhabitants in a state of serious alarm. However, Baden-Powell's advent reassured them, and preparations for war proceeded apace; the townspeople flocked in to be enrolled in the town guard, spending the days in being drilled; the soldiers were busy throwing up such fortifications as were possible under the circumstances. On October 3 the armoured train arrived from the South, and took its first trip on the rails, which had been hastily flung down round the circumference of the town. This train proved afterwards to be absolutely useless when the Boers brought up their artillery. Night alarms occurred frequently; bells would ring, and the inhabitants, who mostly slept in their clothes, had to rush to their various stations. I must admit that these nocturnal incidents were somewhat unpleasant. Still war was not declared, and the large body of Boers, rumoured as awaiting the signal to advance on Mafeking, gave no sign of approaching any nearer.

We were, indeed, as jolly as the proverbial sandboys during those few days in Mafeking before the war commenced. If Colonel Baden-Powell had forebodings, he kept them to himself. Next to him in importance came Lord Edward Cecil, Grenadier Guards, C.S.O. I have often heard it said that if Lord Edward had been a member of any other family but that of the gifted Cecils he would have been marked as a genius, and that if he had not been a soldier he would surely have been a politician of note. Then there was Major Hanbury Tracy, Royal Horse Guards, who occupied the position of Director of Military Intelligence. This officer was always devising some amusing if wild-cat schemes, which were to annihilate or checkmate the

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Boers, and prove eventually the source of fame to himself. Mr. Ronald Moncrieff,[20] an extra A.D.C., was, as usual, not blest with a superabundance of this world's goods, but had an unending supply of animal spirits, and he was looking forward to a siege as a means of economizing. Another of our circle was Major Hamilton Gould Adams,[21] Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, who commanded the town guard, representing the civil as opposed to the military interests. In contrast to the usual practice, these departments worked perfectly smoothly together at Mafeking.

Colonel Baden-Powell did not look on my presence with great favour, neither did he order me to leave, and I had a sort of presentiment that I might be useful, considering that there were but three trained nurses in the Victoria Hospital to minister to the needs of the whole garrison. Therefore, though I talked of going South every day by one of the overcrowded trains to Cape Town, in which the Government was offering free tickets to any who wished to avail themselves of the opportunity, I secretly hoped to be allowed to remain. We had taken a tiny cottage in the town, and we had all our meals at Dixon's Hotel, where the food was weird, but where certainly no depression of spirits reigned. I even bought a white pony, called Dop,[22] from a Johannesburg polo-player, and this pony, one of the best I have ever ridden, had later on some curious experiences. One day Dr. Jameson arrived on his way to Rhodesia, but he was hustled away with more haste than courtesy by General Baden-Powell, who bluntly told him that if he meant to stay in the town a battery of artillery would be required to defend it; and of field-guns, in spite of urgent representations, not one had reached us from Cape Town. We used to ride morning and evening on the flat country which surrounds Mafeking, where no tree or hill obscures the view for miles; and one then realized what a tiny place the seat of government of the Bechuanaland Protectorate really was, a mere speck of corrugated iron roofs on the brown expanse of the burnt-up veldt, far away from everywhere. I think it was this very isolation that created the interest in the siege at home, and one of the reasons why the Boers were so anxious to reduce it was that this town was practically the jumping-off place for the Jameson Raid. So passed the days till October 13, and then the sword, which had been suspended by a hair, suddenly fell.

On that day Major Gould Adams received a wire from the High Commissioner at Cape Town to the effect that the South African Republic had sent an ultimatum to Her Majesty's Government, in which it demanded the removal of all troops from the Transvaal borders, fixing five o'clock the following evening as a limit for their withdrawal. I had delayed my departure too long; it was extremely doubtful whether another train would be allowed to pass South, and, even when started, it would stand a great chance of



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being wrecked by the Boers tearing up the rails. Under these circumstances I was allotted comparatively safe quarters at the house of Mr. Benjamin Weil, of the firm of the well-known South African merchants. His residence stood in the centre of the little town, adjacent to the railway-station. At that time bomb-proof underground shelters, with which Mafeking afterwards abounded, had not been thought of, or time had not sufficed for their construction. On all sides one heard reproaches levelled at the Cape Government, and especially at General Sir William Butler, until lately commanding the troops in Cape Colony, for having so long withheld the modest reinforcements which had been persistently asked for, and, above all, the very necessary artillery.

At that date the Mafeking garrison consisted of about seven or eight hundred trained troops. The artillery, under Major Panzera, comprised four old muzzle-loading seven-pounder guns with a short range, a one-pound Hotchkiss, one Nordenfeldt, and about seven <sup>^</sup>{.}303 Maxims—in fact, no large modern pieces whatever. The town guard, hastily enrolled, amounted to 441 defenders, among whom nationalities were curiously mixed, as the following table shows:

British	378
Germans	4
Americans	4
Russians	6
Dutch	27
Norwegians	5
Swedes	2
Arabs and Indians	15

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Total 441[23]

This force did not appear sufficiently strong to resist the three or four thousand Boers, with field-guns, who were advancing to its attack under one of their best Generals—namely Cronje—but everyone remained wonderfully calm, and the townspeople rose to the occasion in a most creditable manner.

Very late that same evening, just as I was going to bed, I received a message from Colonel Baden-Powell, through one of his Staff, to say he had just been informed, on trustworthy authority, that no less than 8,000 burghers composed the force likely to arrive on the morrow, that it was probable they would rush the town, and that the garrison would be obliged to fight its way out. He concluded by begging me to leave at once by road for the nearest point of safety. Naturally I had to obey. I shall never forget



that night: it was cold and gusty after a hot day, with frequent clouds obscuring the moon, as we walked round to Major Gould Adams's house to secure a Cape cart and some Government mules, in order that I might depart at dawn. At first I was ordered to Kanya, a mission-station some seventy miles away, an oasis in the Kalahari Desert. This plan gave rise to a paragraph which I afterwards saw in some of the daily papers, that I had left Mafeking under the escort of a missionary, and some cheery spirit made a sketch of my supposed departure as reproduced here. Later on, however, it was thought provisions

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might run short in that secluded spot, so I was told to proceed to Setlagoli, a tiny store, or hotel as we should call it, with a shop attached, thirty-five miles south in Bechuanaland, on the main road to Kimberley, from which quarter eventually succour was expected. My few preparations completed, I simply had to sit down and wait for daybreak, sleep being entirely out of the question. In the night the wind increased, and howled mournfully round the house. At four o'clock, when day was about to break, I was ready to start, and some farewells had to be said. These were calm, but not cheerful, for it was my firm belief that, in all human probability, I should never see the familiar faces again, knowing well they would sell their lives dearly.

It was reported amongst my friends at home that, in order to escape from Mafeking, my maid and myself had ridden 200 miles. One newspaper extract was sent me which said, concerning this fictitious ride, that it "was all very well for Lady Sarah, who doubtless was accustomed to violent exercise, but we commiserate her poor maid." Their pity was wasted, for the departure of my German maid Metelka and myself took place prosaically in that most vile of all vehicles, a Cape cart. Six fine mules were harnessed to our conveyance, and our two small portmanteaus were strapped on behind. The Jehu was a Cape boy, and, to complete the cortege, my white pony Dop brought up the rear, ridden by a Zulu called Vellum. This boy, formerly Dr. Jameson's servant, remained my faithful attendant during the siege; beneath his dusky skin beat a heart of gold, and to him I could safely have confided uncounted treasures. As the daylight increased so did the wind in violence; it was blowing a perfect gale, and the dust and sand were blinding. We outspanned for breakfast twelve miles out, at the farm of a presumably loyal Dutchman; then on again, the wind by now having become a hurricane, aggravated by the intensely hot rays of a scorching sun. I have never experienced such a miserable drive, and I almost began to understand the feelings of people who commit suicide. However, the long day wore to a close, and at length we reached Setlagoli store and hotel, kept by a nice old Scotch couple, Mr. and Mrs. Fraser. The latter was most kind, and showed us two nice clean rooms. Here, anyway, I trusted to find a haven of rest. This hope was of short duration, for Sergeant Matthews, in charge of the Mounted Police depot, soon came and told me natives reported several hundred Boers at Kraipann, only ten miles away. He said they were lying in wait for the second armoured train, which was expected to pass to Mafeking that very night, carrying the howitzers so badly needed there, and some lyddite shells. The sergeant opined the Boers would probably come on here if victorious, and loot the store, and he added that such marauding bands were more to be feared than the disciplined ones under Cronje. He even suggested my leaving by moonlight that very night.

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The driver, however, was unwilling to move, and we were all so exhausted that I decided to risk it and remain, the faithful sergeant promising to send scouts out and warn us should the enemy be approaching. I was fully determined that, having left Mafeking, where I might have been of use, I would run no risks of capture or impertinence from the burghers, who would also certainly commandeer our cart, pony, and mules.

Then followed another endless night; the moon set at 1 a.m., and occasionally I was roused by the loud and continuous barking of the farm dogs. At four o'clock Vellum's dusky countenance peered into the room, which opened on to the stoep, as do nearly all the apartments of these hotels, to ask if the mules should be inspanned, for these natives were all in wholesale dread of the Boers. Hearing all was quiet, I told him to wait till the sergeant appeared. About an hour later I opened my door to have a look at the weather: the wind had dropped completely, the sky was cloudless, and a faint tinge of pink on the distant horizon denoted where the east lay. I was about to shut it again and dress, when a dull booming noise arrested my attention, then almost froze the blood in my veins. There was no mistaking the firing of big guns at no very great distance.

We are accustomed to such a sound when salutes are fired or on a field-day, but I assure those who have not had a like experience, that to hear the same in actual warfare, and to know that each detonation is dealing death and destruction to human beings and property, sends a shiver down the back akin to that produced by icy cold water. I counted four or five; then there it was again and again and again, till altogether I reckoned twenty shots, followed by impressive silence once more, so intense in the quiet peace of the morning landscape. On the farm, however, there was stir and bustle enough: alarmed natives gathered in a group, weird figures with blankets round their shoulders—for the air was exceedingly cold—all looking with straining eyes in the direction of Kraipann, from where the firing evidently came. I soon joined the people, white and black, in front of the store, and before long a mounted Kaffir rode wildly up, and proceeded, with many gesticulations, to impart information in his own tongue. His story took some time, but at last a farmer turned round and told me the engagement had been with the armoured train, as we anticipated, and that the latter had "fallen down" (as the Kaffir expressed it) owing to the rails being pulled up. What had been the fate of its occupants he did not know, as he had left in terror when the big gun opened fire. Curiously enough, as I afterwards learnt, these shots were the first fired during the war.



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Remembering the sergeant's warning, I decided to start at once for Mosita, twenty-five miles farther away from the border, leaving Vellum to bring on any further intelligence when the sergeant, who had been away all night watching the Boers, returned. We now traversed a fine open grassy country, very desolate, with no human habitation. The only signs of life were various fine "pows"[24] stalking sedately along, or "korans," starting up with their curious chuckle rather like the note of a pheasant, or a covey of guinea-fowl scurrying across the road and losing themselves in the waving grass. Meanwhile the driver kept up an incessant conversation with the mules, and I found myself listening to his varying epithets with stupefied curiosity. During that four hours' drive we only met two natives and one huge herd of cattle, which were being driven by mounted Kaffirs, armed with rifles, to Mosita, our destination, where it was hoped they would be out of the way of marauding Boers. At last we reached the native stadt of Mosita, where our appearance created great excitement. Crowds of swarthy men and youths rushed out to question our driver as to news. The latter waxed eloquent in words and gestures, imitating even the noise of the big gun, which seemed to produce great enthusiasm among these simple folk. Their ruling passion, I afterwards found, was hatred and fear of the Boers, and their dearest wish to possess guns and ammunition to join the English in driving them back and to defend their cattle. In the distance we could see the glimmering blue waters of a huge dam, beyond which was the farm and homestead of a loyal colonial farmer named Keeley, whose hospitality I had been told to seek. Close by were the barracks, with seven or eight occupants, the same sort of depot as at Setlagoli. I asked to see Mrs. Keeley, and boldly announced we had come to beg for a few nights' lodging. We were most warmly received and made welcome. The kindness of the Keeleys is a bright spot in my recollections of those dark weeks. Mrs. Keeley herself was in a dreadful state of anxiety, as she had that very day received a letter from her husband in Mafeking, whither he had proceeded on business, to say he found he must remain and help defend the town; his assistance was urgently needed there in obtaining information respecting the Boers from the natives, whose language he talked like his own. She had five small children, and was shortly expecting an addition to her family, so at last I had found someone who was more to be pitied than myself. She, on the other hand, told me our arrival was a godsend to her, as it took her thoughts off her troubles.

Affairs in the neighbourhood seemed in a strange confusion. Mr. Keeley was actually the *Veldtcoronet* of the district, an office which in times of peace corresponded to that of a magistrate. In reality he was shut up in Mafeking, siding against the Dutch. The surrounding country was peopled entirely, if sparsely, by Dutch farmers and natives, the former of whom at first and before our reverses professed sympathy with the English; but no wonder the poor wife looked to the future with dread, fearful lest British disasters would be followed by Boer reprisals.



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Towards sunset Vellum appeared with a note from Sergeant Matthews. It ran as follows:

“The armoured train captured; its fifteen occupants all killed.[25] Boers opened fire on the train with field artillery.”

In our isolation these words sank into our souls like lead, and were intensified by the fact that we had that very morning been so near the scene of the tragedy—“reverse” I would not allow it to be called, for fifteen men had tried conclusions with 400 Boers, and had been merely hopelessly outnumbered. The latter had, however, scored an initial success, and the intelligence cast a gloom, even where all was blackest night. Vellum brought a few more verbal details, to the effect that Sergeant Matthews had actually succeeded in stopping the armoured train after pursuing it on horseback for some way, expecting every moment to be taken for a Boer and fired on. He asked to speak to the officer in charge, and a young man put his head over the truck. Matthews then told him that several hundred Boers were awaiting the train, strongly entrenched, and that the metals were up for about three-quarters of a mile. “Is that all?” was the answer; then, turning to the engine-driver, “Go straight ahead.” Here was a conspicuous instance of English foolhardy pluck.

The evening was a lovely one. I took a walk along the road by which we had come in the morning, and was soothed by the peaceful serenity of the surrounding country.

It seemed to be impossible that men were killing each other only a few short miles away. The herd of cattle we had passed came into view, and caught sight of the water in the dam. It was curious to see the whole herd, some five or six hundred beasts, break into a clumsy canter, and, with a bellowing noise, dash helter-skelter to the water—big oxen with huge branching horns, meek-eyed cows, young bullocks, and tiny calves, all joining in the rush for a welcome drink after a long hot day on the veldt.

The last news that came in that evening was that all the wires were cut north and south of Mafeking, and the telegraphists fled, as their lives had been threatened.

### FOOTNOTES:

[15] Captain Gordon Wilson, Royal Horse Guards, now Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson, M.V.O.

[16] Now Major-General Sir Herbert Plumer, K.C.B.

[17] Now Marquis of Winchester.

[18] Now Marchioness of Ripon.



[19] Now Lady de Bathe.

[20] Died in Africa, 1909.

[21] Now Sir Hamilton Gould Adams, Governor of the Orange River Colony.

[22] Dutch for a peculiar kind of cheap brandy very popular with the Boers.

[23] This return was given me by Major Gould Adams.

[24] African wild-turkeys.

[25] This was incorrect. The officer in charge and two others were severely wounded, the driver and stoker killed by the explosion of the boiler.



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## CHAPTER VII

IN A REBELLIOUS COLONY—VISIT TO VRYBURG DURING THE BOER OCCUPATION—I PASS OFF AS A DUTCHMAN'S SISTER

"The days are so long, and there are so many of them."  
DU MAURIER.

During the weeks I remained at Mosita, the only book I had to read was "Trilby," which I perused many times, and the lament of the heroine in the line quoted above seemed to re-echo my sentiments. For days and days we were absolutely without news. It is impossible after a lapse of time to realize exactly what that short sentence really means. I must ask my readers to remember that we talked and thought of one topic only; we looked incessantly in the one direction by which messengers might come. Our nerves were so strained that, did we but see one of the natives running across the yard, or hear them conversing in louder tones than usual, we at once thought there must be news, and jumped up from any occupation with which we were trying to beguile the time, only to sink back on our chairs again disappointed. As for knowing what was passing in the world, one might as well have been in another planet. We saw no papers, and there was not much prospect of obtaining any. Before the war we had all talked lightly of wires being cut and railway-lines pulled up, but, in truth, I do not think anyone realized what these two calamities really meant. My only comfort was the reflection that, no matter how hard they were fighting in Mafeking, they could not be suffering the terrible boredom that we were enduring. To such an extent in this monotony did I lose the count of time, that I had to look in the almanack to be able to say, in Biblical language, "The evening and the morning were the sixth day."

At length one evening, when we were sitting on the stoep after supper, we descried a rider approaching on a very tired horse. Rushing to the gate, we were handed letters from Mafeking. It can be imagined how we devoured them. They told of three determined attacks on the town on the third day after I had left, all successfully repulsed, and of a bombardment on the following Monday. The latter had been somewhat of a farce, and had done no damage, except to one or two buildings which, by an irony of fate, included the Dutch church and hotel and the convent. The shells were of such poor quality that they were incapable of any explosive force whatever.[26] After nine hours' bombardment, although some narrow escapes were recorded, the only casualties were one chicken killed and one dog wounded. An emissary from Commandant Snyman had then come solemnly into the town under a flag of truce, to demand an unconditional surrender "to avoid further bloodshed." Colonel Baden-Powell politely replied that, as far as he was concerned, operations had not begun. The messenger was given refreshment at Dixon's Hotel, where lunch was laid out as usual. This had astonished him considerably,

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as presumably he had expected to find but few survivors. He was then sent about his business. Gordon, who imagined me at Setlagoli, concluded his letter by saying the Colonel had informed General Cronje of my presence at Mrs. Fraser's, and begged him to leave me unmolested. This news, which had come by a *Daily Mail* correspondent, on his way South to send off cables, was satisfactory as far as it went, and we at once despatched a trusty old nigger called Boaz with a tiny note, folded microscopically in an old cartridge-case, to give the garrison news of the surrounding country. This old man proved a reliable and successful messenger. On many occasions he penetrated the cordon into the beleaguered town, and during the first two months he was practically the sole means they had of receiving news. His task was of course a risky one, and we used to pay him L3 each way, but he never failed us.

Now commenced a fresh period of anxious waiting, and during this time I had leisure and opportunity to study the characteristics of these Boer farmers and their wives, and to learn what a curious race they are. Mrs. Keeley told me a great deal of their ideas, habits, and ways, in which low cunning is combined with extreme curiosity and naive simplicity. Many of the fathers and sons in the neighbourhood had slunk off to fight across the border, sending meanwhile their wives and daughters to call on Mrs. Keeley and condole with her in what they termed "her trouble," and to ascertain at the same time all the circumstances of the farm and domestic circle. A curious thing happened one day. Directly after breakfast an old shandrydan drove up with a typical Dutch family as occupants. Mrs. Keeley, busy with household matters, pulled a long face, knowing what was before her. No questions as to being at home, disengaged, or follies of that sort, were asked; the horses were solemnly outspanned and allowed to roam; the family party had come to spend the day. Seated gravely in the dining-room, they were refreshed by coffee and cold meat. Mrs. Keeley remarked to me privately that the best thing to do was to put quantities of food before them and then leave them; and, beyond a few passing words as she went in and out of the room, I did not make out that they went in for entertaining each other. So they sat for hours, saying nothing, doing nothing. When Mrs. Keeley wanted me to have lunch, she asked them to remove to the stoep, and in this request they seemed to find nothing strange. Finally, about five o'clock they went away, much to the relief of their hostess; not, however, before the latter had shrewdly guessed the real object of their visit, which was to find out about myself. Report had reached them that Mafeking was in the hands of the Dutch, that the only survivor of the garrison had escaped in woman's clothes, had been wandering on the veldt for days, and had finally been taken in here. "Ach!" said the old vrow, "I would be afraid to meet him. Is he really

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here?" This remark she made to Mrs. Keeley's brother, who could hardly conceal his amusement, but, to reassure her, displayed the cart and mules by which I had come. If in England we had heard of the arrival of a "unicorn" in an aeroplane, we should not have shown more anxiety or taken more trouble to hear about the strange creature than did they concerning myself. Their curiosity did not end here. What was Mr. Keeley doing in Mafeking? Was he fighting for the English? How many head of cattle had they on the farm? And so on *ad libitum*. Mrs. Keeley, however, knew her friends well, and was quite capable of dealing with them, so they probably spent an unprofitable day.

On another occasion an English farmer named Leipner looked in, and gave us some information about Vryburg. This town was absolutely undefended, and was occupied by the Boers without a shot being fired. The ceremony of the hoisting of the *Vierkleur*[27] had been attended by the whole countryside, and had taken place with much psalm-singing and praying, interlarded with bragging and boasting. He told me also that some of the rumours current in the town, and firmly credited, reported that Oom Paul had annexed Bechuanaland, that he was then about to take Cape Colony, after which he would allow no troops to land, and the "Roineks" would have been pushed into the sea. His next step would be to take England. Mr. Leipner assured me the more ignorant Boers had not an idea where England was situated, nor did they know that a great ocean rolled between it and this continent. In fact, they gloried in their want of knowledge, and were insulted if they received a letter in any tongue but their own. He related one tale to illustrate their ignorance: An old burgher and his *vrouw* were sitting at home one Sunday afternoon. Seeing the "predicant"[28] coming, the old man hastily opened his Bible and began to read at random. The clergyman came in, and, looking over his shoulder, said: "Ah! I see you are reading in the Holy Book—the death of Christ." "Alle machter!" said the old lady. "Is He dead indeed? You see, Jan" (to her husband) "you never will buy a newspaper, so we never know what goes on in the world." Mr. Leipner said this story loses in being told in English instead of in the original Dutch. He reiterated they did not wish for education for themselves or for their children. If the young people can read and write, they are considered very good scholars. This gentleman also expressed great satisfaction at Sir Alfred Milner and Mr. Chamberlain being at the head of affairs, which he said was the only thing that gave the colonials confidence. Even now, so many feared England would give way again in the end. I assured him of this there was no possibility, and then he said: "The Transvaal has been a bad place for Englishmen to live these many years; but if Great Britain fails us again, we must be off, for then it will be impossible." I was given to understand that the Boers exhibited great curiosity as to who Mr. Chamberlain was, and that they firmly believed he had made money in Rand mining shares and gold companies; others fancied he was identical with the maker of Chamberlain's Cough Syrup, which is advertised everywhere in the colony.



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Early in November we had a great surprise. Mr. Keeley himself turned up from Mafeking, having been given leave from the town guard to look after his wife and farm. He had to ride for his life to escape the Boers, who were drawing much closer to the town, and the news he brought was not altogether reassuring. True, he stated that the garrison were in splendid spirits, and that they no longer troubled themselves about the daily bombardments, as dug-out shelters had been constructed. The young men, he said, vied with each other in begging for permission to join scouting-parties at night, to pepper the Boers, often, as a result, having a brush with the enemy and several casualties. All the same, they would return at a gallop, laughing and joking. There had been, however, several very severe fights, notably one on Canon Kopje, where two very able officers and many men had been killed. In such a small garrison this loss was a serious one, and the death-roll was growing apace, for, besides the frequent attacks, the rifle fire in the streets was becoming very unpleasant. Intelligence was also to hand of the Boers bringing up one of the Pretoria siege guns, capable of firing a 94-pound shell. This was to be dragged across the Transvaal at a snail's pace by a team of twenty oxen, so secure were they against any interruption from the South. Against these depressing items, he gave intelligence of an incident that had greatly alarmed the Boers. It seemed that, to get rid of two trucks of dynamite standing in the railway-station, which were considered a danger, the same had been sent off to a siding some eight miles north. The engine-driver unhitched them and made good his escape. The Boers, thinking the trucks full of soldiers, immediately commenced bombarding them, till they exploded with terrific force. This chance affair gave the Boers the idea that Mafeking was full of dynamite, and later, when I was in the laager, they told me one of the reasons why they had never pressed an attack home was that they knew the whole town was mined. Mr. Keeley also told us of a tragedy that had greatly disturbed the little circle of defenders. The very evening that the victims of the Canon Kopje fight were laid to rest, Lieutenant Murchison,[29] of the Protectorate Regiment, had, in consequence of a dispute, shot dead with his revolver at Dixon's Hotel the war-correspondent of the London *Daily Chronicle*, a Mr. Parslow. I afterwards learnt that the court-martial which sat on the former had fourteen sessions in consequence of its only being able to deliberate for half an hour at a time in the evening, when the firing was practically over. The prisoner was ably defended by a Dutch lawyer named De Koch, and, owing to his having done good service during the siege, was strongly recommended to mercy, although sentenced to be shot. The most satisfactory points we gleaned were the splendid behaviour of the townspeople, and the fine stand made by the natives when the Boers attacked their stad,



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adjacent to the town. The number of Boer field-guns Mr. Keeley stated to be nine, of the newest type, besides the monster expected from Pretoria. He also said more expert gunners and better ammunition had arrived. As to his own position, Mr. Keeley was by no means sure that either his life or his property were safe, but he relied on his influence with his neighbours, which was considerable, and he thought he would be able to keep them quiet and on their farms.

One night, just as my maid was going to bed, she suddenly saw, in the bright moonlight, a tall figure step out of the shadow of the fir-trees. For an instant a marauding Boer—a daily bugbear for weeks—flashed across her mind, but the next moment she recognized Sergeant Matthews from Setlagoli. He had ridden over post-haste to tell us the Boers were swarming there, and that he and his men had evacuated the barracks. He also warned us the same commando was coming here on the morrow, and advised that all the cattle on the farm should be driven to a place of safety. This information did not conduce to a peaceful night, but, anyway, it gave one something to think of besides Mafeking. I buried a small jewel-case and my despatch-box in the garden, and then we went calmly to bed to await these unwelcome visitors. Mr. Keeley had fortunately left the day before on a business visit to a neighbouring farmer, for his presence would rather have contributed to our danger than to our safety. When we awoke all was peaceful, and there was every indication of a piping hot day. Mrs. Keeley was very calm and sensible, and did not anticipate any rudeness. We decided to receive the burghers civilly and offer them coffee, trusting that the exodus of all the cattle would not rouse their ire. Our elaborate preparations were wasted, for the Boers did not come. The weary hours dragged on, the sun crawled across the steely blue heavens, and finally sank, almost grudgingly, it seemed, into the west, leaving the coast clear for the glorious full moon; the stars came out one by one; the goats and kids came wandering back to the homestead with loud bleatings; and presently everything seemed to sleep—everything except our strained nerves and aching eyes, which had looked all day for Boers, and above all for news, and had looked in vain.

We still continued to have alarms. One day we saw a horseman wrapped in a long cloak up to his chin, surmounted by a huge slouch hat, ride into the yard. Mrs. Keeley exclaimed it was certainly a Boer, and that he had no doubt come to arrest Mr. Keeley. I was positive the unknown was an Englishman, but she was so shrewd that I really believed her, and kept out of sight as she directed, while she sent her brother to question him. It turned out that the rider was the same *Daily Mail* correspondent who had cut his way out of Mafeking in order to send his cables, and that he was now on his way back to the besieged town. The growth of a two weeks' beard had given him such an unkempt appearance as to make even sharp Mrs. Keeley mistake him for a Boer. He had had an interesting if risky ride, which he appeared to have accomplished with energy and dash, if perhaps with some imprudence.[30]

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It was the continued dearth of news, not only concerning Mafeking, but also of what was going on in the rest of South Africa, that made me at length endeavour to get news from Vryburg. As a first step I lent Dop to a young Dutchman named Brevel, who was anxious to go to that township to sell some fat cattle. This youth, who belonged to a respectable Boer family—of course heart and soul against the English—was overwhelmed with gratitude for the loan of the horse, and in consequence I stood high in their good graces. They little knew it was for my sake, not theirs, that they had my pony. By this messenger we sent letters for the English mail, and a note to the magistrate, begging him to forward us newspapers and any reliable intelligence. I also enclosed a cheque to be cashed, for I was running short of English gold wherewith to pay our nigger letter-carriers. I must confess I hardly expected to find anyone confiding enough to part with bullion, but Mr. Brevel duly returned in a few days with the money, and said they were very pleased to get rid of gold in exchange for a cheque on a London bank.

He also, however, brought back our letters, which had been refused at the post-office, as they would take no letters except with Transvaal stamps, and for ours, of course, we had used those of Cape Colony.

The magistrate wrote me a miserable letter, saying his office had been seized by the Boers, who held a daily Kriegsraad there, and that he had received a safe-conduct to depart. The striking part of the communication was that a line had been put through "On H.M. Service" on the top of the official envelope. I was really glad to find the young man had done no good with his own business, having failed to dispose of any of his cattle. He, a Dutchman, had returned with the feeling that no property was safe for the moment, and much alarmed by the irresponsible talk of those burghers who had nothing to lose and everything to gain by this period of confusion and upheaval. He also greatly disturbed Mr. Keeley by saying they meant to wreak vengeance on any who had fought for the English, and by warning him that a commando would surely pass his way. Further news which this young man proceeded to relate in his awful jargon was that Oom Paul and all his grandchildren and nephews had gone to Bulawayo; from there he meant to commence a triumphal march southward; that Kimberley had capitulated; and that Joubert and his army had taken possession of Ladysmith. To all this Mrs. Keeley had to listen with polite attention. Luckily, I did not understand the import of what he said till he had taken himself off, with an unusually deep bow of thanks to myself. The only comfort we derived was the reflection that these lies were too audacious to be aught but inventions made up to clinch the wavering and timid spirits.



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No matter how miserable people in England were then, they will never realize fully what it meant to pass those black months in the midst of a Dutch population; one felt oneself indeed alone amongst foes. Smarting under irritation and annoyance, I decided to go myself to Vryburg—Dutch town though it had become—and see if I could not ascertain the truth of these various reports, which I feared might filter into Mafeking and depress the garrison. Mr. Keeley did not disapprove of my trip, as he was as anxious as myself to know how the land lay, and he arranged that Mrs. Keeley's brother, Mr. Coleman, should drive me there in a trap and pair of ponies. For the benefit of the gossips, I stated as an ostensible reason for my visit that I had toothache. I was much excited at the prospect of visiting the Boer headquarters in that part of the country, and seeing with my own eyes the Transvaal flag flying in the town of a British colony. Therefore I thought nothing of undertaking a sixty miles' drive in broiling heat and along a villainous road. The drive itself was utterly uneventful. We passed several Dutch farmhouses, many of them untenanted, owing to the so-called loyal colonial owners having flocked to the Transvaal flag at Vryburg. All these houses, distinguished by their slovenly and miserable appearance, were built of rough brick or mud, with tiny windows apparently added as an afterthought, in any position, regardless of symmetry. Towards sundown we arrived at a roadside store, where we were kindly entertained for the night by the proprietors, a respectable Jewish couple.

About five miles from Vryburg a party of thirty horsemen appeared on the brow of the hill; these were the first Boers I had seen mounted, in fighting array, and I made sure they would ride up and ask our business; but apparently we were not interesting enough in appearance, for they circled away in another direction. The road now descended into a sort of basin or hollow, wherein lay the snug little town of Vryburg, with its neat houses and waving trees, and beyond it we could see the white tents of the Boer laager. A young Dutchman had recently described Vryburg to me as a town which looked as if it had gone for a walk and got lost, and as we drove up to it I remembered his words, and saw that his simile was rather an apt one. There seemed no reason, beyond its site in a sheltered basin, why Vryburg should have been chosen for the capital of British Bechuanaland. The railway was at least a mile away on the east, and so hidden was the town that, till you were close on it, you could barely see the roofs of the houses. Then suddenly the carriage drove into the main street, which boasted of some quite respectable shops. The first thing that attracted our notice was the Court House, almost hidden in trees, through which glimmered the folds of the gaudy Dutch standard. Before the court were armed Boers, apparently sentries, whilst others were passing in and out or lounging outside. Another group were busy poring over a notice affixed on a tree, which we were told was the latest war news:



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WAR NEWS

LATEST REPORTS

*Price 3d.*

VRYBURG, OCT. 31, 1899

MAFEKING SPEECHLESS WITH TERROR

KIMBERLEY TREMBLES

40 ENGLISH SOLDIERS DESERT TO JOIN OUR RANKS

It appears by telegram received this morning that the Burghers started firing on Mafeking with the big cannon. The town is on fire and is full of smoke.

The British troops in Natal met the Burghers at Elandslaagte. The battle-field was kept by the Burghers under General Prinsloo. Two were killed, four wounded.

We drove down the street, and pulled up at the Central Hotel, where I got capital rooms and was most civilly received by the manager, an Englishman. The latter, however, could hardly conceal his surprise at my visit at this moment. He at once advised me not to mention my name, or show myself too much, as that very day a new Landrost had arrived to take charge of the town, and strict regulations respecting the coming and going of the inhabitants and visitors were being made. He then gave me some splendid news of the Natal border, the first intelligence of the victories of Dundee, Elandslaagte, and Glencoe. To hear of those alone was worth the long drive, and he also showed me the Dutch reports of these same engagements, which really made one smile. On every occasion victory had remained with the burghers, while the English dead and prisoners varied in numbers from 500 to 1,300, according to the mood of the composer of the despatch. The greatest losses the burghers had sustained up to then in any one engagement were two killed and three wounded. The spoils of war taken by the Dutch were of extraordinary value, and apparently they had but to show themselves for every camp to be evacuated. They were kind enough to translate these wonderful despatches into a sort of primitive English, of which printed slips could be bought for threepence. The hotel manager said if they did not invent these lies and cook the real account the burghers would desert *en masse*. So afraid were their leaders of news filtering in from English sources that all messengers were closely watched and searched. In the afternoon I drove up to the little hospital to see three of the occupants of the ill-fated armoured train. They were all convalescent, and said they were being very kindly treated in every way, but that the Boer doctoring was of the roughest



description, the surgeon's only assistant being a chemist-boy, and trained nurses were replaced by a few well-meaning but clumsy Dutch girls, while chloroform or sedatives were quite unknown.



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It was grievous to hear of all the Government military provisions, police and private properties, being carted off by the “powers that be,” and not a little annoying for the inhabitants to have to put all their stores at the disposal of the burghers, who had been literally clothed from head to foot since their arrival. The owners only received a “brief” or note of credit on the Transvaal Government at Pretoria, to be paid after the war. For fear of exciting curiosity, I did not walk about much, but observed from the windows of my sitting-room the mounted burghers patrolling the town, sometimes at a foot’s pace, more often at a smart canter. I felt I never wished to see another Boer. I admitted to myself they sat their horses well and that their rifle seemed a familiar friend, but when you have seen one you have seen them all. I never could have imagined so many men absolutely alike: all had long straggling beards, old felt hats, shabby clothes, and some evil-looking countenances. Most of those I saw were men of from forty to fifty years of age, but there were also a few sickly-looking youths, who certainly did not look bold warriors. These had not arrived at the dignity of a beard, but, instead, cultivated feeble whiskers.

After I had seen and heard all I could, came the question of getting away. The manager told me the Landrost had now forbidden any of the residents to leave the town, and that he did not think I could get a pass. However, my Dutch friend was equal to the occasion; he applied for leave to return to his farm with his sister, having only come in for provisions. After a long hesitation it was given him, and we decided to set out at daybreak, fearful lest the permission might be retracted, as it certainly would have been had my identity and his deception been discovered, and we should both have been ignominiously lodged in a Boer gaol. As the sun was rising we left Vryburg. On the outskirts of the town we were made to halt by eight or ten Boers whose duty it was to examine the passes of travellers. It can be imagined how my heart beat as I was made to descend from the cart. I was wearing a shabby old ulster which had been lent me at the hotel for this purpose; round a battered sailor hat I had wound a woollen shawl, which with the help of a veil almost completely concealed my identity. It had been arranged that Mr. Coleman should tell them I was suffering from toothache and swollen face. The ordeal of questioning my supposed brother and examining our passports took some minutes—the longest I have ever experienced. He contrived to satisfy these inquisitors, and with a feeling of relief we bundled into the cart again and started on our long drive to Mosita. On that occasion we accomplished the sixty miles in one day, so afraid were we of being pursued.



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On my return to Mosita I at once despatched old Boaz to Mafeking, giving them the intelligence of the victories in Natal. This proved to be the first news that reached them from the more important theatre of the war. Our life now became uneventful once more. One day an old Irish lady, wife of a neighbouring farmer, dropped in for a chat. She was a nice old woman, as true as steel, and terribly worried by these dreadful times. She had a married daughter in the Transvaal, and a brother also, whose sons, as well as daughters' husbands, would, she sorely feared, be commandeered to fight, in which case they might unknowingly be shooting their own relations over the border. It was the same tale of misery, anxiety, and wretchedness, everywhere, and the war was but a few weeks old. The population in that colony, whether Dutch or English, were so closely mixed together—their real interests so parallel—that it resolved itself locally into a veritable civil war. It was all the more dreadful that these poor farmers, after having lost all their cattle by rinderpest, had just succeeded in getting together fresh herds, and were hoping for renewed prosperity. Then came the almost certain chance of their beasts being raided, of their stores being looted, and of their women and children having to seek shelter to avoid rough treatment and incivility. Often during the long evenings, especially when I was suffering from depression of spirits, I used to argue with Mr. Keeley about the war and whether it was necessary. It seemed to me then we were not justified in letting loose such a millstream of wretchedness and of destruction, and that the alleged wrongs of a large white population—who, in spite of everything, seemed to prosper and grow rich apace—scarcely justified the sufferings of thousands of innocent individuals. Mr. Keeley was a typical old colonist, one who knew the Boers and their character well, and I merely quote what he said, as no doubt it was, and is, the opinion of many other such men. He opined that this struggle was bound to come, declaring that all the thinking men of the country had foreseen it. The intolerance of the Boers, their arrogance, their ignorance, on which they prided themselves, all proclaimed them as unfit to rule over white or black people. Of late years had crept in an element of treachery and disloyalty, emanating from their jealousy of the English, which by degrees was bound to permeate the whole country, spreading southward to Cape Colony itself, till the idea of "Africa for the Dutch, and the English in the sea," would have been a war-cry that might have dazzled hundreds of to-day's so-called loyal colonists. He even asserted that those at the head of affairs in England had shown great perspicacity and a clear insight into the future. If at the Bloemfontein Conference, or after, Kruger had given the five years' franchise, and the dispute had been patched up for the moment, it would have been the greatest misfortune that could have happened.



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The intriguing in the colony, the reckless expenditure of the Transvaal Secret Service money, the bribery and corruption of the most corrupt Government of modern times, would have gone on as before, and things would soon have been as bad as ever. Mr. Keeley was positive that it was jealousy that had engendered this race hatred one heard so much about; even the well-to-do Dutch knew the English were superior to them in knowledge and enterprise. At the same time any English invention was looked upon with awe and interest; they were wont to copy us in many respects, and if a Dutch girl had the chance of marrying an Englishman, old or young, poor or rich, she did not wait to be asked a second time. There is no doubt the women were a powerful factor in Boerland. Even a Britisher married to a Dutchwoman seemed at once to consider her people as his people, and the Transvaal as his fatherland. These women were certainly the most bitter against the English; they urged their husbands in the district to go and join the commandoes, and their language was cruel and bloodthirsty.

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Towards the middle of November I decided that I could not remain in my present quarters much longer. My presence was attracting unwelcome attention to my kind host and hostess, albeit they would not admit it. From the report that I was a man dressed as a woman, the rumour had now changed to the effect that I was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, sent specially out by Her Majesty to inform her of the proceedings of her rebellious subjects. Another person had heard I was the wife of the General who was giving the Boers so much trouble at Mafeking. I determined, therefore, to return to Mrs. Fraser's hotel, which was always a stage nearer Mafeking, whither I was anxious to return eventually. As a matter of fact, there was no alternative resting-place. It was impossible to pass south to Kimberley, to the west lay the Kalahari Desert, and to the east the Transvaal. With many grateful thanks to the Keeleys, I rode off one morning, with Vellum in attendance, to Setlagoli, which I had left a month before. We thought it prudent to make sure there were no Boers about before bringing the Government mules and cart. Therefore I arranged for my maid to follow in this vehicle if she heard nothing to the contrary within twenty-four hours. Mrs. Fraser was delighted to see me, and reported the Boers all departed after a temporary occupation, so there I settled down for another period of weary waiting.

### FOOTNOTES:

[26] The Boers used better ammunition later.

[27] Boer national flag.

[28] Clergyman.



[29] Mr. Murchison was shut up in the gaol awaiting Lord Roberts's confirmation of his sentence. When Eloff succeeded in entering Mafeking many months later, the former was liberated with the other prisoners, and given a rifle to fire on the Boers, which he did with much effect. I believe he was afterwards taken to a gaol in the Isle of Wight, but I do not know if his life-sentence is still in force.



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[30] This gentleman on a later occasion again attempted to leave Mafeking on horseback, and was taken prisoner by the Boers and sent to Pretoria, leaving the *Daily Mail* without a correspondent in Mafeking. At the request of that paper I then undertook to send them cables about the siege.

### CHAPTER VIII

#### BETRAYED BY A PIGEON—THE BOERS COME AT LAST

“For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter.”—ECCLES. x. 20.

The day after my arrival at Setlagoli some natives came in with apparently well-authenticated news of an English victory near Vryburg. They also asserted that the line was already being relaid to Maribogo, and that the railway servants had returned to that station. I drove over at once to prove the truth of their statements; of course, I found they were all false, except the fact of the station-master having returned to the barricaded and desolate station. I discovered him sitting disconsolately at the door of his ruined house, gloomily perusing “Nicholas Nickleby.” On returning home, I was delighted to find interesting letters from Mr. and Mrs. Rochfort Maguire, who were shut up in Kimberley, as was also Mr. Rhodes. The latter had despatched them by a boy, ordered to continue his journey to Mafeking with other missives and also with some colonial newspapers. These latter, only about a fortnight old, we fairly spelled through before sending them on. They were already so mutilated by constant unfolding that in parts they were scarcely decipherable, but none the less very precious. Two days later arrived a representative of Reuter’s Agency, whom I shall call Mr. P. He had come by rail and horseback straight from Cape Town and he was also under orders to proceed to Mafeking; but his horses were so done up that he decided to give them a few days’ rest. I took advantage of his escort to carry out a long-cherished desire to see the wreck of the armoured train at Kraipann. Accompanied by a boy to show us the way, we started after an early lunch. As it was a Sunday, there was not much fear of our meeting any Boers, as the latter were always engaged that day in psalm-singing and devotions. We cantered gaily along, passing many Kaffir huts, outside of which were grouped wondering natives, in their Sunday best. These kept up a lively conversation with our guide as long as we remained within earshot. I was always impressed with the freemasonry that existed in that country among the blacks. Everywhere they found acquaintances, and very often relations. They used to tell me that such and such a man was their wife’s cousin or their aunt’s brother. Moreover, as long as you were accompanied by a native, you were always sure of certain information concerning the whereabouts of the Boers; but to these latter they would lie with stupid, solemn faces. When we neared Kraipann, we came to a region of rocks and kopjes, truly a God-forsaken



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country. Leaving our horses in the native stadt, we proceeded on foot to the scene of the disaster. There was not much to see, after all—merely a pilot armoured engine, firmly embedded its whole length in the gravel. Next to this, an ordinary locomotive, still on the rails, riddled on one side with bullets, and on the other displaying a gaping aperture into the boiler, which told its own tale. Then came an armoured truck—H.M.'s *Mosquito*—that I had seen leaving Mafeking so trim and smart, but now battered with shot; and lastly another truck, which had been carrying the guns. This had been pushed back into a culvert, and presented a dilapidated appearance, with its front wheels in the air. The whole spectacle was forlorn and eerie. All the time I gave cursory glances right and left, to make sure no Boers were prowling about, and I should not have been surprised to have seen an unkempt head bob up and ask us our business. But all remained as silent as the grave. Swarms of locusts were alone in possession, and under the engine and carriages the earth was a dark brown moving mass, with the stream of these jumping, creeping things. I had soon gratified my curiosity, and persuaded my companion, who was busy photographing, also to leave this desolate spot.

The Boers continued to ride roughshod over the land, commandeering oxen and cattle, putting up to public auction such Government properties as they had seized at the different railway-stations, and employing hundreds of Kaffirs to tear up the railway-line. Our enemies were perfectly secure in the knowledge that no help could come for months, and the greater number believed it would never come at all, and that the "Roineks" were being cut to pieces in the South. They openly stated there would be no more railway traffic, but that in future trade and transit would be carried on by transport riding—*i.e.*, by ox-waggon, their favourite amusement and occupation. In the meantime the cry of the loyal colonists went up from all sides: "How much longer can it last?"

After a few days Mr. P. duly returned from Mafeking, having had a risky but successful trip in and out of the town. He reported it all well, and that the inhabitants were leading a mole existence, owing to the constant shelling. The Boers evidently preferred dropping in shells at a safe distance to risking their lives by a storming attack. With great pride Mr. P. showed me a basket of carrier pigeons, by which he assured me I could now communicate swiftly and safely with the garrison. He was even kind enough to send off one at once on a trial trip, with a short note signed with his name, informing Colonel Baden-Powell that I was at Setlagoli, and that I would be able to forward any letters or information they might wish to send. I had never had any experience of such birds, and was delighted to think how much quicker they would travel than old Boaz. When the pigeon was released, however, I must confess it



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was rather disturbing to note that it did not seem at all sure of the direction it should take, circling round at least twenty times in the air. However, Mr. P. assured me this was their usual habit, and that this particular bird knew its business, having taken several prizes; so, as it eventually disappeared, I thought no more about it. The next day Mr. P. left for Cape Town, and passed out of our ken, but we were soon to be reminded of him in an unpleasant fashion.

On going into the dining-room to lunch one day, I saw little Mr.—, a kinsman of Mrs. Fraser's, and particularly short of stature, with an axe in hand, in the act of taking up the boards in a corner of the room, revealing as he did so a sort of shallow cellar, with no light or ventilation. Watching the operation was another man, an Englishman, the dispossessed manager of a local store, who had sought a temporary lodging at the hotel, and was a big, strong individual, over 6 feet in height. I inquired in amazement, of this strangely assorted pair, what they were trying to do. "We are going to hide, Lady Sarah," chirped the former. "The Boers are on the premises." So saying, he was about to descend into the cavity, and evidently expected the companionship of his tall friend. When I pointed out to them that they would probably suffocate in this modern Black Hole of Calcutta, the little man proceeded to dance round the room, still shouldering his axe, jibbering the while: "I will not go to fight; I am an American. I will not be put in the front rank to be shot by the English, or made to dig trenches." The whole scene was so comic that I sat down and laughed, and the climax was reached when the cock-sparrow, who had always talked so big of what he was going to do and to say to the Boers, crawled under the old grand piano in the farther corner of the big room. I was forced to tell him that no American or Englishman could be found in such an ignominious position, should the house be searched, and I even assured the little gentleman that I did not think it was the least likely his services would be wanted. The other man, whose position was more risky, I advised to lie down on the sofa and feign illness; and I really believe anxiety and worry had so preyed on him that he was as ill as he looked. When calm had been restored, I sat down to lunch, Mrs. Fraser coming in at intervals to report what our visitors were doing at the store. They had demanded coffee and many tins of salmon and sardines. Of these delicacies they seemed particularly fond, eating the latter with their fingers, after which they drank the oil, mixed for choice with golden syrup. After their repast they fitted themselves out in clothes and luxuries, such as silver watches and chains, white silk pocket-handkerchiefs, cigarettes, saddles, and even harness, taking altogether goods to the amount of about L50. This amusement finished, they proceeded to practise shooting, setting up bottles at a distance of about 50 yards. We followed



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all their doings from behind the green Venetian blinds, kept down on account of the heat. Up to this time none of them had come up to the house, for which we had reason to be grateful, as the “dop” they had found, and quickly finished, was beginning to affect their demeanour and spirits, particularly of the one named Dietrich, who appeared to be the boss of the party. At last the immediate reason for their visit filtered out. This slightly intoxicated gentleman inquired of Mr. Fraser where they could find a man named Mr. P. and the English lady of whom he had written. The old gentleman, who could be more than common deaf when he chose, affected utter vacancy at the mention of these individuals, merely stating that he knew a man of the name of P. fifteen years ago. Then the whole story was told. They had captured our pigeon, with its tell-tale note. This confiding bird had flown straight to the laager, had perched on the General’s house, where it had been shot by this same Dietrich, and we owed the present visit to the information supplied therein by Mr. P., Dietrich informing us he attributed this occurrence to the Almighty working for the Boers. They stated they were now awaiting the arrival of the *Veldtcoronet* and of Mr. Lamb, a neighbouring farmer, whom they had sent for, and they proceeded to make their preparations to spend the night. After supper we were relieved to hear Mr. Lamb’s cheerful voice, as he rode up in the dark with the jovial Dietrich, who had ridden out to meet him, and who, it appeared, was an old friend of his. I must say the pleasure of meeting was more on the Dutchman’s side than on the Englishman’s. By this time the former was quite intoxicated, and Mr. Lamb cleverly managed to get him to his room, and after having, as he thought, disposed of him, he came and joined us on the stoep. There we freely discussed our visitors, and were having a cheery conversation, when I suddenly looked up, and round the corner of the verandah saw the unsteady form of a typical Boer—slouch hat, bandolier, and rifle, complete—staggering towards us, truly a weird apparition. The rising moon shining on the rifle-barrel made it glitter like silver. I confess I disappeared round the corner to my room with more haste than dignity. To Boers by daytime, when sober, I had by now become accustomed, but at night, after liberal doses of “dop,” armed with a loaded rifle, I preferred their room to their company. Luckily, Mr. Lamb was equal to the occasion, and persuaded Dietrich to return to his quarters, in spite of his assurance that he (Dietrich) “was the man who watched, and who did not sleep.” With the morning arrived nine or ten more, including the newly-appointed *Veldtcoronet*, by name De Koker, who had been lately convicted of sheep-stealing. After a long idle morning and more refreshments, they all adjourned to the living-room, where, with much difficulty, one of them stumbled through the reading of a printed proclamation, which



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enacted that “This country now being part of the Transvaal, the residents must within seven days leave their homes or enrol themselves as burghers.” Nothing was mentioned about fighting, so all there complied with what was required—namely, to sign their names on a blank sheet of paper. By evening all had left for Mosita, as Mr. P. had also mentioned Mr. Keeley’s name in his unlucky note. Three, however, remained to keep a watch on myself, and one of these, I regretted to observe, was the jovially-inclined Dietrich. It can be imagined that our irritation with Mr. P. was great for having so foolishly mentioned names and places, and still more with the idiotic bird, the real origin of a very unpleasant two days. I reflected that, if these were the tricks carrier-pigeons were wont to play, I greatly preferred the old nigger as a letter-carrier in wartime.

We were not to wait long for more developments. Next day at dusk arrived a large cavalcade, which included Mr. Keeley, a prisoner. He went on with his escort at daybreak, leaving us full of sympathy for his poor wife. I sent by his bodyguard, under the command of another Dietrich, brother to the drunkard, who seemed a decent sort of man, a letter to General Snyman, begging for a pass into Mafeking to rejoin my husband. Mr. Keeley told me their Intelligence Department was very perfect, as they had been aware of every one of my movements since I left Mafeking, and even of my rides during the last fortnight. He also told me General Cronje and a great number of Boers had left Mafeking and trekked South. This encouraged me in my belief that it would be better for me to be in that beleaguered town than to submit to the possible insults of Boer sentinels at Setlagoli.

The next day was Sunday, and in the morning returned the energetic Veldtcoronet De Koker. He had heard of my letter to Snyman, and, wishing to be important, had come to offer me a pass to the laager for a personal interview with the General, assuring me the latter was always very polite to ladies. He even wished to escort me there that very day. However, I had no mind to act hastily, so I made an excuse of the mules being away—also that I did not like to travel on a Sunday. This latter reason he fully appreciated, and arranged with me to come to his house the following day, for which purpose he left me a permit, vilely scrawled in Dutch. I mentally reserved to myself the decision as to keeping the rendezvous. We sat down to breakfast together, although, as he could speak no English and I could speak no Dutch, the conversation was nil. He was pleased with the cigarette I offered him, and observed me with some curiosity, probably never having seen anything approaching an English lady previously. Before he left, I complained, through an interpreter, of the insobriety of my self-constituted sentinel Dietrich, remarking it was quite impossible I could stand such a man dogging my footsteps much longer. He promised to report the matter, and insisted on shaking hands with great cordiality.



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It was fortunate I had not accompanied De Koker, for that very evening back came Mr. Keeley, who had luckily succeeded in satisfying the suspicions of General Snyman, and who had received a permit to reside on his farm during the war. He brought me a letter in Dutch from the same authority, refusing, "owing to the disturbed state of the country," to give me a pass to Mafeking, and requesting me to remain where I was, under the "surveillance of his burghers." It was exactly the surveillance of one of his said burghers I wished to avoid; but there seemed no possibility of getting rid of Dietrich, who evidently preferred his comfortable quarters at the hotel to roughing it in the laager. I was exceedingly disappointed, and also somewhat indignant with Mr. Keeley, who firmly believed, and was much cast down by, some telegrams he had read out in the laager, relating the utter defeat of 15,000 English at the Modder River;<sup>[31]</sup> 1,500 Boers, he stated, had surrounded this force, of which they had killed 2,000. I stoutly refused to credit it till I had seen it in an English despatch. But all this was enough to subdue the bravest spirit; we had received practically nothing but Dutch information during the last six weeks, telling of their successes and English disasters; we had seen nobody but our enemies. Even if one did not allow oneself to believe their tales, there was always a sort of uncomfortable feeling that these must contain some element of truth. Fortunately, however, I was reading an account of the Franco-German War in 1870, and there I found that the same system of inventing successes was carried on by the French press right up to, and even after, the Emperor's capitulation at Sedan. So it was comforting to think that, if it had been necessary to keep up the spirits of paid and regular soldiers, it must be a thousand times more essential for the Transvaal authorities to do so, as regards their unpaid mixed army, who had no encouragement to fight but knowledge of successes and hopes of future loot. All the same, it was a great trial of patience.

### FOOTNOTES:

[31] This news must have been a garbled account of the fighting with Lord Methuen's column.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOW I WAS MADE A PRISONER—IN A BOER LAAGER

"Ah, there, Piet! be'ind 'is stony kop,  
With 'is Boer bread an' biltong, an' 'is flask of awful dop;  
'Is mauser for amusement an' 'is pony for retreat,  
I've known a lot o' fellers shoot a dam' sight worse than  
Piet."—KIPLING.



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Provisions at Setlagoli and in the surrounding districts were now fast running out, and Mrs. Fraser announced to me one morning she had only full allowance of meal for another week. In that colony no meal meant no bread, and it was, in fact, the most important factor in the housewife's mind when thinking of supplies. While on this subject, I must remark what very excellent bread is that made by the Dutch; no matter how poor or dilapidated the farmhouses, large loaves of beautiful, slightly browned bread are always in evidence, baked by the mother or daughters. The non-existence of the railway was beginning to cause much distress, Dutch and English suffering alike. In fact, if it had not been for the locusts, unusually numerous that year, and always a favourite food with the natives, these latter would also have been starving. As every mouth to feed was a consideration, I determined to see if I could personally induce the Boer General to pass me into Mafeking. Under Mrs. Fraser's charge I left my maid, as I did not wish to expose her to any hardships in the laager; and to her I gave the custody of my pony Dop, to whom I had become much attached. After detaining me a prisoner, the Boers returned to Setlagoli specially to secure this animal; they had heard the natives speak of her in terms of high appreciation, and describe her as "not a horse, but lightning." Metelka, with much spirit, declared the pony to be her property, having been given her, she said, in lieu of wages. She further stated she was a German subject, and that if her horse were not returned in three days she should write to the Kaiser. All this was repeated to General Snyman by the awestruck *Veldtcornet*. After a week spent with the Boers, Dop arrived back at Setlagoli, carefully led, as if she were a sacred beast, and bringing a humble letter of apology from the Commandant.

But I am anticipating, and must return to my solitary drive to the laager, accompanied only by Vellum and another black boy. I took the precaution of despatching a nigger with a note to Mafeking, telling Colonel Baden-Powell of my plan, and that, having heard a Dutch woman called Mrs. Delpoort, in Mafeking, wished to join her friends in the Transvaal, I intended asking General Snyman to exchange me for her. The distance we had to drive was forty-five miles, along villainous sandy roads and under a burning African sun. We outspanned for the second time at the house of De Koker, who had been the first to advise me to visit the laager. His dwelling was situated close to the railway-line, or, rather, to where the railway-line had been. Here there was a great stir and bustle; men were hurrying in and out, nearly all armed; horses were tethered before the door; and, on hearing my cart drive up, the *Veldtcornet* himself came out to meet me, and gravely invited me to descend. I now saw the interior of a typical Dutch house, with the family at home. The *vrouw* came forward



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with hand outstretched in the awkward Boer fashion. The Dutch do not shake hands; they simply extend a wooden member, which you clasp, and the greeting is over. I had to go through this performance in perfect silence with about seven or eight children of various ages, a grown-up daughter, and eight or ten men, most of whom followed us into the poky little room which appeared to serve as a living-room for the whole family. Although past ten o'clock, the remains of breakfast were still on the table, and were not appetizing to look at. We sat down on chairs placed in a circle, the whole party commencing to chatter volubly, and scarcely a word being intelligible to me. Presently the *vrouw* brought me a cup of coffee in a cracked cup and saucer. Not wishing to give offence, I tried to swallow it; the coffee was not bad, if one could only have dissociated it from that dreadful breakfast-table. I then produced some cigarettes, and offered them to the male element. They were enchanted, laid aside their pipes, and conversed with more animation than ever; but it was only occasionally that I caught a word I could understand; the sentence "twee tozen Engelman dood"[32] recurred with distressing frequency, and enabled me to grasp their conversation was entirely about the war. I meanwhile studied the room and its furniture, which was of the poorest description; the chairs mostly lacked legs or backs, and the floor was of mud, which perhaps was just as well, as they all spat on it in the intervals of talk, and emptied on to it the remains of whatever they were drinking. After a short time a black girl came in with a basin of water, with which she proceeded to plentifully sprinkle the floor, utterly disregarding our dresses and feet. Seeing all the women tuck their feet under their knees, I followed their example, until this improvised water-cart had finished its work. The grown-up daughter had a baby in her arms, as uncared for as the other children, all of whom looked as if soap and water never came their way. The men were fine, strong-looking individuals, and all were very affable to me, or meant to be so, if I could but have understood them. Finally four or five more women came into this tiny overcrowded room, evidently visitors. This was the finishing stroke, and I decided that, rested or not, the mules must be inspanned, that I might leave this depressing house. One of the young burghers brought me the pass to General Snyman, the caligraphy of which he was evidently very proud of; and having taken leave of all the ladies and men in the same peculiar stiff manner as that in which I had greeted them, I drove off, devoutly thankful to be so far on my journey. About four in the afternoon we came to a rise, and, looking over it, saw the white roofs of Mafeking lying about five miles away in the glaring sunlight. Then we arrived at the spot where General Cronje's laager had been before he trekked South, marked by the grass being worn away for nearly a square mile,

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by broken-down waggons, and by sundry aas-vogels (the scavengers of South Africa) hovering over carcasses of horses or cattle. Mafeking was now only three miles distant, and, seeing not a solitary soul on the flat grass plains, I felt very much tempted to drive in to the native stadt; but the black boys resolutely declined to attempt it, as they feared being shot, and they assured me that many Boer sharpshooters lay hidden in the scrub. Thinking discretion the better part of valour, I regretfully turned away from Mafeking by the road leading up an incline to the laager, still several miles distant. The cart was suddenly brought to a standstill by almost driving into a Boer outpost, crouched under a ruined wall, from which point of vantage they were firing with their rifles at the advance trenches of the town. The officer in charge of this party told me I must stay here till sundown, when he and his men would accompany me to headquarters, as he averred the road I was now pursuing was not safe from the Mafeking gun-range. I therefore waited their good pleasure for an hour, during which time the firing from all round the town went on in a desultory sort of way, occasionally followed by a boom from a large Boer gun, and the short, sharp, hammering noise from the enemy's one-pounder Maxim. The sun was almost down when the burgher in charge gave the signal to bring up their horses, and in a few minutes we were under way. This time I was attended by a bodyguard of about eighteen or twenty burghers, and we went along, much to my annoyance, at a funereal pace. On our way we met the relieving guard coming out to take the place just evacuated by my escort. When seen riding thus more or less in ranks, a Boer squadron, composed of picked men for outpost duty, presented really a formidable appearance. The men were mostly of middle age, all with the inevitable grizzly beard, and their rifles, gripped familiarly, were resting on the saddle-bow; nearly all had two bandoliers apiece, which gave them the appearance of being armed to the teeth—a more determined-looking band cannot be imagined. The horses of these burghers were well bred and in good condition, and, although their clothes were threadbare, they seemed cheerful enough, smoking their pipes and cracking their jokes.

When we at last drew up at headquarters, I was fairly startled to find what an excitement my appearance created, about two or three hundred Boers swarming up from all over the laager, and surrounding the cart. The General was then accommodated in a deserted farmhouse, and from this building at last issued his secretary, a gentleman who spoke English perfectly, and to whom I handed my letter requesting an interview. After an interminable wait among the gaping crowd, the aforementioned gentleman returned, and informed me I could see the General at once. He literally had to make a way for me from the cart to the house, but I must admit the burghers were very civil, nearly all of them taking



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off their hats as I passed through them. Once inside the house, I found myself in a low, dark room, and in the farthest corner, seated on a bench, were two old gentlemen, with extra long beards, who were introduced to me as General Snyman and Commandant Botha.[33] I was at once struck by the anything but affable expression of their countenances. They motioned to me to take a chair; someone handed me a bowl with a brown mixture—presumably coffee—which I found very embarrassing to hold during our conversation. This was carried on through the secretary, and the General got more and more out of temper as he discovered what my request was. I informed him I had come at the suggestion of his *Veldtcornet*; that all my relations were in England, except my husband, who was in Mafeking; that there was no meal in the colony where I had been living; and that I was prepared to ask Colonel Baden-Powell to exchange me for a Dutch lady whom I heard wished to leave, if he (General Snyman) would accept the exchange. He promptly and with much decision refused. Then it occurred to me this old gentleman meant to keep me as a prisoner of war, and my heart sank into my shoes. The only concession I could obtain was that he would consider my case, and in the meantime he ordered that I should be accommodated in the field hospital. Accompanied by the secretary, and leaving the staring crowd behind, I drove off to a little house, about half a mile away, where we found our destination. I was shown into a tiny room, smelling strongly of disinfectants, which from the large centre-table I at once recognized as the operating-room, and here I was told I could sleep. I was too tired to care much. There was no bed, only a broken-down sofa, and in the corner a dilapidated washstand; the walls and windows were riddled with bullets, denoting where the young burghers had been amusing themselves with rifle practice. The secretary then informed me that they had to search my luggage, which operation lasted fully half an hour, although I had but one small portmanteau and a dressing-case. The latter two Dutch nurses were told off to look through, which, I am bound to say, they did most unwillingly, remarking to me they had not contemplated searching people's luggage as part of their already onerous duties. I had even to undress, in order that they might reassure the officials I had no documents on my person. Meanwhile the men examined my correspondence and papers almost microscopically. Needless to say, they found nothing. They had barely finished their researches, when a messenger came from the General to say, if Colonel Baden-Powell would exchange me for a Dutchman imprisoned in Mafeking, a certain Petrus Viljoen, he would consent to my going in. I found, on inquiry, that this man had been imprisoned for theft several months before the war, and I told them plainly it was manifestly unfair to exchange a man and a criminal for a woman; further, that I could not even ask Colonel Baden-Powell officially to do such a thing, and could only mention it, as an impossible condition, in a letter to my husband, if they chose to send it in. To this they agreed, so I indited the following letter, couched in terms which the secretary might peruse:



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*"December 2, 1899.*

"MY DEAR GORDON,

"I am at the laager. General Snyman will not give me a pass unless Colonel Baden-Powell will exchange me for a Mr. Petrus Viljoen. I am sure this is impossible, so I do not ask him formally. I am in a great fix, as they have very little meal left at Setlagoli or the surrounding places. I am very kindly looked after here."

I then went to sleep in my strange surroundings, with small hope of any success from my application to Mafeking. The next day, Sunday, was observed by both parties as a day of rest. About seven one of the nurses brought me a cup of coffee, and then I proceeded to dress as best I might. So clearly did that horrid little room imprint itself on my memory that I seem to see it as I write. The dusty bare boards, cracked and loose in places, had no pretence to any acquaintance with a scrubbing-brush, and very little with a broom. A rickety old chest of drawers stood in one corner, presumably filled with hospital necessaries, from the very strong smell of drugs emanating from it, and from the fact that the nurses would bustle in and rummage for some desired article, giving glimpses of the confusion inside. On the top of the drawers were arranged a multitude of medicine-bottles, half full and half empty, cracked and whole. The broken old washstand had been of valuable service during the night, as with it I barricaded the door, innocent of any lock or key. When I was dressed, I walked out on to the tiny stoep, surrounded by a high paling. My attention was at once attracted to a woman in a flood of tears, and presently the cause of her weeping was explained, as an elderly man came round the corner of the house with both his hands roughly tied up with bandages covered with blood—a sight which caused the young woman to sob with renewed vigour. After a little talk with the man, who, in spite of his injuries, seemed perfectly well, the latter went away, and I entered into conversation with the weeping female, whom I found to speak good English, and to be the daughter of the wounded warrior, Hoffman by name and German by birth. They were Transvaal subjects, and her father had been among the first of the burghers to turn out when hostilities threatened. She then proceeded to tell me that she and her mother and a numerous collection of young brothers and sisters had trekked in from their home in the Transvaal to spend the Sunday in the laager with their father. On their arrival early that morning, they learnt, to their horror, that he had been wounded, or, rather, injured, late the night before, as the mutilated state of his hands arose from a shell exploding in the high-velocity Krupp gun just as he was loading it. She told me her father was one of the most valued artillerymen on the Boer side, and that he was also an adept in the art of making fireworks, his last triumph in this line having been at Mafeking on the occasion of the

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celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Fully appreciating the value of his services, the Transvaal authorities had from the commencement given him the most arduous tasks, and always, she indignantly added, in the forefront of the battle. As regarded the present accident, she said her father had repeatedly told the authorities these particular shells were not safe to handle. Apparently the safety-bolt was missing from all of them, making them when loaded as brittle as an eggshell. This young lady and her mother were certainly very anti-Boer in their sympathies, though terribly afraid of allowing their feelings to be known. All that day and the next they spent in the laager, looking after the injured *pere de famille*, whom, by the way, I got quite friendly with, but who, I think, was rather relieved to see his family depart. I rather regretted them, as Miss Hoffman used to bring me a lot of gossip overheard in the laager, where she assured me public opinion was running very strongly against me, and that all were of opinion the General should certainly not allow me to join my friends in Mafeking.

The morning dragged on. It was a hot, gusty day, and I found the shelter of my poky little room the most comfortable resting-place, although instead of a chair I had but a wooden case to sit on. About eleven I saw a clerical gentleman arriving, who I rightly concluded was the parson coming to conduct the service. Presently the strangest of noises I have ever heard arose from the back-premises of the tiny house. It is difficult to conceive anything so grotesque as some Dutch singing is. Imagine a doleful wail of many voices, shrill treble and deep bass, all on one note, now swelling in volume, now almost dying away, sung with a certain metre, and presumably with soul-stirring words, but with no attempt to keep together or any pretensions to an air of any kind, and you will have an idea of a Dutch chant or hymn. This noise—for it cannot be called a harmony—might equally well be produced by a howling party of dogs and cats. Then followed long prayers—for only the parson's voice could be heard—then more dirges, after which it was over, and all trooped away, apparently much edified. One of the nurses brought me some lunch and spread it on the rickety table, with a dirty napkin as a tablecloth. As regards the food, which these young ladies told me they took it in turn to cook, it was very fair; only one day we got no meat and no meal; the other days they gave me eggs, very good beef, splendid potatoes, and bread in any quantity. Besides this, I was able to buy delicious fruit, both figs and apricots. As beverages there were tea and coffee, the latter, of course, being the Transvaal national drink—that is to say, when “dop” cannot be had. Beer is almost unknown, except the imported kinds of Bass and Schlitz, for what is known as “Kaffir beer” is a filthy decoction. About midday I received a formal reply from Gordon, as follows:



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“MAFEKING,” *December 3, 1899.*

“MY DEAR SARAH,

“I am delighted to hear you are being well treated, but very sorry to have to tell you that Colonel Baden-Powell finds it impossible to hand over Petrus Viljoen in exchange for you, as he was convicted of horse-stealing before the war. I fail to see in what way it can benefit your captors to keep you a prisoner. Luckily for them, it is not the custom of the English to make prisoners of war of women.

“GORDON WILSON.”

Of course I was grievously disappointed, but at the same time I had really expected no other answer, as I informed Mr. Brink (the General’s second secretary), who had brought me the letter. He was gravely apologetic, and informed me the General and Commandant were holding a Kriegsraad early on the following morning, when my case would receive their full consideration. In the afternoon we had the excitement of seeing the Pretoria coach drive up to the laager with much horn-blowing and whip-cracking. Later some newspapers were brought across, and I was able actually to peruse a Transvaal paper only two days old. The General’s other secretary, who presented them to me, made some astounding statements, which he said had just come up on official wires—namely, that England and Russia would be at war before that very week was out, in what locality he did not know; and that Germany had suddenly increased her fleet by many ships, spending thereon L10,000,000. To this I ventured to remark that the building of those ships would take four or five years, which would make it almost too late to assist the Transvaal in the present war. I also reminded him casually that Germany’s Emperor and Empress were, according to their own papers, then paying a visit to Queen Victoria, which did not look as if that country was exactly unfriendly to England. To this he had nothing to reply, and I saw that this imperial visit was a sore subject with my entertainers. For this reason I made a point of referring to it on every possible occasion. As I was eating my solitary supper, Mr. Brink appeared with a letter from Colonel Baden-Powell as follows:

“*December 5, 1899.*

“DEAR LADY SARAH,

“I am so distressed about you. You must have been having an awful time of it, and I can’t help feeling very much to blame; but I had hoped to save you the unpleasantness of the siege.

“However, I trust now that your troubles are nearly over at last, and that General Snyman will pass you in here.



“We are all very well, and really rather enjoying it all.

“I wrote last night asking for you to be exchanged for Mrs. Delpoort, but had no answer, so have written again to-day, and sincerely hope it will be all right.

“Hope you are well, in spite of your troubles.

“Yours sincerely,



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“R. BADEN-POWELL.”

I then learnt from another letter that Mrs. Delport, who had originally expressed the wish to leave Mafeking, where she was residing with many other friends in the women's laager, had changed her mind, or her relatives did not encourage her to leave the shelter of the town; for the Staff had experienced some difficulty in persuading her to agree to the exchange, even if General Snyman allowed the same. I asked if an answer had been returned to the Colonel's letter, and Mr. Brink replied in the negative. Very indignant, I said that I did not mean to be kept in my present wretched quarters indefinitely, and that, if no exchange could be effected, I would request a pass to return to Setlagoli, and risk the scarcity of food. He looked rather confused, and said somewhat timidly that no doubt the General would allow me to go to Pretoria, where I should find "pleasant ladies' society." Seeing my look of angry surprise, he hastily added that he only wished he had a house of his own to place at my disposal. I saw it was no use venting my annoyance on this young man, who was civility itself, so I merely remarked I had no intention of visiting their capital, and that the present was certainly not a time for an English lady to travel alone in the Transvaal. To this he gushingly agreed, but added that, of course, the General would give me a proper escort. These words were quite enough to denote which way the wind was blowing. I would not for an instant admit they had a right to detain me or to send me to any place against my will, having come there voluntarily, merely to ask the General a favour. I was therefore conveniently blind and deaf, and, begging my amiable young friend to submit Colonel Baden-Powell's suggestion to the Kriegsraad on the following morning, and to apprise me of the result, I wished him good-night, and went to bed once more on the wretched sofa, in anything but a hopeful frame of mind. However, as is so often the case, my spirits revived in the morning, and, on considering the situation, I could not see what object the Transvaal authorities could have in detaining me a prisoner. I was certainly very much in the way of the hospital arrangements, and I fully made up my mind to refuse absolutely to go to Pretoria, unless they took me by force. I also determined to leave them no peace at the headquarters till they gave me a definite reply. The day dragged on; the flies simply swarmed in my poky little room. Never have I seen anything like the plague of these insects, but the nurses assured me that at the laager itself they were far worse, attracted, doubtless, by the cattle, horses, and food-stuffs. At length I received a letter in an enormous official envelope, saying General Snyman had wired to Pretoria about me, and expected an answer every minute, which reply should be immediately communicated to me. By my own free will I had put myself completely in their power. This did not prevent me, however,



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from speaking my mind freely on what I termed “the extraordinary treatment I was receiving,” to both of the secretaries, to the nurses, and to the patients. The latter, being men, were very sympathizing; the nurses, though kind and attentive, were not quite so friendly, and seemed somewhat suspicious of my business. Neither of these, I ascertained, had gone through any previous training, but had volunteered their services, as they thought it “would be a lark.” Whether their expectations were realized was doubtful, as they told me they were worked off their legs; that they had to cook, wash their clothes, and clean out the wretched little rooms, besides looking after the patients. In addition to these two girls there was a “lady doctor,” the first of her species I had ever come across, and with whom I was not favourably impressed. Very untidy in her appearance, her head covered with curls, her costume composed of the remnants of showy finery, this lady had been a handsome woman, but her personality, combined with a very discontented expression of countenance, did not exactly form one’s idea of a substitute for the skilful, kind, and cheerful hospital doctor that we know at home. In fact, she looked singularly out of place, which I remarked to several people, partly from the irritation I felt on hearing her addressed as “Doctor.” No doubt these remarks were repeated to her, and this accounted for her black looks.

I must not omit a few words about the patients and visitors of the hospital, with all of whom I was most friendly. One and all were exceedingly civil, and I never encountered any rudeness whatever. Even the burghers of no importance, poorly clad, out at elbow, and of starved appearance, who came to the hospital for advice and medicines, all alike made me a rough salutation, evidently the best they were acquainted with. Those of more standing nearly always commenced to chat in very good English; in fact, I think a great many came up with the purpose of observing the captured *rara avis*, an Englishwoman. We did not actually discuss the progress of the war and what led to it, sticking more to generalities. One hope was universally expressed, that it would soon be over, and this I heartily re-echoed. I told one of them I thought they had been foolish to destroy all the railway-line, as it had left their own people so terribly short of food; to this he replied that such minor matters could not be helped, that they must all suffer alike and help each other; also that they were well aware that they were taking on a very great Power, and that every nerve must be strained if they could hope for success. So another day and night passed. I continued to send down letters without end to headquarters; but it was always the same answer: they were waiting for the reply from Pretoria. One afternoon we had a very heavy thunderstorm and deluges of rain, the heaviest I had seen in South Africa; the water trickled into my room,



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and dripped drearily on the floor for hours; outside, the stream between the hospital and laager became a roaring torrent. No one came near us that afternoon, and I really think communication was not possible. Later it cleared and the flood abated; a lively bombardment was then commenced, on the assumption, probably, that the Mafeking trenches were filled with water and uninhabitable. It was trying to the nerves to sit and listen to the six or seven guns all belching forth their missiles of death on the gallant little town, which was so plainly seen from my windows, and which seemed to lie so unprotected on the veldt. Just as I had barricaded my door and gone to rest on my sofa about nine o'clock, the big siege gun suddenly boomed out its tremendous discharge, causing the whole house to shake and everything in the room to jingle. It seemed a cruel proceeding, to fire on a partially sleeping town, but I did not know then how accustomed the inhabitants were to this evening gun, and how they took their precautions accordingly.

I must say I disliked the nights at the hospital exceedingly. It was insufferably hot and stuffy in the little room, and the window, only about 2 feet above the ground, had to be left open. The sentries, about six in number—doubled, as I understood, on my account—lay and lounged on the stoep outside. Instead of feeling them anything of a protection, I should have been much happier without them. It must be recollected that these burghers were very undisciplined and independent of authority, only a semblance of which appeared to be exercised over them. They included some of a very low type, and it appeared to be left to themselves to choose which post they would patronize. It was remarked to me they preferred the hospital, as it was sheltered, and that the same men had latterly come there every night. Their behaviour during their watch was very unconventional. They came on duty about 6 p.m., and made themselves thoroughly comfortable on the stoep with mackintoshes and blankets. Their rifles were propped up in one corner, and the bandoliers thrown on the ground. There were a couple of hammocks for the patients' use, and in these two of them passed the night. Before retiring to rest, they produced their pipes and foul-smelling Boer tobacco, proceeding to light up just under my windows, meanwhile talking their unmusical language with great volubility. At length, about ten, they appeared to slumber, and a chorus of snoring arose, which generally sent me to sleep, to be awakened two or three hours later by renewed conversations, which now and then died away into hoarse whispers. I always imagined they were discussing myself, and devising some scheme to step over the low sill into my room on the chance of finding any loot. I complained one day to the nurses of the fact that their extreme loquacity really prevented my sleeping, and, as she told me that the patients suffered in the same way, I advised her to speak to the sentinels and ask them to be more quiet. She told me afterwards she had done so, and that they said they had been insulted, and would probably not come again. We both laughed, and agreed it would not matter much if this calamity occurred.



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The next day I was still put off, when I requested to know what had been decided about my fate. I was getting desperate, and had serious thoughts of taking “French leave,” risking Boer sentries and outposts, and walking into Mafeking at night; but it was the fear of being fired on from our own trenches that deterred me. Fortunately, however, assistance was at hand. On the afternoon of the fifth day that I had spent at the laager, a fine-looking burgher rode up to the hospital, and I heard him conversing in very good English. Presently, after staring at me for some time, he came up and said he had known Randolph Churchill, who, he heard, was my brother, and that he should so like to have a little talk. He then informed me his name was Spencer Drake, to which I said: “Your name and your conversation would make me think you are an Englishman, Mr. Drake.” “So I am,” was his reply. “I was born in Norfolk. My father and grandfather before me were in Her Majesty’s Navy, and we are descended from the old commander of Queen Elizabeth’s time.” To this I observed that I was sorry to see him in the Boer camp amongst the Queen’s enemies. He looked rather sheepish, but replied: “Our family settled in Natal many years ago, and I have ever since been a Transvaal burgher. I owe everything I possess to the South African Republic, and of course I fight for its cause; besides which, we colonials were very badly treated and thrown over by the English Government in 1881, and since then I have ceased to think of England as my country.” As he seemed well disposed toward me, I did not annoy him by continuing the discussion, and he went on to inform me that he was the General’s Adjutant, and had been away on business, therefore had only just heard that I was in the laager, and he had come at once to see if he could be of any service. I took the opportunity of telling him what I thought of the way in which they were treating me, pointing out the wretched accommodation I had, and the fact that they had not even supplied me with a bed. He was very sympathetic, and expressed much sorrow at my discomforts, promising to speak to the General immediately, though without holding out much hope of success, as he told me the latter was sometimes very difficult to manage. After a little more talk, during which I made friends with his horse, described by him as a wonderful beast, he rode off, and I was full of renewed hope. A little later the young secretary came up again to see me. To supplement my messages through Mr. Drake, I requested this young man to tell the General that I could see they were taking a cowardly advantage of me because I was a woman, and that they would never have detained a man under similar circumstances. In fact, I was on every occasion so importunate that I am quite sure the General’s Staff only prayed for the moment that I should depart. That afternoon I had a long talk to two old German soldiers, then burghers, who were both characters in their way.



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Hoffman, before alluded to, had been a gunner in the Franco-German War, and was full of information about the artillery of that day and this; while the other had been through the Crimea, and had taken part in the charge of the Light Brigade, then going on to India to assist in repressing the Mutiny. He had evidently never liked the service into which he had been decoyed by the press-gang, and had probably been somewhat of a *mauvais sujet*, for he told me the authorities were glad enough to give him his discharge when the regiment returned to England. He had married and settled in the Transvaal, making a moderate fortune, only to be ruined by a lawsuit being given against him, entirely, he naively admitted, because the Judge was a friend of the other side. In spite of this he remained a most warm partisan of the corrupt Boer Government, and at sixty-seven he had gladly turned out to fight the country whose uniform he had once worn. Whenever I found we were approaching dangerous ground, I used quickly to change the conversation, which perhaps was wise, as I was but one in a mighty host.

### FOOTNOTES:

[32] Two thousand Englishmen dead.

[33] Not to be confounded with General Louis Botha.

### CHAPTER X

#### EXCHANGED FOR A HORSE-THIEF—BACK TO MAFEKING AFTER TWO MONTHS' WANDERINGS

“Hail, fellow! well met!”—SWIFT.

Next morning I was awakened at 6 a.m. by Mr. Drake knocking at my door, and telling me I was to be ready in half an hour, as Colonel Baden-Powell had consented to exchange me for Petrus Viljoen. This exchange had placed our Commanding Officer in an awkward position. The prisoner was, as I stated before, a criminal, and under the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, who would not take upon themselves the responsibility of giving him up. Under these circumstances Lord Edward Cecil had come forward and represented to Colonel Baden-Powell that it was unseemly for an Englishwoman to be left in the hands of the Boers, and transported to Pretoria by the rough coach, exposed to possible insults and to certain discomforts. He even declared himself prepared to take any consequent blame on his shoulders, and, being the Prime Minister's son, his words had great weight. As a matter of fact, Petrus Viljoen was anything but a fighting man, and could be of very little service to our enemies. The burghers had told me his presence was so persistently desired from the fact of the



republic having private scores to settle with him. In any case, he was very reluctant to leave Mafeking and the safety of the prison, which fact had influenced Colonel Baden-Powell in finally agreeing to the exchange.

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As may be imagined, I could hardly believe my good fortune, and I lost no time in scrambling into my clothes while the cart was being inspanned. A vexatious delay occurred from the intractability of the mules, which persistently refused to allow themselves to be caught. The exchange of prisoners had to be effected before 8 a.m., when the truce would be over, and I shall never forget how I execrated those stubborn animals, as the precious minutes slipped by, fearful lest my captors would change their minds and impose fresh conditions. However, at length all was ready, and, escorted by some artillery officers, I drove to headquarters, where I was requested to descend in order to have another interview with the General. Again an inquisitive crowd watched my movements, but civilly made way for me to pass into the little room where General Snyman was holding a sort of levee. The latter asked me a few purposeless questions. I gravely expressed a hope that his eyes were better (he had been suffering from inflamed sight); then he rose and held out his hand, which I could not ignore, and without further delay we were off. About 2,000 yards from Mafeking I noticed the enemy's advanced trenches, with some surprise at their proximity to the town; and here we met the other party with a white flag escorting Mr. Viljoen, who looked foolish, dejected, and anything but pleased to see his friends. He was forthwith given over to their care, the mules were whipped up, and at a gallop we rattled into the main street. From the first redoubt Colonel Baden-Powell and Lord Edward Cecil ran out to greet me, and the men in the trench gave three ringing English cheers, which were good to hear; but no time had to be lost in getting under cover, and I drove straight to Mr. Wiel's house, and had hardly reached it when "Creechy" (a Dutch pet-name which had been given to the big siege gun) sent a parting salute, and her shell whizzed defiantly over our heads.

Then commenced a more or less underground existence, which continued for five and a half months; but, surrounded by friends, it was to me a perfect heaven after so many weeks passed amidst foes. I had much to hear, and it took some time to realize all the changes in the little town since I had left. First and foremost, the town guard were coming splendidly out of their long-protracted ordeal. Divided into three watches, they passed the night at the different redoubts, behind each of which was a bomb-proof shelter. Those of the second watch were ready to reinforce the men on duty, while the third were only to turn out if summoned by the alarm-bell. All the defences had, indeed, been brought to a wonderful pitch of perfection by the C.O. First there was a network of rifle-pits, which gave the Boers no peace day or night, and from which on one side or the other an almost incessant sniping went on. These were supplemented by dynamite mines, the fame of which had frightened the Boers more than anything else, all connected



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with Headquarter Staff Office by electric wires. In addition there was barbed-wire fencing round the larger earthworks, and massive barricades of waggons and sandbags across the principal streets. All this looked very simple once erected and in working order, but it was the outcome of infinite thought and ever-working vigilance. Then there was a complete system of telephones, connecting all the redoubts and the hospital with the Staff Office, thereby saving the lives of galloping orderlies, besides gaining their services as defenders in a garrison so small that each unit was an important factor. Last, but certainly not least, were the bomb-proof shelters, which black labour had constructed under clever supervision all over the town, till at that time, in case of heavy shelling, nearly every inhabitant could be out of harm's way. What struck me most forcibly was that, in carrying out these achievements, Colonel Baden-Powell had been lucky enough to find instruments, in the way of experienced men, ready to his hand. One officer was proficient in bomb-proofs, the postmaster thoroughly understood telephones, while another official had proved himself an expert in laying mines. The area to be defended had a perimeter of six miles; but, in view of the smallness of the garrison and the overwhelming number of the Boers, it was fortunate the authorities had been bold and adventurous enough to extend the trenches over this wide space, instead of following the old South African idea of going into laager in the market-square, which had been the first suggestion. The town was probably saved by being able to present so wide a target for the Boer artillery, and although we were then, and for the next few weeks, cut off from all communication with the outer world, even by nigger letter-carriers, and in spite of bullets rattling and whizzing through the market-square and down the side-streets, the Boer outposts were gradually being pushed away by our riflemen in their invisible pits. While on this subject, I must mention that a day spent in those trenches was anything but an agreeable one. Parties of six men and an officer occupied them daily before dawn, and remained there eighteen hours, as any attempt to leave would have meant a hail of bullets from the enemy, distant only about 600 yards. They were dug deep enough to require very little earthwork for protection; hence they were more or less invisible by the enemy in their larger trenches. These latter were constantly subjected to the annoyance of bullets coming, apparently, from the ground, and, though other foes might have acted differently in like circumstances, the Boers did not care for the job of advancing across the open to dislodge the hidden enemy.



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In a very few days a new bomb-proof shelter had been constructed for me, and to inaugurate it I gave an underground dinner with six guests. This bomb-proof was indeed a triumph in its line, and I must describe it. About 18 by 15 feet, and 8 feet high, it was reached by a flight of twelve wooden steps, at the top of which was a door that gave it the privacy of a room. It was lighted besides by three horizontal apertures, which resembled the very large portholes of a sailing-ship, and this illusion was increased by the wooden flaps that could be closed at will. The roof was composed of two lots of steel rails placed one above the other, and on these were sheets of corrugated iron and a huge tarpaulin to keep out the rain. Above, again, were 9 feet of solid earth, while rows upon rows of sandbags were piled outside the entrance to guard against splinters and stray bullets. The weighty roof was supported, as an additional precaution, on the inside by three stout wooden posts, which, together with the rather dim light, most apparent when descending from the brilliant sunshine outside, gave the bomb-proof the appearance of a ship's cabin; in fact, one of my visitors remarked it much reminded him of the well-known print of the *Victory's* cockpit when Nelson lay a-dying. The interior panelling was painted white. One wall was entirely covered with an enormous Union Jack, and the other was decorated with native weapons, crowned by a trophy of that very war—namely, the only Mauser carbine then taken from the Boers. To complete the up-to-date nature of this protected dwelling, a telephone was installed, through the medium of which I could in a second communicate with the Staff Headquarters, and have due notice given me of “Creechy's” movements. In this shelter it was certainly no hardship to spend those hot days, and it was known to be the coolest place in town at that hot season of the year.

On Sundays we were able, thanks to the religious proclivities of the Boers, to end our mole existence for twenty-four hours, and walk and live like Christians. To almost the end of the siege this truce was scrupulously observed on both sides, and from early dawn to late at night the whole population thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The relieved expression on the faces of all could not fail to be apparent to even a casual observer. Pale women and children emerged from their laager, put on their finery, sunned themselves, and did their shopping. The black ladies went in a body to the veldt to collect firewood with all their natural gaiety and light-heartedness, which not even shell-fire and numerous casualties amongst themselves seemed seriously to disturb. Those of us who had horses and carriages at our disposal rode and drove anywhere within our lines in perfect safety. The first Sunday I was in Mafeking I was up and on my pony by 6 a.m., unwilling to lose a moment of the precious day. We rode all round our defences, and inspected Canon Kopje, the scene of the most determined attack

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the Boers had made, the repulse of which, at the beginning of the siege, undoubtedly saved the town. From there we looked through the telescope at “Creechy,” whose every movement could be watched from this point of vantage, and whose wickedly shining barrel was on the “day of rest” modestly pointed to the ground. Returning, we rode through the native stadt, quite the most picturesque part of Mafeking, where the trim, thatched, beaver-shaped huts, surrounded by mud walls, enclosing the little gardens and some really good-sized trees, appeared to have suffered but little damage from the bombardment, in spite of the Boers having specially directed their fire against the inhabitants (the Baralongs), who were old opponents of theirs. These natives were only armed by the authorities when the invaders specially selected them for their artillery fire and made raids on their cattle. The variety and sizes of these arms were really laughable. Some niggers had old-fashioned Sniders, others elephant guns, and the remainder weapons with enormously long barrels, which looked as if they dated back to Waterloo. To their owners, however, the maker or the epoch of the weapon mattered little. They were proud men, and stalked gravely along the streets with their precious rifles, evidently feeling such a sense of security as they had never experienced before.

On the Sunday I alluded to, after our ride we attended morning service, held as usual in the neat little church, which, with the exception of a few gashes in the ceiling rafters, caused by fragments of shell, had up to date escaped serious injury. The Dutch Church, on the other hand, curiously enough, was almost demolished by shell-fire at the beginning of the siege. We then drove up to the hospital, where Miss Hill, the plucky and youthful-looking matron, received us and showed us round. This girl—for she was little more—had been the life and prop of the place for the past two months, during which time the resources of the little hospital had been taxed almost past belief. Where twenty was the usual number of patients, there were actually sixty-four on the occasion of my first visit. The staff was composed of only a matron and three trained nurses. In addition to their anxieties for the patients, who were being so frequently brought in with the most terrible injuries, these nurses underwent considerable risks from the bombardment, which, no doubt from accident, had been all along directed to the vicinity of the hospital and convent, which lay close together. The latter had temporarily been abandoned by the nuns, who were living in an adjacent bomb-proof, and the former had not escaped without having a shell through one of the wards, at the very time a serious operation was taking place. By a miraculous dispensation no patient was injured, but a woman, who had been previously wounded by a Mauser bullet while in the laager, died of fright.



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The afternoon was taken up by a sort of gymkhana, when a happy holiday crowd assembled to see the tilting at the ring, the lemon-cutting, and the tug-of-war. At this entertainment Colonel Baden-Powell was thoroughly in his element, chatting to everyone and dispensing tea from a travelling waggon. In the evening I dined at Dixon's with our old party, and, really, the two months that had elapsed since I was at that same table had effected but little change in the surroundings and in the fare, which at that early stage of the siege was as plentiful as ever, even the stock of Schweppes' soda-water appearing inexhaustible. Besides this luxury, we had beautiful fresh tomatoes and young cabbages. The meat had resolved itself into beef, and beef only, but eggs helped out the menu, and the only non-existent delicacy was "fresh butter." This commodity existed in tins, but I must confess the sultry weather had anticipated the kitchen, in that it usually appeared in a melted state.

The most formidable weapon of the Boers was, naturally, the big siege Creusot gun. The very first day I arrived in Mafeking "Creechy" discharged a shell that killed a trooper of the Protectorate Regiment, who happened to be standing up in the stables singing a song, whilst four or five others were seated on the ground. The latter were uninjured, but the dead man was absolutely blown to bits, and one of his legs was found in the roof. A few days after two more shells landed in the market-square, one going through the right window of the chemist's shop, the other demolishing the left-hand one. Some of the staff were actually in the shop when the second shell came through the window, and were covered with dust, broken bits of glass, and shattered wood, but all providentially escaped unhurt. Others were not so fortunate, for a nigger in the market-square was literally cut in half, and a white man 100 yards away had his leg torn off. Again, in Mr. Wiel's store a shell burst while the building was full of people, without injuring anyone; but one of the splinters carried an account-book from the counter and deposited it in the roof on its outward passage. Indeed, not a day passed but one heard of marvellously narrow escapes.

As the heat increased, the shelling grew certainly slacker, and, after an hour or two spent in exchanging greetings in the early morning, both besieged and besiegers seemed to slumber during the sultry noonday hours. About four they appeared to rouse themselves, and often my telephone would then ring up with the message: "The gun is loaded, and pointed at the town." Almost simultaneously a panting little bell, not much louder than a London muffin-bell, but heard distinctly all over the town in the clear atmosphere, would give tongue, and luckless folk who were promenading the streets had about three seconds to seek shelter, the alarm being sounded as the flash was seen by the look-out. One afternoon they gave us three shots in six minutes, but, of course,



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this rapid firing was much safer for the inhabitants than a stray shot after a long interval, as people remained below-ground expecting a repetition of that never-to-be-forgotten crashing explosion, followed by the sickening noise of the splinters tearing through the air, sometimes just over one's head, like the crack of a very long whip, manipulated by a master-hand. The smallest piece of one of these fragments was sufficient to kill a man, and scarcely anyone wounded with a shell ever seemed to survive, the wounds being nearly always terribly severe, and their poison occasioning gangrene to set in. There were many comic as well as tragic incidents connected with the shells of the big gun. A monkey belonging to the post-office, who generally spent the day on the top of a pole to which he was chained, would, on hearing the alarm-bell, rapidly descend from his perch, and, in imitation of the human beings whom he saw taking shelter, quickly pop under a large empty biscuit-tin. Dogs also played a great part in the siege. One, belonging to the Base-Commandant, was wounded no less than three times; a rough Irish terrier accompanied the Protectorate Regiment in all its engagements; and a third amused itself by running after the small Maxim shells, barking loudly, and trying to retrieve pieces. On the other hand, the Resident Commissioner's dog was a prudent animal, and whenever she heard the alarm-bell, she would leave even her dinner half eaten, and bolt down her master's bomb-proof. On one occasion I remember being amused at seeing a nigger, working on the opposite side of the road, hold up a spade over his head like an umbrella as the missile came flashing by, while a fellow-workman crawled under a large tarpaulin that was stretched on the ground. These natives always displayed the most astonishing sang-froid. One day we saw a funny scene on the occasion of a Kaffir wedding, when the bridegroom was most correctly attired in morning-dress and an old top-hat. Over his frock-coat he wore his bandolier, and carried a rifle on his shoulder; the bride, swathed in a long white veil from head to foot, walked by his side, and was followed by two young ladies in festive array, while the procession was brought up by more niggers, armed, like the bridegroom, to the teeth. The party solemnly paraded the streets for fully half an hour, in no wise disconcerted by a pretty lively shelling and the ring of the Mausers on the corrugated iron roofs.

Quite as disagreeable as "Creechy," although less noisy, was the enemy's 1-pound Maxim. A very loud hammering, quickly repeated, and almost simultaneously a whirring in the air, followed by four quick explosions, and then we knew this poisonous devil was at work. The shells were little gems in their way, and when they did not burst, which was often the case, were tremendously in request as souvenirs. Not much larger than an ordinary pepper-caster, when polished up and varnished they made really charming



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ornaments, and the natives were quick to learn that they commanded a good price, for after a shower had fallen there was a helter-skelter amongst the black boys for any unexploded specimens. One evening we had a consignment into the road just outside my bomb-proof, attracted by a herd of mules going to water. Immediately the small piccaninny driving these animals scampered off, returning in triumph with one of these prizes, which he brought me still so hot that I could not hold it. It used often to strike me how comic these scenes at Mafeking would have been to any aeronaut hovering over the town of an evening, especially when the shelling had been heavy. Towards sundown the occupants of the various bomb-proofs used to emerge and sit on the steps or the sandbags of their shelters, conversing with their neighbours and discussing the day's damage. All of a sudden the bell would tinkle, and down would go all the heads, just as one has often seen rabbits on a summer evening disappear into their holes at the report of a gun. In a few minutes, when the explosion was over, they would bob up again, to see if any harm had been done by the last missile. Then night would gradually fall on the scene, sometimes made almost as light as day by a glorious African moon, concerning which I shall always maintain that in no other country is that orb of such brightness, size, and splendour. The half-hour between sundown and moonrise, or twilight and inky blackness, as the case happened to be, according to the season or the weather, was about the pleasantest time in the whole day. As a rule it was a peaceful interval as regards shelling. Herds of mules were driven along the dusty streets to be watered; cattle and goats returned from the veldt, where they had been grazing in close proximity to the town, as far as possible out of sight; foot-passengers, amongst them many women, scurried along the side-walks closely skirting the houses. Then, when daylight had completely faded, all took shelter, to wait for the really vicious night-gun, which was usually fired between eight and nine with varying regularity, as our enemies, no doubt, wished to torment the inhabitants by not allowing them to know when it was safe for them to seek their homes and their beds. There was a general feeling of relief when "Creechy" had boomed her bloodthirsty "Good-night." Only once during the whole siege was she fired in the small hours of the morning, and that was on Dingaan's Day (December 16), when she terrified the sleeping town by beginning her day's work at 2.30 a.m., followed by a regular bombardment from all the other guns in chorus, to celebrate the anniversary of the great Boer victory over the Zulus many years ago. Frequent, however, were the volleys from the trenches that suddenly broke the tranquillity of the early night, and startling were they in their apparent nearness till one got accustomed to them. At first I thought the enemy must be firing in the streets, so loud were



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the reports, owing to the atmosphere and the wind setting in a particular direction. The cause of these volleys was more difficult to discover, and, as our men never replied, it seemed somewhat of a waste of ammunition. Their original cause was a sortie early in the siege, when Captain Fitzclarence made a night attack with the bayonet on their trenches. Ever afterwards an animal moving on the veldt, a tree or bush stirred by the wind, an unusual light in the town, was sufficient for volley after volley to be poured at imaginary foes. By nine o'clock these excitements were usually over, and half an hour afterwards nearly every soul not on duty was asleep, secure in the feeling that for every one who reposed two were on watch; while, as regards Colonel Baden-Powell, he was always prowling about, and the natives revived his old Matabele nickname of "the man that walks by night."

## CHAPTER XI

### LIFE IN A BESIEGED TOWN

"There is a reaper whose name is Death."—LONGFELLOW.

We celebrated Christmas Day, 1899, by a festive luncheon-party to which Colonel Baden-Powell and all his Staff were invited. By a strange and fortunate coincidence, a turkey had been overlooked by Mr. Weil when the Government commandeered all live-stock and food-stuffs at the commencement of the siege, and, in spite of the grilling heat, we completed our Christmas dinner by a real English plum-pudding. In the afternoon a tea and Christmas-tree for the Dutch and English children had been organized by some officers of the Protectorate Regiment. Amongst those who contributed to the amusement of these poor little white-faced things, on whom the close quarters they were obliged to keep was beginning to tell, none worked harder than Captain Ronald Vernon. I remember returning to my quarters, after the festivity, with this officer, and his telling me, in strict confidence, with eager anticipation, of a sortie that was to be made on the morrow, with the object of obtaining possession of the Boer gun at Game Tree Fort, the fire from which had lately been very disastrous to life and property in the town. He was fated in this very action to meet his death, and afterwards I vividly recalled our conversation, and reflected how bitterly disappointed he would have been had anything occurred to prevent his taking part in it. The next day, Boxing Day, I shall ever remember as being, figuratively speaking, as black and dismal as night. I was roused at 4.30 a.m. by loud cannonading. Remembering Captain Vernon's words, I telephoned to Headquarters to ask if the Colonel and Staff were there. They had all left at 2.30 a.m., so I knew the projected action was in progress. At five o'clock the firing was continuous, and the boom of our wretched little guns was mingled with the rattle of Boer musketry. Every moment it grew lighter—a beautiful morning, cool and bright, with a gentle breeze.



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In Mr. Wiel's service was a waiter named Mitchell, a Cockney to the backbone, and a great character in his way. What had brought him to South Africa, or how he came to be in Mafeking, I never discovered; but he was a cheerful individual, absolutely fearless of shells and bullets. That morning I began to get very anxious, and Mitchell was also pessimistic. He mounted to the roof to watch the progress of the fight, and ran down from time to time with anything but reassuring pieces of intelligence, asking me at intervals, when the firing was specially fierce: "Are you scared, lady?" At length he reported that our men were falling back, and that the ambulances could now be seen at work. With marvellous courage and coolness, the soldiers had advanced absolutely to under the walls of the Boer fort, and had found the latter 8 feet high, with three tiers of loopholes. There it was that three officers—Captains Vernon, Paton, and Sandford—were shot down, Captain Fitzclarence having been previously wounded in the leg, and left on the veldt calling to his men not to mind him, but to go on, which order they carried out, nothing daunted by the hail of bullets and the loss of their officers. Thanks to the marvellous information the Boers constantly received during the siege, no doubt from the numerous Dutch spies which were known to be in the town, Game Tree Fort had been mysteriously strengthened in the night; and, what was still more significant, the gun had not only been removed, but General Snyman and Commandment Botha were both on the scene with reinforcements shortly after our attack commenced, although the Boer Headquarter camp was fully three miles away. Without scaling-ladders, it was impossible to mount the walls of the fort. Our soldiers sullenly turned and walked slowly away, the idea of running or getting under shelter never even occurring to them. Had the Boers then had the determination required to come out of their fort and pursue the retiring men, it is possible very few would have returned alive; but, marvellous to relate, and most providentially as we were concerned, no sooner did they observe our men falling back than they ceased firing, as if relief at their departure was coupled with the fear of aggravating the foes and causing a fresh attack. The Boers were exceedingly kind in picking up our dead and wounded, which were immediately brought in by the armoured train, and which, alas! mounted up to a disastrous total in the tiny community which formed our garrison. No less than twenty-five men were killed, including three officers; and some twenty or thirty were wounded, most of them severely. The Boers told the ambulance officers they were staggered at our men's pluck, and the Commandant especially appreciated the gallantry required for such an attack, knowing full well how difficult it would have been to induce the burghers to make a similar attempt. About 10 a.m. a rush of people to the station denoted the arrival of the armoured train and its sad burden, and then a melancholy procession of stretchers commenced from the railway, which was just opposite my bomb-proof, to the hospital. The rest of the day seemed to pass like a sad dream, and I could hardly realize in particular the death of Captain Vernon, who had been but a few short hours before so full of health, spirits, and confidence.



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Recognizing what a press of work there would be at the hospital, I walked up there in the afternoon, and asked to be made useful. No doubt out of good feeling, the Boers did not shell at all that day till late evening, but at the hospital all was sad perturbation. There had only been time to attend to the worst cases, and the poor nurses were just sitting down to snatch a hasty meal. The matron asked me if I would undertake the management of a convalescent home that had to be organized to make more room for the new patients. Of course I consented, and by evening we were busy installing sixteen patients in the railway servants' institute, near the station. To look after the inmates were myself, four other ladies, and one partly professional nurse. We arranged that the latter should attend every day, and the four ladies each take a day in turn, while I undertook to be there constantly to order eatables and superintend the housekeeping. On the first evening, when beds, crockery, kitchen utensils, and food, all arrived in a medley from the universal provider, Wiel, great confusion reigned; and when it was at its height, just as the hospital waggon was driving up with the patients, "Creechy" sent off one of her projectiles, which burst with a deafening explosion about a hundred yards beyond the improvised hospital, having absolutely whizzed over the approaching ambulance vehicles. The patients took it most calmly, and were in no way disconcerted. By Herculean efforts the four ladies and myself got the place shipshape, and all was finished when the daylight failed. As I ran back to my quarters, the bugle-call of the "Last Post," several times repeated, sounded clear in the still atmosphere of a calm and beautiful evening, and I knew the last farewells were being said to the brave men who had gone to their long rest. Of course Mafeking's losses on that black Boxing Day were infinitesimal compared to those attending the terrible struggles going on in other parts of the country; but, then, it must be remembered that not only was our garrison a very small one, but also that, when people are shut up together for months in a beleaguered town—a handful of English men and women surrounded by enemies, with even spies in their midst—the feeling of comradeship and friendship is tremendously strengthened. Every individual was universally known, and therefore all the town felt they had lost their own friends, and mourned them as such.

From that date for three weeks I went daily to the convalescent home. The short journey there was not totally without risk, as the enemy, having heard of the foundry where primitive shells were being manufactured, and which was situated immediately on the road I had to take, persistently sent their missiles in this direction, and I had some exciting walks to and fro, very often alone, but sometimes accompanied by any chance visitor. One morning Major Tracy and I had just got across the railway-line, when we heard



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the loading bell, and immediately there was a *saue qui pent* among all the niggers round us, who had been but a moment before lolling, sleeping, and joking, in their usual fashion. Without losing our dignity by joining in the stampede, we put our best foot forward, and scurried along the line till we came to some large coal-sheds, where my companion made me crawl under a very low arch, he mounting guard outside. In this strange position I remained while the shell came crashing over us, a bad shot, and continued its course away into the veldt. Another evening the same officer was escorting me to the institute, and, as all had been very quiet that afternoon, we had not taken the precaution of keeping behind the railway buildings, as was my usual custom. We were in the middle of an open space, when suddenly an outburst of volleys from the Boer trenches came as an unpleasant surprise, and the next moment bullets were falling behind us and even in front of us, their sharp ring echoing on the tin roofs. On this occasion, as the volleys continued with unabated vigour, I took to my heels with a view to seeking shelter; but Major Tracy could not be moved out of a walk, calling out to me I should probably run into a bullet whilst trying to avoid it. My one idea being to get through the zone of fire, I paid no attention to his remonstrances, and soon reached a safe place. The Boers only learnt these detestable volleys from our troops, and carried them out indifferently well; but the possibility of their occurrence, in addition to the projectiles from "Creechy," added greatly to the excitement of an evening stroll, and we had many such episodes when walking abroad after the heat of the day.

In January, Gordon was laid up by a very sharp attack of peritonitis, and was in bed for over a week in my bomb-proof, no other place being safe for an invalid, and the hospital full to overflowing. When he began to mend, I unfortunately caught a chill, and a very bad quinsy sore throat supervened. I managed, however, to go about as usual, but one afternoon, when I was feeling wretchedly ill, our hospital attendant came rushing in to say that a shell had almost demolished the convalescent home, and that, in fact, only the walls were standing. The patients mercifully had escaped, owing to their all being in the bomb-proof, but they had to be moved in a great hurry, and were accommodated in the convent. For weeks past this building had not been shot at, and it was therefore considered a safe place for them, as it was hoped the Boer gunners had learned to respect the hospital, its near neighbour. Owing to the rains having then begun, and being occasionally very heavy, the bomb-proofs were becoming unhealthy. My throat was daily getting worse, and the doctor decided that Gordon and myself had better also be removed to the convent, hoping that being above-ground might help recovery in both our cases. There was heavy shelling going on that afternoon, and the drive to our new quarters, on the most exposed and extreme edge of the town, was attended with some excitement. I could scarcely swallow, and Gordon was so weak he could hardly walk even the short distance we had to compass on foot. However, we arrived in safety, and were soon made comfortable in this strange haven of rest.



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As I have before written, the convent in Mafeking was from the commencement of the bombardment picked out by the enemy as a target, and during the first week it was hit by certainly ten or twelve projectiles, and reduced more or less to a ruined state. At no time can the building have laid claims to the picturesque or the beautiful, but it had one peculiarity—namely, that of being the only two-storied building in Mafeking, and of standing out, a gaunt red structure, in front of the hospital, and absolutely the last building on the north-east side of the town. It was certainly a landmark for miles, and, but for its sacred origin and the charitable calling of its occupants, would have been a fair mark for the enemy's cannon. Very melancholy was the appearance it presented, with large gaping apertures in its walls, with its shattered doors and broken windows; whilst surrounding it was what had been a promising garden, but had then become a mere jungle of weeds and thorns. The back of the edifice comprised below several large living-rooms, over them a row of tiny cubicles, and was practically undamaged. The eighteen convalescent patients had been comfortably installed on the ground-floor, and we had two tiny rooms above. This accommodation was considered to be practically safe from shells, in spite of the big gun having been shifted a few days previously, and it being almost in a line with the convent. On the upper floor of the eastern side a large room, absolutely riddled with shot and shell, was formerly occupied as a dormitory by the children of the convent school. It was now put to a novel use as a temporary barracks, a watch being always on duty there, and a telescope installed at the window. Since the nuns left to take up their abode in a bomb-proof shelter, a Maxim had been placed at one of the windows, which commanded all the surrounding country; but it was discreetly covered over, and the window-blind kept closely drawn to avert suspicion, as it was only to be used in case of real emergency. To reach our cubicles there was but a single staircase, which led past this room allotted to the soldiers—a fact which left an unsatisfactory impression on my mind, for it was apparent that, were the convent aimed at, to reach terra-firma we should have to go straight in the direction of shells or bullets. However, the authorities opined it was all right; so, feeling very ill, I was only too glad to crawl to bed. Just as the sun was setting, the soldiers on watch came tearing down the wooden passage, making an awful clatter, and calling out: "The gun is pointed on the convent!" As they spoke, the shell went off, clean over our heads, burying itself in a cloud of dust close to a herd of cattle half a mile distant. This did not reassure me, but we hoped it was a chance shot, which might not occur again, and that it had been provoked by the cattle grazing so temptingly within range. I must say there was something very weird and eerie in those long nights spent at



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the convent. At first my throat was too painful to enable me to sleep, and endless did those dreary hours seem. We had supper usually before seven, in order to take advantage of the fading daylight, for lights were on no account to be shown at any of the windows, being almost certain to attract rifle-fire. By eight we were in total darkness, except for the dim little paraffin hand-lamp the Sisters kindly lent me, which, for precaution's sake, had to be placed on the floor. Extraordinary noises emanated from those long uncarpeted passages, echoing backwards and forwards, in the ceiling, till they seemed to pertain to the world of spirits. The snoring of the men on the relief guard was like the groans of a dying man, the tread of those on duty like the march of a mighty army. Then would come intense stillness, suddenly broken by a volley from the enemy sounding appallingly near—in reality about a mile off—and provoked, doubtless, by some very innocent cause. Many of these volleys were often fired during the night, sometimes for ten minutes together, at other times singly, at intervals; anon the boom of a cannon would vary the entertainment. Occasionally, when unable to sleep, I would creep down the pitch-dark corridor to a room overlooking the sleeping town and the veldt, the latter so still and mysterious in the moonlight, and, peeping through a large jagged hole in the wall caused by a shell, I marvelled to think of the proximity of our foes in this peaceful landscape. At length would come the impatiently-longed-for dawn about 4 a.m.; then the garrison would appear, as it were, to wake up, although the greater part had probably spent the night faithfully watching. Long lines of sentries in their drab khaki would pass the convent on their homeward journey, walking single file in the deep trench connecting the town with the outposts, and which formed a practically safe passage from shell and rifle fire. Very quickly did the day burst on the scene, and a very short time we had to enjoy those cool, still morning hours or the more delightful twilight; the sun seemed impatient to get under way and burn up everything. Of course we had wet mornings and wet days, but, perhaps fortunately, the rains that year were fairly moderate, though plentiful enough to have turned the yellow veldt of the previous autumn into really beautiful long green grass, on which the half-starved cattle were then thriving and waxing fat. The view from our tiny bedrooms was very pretty, and the coming and going of every sort of person in connection with the convalescent hospital downstairs made the days lively enough, and compensated for the dreariness of the nights. The splendid air blowing straight from the free north and from the Kalahari Desert on the west worked wonders in the way of restoring us to health, and I began to talk of moving back to my old quarters. I must confess I was never quite comfortable about the shells, which seemed so constantly to narrowly miss the building,



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although the look-out men always maintained they were aiming at some other object. One morning I was still in bed, when a stampede of many feet down the passage warned me our sentinels had had a warning. Quickly opening my door, I could not help laughing at seeing the foremost man running down the corridor towards our rooms with the precious Maxim gun, enveloped in its coat of canvas, in his arms as if it were a baby. "They're on us this time," he called out; then came a terrific explosion and a crash of some projectile against the outer walls and doors. The shell had fallen about 40 feet short of the convent, on the edge of the deserted garden. Many explanations were given to account for this shot, none of which seemed to me to be very lucid, and I secretly determined to clear out as soon as the doctor would permit. The very next day we had the narrowest escape of our lives that it is possible to imagine. There had been very little shelling, and I had taken my first outing in the shape of a rickshaw drive during the afternoon. The sun was setting, and our little supper-table was already laid at the end of the corridor into which our rooms opened, close to the window beside which we used to sit. Major Gould Adams had just dropped in, as he often did, to pay a little visit before going off to his night duties as Commandant of the Town Guard, and our repast was in consequence delayed—a circumstance which certainly helped to save our lives. We were chatting peacefully, when suddenly I recollect hearing the big gun's well-known report, and was just going to remark, "How near that sounds!" when a terrifying din immediately above our heads stopped all power of conversation, or even of thought, and the next instant I was aware that masses of falling brick and masonry were pushing me out of my chair, and that heavy substances were falling on my head; then all was darkness and suffocating dust. I remember distinctly putting my hands clasped above my head to shelter it, and then my feeling of relief when, in another instant or two, the bricks ceased to fall. The intense stillness of my companions next dawned upon me, and a sickening dread supervened, that one of them must surely be killed. Major Gould Adams was the first to call out that he was all right; the other had been so suffocated by gravel and brickdust that it was several moments before he could speak. In a few minutes dusty forms and terrified faces appeared through the gloom, as dense as the thickest London yellow fog, expecting to find three mutilated corpses. Imagine their amazement at seeing three human beings, in colour more like Red Indians than any other species, emerge from the ruins and try to shake themselves free from the all-pervading dust. The great thing was to get out of the place, as another shell might follow, the enemy having seen, from the falling masonry, how efficacious the last had been. So, feeling somewhat dazed, but really not alarmed, as the whole thing had been too quick



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for fear, I groped my way downstairs. Outside we were surrounded by more frightened people, whom we quickly reassured. The woman cook, who had been sitting in her bomb-proof, was quite sure *she* had been struck, and was calling loudly for brandy; while the rest of us got some soda-water to wash out our throats—a necessary precaution as far as I was concerned, as mine had only the day previously been lanced for quinsy. By degrees the cloud of dust subsided, and then in the fading light we saw what an extraordinary escape we had had. The shell had entered the front wall of the convent, travelled between the iron roof and the ceiling of the rooms, till it reached a wall about 4 feet from where we were sitting. Against this it had exploded, making a huge hole in the outside wall and in the other which separated our passage from a little private chapel. In this chapel it had also demolished all the sacred images. It was not, however, till next day, when we returned to examine the scene of the explosion, that we realized how narrowly we had escaped death or terrible injuries. Three people had been occupying an area of not more than 5 feet square; between us was a tiny card-table laid with our supper, and on this the principal quantity of the masonry had fallen—certainly 2 tons of red brick and mortar—shattering it to atoms. If our chairs had been drawn up to the table, we should probably have been buried beneath this mass. But our most sensational discovery was the fact that two enormous pieces of shell, weighing certainly 15 pounds each, were found touching the legs of my chair, and the smallest tap from one of these would have prevented our ever seeing another sunrise. Needless to say, we left our ruined quarters that evening, and I reposed more peacefully in my bomb-proof than I had done for many nights past. The air at the convent had accomplished its healing work. We were both practically recovered, and we had had a hairbreadth escape; but I was firmly convinced that an underground chamber is preferable to a two-storied mansion when a 6-inch 100-pound shell gun, at a distance of two miles, is bombarding the town you happen to be residing in.

## CHAPTER XII

LIFE IN A BESIEGED TOWN (*continued*)

“And so we sat tight.”—*Despatch from Mafeking to War Office.*

February came and went without producing very much change in our circumstances, and yet, somehow, there was a difference observable as the weeks passed. People looked graver; a tired expression was to be noted on many hitherto jovial countenances; the children were paler and more pinched. Apart from the constant dangers of shells and stray bullets, and the knowledge that, when we were taking leave of any friend for a few hours, it might be the last farewell on earth—apart from these facts, which constituted a constant wear and tear of mind, the impossibility of making any

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adequate reply to our enemy's bombardment gradually preyed on the garrison. By degrees, also, our extreme isolation seemed to come home to us, and not a few opined that relief would probably never come, and that Mafeking would needs have to be sacrificed for the greater cause of England's final triumph. Since Christmas black "runners" had contrived to pass out of the town with cables, bringing us on their return scrappy news and very ancient newspapers. For instance, I notice in my diary that at the end of March we were enchanted to read a *Weekly Times* of January 5. On another occasion the Boers vacated some trenches, which were immediately occupied by our troops, who there found some Transvaal papers of a fairly recent date, and actually a copy of the *Sketch*. I shall never forget how delighted we were with the latter, and the amusement derived therefrom compensated us a little for the accounts in the Boer papers of General Buller's reverses on the Tugela. About the middle of February I was enchanted to receive a letter from Mr. Rhodes, in Kimberley, which I reproduce.

[Transcription of letter:

"Kimberly "Jan 12 / 1900

"DEAR LADY SARAH,

"Just a line to say I often think of you[.] I wonder do you play bridge, it takes your mind off hospitals, burials and shells. A change seems coming with Buller crossing the Tulega. Jameson should have stopped at Bulawayo and relieved you from North. He can do no good shut up in Ladysmith[.] I am doing a little good here as I make De Beers purse pay for things military cannot sanction[.] We have just made and fired a 4 inch gun, it is a success.

"Yrs (.).Rhodes]

This characteristic epistle seemed a link with the outer world, and to denote we were not forgotten, even by those in a somewhat similar plight to ourselves.

The natives and their splendid loyalty were always a source of interest. Formed into a "cattle guard," under a white man named Mackenzie, the young bloods did excellent service, and were a great annoyance to the Boers by making daring sorties in order to secure some of the latter's fat cattle. This particular force proudly styled itself "Mackenzie's Black Watch." There were many different natives in Mafeking. Besides the Baralongs before alluded to, we had also the Fingos, a very superior race, and 500 natives belonging to different tribes, who hailed from Johannesburg, and who had been forcibly driven into the town by Cronje before the siege commenced. These latter were the ones to suffer most from hunger, in spite of Government relief and the fact that they had plenty of money; for they had done most of the trench-work, and had been well



paid. The reason was that they were strangers to the other natives, who had their own gardens to supplement their food allowance, and blacks are strangely unkind and hard to each other, and remain quite unmoved if a (to them) unknown man dies of starvation, although he be of their own colour.

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The native stadt covered altogether an area of at least a square mile, and was full of surprises in the shape of pretty peeps and rural scenery. Little naked children used to play on the grass, pausing to stare open-eyed at the passer-by, and men and women sat contentedly gossiping in front of their huts. The whole gave an impression of prosperity, of waving trees, green herbage, and running water, and was totally different to the usual African landscape. To ride or drive through it on a Sunday was quite a rest, when there was no risk of one's illusions being dispelled by abominable shells, whose many visible traces on the sward, in the shape of deep pear-shaped pits, were all the same in evidence.

Standing in a commanding position among the thatched houses of the picturesque native stadt was the Mission Church, of quaint shape, and built of red brick, the foundation of which had been laid by Sir Charles Warren in 1884. One Sunday afternoon we attended service in this edifice, and were immensely struck with the devotion of the enormous congregation of men and women, who all followed the service attentively in their books. The singing was most fervent, but the sermon a little tedious, as the clergyman preached in English, and his discourse had to be divided into short sentences, with a long pause between each, to enable the black interpreter at his side to translate what he said to his listeners, who simply hung on his words.

All the natives objected most strongly to partaking of horse soup, supplied by the kitchens, started by the C.O., as they declared it gave them the same sickness from which the horses in Africa suffered, and also that it caused their heads to swell. The authorities were therefore compelled to devise some new food, and the resourceful genius of a Scotchman introduced a porridge called "sowens" to the Colonel's notice. This nutriment, said to be well known in the North of Scotland, was composed of the meal which still remained in the oat-husks after they had been ground for bread and discarded as useless. It was slightly sour, but very wholesome, and enormously popular with the white and the black population, especially with the latter, who preferred it to any other food.

I must now mention the important item of supplies and how they were eked out. The provisions sent to Mafeking by the Cape Government before the war were only sufficient to feed 400 men for a little over a fortnight. At that time a statement was made, to reassure the inhabitants, that the Cape Ministry held themselves personally responsible for the security of the railway in the colony. Providentially, the firm of Weil and Company had sent vast stores to their depot in the town on their own initiative. This firm certainly did not lose financially by their foresight, but it is a fact that Mafeking without this supply could have made no resistance whatever. There were 9,000 human beings to feed, of which 7,000 were natives and 2,000 white people. It can therefore



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be imagined that the task of the D.A.A.G. was not a light one. Up to April the town consumed 4,099 tons of food-stuffs; 12,256 tons of oats, fodder, meal, and flour; and 930 tons of fuel; making a total of 17,285 tons. Of matches, the supply of which was soon exhausted, 35,400 boxes were used, and to take their place tiny paraffin lamps were supplied to all, which burnt night and day. Fortunately, the supply of liquid fuel was very large, and it would have taken the place of coal if the siege had been indefinitely prolonged. Among miscellaneous articles which were luckily to be obtained at Weil's stores were 2 tons of gunpowder and other ammunition, 132 rifles, insulated fuses, and electric dynamos for discharging mines, *etc.*

About a month after the siege started, the C.O. placed an embargo on all food-stuffs, and the distribution of rations commenced. From then onward special days were allowed for the sale of luxuries, but always in strictly limited quantities. At first the rations consisted of 1-1/4 pounds of meat and 1-1/4 pounds of bread, besides tea, coffee, sugar, and rice. As time went on these were reduced, and towards the end of March we only had 6 ounces of what was called bread and 1 pound of fresh meat, when any was killed; otherwise we had to be content with bully beef. As to the "staff of life," it became by degrees abominable and full of foreign substances, which were apt to bring on fits of choking. In spite of this drawback, there was never a crumb left, and it was remarkable how little the 6 ounces seemed to represent, especially to a hungry man in that keen atmosphere.

One day it was discovered there was little, if any, gold left of the L8,000 in specie that was lodged at the Standard Bank at the beginning of the siege. This sum the Boers had at one time considered was as good as in their pockets. It was believed the greater portion had since been absorbed by the natives, who were in the habit of burying the money they received as wages. In this quandary, Colonel Baden-Powell designed a paper one-pound note, which was photographed on to thick paper of a bluish tint, and made such an attractive picture that the Government must have scored by many of them never being redeemed.

It was not till Ash Wednesday, which fell that year on the last day of February, that we got our first good news from a London cable, dated ten days earlier. It told us Kimberley was relieved, that Colesberg was in our hands, and many other satisfactory items besides. What was even of greater importance was a message from Her Majesty Queen Victoria to Colonel Baden-Powell and his garrison, applauding what they had done, and bidding them to hope on and wait patiently for relief, which would surely come. This message gave especial pleasure from its being couched in the first person, when, as was universally remarked, the task of sending such congratulations might so easily have been relegated to one of Her Majesty's Ministers. I really



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think that no one except a shipwrecked mariner, cast away on a desert island, and suddenly perceiving a friendly sail, could have followed our feelings of delight on that occasion. We walked about thinking we must be dreaming, and finding it difficult to believe that we were in such close contact with home and friends. In less than ten minutes posters were out, and eager groups were busy at the street-corners, discussing the news, scrappy indeed, and terribly deficient in all details, but how welcome, after all the vague native rumours we had had to distract us during the past weeks! We were content then to wait any length of time, and our lives varied very little as the weeks slipped by. The bombardment was resumed with vigour, and the old monster gun cruised right round the town and boomed destruction at us from no less than five different points of vantage. When the shelling was very heavy, we used to say to ourselves, "What a good thing they are using up their ammunition!" when again for a few days it was slack, we were convinced our foes had had bad news. What matter if our next information was that the Boers had been seen throwing up their hats and giving vent to other visible expressions of delight: we had passed a few peaceful hours.

Many casualties continued to take place; some were fatal and tragic, but many and providential were the escapes recorded. Among the former, one poor man was blown to bits while sitting eating his breakfast; but the same day, when a shell landed in or near a house adjacent to my bomb-proof, it merely took a cage containing a canary with it through the window, while another fragment went into a dwelling across the street, and made mince-meat of a sewing-machine and a new dress on which a young lady had been busily engaged. She had risen from her pleasant occupation but three minutes before. The coolness of the inhabitants, of both sexes, was a source of constant surprise and admiration to me, and women must always be proud to think that the wives and daughters of the garrison were just as conspicuous by their pluck as the defenders themselves. Often of a hot afternoon, when I was sitting in my bomb-proof, from inclination as well as from prudence—for it was a far cooler resort than the stuffy iron-roofed houses—while women and children were walking about quite unconcernedly outside, I used to hear the warning bell ring, followed by so much scuffling, screaming, and giggling, in which were mingled jokes and loud laughter from the men, that it made me smile as I listened; then, after the explosion, they would emerge from any improvised shelter and go gaily on their way, and the clang of the blacksmith's anvil, close at hand, would be resumed almost before the noise had ceased and the dust had subsided. One day a lady was wheeling her two babies in a mail-cart up and down the wide road, while the Boers were busily shelling a distant part of the defences. The children clapped their hands when they heard the peculiar siren and whistle

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of the quick-firing Krupp shells, followed by dull thuds, as they buried themselves in the ground. On my suggesting to her that it was not a very favourable time to air the children, she agreed, and said that her husband had just told her to go home, which she proceeded leisurely to do. Another morning the cattle near the convent were being energetically shelled, and later I happened to see the Mother Superior, and commiserated with her in having been in such a hot corner. "Ah, shure!" said the plucky Irish lady, "the shells were dhroppin' all round here; but they were only nine-pounders, and we don't take any notice of them at all." No words can describe the cheerful, patient behaviour of those devoted Sisters through the siege. They bore uncomplainingly all the hardships and discomforts of a flooded bomb-proof shelter, finally returning to their ruined home with any temporary makeshifts to keep out the rain; and whereas, from overwork and depression of spirits, some folks were at times a little difficult to please, not a word of complaint during all those months ever came from the ladies of the convent. They certainly gave an example of practical religion, pluck, charity, and devotion.

And so the moons waxed and waned, and Mafeking patiently waited, and, luckily, had every confidence in the resource and ability of Colonel Baden-Powell. An old cannon had been discovered, half buried in the native stadt, which was polished up and named "The Lord Nelson," from the fact of its antiquity. For this gun solid cannon-balls were manufactured, and finally fired off at the nearest Boer trenches; and the first of these to go bounding along the ground certainly surprised and startled our foes, which was proved by their quickly moving a part of their laager. In addition a rough gun, called "The Wolf," was actually constructed in Mafeking, which fired an 18-pound shell 4,000 yards. To this feat our men were incited by hearing of the magnificent weapon which had been cast by the talented workmen of Kimberley in the De Beers workshops. In spite of there being nothing but the roughest materials to work with, shells were also made, and some Boer projectiles which arrived in the town without exploding were collected, melted down, and hurled once more at our enemy. Truly, there is no such schoolmaster as necessity.

On Sundays we continued to put away from us the cares and worries of the week, and the Church services of the various denominations were crowded, after an hour devoted to very necessary shopping. During the whole siege the Sunday afternoon sports on the parade-ground were a most popular institution; when it was wet, amusing concerts were given instead at the Masonic Hall. On these occasions Colonel Baden-Powell was the leading spirit, as well as one of the principal artistes, anon appearing in an impromptu sketch as "Signor Paderewski," or, again, as a coster, and holding the hall entranced or convulsed with laughter.



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He was able to assume very various roles with “Fregoli-like” rapidity; for one evening, soon after the audience had dispersed, suddenly there was an alarm of a night attack. Firing commenced all round the town, which was a most unusual occurrence for a Sunday night. In an instant the man who had been masquerading as a buffoon was again the commanding officer, stern and alert. The tramp of many feet was heard in the streets, which proved to be the reserve squadron of the Protectorate Regiment, summoned in haste to headquarters. A Maxim arrived, as by magic, from somewhere else, the town guard were ordered to their places, and an A.D.C. was sent to the hall, where a little dance for the poor overworked hospital nurses was in full swing, abruptly to break up this pleasant gathering. It only remained for our defenders to wish the Boers would come on, instead of which the attack ended in smoke, after two hours’ furious volleying, and by midnight all was quiet again.

During the latter part of this tedious time Colonel Plumer and his gallant men were but thirty miles away, having encompassed a vast stretch of dreary desert from distant Bulawayo. This force had been “under the stars” since the previous August, and had braved hardships of heat, fever districts, and flooded rivers, added to many a brush with the enemy. These trusty friends were only too anxious to come to our assistance, but a river rolled between—a river composed of deep fortified trenches, of modern artillery, and of first-rate marksmen with many Mausers. One day Colonel Plumer sent in an intrepid scout to consult with Colonel Baden-Powell. This gentleman had a supreme contempt for bullets, and certainly did not know the meaning of the word “fear,” but the bursting shells produced a disagreeable impression on him. “Does it always go on like that?” he asked, when he heard the vicious hammer of the enemy’s Maxim. “Yes,” somebody gloomily answered, “it always goes on like that, till at length we pretend to like it, and that we should feel dull if it were silent.”

Although the soldiers in Mafeking were disposed to grumble at the small part they seemed to be playing in the great tussle in which England was engaged, the authorities were satisfied that for so small a town to have kept occupied during the first critical month of the war 10,000—and at later stages never less than 2,000—Boers, was in itself no small achievement. We women always had lots to do. When the hospital work was slack there were many Union Jacks to be made—a most intricate and tiresome occupation—and these were distributed among the various forts. We even had a competition in trimming hats, and a prize was given to the best specimen as selected by a competent committee. In the evenings we never failed to receive the Mafeking evening paper, and were able to puzzle our heads over its excellent acrostics, besides frequently indulging in a pleasant game of cards.



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In the meantime food was certainly becoming very short, and on April 3 I cabled to my sister in London as follows: "Breakfast to-day, horse sausages; lunch, minced mule, curried locusts. All well." Occasionally I used to be allowed a tiny white roll for breakfast, but it had to last for dinner too. Mr. Weil bought the last remaining turkey for L5, with the intention of giving a feast on Her Majesty's birthday, and the precious bird had to be kept under a Chubb's lock and key till it was killed. No dogs or cats were safe, as the Basutos stole them all for food. But all the while we were well aware our situation might have been far worse. The rains were over, the climate was glorious, fever was fast diminishing, and, in spite of experiencing extreme boredom, we knew that the end of the long lane was surely coming.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### ELOFF'S DETERMINED ATTACK ON MAFEKING, AND THE RELIEF OF THE TOWN—THE MAFEKING FUND

"War, war is still the cry—war even to the knife!"—BYRON.

"The Boers are in the stadt!" Such was the ominous message that was quickly passed round from mouth to mouth on Saturday morning, May 12, 1900, as day was breaking. One had to be well acquainted with the labyrinth of rocks, trees, huts, and cover generally, of the locality aforementioned, all within a stone's-throw of our dwelling, to realize the dread import of these words.

All the previous week things had been much as usual: inferior food, and very little of it; divine weather; "bridge" in the afternoons; and one day exactly like another. Since the departure of the big gun during the previous month, we had left our bomb-proofs and lived above-ground. In the early hours of the morning alluded to came the real event we had been expecting ever since the beginning of the siege—namely, a Boer attack under cover of darkness. The moon had just set, and it was pitch-dark. A fierce fusillade first began from the east, and when I opened the door on to the stoep the din was terrific, while swish, swish, came the bullets just beyond the canvas blinds, nailed to the edge of the verandah to keep off the sun. Now and then the boom of a small gun varied the noise, but the rifles never ceased for an instant. To this awe-inspiring tune I dressed, by the light of a carefully shaded candle, to avoid giving any mark for our foes. The firing never abated, and I had a sort of idea that any moment a Dutchman would look in at the door, for one could not tell from what side the real attack might be. In various stages of deshabelle people were running round the house seeking for rifles, fowling-pieces, and even sticks, as weapons of defence. Meanwhile the gloom was still unbroken, but for the starlight, and it was very cold. The Cockney waiter, who was such a fund of amusement to me, had dashed off with his rifle to his redoubt, taking the keys of the house in his pocket, so no

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one could get into the dining-room to have coffee, except through the kitchen window. The two hours of darkness that had to elapse were the longest I have ever spent. Hurried footsteps passed to and fro, dark lanterns flashed for an instant, intensifying the blackness, and all of a sudden the sound I had been waiting for added to the weird horror of the situation, an alarm bugle, winding out its tale, clear and true to the farthest byways and the most remote shanties, followed by our tocsin, the deep-toned Roman Catholic Church bell, which was the signal that a general attack was in progress. We caught dim glimpses of the town guard going to their appointed places in the most orderly manner, and I remember thinking that where there was no panic there could be but little danger. An officer of this guard came down the road and told us all his men had turned out without exception, including an old fellow of seventy, and stone-deaf, who had been roused by the rifle-fire, and one minus several fingers recently blown off by a shell. I went out to the front of the house facing the stadt, and therefore sheltered from the hail of bullets coming from the east; and just as we were noticing that objects could be discerned on the road, that before were invisible, forked tongues of lurid light shot up into the sky in the direction where, snug and low by the Malopo River, lay the natives' habitations. Even then one did not realize what was burning, and someone said: "What a big grass fire! It must have commenced yesterday." At the same moment faint cries, unmistakable for Kaffir ejaculations, were borne to us by the breeze, along with the smell of burning thatch and wood, and the dread sentence with which I commenced this chapter seemed to grow in volume, till to one's excited fancy it became a sort of chant, to which the yells of the blacks, the unceasing rattle of musketry, formed an unholy accompaniment. "Hark, what is that?" was a universal exclamation from the few folk, mostly women, standing in front of Mr. Weil's house, as a curious hoarse cheer arose—not in the stadt, half a mile away, but nearer, close by, only the other side of the station, where was situated the B.S.A.P. fort, the headquarters of the officer commanding the Protectorate Regiment. This so-called fort was in reality an obsolete old work of the time of Sir Charles Warren's 1884 expedition, and was but slightly fortified.

The Boers, after setting fire to the stadt, had rushed it, surprising the occupants; and the horrible noise of their cheering arose again and again. Then a terrific fusillade broke out from this new direction, rendering the roadway a place of the greatest danger. My quarters were evidently getting too hot, and I knew that Weil's house and store would be the first objective of the Boers. I bethought me even novices might be useful in the hospital, so I decided to proceed there in one way or another. Although the rifle-fire was slackening towards the east, from



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the fort, on the west it was continuing unabated; and the way to the hospital lay through the most open part of the town. Calling to our soldier servant of the Royal Horse Guards to accompany me, I snatched up a few things of value and started off. "You will be shot, to a certainty," said Mr. Weil. But it was no use waiting, as one could not tell what would happen next. The bullets were fortunately flying high; all the same, we had twice to stop under a wall and wait for a lull before proceeding. Then I saw a native boy fall in front of me, and at the same moment I stumbled and fell heavily, the servant thinking I was hit; and all the while we could hear frightened cries continuing to emanate from the flaming stad.

The day had fully broken, and never had the roads appeared so white and wide, the sheltering houses so few and far between. At length we reached the hospital trench, and the last 500 yards of the journey were accomplished in perfect safety. My dangerous experiences ended for the rest of that dreadful day, which I spent in the haven of those walls, sheltering so much suffering, and that were, alas! by evening crammed to their fullest capacity. It was a gruesome sight seeing the wounded brought in, and the blood-stained stretchers carried away empty, when the occupants had been deposited in the operating-room. Sometimes an ambulance waggon would arrive with four or five inmates; at others we descried a stretcher-party moving cautiously across the recreation-ground towards us with a melancholy load. It is easy to imagine our feelings of dread and anxiety as we scanned the features of the new arrivals, never knowing who might be the next. During the morning three wounded Boers were brought in—the first prisoners Mafeking could claim; then a native with his arm shattered to the shoulder. All were skilfully and carefully attended to by the army surgeon and his staff in a marvellously short space of time, and comfortably installed in bed. But the Boers begged not to have sheets, as they had never seen such things before. Among the English casualties, one case was a very sad one. A young man, named Hazelrigg, of an old Leicestershire family, was badly shot in the region of the heart when taking a message to the B.S.A.P. fort, not knowing the Boers were in possession. Smart and good-looking, he had only just been promoted to the post of orderly from being a private in the Cape Police, into which corps he had previously enlisted, having failed in his army examination. When brought to the hospital, Hazelrigg had nearly bled to death, and was dreadfully weak, his case being evidently hopeless. I sat with him several hours, putting eau-de-Cologne on his head and brushing away the flies. In the evening, just before he passed into unconsciousness, he repeated more than once: "Tell the Colonel, Lady Sarah, I did my best to give the message, but they got me first." He died at dawn.



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All through the weary hours of that perfect summer's day the rifles never ceased firing. Sometimes a regular fusillade for ten minutes or so; then, as if tired out, sinking down to a few single shots, while the siren-like whistle and sharp explosion of the shells from the high-velocity gun continued intermittently, and added to the dangers of the streets. So the hours dragged on. All the time the wildest rumours pervaded the air. Now the Boers had possession of the whole stadt; again, as soon as night fell, large reinforcements were to force their way in. Of course we knew the Colonel was all the while maturing his plans to rid the town of the unbidden guests, but what these were no one could tell. About 8 p.m., when we were in the depth of despair, we got an official message to say that the Boers in the stadt had been surrounded and taken prisoners, and also that the fort had surrendered to Colonel Hore, who, with some of his officers, had been all day in the curious position of captives in their own barracks. Of course our delight and thankfulness knew no bounds. In spite of the dead and dying patients, those who were slightly wounded or convalescent gave a feeble cheer, which was a pathetic sound. We further heard that the prisoners, in number about a hundred, including Commandant Eloff, their leader, were then being marched through the town to the Masonic Hall, followed by a large crowd of jeering and delighted natives. Two of the nurses and myself ran over to look at them, and I never saw a more motley crew. In the dim light of a few oil-lamps they represented many nationalities, the greater part laughing, joking, and even singing, the burghers holding themselves somewhat aloof, but the whole community giving one the idea of a body of men who knew they had got out of a tight place, and were devoutly thankful still to have whole skins. Eloff and three principal officers were accommodated at Mr. Weil's house, having previously dined with the Colonel and Staff. At 6 a.m. Sunday morning we were awakened by three shells bursting close by, one after the other. I believe no one was more frightened than Eloff; but he told us that it was a preconcerted signal, and that, if they had been in possession of the town, they were to have answered by rifle-fire, when the Boers would have marched in. These proved to be the last shells that were fired into Mafeking.

The same morning at breakfast I sat opposite to Commandant Eloff, who was the President's grandson, and had on my right a most polite French officer, who could not speak a word of English, Dutch, or German, so it was difficult to understand how he made himself understood by his then companions-in-arms. In strong contrast to this affable and courteous gentleman was Eloff, of whom we had heard so much as a promising Transvaal General. A typical Boer of the modern school, with curiously unkempt hair literally standing on end, light sandy whiskers, and a small moustache,



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he was wearing a sullen and dejected expression on his by no means stupid, but discontented and unprepossessing, face. This scion of the Kruger family did not scruple to air his grievances or disclose his plans with regard to the struggle of the previous day. That he was brilliantly assisted by the French and German freelances was as surely demonstrated as the fact of his having been left more or less in the lurch by his countrymen when they saw that to get into Mafeking was one thing, but to stay there or get out of it again was quite a different matter. In a few words he told us, in fairly good English, how it had been posted up in the laager, "We leave for Mafeking to-night: we will breakfast at Dixon's Hotel to-morrow morning"; how he had sent back to instruct Reuter's agent to cable the news that Mafeking had been taken as soon as the fort was in their hands; how he had left his camp with 400 volunteers, and how, when he had counted them by the light of the blazing stadt, only 240 remained; moreover, that the 500 additional men who were to push in when the fort was taken absolutely failed him. [34] He was also betrayed in that the arranged forward movement all round the town, which was to have taken place simultaneously with his attack, was never made. The burghers instead contented themselves by merely firing senseless volleys from their trenches, which constituted all the assistance he actually received. This, and much more, he told us with bitter emphasis, while the French officer conversed unconcernedly in the intervals of his discourse about the African climate, the weather, and the Paris Exhibition; finally observing with heart-felt emphasis that he wished himself back once more in "La Belle France," which he had only left two short months ago. The Dutchman, not understanding what he was saying, kept on the thread of his story, interrupting him without any compunction. It was one of the most curious meals at which I have ever assisted. That afternoon these officers were removed to safer quarters in gaol while a house was being prepared for their reception.

As after-events proved, Eloff's attack was the

Boers' last card, which they had played when they heard of the approaching relief column under Colonel Mahon,[35] and of his intention to join hands with Colonel Plumer, coming from the North. After lunch, two days later, we saw clouds of dust to the south, and, from information to hand, we knew it must be our relievers. The whole of Mafeking spent hours on the roofs of the houses. In the meantime the Boers were very uneasy, with many horsemen coming and going, but the laagers were not being shifted. In the late afternoon a desultory action commenced, which to us was desperately exciting. We could see little but shells bursting and columns of dust. One thing was certain: the Boers were not running away, although the Colonel declared that our troops had gained possession of the position the Boers had



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held, the latter having fallen a little farther back. As the sun set came a helio-message: "Diamond Fields Horse.—All well. Good-night." We went to dinner at seven, and just as we were sitting down I heard some feeble cheers. Thinking something must have happened, I ran to the market-square, and, seeing a dusty khaki-clad figure whose appearance was unfamiliar to me, I touched him on the shoulder, and said: "Has anyone come in?" "We have come in," he answered—"Major Karri-Davis and eight men of the Imperial Light Horse." Then I saw that officer himself, and he told us that, profiting by an hour's dusk, they had ridden straight in before the moon rose, and that they were now sending back two troopers to tell the column the way was clear. Their having thus pushed on at once was a lucky inspiration, for, had they waited for daylight, they would probably have had a hard fight, even if they had got in at all. This plucky column of 1,100 men had marched nearly 300 miles in twelve days, absolutely confounding the Boers by their rapidity.

We heard weeks afterwards how that same day of the relief of Mafeking was celebrated in London with jubilation past belief, everyone going mad with delight. The original event in the town itself was a very tame if impressive affair—merely a score or so of people, singing "Rule, Britannia," surrounding eight or nine dust-begrimed figures, each holding a tired and jaded horse, and a few women on the outskirts of the circle with tears of joy in their eyes. Needless to say, no one thought of sleep that night. At 3.30 a.m. someone came and fetched me in a pony-cart, and we drove out to the polo-ground, where, by brilliant moonlight, we saw the column come into camp. Strings and strings of waggons were soon drawn up; next to them black masses, which were the guns; and beyond these, men, lying down anywhere, dead-tired, beside their horses. The rest of the night I spent at the hospital, where they were bringing in those wounded in the action of the previous afternoon. At eight o'clock we were having breakfast with Colonel Mahon, Prince Alexander of Teck, Sir John Willoughby, and Colonel Frank Rhodes, as additional guests. We had not seen a strange face for eight months, and could do nothing but stare at them, and I think each one of us felt as if he or she were in a dream. Our friends told of their wonderful march, and how they had encamped one night at Setlagoli, where they had been taken care of by Mrs. Fraser and Metelka, who had spent the night in cooking for the officers, which fact had specially delighted Colonel Rhodes, who told me my maid was a "charming creature." But this pleasant conversation was interrupted by a message, saying that, as the Boer laagers were as intact as yesterday, the artillery were going to bombard them at once. Those of us who had leisure repaired at once to the convent, and from there the sight that followed was worth waiting all these many months to see. First

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came the splendid batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery trotting into action, all the gunners bronzed and bearded. They were followed by the Canadian Artillery, who had joined Colonel Plumer's force, and who were that day horsed with mules out of the Bulawayo coach. These were galloping, and, considering the distance all had come, both horses and mules looked wonderfully fit and well. Most of the former, with the appearance of short-tailed English hunters, were stepping gaily out. The Imperial Light Horse and the Diamond Fields Horse, the latter distinguished by feathers in their felt hats, brought up the procession. Everybody cheered, and not a few were deeply affected. Personally, ever since, when I see galloping artillery, that momentous morning is brought back to my mind, and I feel a choking sensation in my throat.

About a quarter of a mile from town the guns unlimbered, and we could not help feeling satisfaction at watching the shells exploding in the laager—that laager we had watched for so many months, and had never been able to touch. The Boers had evidently never expected the column to be in the town, or they would have cleared off. We had a last glimpse of the tarpaulined waggons, and then the dust hid further developments from sight. After about thirty minutes the artillery ceased firing, and as the atmosphere cleared we saw the laager was a desert. Waggons, horses, and cattle, all had vanished.

After their exertions of the past fortnight, Colonel Mahon did not consider it wise to pursue the retreating Boers; but later in the afternoon I went out with others in a cart to where the laager had been—the first time since December that I had driven beyond our lines. I had the new experience of seeing a "loot" in progress. First we met two soldiers driving a cow; then some more with bulged-out pockets full of live fowls; natives were staggering under huge loads of food-stuffs, and eating even as they walked. I was also interested in going into the very room where General Snyman had treated me so scurvily, and where everything was in terrible confusion: the floor was littered with rifles, ammunition, food-stuffs of all sorts, clothes, and letters. Among the latter some interesting telegrams were found, including one from the President, of a date three days previously, informing Snyman that things were most critical, and that the enemy had occupied Kroonstadt. We were just going on to the hospital, where I had spent those weary days of imprisonment, when an officer galloped up and begged me to return to Mafeking, as some skirmishing was going to commence. It turned out that 500 Boers had stopped just over the ridge to cover their retreating waggons, but they made no stand, and by evening were miles away.



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On Friday, May 18, the whole garrison turned out to attend a thanksgiving service in an open space close to the cemetery. They were drawn up in a three-sided square, which looked pathetically small. After the service Colonel Baden-Powell walked round and said a few words to each corps; then three volleys were fired over the graves of fallen comrades, and the "Last Post" was played by the buglers, followed by the National Anthem, in which all joined. It was a simple ceremony, but a very touching one. The same afternoon Colonel Plumer's force was inspected by the Colonel, prior to their departure for the North to repair the railway-line from Bulawayo. They were striking-looking men in their campaigning kit, having been in the field since last August. Some wore shabby khaki jackets and trousers, others flannel shirts and long boots or putties. However attired, they were eager once more for the fray, and, moreover, looked fit for any emergency.

The next few days were a period of intense excitement, and we were constantly stumbling against friends who had formed part of the relief column, but of whose presence we were totally unaware. Letters began to arrive in bulky batches, and one morning I received no less than 100, some of which bore the date of September of the year before. My time was divided between eagerly devouring these missives from home, sending and answering cables (a telegraph-line to the nearest telephone-office had been installed), and helping to organize a new hospital in the school-house, to accommodate the sick and wounded belonging to Colonel Mahon's force. All the while my thoughts were occupied by my return to England and by the question of the surest route to Cape Town. The railway to the South could not be relaid for weeks, and, as an alternative, my eyes turned longingly towards the Transvaal and Pretoria. It must be remembered that we shared the general opinion that, once Lord Roberts had reached the latter town, the war would be practically over. How wrong we all were after-events were to prove, but at the end of May, 1900, it appeared to many that to drive the 200 miles to Pretoria would be very little longer, and much more interesting, than to trek to Kimberley, with Cape Town as the destination. Mrs. Godley (to whom I have before alluded) had arrived at Mafeking from Bulawayo, and we agreed to make the attempt, especially as the Boers in the intervening country were reported to be giving up their arms and returning to their farms. In the meantime it had been decided that Colonel Plumer should occupy Zeerust in the Transvaal, twenty-eight miles from the border, while Colonel Baden-Powell and his force pushed on to Rustenburg. On May 28 Colonel Mahon and the relief column all departed to rejoin General Hunter in or near Lichtenburg, and Mafeking was left with a small garrison to look after the sick and wounded. This town, so long a theatre of excitement to itself and of interest to the world at large, then resumed by degrees the sleepy, even tenor of its ways, which had been so rudely disturbed eight months before.



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### FOOTNOTES:

[34] Later on, when I was at Zeerust, I met a telegraph clerk who had then been in the employ of the Boers, and he told me how indignant all were with General Snyman for deserting Eloff on that occasion. When one of the *Veldtcornets* went and begged his permission to collect volunteers as reinforcements, all the General did was to scratch his head and murmur in Dutch, "Morro is nocher dag" (To-morrow is another day).

[35] Now Major-General Mahon.

### CHAPTER XIV

#### ACROSS THE TRANSVAAL TO PRETORIA DURING THE WAR

"There never was a good war or a bad peace."—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

On Sunday morning, June 4, we packed into a Cape cart, with four siege horses in fair condition, and started to drive to Zeerust. It was a glorious day of blue skies and bright sun, with just enough breeze to prevent the noonday from being too hot. As we left Mafeking and its outworks behind, I had a curious feeling of regret and of gratitude to the gallant little town and its stout citizens: to the former for having been a haven in the midst of fierce storms during all these months; to the latter for their stout arms and their brave hearts, which had warded off the outbursts of the same tempests, whose clouds had hung dark and lowering on our horizon since the previous October. We also experienced a wonderful feeling of relief and freedom at being able to drive at will over the very roads which we had seen covered by Boer waggons, burghers, and guns, and, needless to say, we marked with interest the lines of their forts, so terribly near our little town. We noted the farmhouse lately the headquarters of General Snyman, standing naked and alone. Formerly surrounded by a flourishing orchard and a carefully tended garden, it was now the picture of desolation. The ground was trampled by many feet of men and horses; straw, forage, packing-cases, and rubbish of all kinds, were strewn about, and absolutely hid the soil from view. Away on the hill beyond I spied the tiny house and hospital where I had spent six weary nights and days; and between these two buildings a patch of bare ground nearly half a mile square, indescribably filthy, had been the site of the white-hooded waggons and ragged tents of the laager itself. The road was of no interest, merely rolling veldt with a very few scattered farmhouses, apparently deserted; but one noticed that rough attempts had been made in the way of irrigation, and that, as one approached the Transvaal, pools of water were frequently to be seen.



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A shallow ditch was pointed out to us by the driver, as the boundary between Her Majesty's colony and the South African Republic, and after another eight or ten miles we saw a few white roofs and trees, which proved to be Otto's Hoep, in the Malmani Gold District, from which locality great things had been hoped in bygone days, before the Rand was ever thought of. At the tiny hotel we found several officers and men of the Imperial Light Horse, who, warned by a telephone message from Mafeking, had ordered us an excellent hot lunch. The proprietor, of German origin, could do nothing but stare at us while we were eating the meal, apparently amazed at finding his house reopened after so many months of inactivity, and that people were actually prepared to pay for what they had. We soon pushed on again, and just after leaving the hotel a sharp turn brought us to a really wide river, close to where the Imperial Light Horse were encamped. Our driver turned the horses' heads towards it, and without any misgivings we plunged in. The water grew deeper and deeper, and our thoughts flew to our portmanteaus, tied on behind, which were practically submerged. Just then the leaders took it into their heads they preferred not to go any farther, and forthwith turned round and faced us. The black coachman, however, did not lose his head, but pulled the wheelers round also, and we soon found ourselves again on the same bank from which we had started. Had it not been for a kind trooper of the Imperial Light Horse, our chances of getting across would have been nil. This friend in need mounted a loose horse, and succeeded in coaxing and dragging our recalcitrant leaders, and forcing them to face the rushing stream. Once again our portmanteaus had a cold bath, but this time we made a successful crossing, and went gaily on our way. The road was now much improved and the country exceedingly pretty. Many snug little houses, sheltered by rows of cypress, tall eucalyptus and huge orange-trees laden with yellow fruit, their gardens intersected by running brooks, appeared on all sides; while in the distance rose a range of blue hills, at the foot of which we could perceive the roofs of Zeerust.

As the sun was almost sinking, clouds of dust arose on the road in front, denoting a large body of men or waggons moving. A few weeks—nay, days—ago these would have been a burgher commando; now we knew they were our friends, and presently we met Major Weston Jarvis and his dust-begrimed squadron of the Rhodesian Regiment, followed by a large number of transport waggons, driven cattle, and donkeys. This living testimony that war was still present in the land only disturbed the peaceful evening landscape till the long line of dust had disappeared; then all was stillness and beauty once more. The young moon came out, the stars twinkled in the dark blue heavens, and suddenly, below the dim range of hills, shone first one light and then another; while away to the left, on higher ground, camp-fires, softened



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by a halo of white smoke, came into view. The scene was very picturesque. No cloud obscured the star-bespangled sky or the crescent of the Queen of the Night. Still far away, the lights of the little town were a beacon to guide us. The noise and cries of the camp were carried to us on the gentlest of night breezes, and, to complete the calm beauty of the surroundings, the deep, slow chime of a church-bell struck our ears.

We had reached our destination, and were in a few minutes driving through the quiet little street, pulling up in front of the Central Hotel, kept by a colonial Englishman and his wife. The former had been commandeered twice during the war, but he hastened to assure us that, though he had been at the laager, and even in the trenches before Mafeking, he had never let off his rifle, and had given it up with great pleasure to the English only the day before. This old-fashioned hostelry was very comfortable and commodious, with excellent cooking, but it was not till the next day that we realized how pretty was the town of Zeerust, and how charmingly situated. The houses, standing back from the wide road, were surrounded by neat little gardens and rows of cypresses. Looking down the main street, in either direction, were purple, tree-covered hills. A stream wound its way across one end of the highway, and teams of sleepy fat oxen with bells completed the illusion that we had suddenly been transported into a town of Northern Italy or of the Lower Engadine. However, other circumstances contributed to give it an air of depression and sadness. On the stoeps of the houses were gathered groups of Dutch women and girls, many of them in deep mourning, and all looking very miserable, gazing at us with unfriendly eyes. Fine-looking but shabbily-clad men were to be met carrying their rifles and bandoliers to the Landrost's late office, now occupied by Colonel Plumer and his Staff. Sometimes they were leading a rough-coated, ill-fed pony, in many cases their one ewe lamb, which might or might not be required for Her Majesty's troops. They walked slowly and dejectedly, though some took off their hats and gave one a rough "Good-day." Most of them had their eyes on the ground and a look of mute despair. Others, again, looked quite jolly and friendly, calling out a cheery greeting, for all at that time thought the war was really over. I was told that what caused them surprise and despair was the fact of their animals being required by the English: "requisitioned" was the term used when the owner was on his farm, which meant that he would receive payment for the property, and was given a receipt to that effect; "confiscated," when the burgher was found absent, which signified he was still on commando. Even in the former case he gave up his property sadly and reluctantly, amid the tears and groans of his wife and children, for, judging by the ways of his own Government, they never expected the paper receipt would produce any



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recognition. Many of the cases of these poor burghers seemed indeed very hard, for it must be remembered that during the past months of the war all their things had been used by their own Government for the patriotic cause, and what still remained to them was then being appropriated by the English. All along they had been misled and misinformed, for none of their leaders ever hinted there could be but one end to the war—namely, the decisive success of the Transvaal Republic. It made it easy to realize the enormous difficulties that were connected with what was airily talked of as the “pacification of the country,” and that those English officers who laboured then, and for many months afterwards, at this task had just as colossal and arduous an undertaking as the soldiers under Lord Roberts, who had gloriously cut their way to Johannesburg and Pretoria. Someone said to me in Zeerust: “When the English have reached Pretoria their difficulties will only begin.” In the heyday of our Relief, and with news of English victories constantly coming to hand, I thought this gentleman a pessimist; but the subsequent history of the war, and the many weary months following the conclusion of peace, proved there was much truth in the above statement.

Two days later we heard that Lord Roberts had made his formal entry into Pretoria on June 5, but our journey thither did not proceed as smoothly as we had hoped. We chartered a Cape cart and an excellent pair of grey horses, and made our first attempt to reach Pretoria via the lead-mines, the same route taken by Dr. Jameson and the Raiders. Here we received a check in the shape of a letter from General Baden-Powell requesting us not to proceed, as he had received information that Lord Roberts’s line of communication had been temporarily interrupted. The weather had turned exceedingly wet and cold, like an English March or late autumn, and after two days of inactivity in a damp and gloomy Dutch farmhouse we were perforce obliged to return to our original starting-point, Zeerust. A few days later we heard that Colonel Baden-Powell had occupied Rustenburg, and that the country between there and Pretoria was clear; so we decided to make a fresh start, and this time to take the northern and more mountainous route. We drove through a very pretty country, with many trees and groves of splendid oranges, and we crossed highly cultivated valleys, with numerous farms dotted about. All those we met described themselves as delighted at what they termed the close of the war, and gave us a rough salutation as we went on our way, after a friendly chat. Presently we passed an open trolley with a huge red-cross flag flying, but which appeared to contain nothing but private luggage, and was followed by a man, evidently a doctor, driving a one-horse buggy, and wearing an enormous red-cross badge on his hat. At midday we outspanned to rest the horses and eat our lunch, and in the afternoon we crossed the great Marico River, where was situated



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a deserted and ruined hotel and store. The road then became so bad that the pace of our horses scarcely reached five miles an hour, and to obtain shelter we had to reach Eland's River before it became quite dark. A very steep hill had to be climbed, which took us over the shoulder of the chain of hills, and rumbling slowly down the other side, with groaning brake and stumbling steeds, we met a typical Dutch family, evidently trekking back from the laager in a heavy ox waggon. The sad-looking mother, with three or four children in ragged clothes, was sitting inside; the father and the eldest boy were walking beside the oxen. Their apparent misery was depressing, added to which the day, which all along had been cold and dismal, now began to close in, and, what was worse, rain began to fall, which soon grew to be a regular downpour. At last we could hardly see our grey horses, and every moment I expected we should drive into one of the many pitfalls in the shape of big black holes with which the roads in this part of the Transvaal abounded, and a near acquaintance with any one of these would certainly have upset the cart. At last we saw twinkling lights, but we first had to plunge down another river-bed and ascend a precipitous incline up the opposite bank. Our horses were by now very tired, and for one moment it seemed to hang in the balance whether we should roll back into the water or gain the top. The good animals, however, responded to the whip, plunged forward, and finally pulled up at a house dimly outlined in the gloom. In response to our call, a dripping sentry peered out, and told us it was, as we hoped, Wolhuter's store, and that he would call the proprietor. Many minutes elapsed, during which intense stillness prevailed, seeming to emphasize how desolate a spot we had reached, and broken only by the splash of the heavy rain. Then the door opened, and a man appeared to be coming at last, only to disappear again in order to fetch coat and umbrella. Eventually it turned out the owner of the house was a miller, by birth a German, and this gentleman very kindly gave us a night's hospitality. He certainly had not expected visitors, and it took some time to allay his suspicions as to who we were and what was our business. Accustomed to the universal hospitality in South Africa, I was somewhat surprised at the hesitation he showed in asking us into his house, and when we were admitted he claimed indulgence for any shortcomings by saying his children were ill. We assured him we should give no trouble, and we were so wet and cold that any roof and shelter were a godsend. Just as I was going to bed, my maid came and told me that, from a conversation she had had with the Kaffir girl, who seemed to be the only domestic, she gathered that two children were suffering from an infectious disease, which, in the absence of any medical man, they had diagnosed as smallpox. To proceed on our journey was out of the question, but it may be imagined that we left next morning at the very earliest hour possible.



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This very district round Eland's River was later the scene of much fighting, and it was there a few months afterwards that De la Rey surrounded an English force, who were only rescued in the nick of time by the arrival of Lord Kitchener. At the date of our visit, however, all was peaceful, and, but for a few burghers riding in haste to surrender their arms, not a trace of the enemy was to be seen.

The next day we reached Rustenburg, where we stayed the night, and learnt that General Baden-Powell and his Staff had left there for Pretoria, to confer with Lord Roberts. Our gallant grey horses were standing the strain well, and the worst roads as well as the most mountainous country were then behind us; so, without delay, we continued on the morrow, spending the third night at a storekeeper's house at Sterkstrom. Towards the evening of the fourth day after leaving Zeerust, we entered a long wide valley, and by degrees overtook vehicles of many lands, wearied pedestrians, and horsemen—in fact, the inevitable stragglers denoting the vicinity of a vast army. The valley was enclosed by moderately high hills, and from their summits we watched helio messages passing to and fro during all that beautiful afternoon, while we slowly accomplished the last, but seemingly endless, miles of our tedious drive. At 5 p.m. we crawled into the suburbs of the Boer capital, having driven 135 miles with the same horses. The description of Pretoria under British occupation, and the friends we met there, I must leave to another chapter.

## CHAPTER XV

### PRETORIA AND JOHANNESBURG UNDER LORD ROBERTS AND MILITARY LAW

“With malice to none ... with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in.”—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

At Pretoria Mrs. Godley and I found accommodation, not without some difficulty, at the Grand Hotel. Turned for the moment into a sort of huge barrack, this was crowded to its utmost capacity. The polite manager, in his endeavour to find us suitable rooms, conducted us all over the spacious building, and at last, struck by a bright thought, threw open the door of an apartment which he said would be free in a few hours, as the gentleman occupying it was packing up his belongings preparatory to his departure. Great was my surprise at discovering in the khaki-clad figure, thus unceremoniously disturbed in the occupation of stowing away papers, clothes, and campaigning kit generally, no less a personage than my nephew, Winston Churchill, who had experienced such thrilling adventures during the war, the accounts of which had reached us even in far-away Mafeking. The proprietor was equally amazed to see me warmly greet the owner of the rooms he proposed to allot us, and, although Winston postponed his departure for another twenty-four hours, he gladly gave up part of his suite for our use, and everything was satisfactorily arranged.



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Good-looking figures in khaki swarmed all over the hotel, and friends turned up every minute—bearded pards, at whom one had to look twice before recognizing old acquaintances. No less than a hundred officers were dining that night in the large restaurant. Between the newly liberated prisoners and those who had taken part in the victorious march of Lord Roberts's army one heard surprised greetings such as these: "Hallo, old chap! where were you caught?" or a late-comer would arrive with the remark: "There has been firing along the outposts all day. I suppose the beggars have come back." (I was relieved to hear the outposts were twelve miles out.) The whole scene was like an act in a Drury Lane drama, and we strangers seemed to be the appreciative audience. Accustomed as we were to a very limited circle, it appeared to us as if all the inhabitants of England had been transported to Pretoria.

Early next day we drove out to see the departure of General Baden-Powell[36] and his Staff, who had been most warmly received by Lord Roberts, and who, after receiving his orders, were leaving to rejoin their men at Rustenburg. As an additional mark of favour, the Commander-in-Chief and his retinue gave the defender of Mafeking a special send-off, riding with him and his officers some distance out of the town. This procession was quite an imposing sight, and was preceded by a company of turbaned Indians. Presently, riding alongside of General Baden-Powell, on a small, well-bred Arab, came the hero of a thousand fights, the man who at an advanced age, and already crowned with so many laurels, had, in spite of a crushing bereavement, stepped forward to help his country in the hour of need. We were delighted when this man of the moment stopped to speak to us. He certainly seemed surprised at the apparition of two ladies, and observed that we were very daring, and the first of our sex to come in. I shall, however, never forget how kindly he spoke nor the inexpressible sadness of his face. I told him how quiet everything appeared to be along the road we had taken, and how civil were all the Boers we had met. At this he turned to the guest whose departure he was speeding, and said, with a grave smile, "That is thanks to you, General." And then the cortege rode on. On reflection, I decided, rather from what Lord Roberts had left unsaid than from his actual words, that if we had asked leave to travel home via Pretoria, it would have been refused.

The rest of that day and the next we spent in seeing the town under its new auspices, and it certainly presented far more to interest a visitor than on the occasion of my last visit in 1896. In a suburb known as Sunny Side was situated Lord Roberts's headquarters, at a house known as the Residency. Close by was a charming villa inhabited for the nonce by General Brabazon, Lord Dudley, Mr. John Ward, and Captain W. Bagot. The surroundings of these dwellings were exceedingly pretty, with shady trees, many streams,



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and a background of high hills crowned by forts, which latter were just visible to the naked eye. From Sunny Side we were conducted over some of these fortifications: there was Schantz's Kop Fort, of very recent construction, and looking to the uninitiated of tremendous strength, with roomy bomb-proof shelters. Here a corner of one of the massive entrance pillars had been sharply severed off by a British lyddite shell. Later we inspected Kapper Kop Fort, the highest of all, where two British howitzer guns, firing a 280-pound shell, had found a resting-place. Surrounded by a moat with a drawbridge, the view from this fort was magnificent. The Boers were in the act of making a double-wire entanglement round it, and had evidently meant to offer there a stubborn resistance, when more prudent counsels prevailed, and they had left their work half finished, and decamped, carrying off all their ammunition. In the town itself General French and his Staff had established themselves at the Netherlands Club, from which resort the members had been politely ejected.

To outward appearances, civil as well as military business was being transacted in Pretoria with perfect smoothness, in spite of the proximity of the enemy. The yeomanry were acting as police both there and in Johannesburg. The gaol, of which we had a glimpse, was crowded with 240 prisoners, but was under the competent direction of the usual English under-official, who had been in the service of the Transvaal, and who had quietly stepped into the shoes of his chief, a Dutchman, when the latter bolted with Kruger. This prison was where the Raiders and the Reformers had been in durance vile, and the gallows were pointed out to us with the remark that, during the last ten years, they had only been once used, their victim being an Englishman. A Dutchman, who had been condemned to death during the same period for killing his wife, had been reprieved.

In the same way the Natal Bank and the Transvaal National Bank were being supervised by their permanent officials, men who had been at their posts during the war, and who, although under some suspicions, had not been removed. At the latter bank the manager told us how President Kruger had sent his Attorney-General to fetch the gold in coins and bar just before he left for Delagoa Bay, and how it was taken away on a trolley. The astute President actually cheated his people of this bullion, as he had already forced them to accept paper tokens for the gold, which he then acquired and removed. We also saw the Raad Saals—especially interesting from being exactly as they were left after the last session on May 7—Kruger's private room, and the Council Chamber. These latter were fine apartments, recently upholstered by Maple, and littered with papers, showing every evidence of the hurried departure of their occupants. Finally, specially conducted by Winston, we inspected the so-called "Bird-cage," where all the English officers had been imprisoned, and the "Staat Model" School, from where our cicerone had made his escape. These quarters must have been a particularly disagreeable and inadequate residence.



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After a day in Pretoria we realized that, in spite of the shops being open and the hotels doing a roaring trade, notwithstanding the marvellous organization visible on all sides, events were not altogether satisfactory; and one noted that the faces of those behind the scenes were grave and serious. Louis Botha, it was evident, was anything but a defeated foe. This gentleman had actually been in the capital when the English entered, and he was then only sixteen miles away. During the previous week a severe action had been fought with him at Diamond Hill, where the English casualties had been very heavy. The accounts of this engagement, as then related, had a touch of originality. The Commander-in-Chief and Staff went out in a special train, sending their horses by road, which reminded one forcibly of a day's hunting; cab-drivers in the town asked pedestrians if they would like to drive out and see the fight. The real affair, however, was grim earnest, and many were the gallant men who lost their lives on that occasion. All the while De Wet was enjoying himself to the south by constantly interrupting the traffic on the railway. No wonder the Generals were careworn, and it was a relief to meet Lord Stanley,[37] A.D.C. to Lord Roberts, with a smiling face, who, with his unflinching spirits, must have been an invaluable companion to his chief during those trying weeks. One specially sad feature was the enormous number of sick in addition to wounded soldiers.

Of the former, at that time, there were over 1,500, and the recollection of the large numbers buried at Bloemfontein was still green in everyone's memory. The origin of all the sickness, principally enteric, was undoubtedly due to the Paardeberg water in the first instance, and then to that used at Bloemfontein; for Pretoria was perfectly healthy—the climate cool, if rainy, and the water-supply everything that could be desired. As additional accommodation for these patients, the magnificent and recently finished Law Courts had been arranged to hold seven or eight hundred beds. Superintended by Sir William Thompson, this improvised establishment was attended to by the personnel of the Irish hospital, and Mr. Guinness was there himself, organizing their work and doing excellent service.

One evening we were most hospitably entertained to dinner by Lord Stanley, Captain Fortescue, the Duke of Westminster, and Winston. As it may be imagined, we heard many interesting details of the past stages of the war. Winston, even at that early stage of his career, and although he had been but a short time, comparatively, with Lord Roberts's force, had contrived therein to acquire influence and authority. The "bosses," doubtless, disapproved of his free utterances, but he was nevertheless most amusing to listen to, and a general favourite. The next day we saw him and the Duke of Westminster off on their way South, and having fixed my own departure for the following Monday, and seen most of the sights,



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I determined to avail myself of an invitation Captain Laycock, A.D.C. to General French, had given me, and go to the Netherlands Club in order to peruse the goodly supply of newspapers and periodicals of which they were the proud possessors. It was a cold, windy afternoon, and, finding the front-door locked and no bell visible, I went to one of the long French windows at the side of the house, through which I could see a cozy fire glimmering. Perceiving a gentleman sitting in front of the inviting blaze, I knocked sharply to gain admittance. On nearer inspection this gentleman proved to be asleep, and it was some minutes before he got up and revealed himself as a middle-aged man, strongly built, with slightly grey hair. For some unknown reason I imagined him to be a Major in a cavalry regiment, no doubt attached to the Staff, and when, after rubbing his eyes, he at length opened the window, I apologized perfunctorily for having disturbed him, adding that I was acting on Captain Laycock's suggestion in coming there. In my heart I hoped he would leave me to the undisturbed perusal of the literature which I saw on a large centre table. He showed, however, no signs of taking his departure, and made himself so agreeable that I was perforce obliged to continue the conversation he commenced. I told him of the Mafeking siege, giving him my opinion of the Boers as opponents and of their peculiarities as we had experienced them; also of how, in the west and north, the enemy seemed to have practically disappeared. Presently, by way of politeness, I asked him in what part of the country, and under which General, he had been fighting. He answered evasively that he had been knocking about, under several commanders, pretty well all over the place, which reply left me more mystified than ever. Soon Captain Laycock came in, and after a little more talk, during which I could see that he and my new acquaintance were on the best of terms, the latter went out, expressing a hope I should stay to tea, which I thought exceedingly kind of him, but scarcely necessary, as I was Captain Laycock's guest. When he had gone, I questioned the latter as to the identity of his friend, and was horrified to learn that it was General French himself whom I had so unceremoniously disturbed, and to whom I had volunteered information. When the General returned with some more of his Staff, including Lord Brooke, Colonel Douglas Haig,[38] Mr. Brinsley Fitzgerald, and Mr. Brinton, 2nd Life Guards,[39] I was profuse in my apologies, which he promptly cut short by asking me to make the tea, and we had a most cheery meal, interspersed with a good deal of chaff, one of his friends remarking to me that it was probably the only occasion during the last six months in South Africa that General French had been caught asleep.

The following day, Sunday, we attended a very impressive military service, at which Lord Roberts and his Staff, in full uniform, were present, and at the conclusion the whole congregation sang the National Anthem with the organ accompaniment. The volume of sound, together with the well-loved tune, was one not soon to be forgotten.



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In the evening I had a visit from a stranger, who announced himself to be Mr. Barnes, correspondent to the *Daily Mail*. This gentleman handed me a letter from my sister, Lady Georgiana Curzon, dated Christmas Day of the previous year, which had at last reached me under peculiar circumstances. It appeared that, when my resourceful sister heard I had been taken prisoner by the Boers, she decided the best way of communicating with me would be through the President of the South African Republic, via Delagoa Bay. She had therefore written him a letter as follows:

*“Christmas Day, 1899.*

“Lady Georgiana Curzon presents her compliments to His Honour President Kruger, and would be very much obliged if he would give orders that the enclosed letter should be forwarded to her sister, Lady Sarah Wilson, who, according to the latest reports, has been taken prisoner by General Snyman.”

In this letter was enclosed the one now handed to me by Mr. Barnes. The President, in the novel experience of receiving a letter from an English lady, had sent for the American Consul, and had handed him both epistles without a remark of any kind, beyond asking him to deal with them. Thus the missive finally reached its destination. This visitor had hardly departed when another was announced in the person of a Dr. Scholtz, whom, with his wife, I had met at Groot Schuur as Mr. Rhodes’s friends. This gentleman, who is since dead, had always seemed to me somewhat of an enigmatical personage. German by origin, he combined strong sympathies with the Boers and fervent Imperialism, and I was therefore always a little doubtful as to his real sentiments. He came very kindly on this occasion to pay a friendly call, but also to inform me that he was playing a prominent part in the abortive peace negotiations which at that stage of the war were being freely talked about. Whether he had acted on his own initiative, or whether he had actually been employed by the authorities, he did not state; but he seemed to be full of importance, and proud of the fact that he had spent two hours only a few days before on a kopje in conference with Louis Botha, while the same kopje was being energetically shelled by the English. He gave me, indeed, to understand that the successful issue of the interview had depended entirely on the amount the English Government was prepared to pay, and that another L2,000,000 would have ended the war then and there. He probably did not enjoy the full confidence of either side, and I never verified the truth of his statements, which were as strange and mysterious as the man himself, whom, as events turned out, I never saw again.

It had been difficult to reach Pretoria, but the departure therefrom was attended by many formalities, and I had to provide myself, amongst other permits, with a railway pass, which ran as follows:

RAILWAY PASSES.

The bearer, Lady Sarah. Wilson (and maid) is permitted to travel at her own expense from Pretoria to Cape Town via the Vaal River.



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O.S. NUGENT,  
Major, Provost Marshal  
(For Major-General, Military  
Governor of Pretoria).

To R.S.O.  
Pretoria  
*June 25, 1900.*

Everything being then pronounced in order, I said good-bye to Mrs. Godley, who was returning by road to Zeerust and Mafeking, and, accompanied by Captain Seymour Fortescue, who had a few days' leave, and by Major Bobby White, I left on June 25 for Johannesburg. The train was painfully slow, and rarely attained a speed of more than five or six miles an hour. At Elandsfontein the engine gave out entirely, and a long delay ensued while another was being procured. At all the stations were small camps and pickets of bronzed and bearded soldiers, and on the platforms could be seen many officers newly arrived from England, distinguished by their brand-new uniforms, nearly all carrying the inevitable Kodak. At length we arrived at Johannesburg as the daylight was fading, and found excellent accommodation at Heath's Hotel. In the "Golden City," as at Pretoria, the shops were open, and seemed wonderfully well supplied, butter and cigarettes being the only items that were lacking. I remember lunching the next day at a grill-room, called Frascati's, underground, where the cuisine was first-rate, and which was crowded with civilians of many nationalities, soldiers not being in such prominence as at Pretoria. The afternoon we devoted to seeing some of the principal mines, including the Ferreira Deep, which had been worked by the Transvaal Government for the last eight months. For this purpose they had engaged capable managers from France and Germany, and therefore the machinery was in no way damaged. At a dinner-party the same evening, given by Mr. A. Goldmann, we met a German gentleman who gave an amusing account of the way in which some of the city financiers had dashed off to the small banks a few days before Lord Roberts's entry, when the report was rife that Kruger was going to seize all the gold at Johannesburg as well as that at Pretoria. They were soon seen emerging with bags of sovereigns on their backs, which they first carried to the National Bank, but which, on second thoughts, they reclaimed again, finally confiding their treasure to the Banque de la France.

### FOOTNOTES:

[36] Colonel Baden-Powell had been promoted to the rank of Major-General.

[37] Now Earl of Derby.

[38] Now Major-General Haig.



[39] Now Major Brinton.

## CHAPTER XVI

MY RETURN TO CIVILIZATION ONCE MORE—THE MAFEKING  
FUND—LETTERS FROM THE KING AND QUEEN

“Let us admit it fairly,  
As business people should,  
We have had no end of a lesson:  
It will do us no end of good.”  
KIPLING.



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On June 27 I left Johannesburg under the escort of Major Bobby White, who had kindly promised to see me safely as far as Cape Town. We travelled in a shabby third-class carriage, the only one on the train, which was merely composed of open trucks. Our first long delay was at Elandsfontein, practically still in the Rand District. There the officer in charge came up with the pleasing intelligence that the train we were to join had broken down, and would certainly be four hours late; so we had to get through a very weary wait at this most unattractive little township, whose only interesting features were the distant chimneys and unsightly shafts of the Simmer and Jack and the Rose Deep Mines, and far away, on the horizon, the little white house, amid a grove of trees, which had been Lord Roberts's headquarters barely a month ago, and from which he had sent the summons to Johannesburg to surrender. All around, indeed, was the scene of recent fighting, and various polite transport officers tried to while away the tedium of our enforced delay by pointing out various faint ridges, and explaining that *there* the Gordons had made their splendid charge, or, again, that farther back General French had encountered such a stubborn resistance, and so on, *ad libitum*. In response I gazed with enthusiastic interest, but the flat, hideous country, which guards its deeply buried treasure so closely, seemed so alike in every direction, and the operations of the victorious army covered so wide an area, that it was difficult to make a brain picture of that rapid succession of feats of arms. At the station itself the "Tommys" buzzed about like bees, and the officers were having tea or dinner, or both combined, in the refreshment-room. One overheard scraps of conversation, from a subaltern to his superior officer: "A capital bag to-day, sir. Forty Mausers and ten thousand rounds of ammunition." Then someone else remarked that a railway-train from the South passed yesterday, riddled with bullets, and recounted the marvellous escape its occupants had had, which was not encouraging in view of our intended journey over the same route. A young man in uniform presently entered with a limp, and, in answer to inquiries, said his wounded leg was doing famously, adding that the bullet had taken exactly the same course as the one did not six weeks ago—only then it had affected the other knee; "so I knew how to treat it, and I am off to the Yeomanry Hospital, if they will have me. I only left there a fortnight ago, and, by Jove! it was like leaving Paradise!" Another arrival came along saying the Boers had received a proper punishing for their last depredations on the railway, when De Wet had brought off his crowning *coup* by destroying the mail-bags. But this gentleman had hardly finished his tale when a decided stir was observable, and we heard a wire was to hand saying the same De Wet was again on the move, and that a strong force of men and guns were to leave for the scene of action



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by our train to-night. At this juncture, seeing there was no prospect of any immediate departure, I installed myself comfortably with a book in the waiting-room, and was so absorbed that I did not even notice the arrival of a train from Heidelberg, till the door opened, and my nephew, the Duke of Marlborough, looked in, and we exchanged a surprised greeting, being totally unaware of each other's whereabouts. Except for meeting Winston in Pretoria, I had not seen the face of one of my relations for more than a year, but so many surprising things happen in wartime that we did not evince any great astonishment at this strange and unexpected meeting. In answer to my inquiries as to what brought him there, he told me he was returning to Pretoria with his temporarily incapacitated chief, General Ian Hamilton, who was suffering from a broken collar-bone, incurred by a fall from his horse. Expecting to find the General in a smart ambulance carriage, it was somewhat of a shock to be guided to a very dilapidated old cattle-truck, with open sides and a floor covered with hay. I peeped in, and extended on a rough couch in the farther corner, I perceived the successful General, whose name was in everybody's mouth. In spite of his unlucky accident, he was full of life and spirits, and we had quite a long conversation. I have since often told him how interesting was his appearance, and he, in reply, has assured me how much he was impressed by a blue bird's-eye cotton dress I was wearing, the like of which he had not seen since he left England, many months before. His train soon rumbled on, and then we had a snug little dinner in the ladies' waiting-room that the Station-Commandant, a gallant and hospitable Major, had made gay with trophies, photographs, and coloured pictures out of various journals. From a deep recess under his bed he produced an excellent bottle of claret, and the rest of the dinner was supplied from the restaurant.

The short African winter's day had faded into a blue and luminous night, resplendent with stars, and still our belated train tarried. However, the situation was improved, for later advices stated that the Boers had cleared off from the vicinity of the railway-line, and that we should surely leave before midnight. All these rumours certainly added to the excitement of a railway-journey, and it occurred to me how tame in comparison would be the ordinary departure of the "Flying Scotsman," or any other of the same tribe that nightly leave the great London termini.

At length, with many a puff and agonized groan from the poor little undersized engine, we departed into the dim, mysterious night, which hourly became more chill, and which promised a sharp frost before morning. As we crawled out of the station, our kind military friends saluted, and wished us, a little ironically, a pleasant journey. When I was about to seek repose, Major White looked in, and said: "Sleep with your head away from the window, in case of a stray shot"; and then I turned down the light, and was soon in the land of dreams.



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The much-dreaded night passed quite quietly, and in the morning the carriage windows were thickly coated with several degrees of frost. The engines of the Netherlands Railway, always small and weak, were at that time so dirty from neglect and overpressure during the war, that their pace was but a slow crawl, and uphill they almost died away to nothing. However, fortunately, going south meant going downhill, and we made good progress over the flat uninteresting country, which, in view of recent events, proved worthy of careful attention. Already melancholy landmarks of the march of the great army lay on each side of the line in the shape of carcasses of horses, mules, and oxen. Wolvehoek was the first stop. Here blue-nosed soldiers descended from the railway-carriages in varied and weird costumes, making a rush with their billies[40] for hot water, wherewith to cook their morning coffee, cheerily laughing and cracking their jokes, while shivering natives in blankets and tattered overcoats waited hungrily about for a job or scraps of food. After leaving Wolvehoek, we entered on Commandant De Wet's hunting-ground and the scene of his recent exploits. There, at almost every culvert, at every ganger's house, were pickets of soldiers, all gathered round a crackling fire at that chill morning hour; and at every one of these posts freshly constructed works of sandbags and deep trenches were in evidence to denote that their sentry work was no play, but grim earnest.

We next crossed the Rhenoster Spruit, and passed the then famous Rhenoster position, so formidable even to the unskilled eye, and where my military friends told me the Boers would have given much trouble, had it not been for the two outspread wings of the Commander-in-Chief's army. A little farther on, the deviation line and the railway-bridge were pointed out as one of the many triumphs of engineering skill to be seen and marvelled at on that recently restored line. The achievements of these lion-hearted engineers could not fail to impress themselves even on a civilian. Many amongst them were volunteers, who had previously occupied brilliant positions in the great mining community in Johannesburg, and whose brains were the pride of a circle where intellectual achievements and persevering resource commanded at once the greatest respect and the highest remuneration. Some of these latter had family ties besides their considerable positions, but they gladly hastened to place their valuable services at the disposal of their Queen, and, in conjunction with the regular Royal Engineers, were destined to find glory, and in many cases death, at their perilous work. The task of the engineers is probably scarcely realized by people who have not seen actual warfare. We do not read so frequently of their doings as of those of their gallant colleagues on foot or on horse; but soldiers know that neither the genius of the Generals nor the intrepidity of the men could avail without



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them; and as the scouts are called the eyes, so might the engineers, both regular and volunteer, be termed the hands and feet, of an advancing force. The host sweeps on, and the workers are left with pickaxe and shovel, rifles close at hand, to work at their laborious task loyally and patiently, while deeds of courage and daring are being done and applauded not many miles away from them. This particular Rhenoster bridge was destroyed and rebuilt no less than three times up to the date of which I write, and the third time was only ten days previously, when Christian De Wet had also worked havoc among the mail-bags, the only cruel thing attributed to that commander, respected both by friends and foes. The sad, dumb testimony of this lamented misfortune was to be seen in the shape of thousands of mutilated envelopes and torn letters which covered the rails and the ground beyond—letters which would have brought joy to many a lonely heart at the front. It was really heart-breaking to behold this melancholy remnant of 1,500 mail-bags, and, a little farther on, to see three skeleton trucks charred by fire, which told how the warm clothing destined for the troops perished when De Wet and his burghers had taken all they needed. Many yarns were related to me about the chivalry of this farmer-General, especially respecting the mail-bags, and how he said that his burghers should not make fun of the English officers' letters, and therefore that he burnt them with his own hands. Another anecdote was remarkable—namely, that of an officer searching sadly among the heap of debris for some eagerly expected letter, and who came across an uninjured envelope directed to himself, containing his bank-book from Messrs. Cox and Sons, absolutely intact and untouched. It can only be conjectured whether he would as soon have known it in ashes.

On arriving in the vicinity of Kroonstadt, the most risky part of the journey was over, and then a wonderfully novel scene unfolded itself as we crawled over a rise from the desolate, barren country we had been traversing, and a tented city lay in front of us. Anyway, such was its appearance at a first glance, for white tents stretched far away east and west, and appeared to swamp into insignificance the unpretentious houses, and even a fairly imposing church-spire which lay in the background. I had never seen anything like this vast army depot, and examined everything with the greatest attention and interest. Huge mountains of forage covered by tarpaulin sheets were the first things to catch my eye; then piles upon piles of wooden cases were pointed out as “rations”—that mysterious term which implies so much and may mean so little; again, there was a hillock of wicker-covered bottles with handles which puzzled me, and which were explained as “cordials” of some kind. Powerful traction-engines, at rest and in motion, next came into sight, and weird objects that looked like life-boats mounted on trucks, but which proved to



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be pontoons—strange articles to perceive at a railway-station. Then we passed a vast concourse of red-cross tents of every description, proclaiming a hospital. As far as outward appearances went, it looked most beautifully arranged in symmetrically laid-out streets, while many of the marquees had their sides thrown back, and showed the patients within, either in bed or sitting about and enjoying the breeze and the rays of a sun never too hot at that time of year. “How happy and comfortable they look!” was my remark as we left them behind. Someone who knew Kroonstadt said: “Yes, they are all right; but the Scotch Hospital is the one to see if you are staying long enough—spring-beds, writing-tables, and every luxury.” I was sorry time admitted of no visit to this establishment or to the magnificent Yeomanry Hospital at Deelfontein, farther south, to which I shall have occasion to allude in a later chapter. This last establishment was, even at that early stage of the war, a household word among the soldiers at the front, a dearly longed-for Mecca amongst the sick and wounded.

Our train had come to an abrupt standstill, and, on looking out, the line appeared so hopelessly blocked that the only way of reaching the station and lunch appeared to be on foot. We walked, therefore, upwards of half a mile, undergoing many perils from shunting engines, trains undecided whether to go on or to go back, and general confusion. It certainly did not look as if our train could be extricated for hours, but it proved there was method in this apparent muddle, and we suffered no delay worth speaking of. The station was densely packed with Staff officers and soldiers. Presently someone elbowed a way through the crowd to make way for the General, just arrived from Bloemfontein. A momentary interest was roused as an elderly, soldierly gentleman, with white hair and a slight figure, passed out of sight into one of the officials' rooms, and then we joined the throng trying to get food in the overtaxed refreshment-room. We had some interesting conversation with the officer in command of the station, and learnt how the Kroonstadt garrison were even then living in the midst of daily alarms from De Wet or his followers; added to these excitements, there was a colossal amount of work to be got through in the way of supplying Pretoria with food, by a line liable to be interrupted, and in coping with the task of receiving and unloading remounts, which were arriving from the South in large numbers. I saw some of these poor animals packed nine in a truck, marvellously quiet, and unmindful of strange sights and sounds, and of being hurled against each other when the locomotive jerked on or came to a stop. They were in good condition, but their eyes were sad and their tails were woefully rubbed. After seeing Kroonstadt Railway-station, I realized that the work of a Staff officer on the lines of communication was no sinecure.



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Marvellous to relate, in the early afternoon we found our train in the station, and, climbing into our carriage once more, we proceeded on our road without delay, congratulating ourselves on our good fortune in not being held up at Kroonstadt, as had been the fate of many travellers going south. Immediately south of Kroonstadt we crossed the Vaal River, with its fine high-level bridge reduced to atoms by dynamite. This had given the engineers another opportunity to display their skill by a clever deviation of a couple of miles in length, winding down almost to the water-level, and then serenely effecting the crossing by a little wooden bridge, from which its ruined predecessor was visible about a quarter of a mile up the stream. Darkness and approaching night then hid the landscape. That evening we were told we need have no fears, for we were practically out of the dangerous zone. We dined comfortably in our compartment, and I heard many more reminiscences of the advance from two travelling companions who had taken part in it. Suddenly in the next compartment a party of Canadian officers commenced singing part-songs with real musical talent. We relapsed into silence as we heard the "Swanee River" sung more effectively than I have ever heard it before or since, and it reminded me that we, too, were going home. Presently we found ourselves joining in the chorus of that most touching melody, "Going back to Dixie," greatly to the delight of our sociable and talented neighbours. Daylight next morning brought us to Bloemfontein and civilization, and what impressed me most was the fact of daily newspapers being sold at a bookstall, which sight I had not seen for many months. On arriving at Cape Town, I was most hospitably entertained at Groot Schuur by Colonel Frank Rhodes, in the absence of his brother. This mansion had been a convalescent home for many officers ever since the war began. There I passed a busy ten days in seeing heaps of friends, and I had several interviews with Sir Alfred Milner, to whom events of the siege and relief of Mafeking were of specially deep interest. I gave him as a memento a small Mauser bullet mounted as a scarf-pin, and before leaving for England I received from him the following letter:

"GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
"CAPE TOWN,  
"November 7, 1900.

"DEAR LADY SARAH,

"How very kind of you to think of giving me that interesting relic of Mafeking! It will indeed revive memories of anxiety, as well as of the intensest feeling of relief and thankfulness that I have ever experienced.

"Hoping we shall meet again when 'distress and strain are over,'

"I am,  
"Yours very sincerely,  
"ALFRED MILNER."



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Much of my time was also occupied in corresponding with Mafeking about the distribution of the fund which was being energetically collected in London by my sister, Lady Georgiana Curzon. Many weeks before we were relieved I had written to Lady Georgiana, then hard at work with the organization of the Yeomanry Hospital, suggesting to her to start a relief fund for the inhabitants of Mafeking. It had all along seemed to me that these latter deserved some substantial recognition and compensation beyond what they could expect from the Government, for damage done to their homes and their shops, and for the utter stagnation of the trade in the town during the siege. The nurses, the nuns and their convent, were also worthy objects for charity. This latter residence, but lately built, and including a nicely decorated chapel with many sacred images, had been, as I have said, practically destroyed; and the Sisters had borne their part most nobly, in nursing the sick and wounded, while many were suffering in health from the privations they had undergone. In response to my appeal, Lady Georgiana inserted the following letter in the *Times* just before the news of the Relief reached England:

“20, CURZON STREET, W.,  
“*May 11.*

“SIR,

“I venture to address an appeal to the people of the United Kingdom, through the columns of your paper, on behalf of the inhabitants of Mafeking. Nothing but absolute knowledge of their sufferings prompts me to thus inaugurate another fund, and one which must come in addition to the numerous subscriptions already started in connection with the South African War. I admit the generous philanthropy of our country has been evinced to a degree that is almost inconceivable, and I hesitate even now in making this fresh appeal, but can only plead as an excuse the heartrending accounts of the sufferings of Mafeking that I have received from my sister, Lady Sarah Wilson. “The last mail from South Africa brought me a letter from her, dated March 3. In it she implores me to take active measures to bring before the generous British public the destitute condition of the nuns, refugees, and civilians generally, in Mafeking. She writes with authority, having witnessed their sufferings herself, and, indeed, having shared equally with them the anxieties and privations of this prolonged siege. Her letter describes the absolute ruin of all the small tradespeople, whose homes are in many cases demolished. The compensation they will receive for damaged goods will be totally inadequate to cover their loss. Years must pass ere their trade can be restored to the proportions of a livelihood. Meanwhile starvation in the immediate future lies before them. The unfortunate Sisters in the convent have for weeks hardly had a roof over their heads, the Boer shells having more or less destroyed their home. In consequence, their belongings left intact by shot or shell have been ruined by rain.

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The destruction of their small and humble properties, in addition to their discomfort, has added to their misery; and yet no complaining word has passed their lips, but they have throughout cheerfully and willingly assisted the hospital nurses in their duties, always having smiles and encouraging words for the sick and wounded. "Sitting at home in our comfortable houses, it is hard to realize the actual sufferings of these besieged inhabitants of Mafeking. My letter tells me that for months they have not slept in their beds, and although no opposition to the Boer forces in the first instance would have saved their town, their properties, and in many cases their lives, yet they one and all bravely and nobly 'buckled to,' and stood by that gallant commander, Baden-Powell. Loyalty was their cry, and freedom and justice their household gods. Have not their courage and endurance thrilled the whole world? I feel I need not ask forgiveness for issuing yet this one more appeal. It comes last, but is it least? A handful of soldiers, nearly all colonials, under a man who must now rank as a great and tried commander, have for six months repelled the Boer attacks. Could this small force have for one moment been a match for the well-equipped besiegers if the inhabitants had not fought for and with the garrison? Some worked and fought in actual trenches; others demonstrated by patient endurance their cool and courageous determination never to give in. Would it not be a graceful recognition of their courage if, on that glorious day, which we hope may not be far distant, when the relief of Mafeking is flashed across thousands of miles to the 'heart of the Empire,' we could cable back our congratulations on their freedom, and inform Mafeking that a large sum of money is ready to be placed by this country for the relief of distress amongst the Sisters, refugees, and suffering civilians of the town?

"I feel I shall not ask in vain, but that our congratulations to Mafeking will take most material form by generous admirers in the United Kingdom.

"Subscriptions will be received by Messrs. Hoare and Co., bankers, Fleet Street, E.C.

"I remain,  
"Your obedient servant,  
"GEORGIANA CURZON."

The fund had reached unhoped-for proportions. In our most optimistic moments we did not expect to collect more than two or three thousand pounds, but subscriptions had poured in from the very commencement, and the grand amount of L29,267 was finally the total contributed. This sum was ably administered by Colonel Vyvyan of the Buffs, who had been Base-Commandant of Mafeking during the siege. He was assisted by a committee, and the principal items allocated by these gentlemen were as follows:



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Widows and orphans 6,536  
Refugees 4,630  
Town relief 3,741  
Seaside fund 2,900  
Churches, convent, schools, *etc.* 2,900  
Wounded men 2,245  
Small tradesmen 1,765  
Hospital staff, nuns, *etc.* 1,115  
Colonel Plumer's Rhodesian column, *etc.* 1,000

Lady Georgiana Curzon's eloquent appeal proved to be the salvation of many a family in Mafeking.

The popularity of the fund was enormously helped by the interest of the then Prince and Princess of Wales, now our King and Queen, in the town and in the assistance of the same. This interest was evinced by the following letters, given to me later by my sister:

"TREASURER'S HOUSE,  
"YORK  
"June 20, 1900.

MY DEAR LADY GEORGIE.

"The Princess and I thank you very much for sending your sister's letters for us to read. They are most interesting, and admirably written. She has certainly gone through experiences which ought to last her a lifetime! If the papers are correct in stating that you start on Saturday for Madeira to meet her, let me wish you *bon voyage*.

"Ever yours very sincerely,  
"(Signed) ALBERT EDWARD."

The Princess of Wales had already written as follows:

"MY DEAR GEORGIE,

"I saw in yesterday's *Times* your touching appeal for poor, unfortunate, forsaken Mafeking, in which I have taken the liveliest interest during all these months of patient and brave endurance. I have therefore great pleasure in enclosing L100 for the benefit of the poor nuns and other inhabitants. I hope very soon, however, they will be relieved, and I trust poor sister Sarah will be none the worse for all she has gone through during her forced captivity. Many thanks for sending me that beautifully drawn-up report of your Yeomanry Hospital. How well you have explained everything! Hoping to meet soon,



"Yours affectionately,  
"(Signed) ALEXANDRA."[41]

Some fourteen months after my return home a *Gazette* appeared with the awards gained during the early part of the war, and great was my delight to find I had been selected for the coveted distinction of the Royal Red Cross. The King had previously nominated Lady Georgiana Curzon and myself to be Ladies of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, which entitles its members to wear a very effective enamel locket on a black bow; but, next to the Red Cross, the medal which I prize most highly is the same which the soldiers received for service in South Africa, with the well-known blue and orange striped ribbon. This medal was given to the professional nurses who were in South Africa, but I think I was, with one other exception, the only amateur to receive it, and very unworthy I felt myself when I went to St. James's Palace with all the gallant and skilful sisterhood of army nurses to share with them the great honour of receiving the same from His Majesty in person.



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### FOOTNOTES:

[40] Small kettles.

[41] I am allowed to reproduce the foregoing letters by the gracious permission of Their Majesties the King and Queen.

### CHAPTER XVII

THE WORK OF LADY GEORGIANA CURZON, LADY CHESHAM, AND THE YEOMANRY HOSPITAL, DURING THE WAR—THIRD VOYAGE TO THE CAPE, 1902

“Fight the good fight.”

On the pages of history is recorded in golden letters the name and deeds of Florence Nightingale, who, as the pioneer of scientific hospital nursing, did so much to mitigate the horrors of war. Her example was nobly followed half a century later by two other English ladies, who, although they had not to encounter the desperate odds connected with ignorance and old-fashioned ideas which Miss Nightingale successfully combated, did marvellous service by displaying what private enterprise can do in a national emergency—an emergency with which, in its suddenness, gravity, and scope, no Government could have hoped to deal successfully. I must go back to the winter of 1899 to call their great work to mind. War had already been waging some weeks in South Africa when the Government’s proclamation was issued calling for volunteers from the yeomanry for active service at the front, and the lightning response that came to this appeal from all quarters and from all grades was the silver lining shining brightly through the black clouds that hovered over the British Empire during that dread winter. Thus the loyalty of the men of Britain was proven, and among the women who yearned to be up and doing were Lady Georgiana Curzon and Lady Chesham. Not theirs was the sentiment that “men must work and women must weep”; to them it seemed but right that they should take their share of the nation’s burden, and, as they could not fight, they could, and did, work.

Filled with pity for all who were so gallantly fighting at the seat of war, it was the yeomen—called suddenly from peaceful pursuits to serve their country in her day of distress—who claimed their deepest sympathies, and, with the object of establishing a hospital for this force at the front, Lady Georgiana Curzon and Lady Chesham, on December 29, 1899, appealed to the British public for subscriptions. The result far exceeded their expectations, and every post brought generous donations in cash and in kind. Even the children contributed eagerly to the Yeomen’s Fund, and one poor woman gave a shilling towards the cost of providing a bed in the hospital, “in case her son might have to lie on it.” The Queen—then Princess of Wales—allowed herself to be nominated President;



the present Princess of Wales and the Duchess of Connaught gave their names as Vice-Presidents of the Imperial Yeomanry Hospitals. The working committee was composed of the following: Adeline, Duchess of Bedford, the Duchess of Marlborough, the Countesses of Essex and Dudley, the Ladies Chesham and Tweedmouth, Mesdames S. Neumann, A.G. Lucas, Blencowe Cookson, Julius Wernher (now Lady Wernher), and Madame von Andre. Amongst the gentlemen who gave valuable assistance, the most prominent were: Viscount Curzon, M.P. (now Lord Howe), Hon. Secretary; Mr. Ludwig Neumann, Hon. Treasurer; General Eaton (now Lord Cheylesmore); and Mr. Oliver Williams.



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Lady Georgiana Curzon was a born leader, and it was but natural that the capable ladies aforementioned appointed her as their chairman. Passionately devoted to sport though she was, she willingly forsook her beloved hunting-field, leaving a stable full of hunters idle at Melton Mowbray, for the committee-room and the writing-table. The scheme was one fraught with difficulties great and numerous, and not the least amongst them was the "red tape" that had to be cut; but Lady Georgiana Curzon took up the good cause with enthusiasm and ability, and she and her colleagues worked to such purpose that, on March 17, 1900, a base hospital containing over 500 beds (which number was subsequently increased to 1,000), fully equipped, left our shores. So useful did these institutions prove themselves, that as time went on, and the evils of war spread to other parts of South Africa, the committee were asked to inaugurate other hospitals, and, the funds at their disposal allowing of acquiescence, they established branches at Mackenzie's Farm, Maitland Camp, Eastwood, Elandsfontein, and Pretoria, besides a small convalescent home for officers at Johannesburg. Thus in a few months a field-hospital and bearer company (the first ever formed by civilians), several base hospitals, and a convalescent home, were organized by the Imperial Yeomanry Hospitals Committee, who frequently met, with Lady Georgiana Curzon presiding, to discuss ways and means of satisfactorily working those establishments so many thousands of miles away.

The Hospital Commissioners who visited Deelfontein in November, 1900, said it was one of the best-managed hospitals in Africa. A similar opinion was expressed by Colonel A.G. Lucas, M.V.O., when he visited it in the autumn, and this gentleman also reported most favourably on the section at Mackenzie's Farm. Through Colonel Kilkelly, Lord Kitchener sent a message to the committee early in 1901, expressing his admiration of the Pretoria Hospital. In this branch Lady Roberts showed much interest, and, with her customary kindness, rendered it every assistance in her power. At a time when military hospitals were being weighed in the balance, and in some instances found wanting, the praise bestowed on the Yeomanry Institutions was worthy of note. From first to last the various staffs numbered over 1,400 persons, and more than 20,000 patients were treated in the Yeomanry Hospitals whilst they were under the management of Lady Georgiana Curzon and her committee. Although sick and wounded from every force under the British flag in South Africa were taken in, and many Boers as well, a sufficient number of beds was always available for the immediate admittance of patients from the force for which the hospitals were originally created. The subscriptions received for this great national work totalled over L145,300, in addition to a subsidy of L3,000 from the Government for prolonging the maintenance of the field-hospital and bearer company from January



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1 to March 31, 1901. The interest on deposits alone amounted to over L1,635, and when, with the cessation of hostilities, there was, happily, no further need for these institutions, the buildings, *etc.*, were sold for L24,051. The balance which the committee ultimately had in hand from this splendid total of over L174,000 was devoted to the maintenance of a school which had since been established at Perivale Alperton, for the benefit of the daughters of yeomen who were killed or disabled during the war.

There has been ample testimony of the excellent way in which this admirable scheme was created and carried out. Numerous letters, touching in their expressions of gratitude, were received from men of all ranks whose sufferings were alleviated in the Yeomanry Hospitals; newspapers commented upon it at the time, but it is only those who were behind the scenes that can tell what arduous work it entailed, and of how unflinchingly it was faced by the chairman of the committee. Constant interviews with War Office officials, with doctors, with nurses; the hundreds of letters that had to be written daily; the questions, necessary and unnecessary, that had to be answered; the estimates that had to be examined, would have proved a nightmare to anyone not possessed of the keenest intellect combined with the strongest will. It involved close and unremitting attention from morning till night, and this not for one week, but for many months; and yet no detail was ever momentarily shirked by one who loved an outdoor life. Lady Georgiana realized to the full the responsibilities of having this vast sum of money entrusted to her by the British public, and not wisely, but too well, did she devote herself to discharging it.

Her services to the country were as zealous as they were invaluable. By her quick grasp of the details of administration, by the marvellous tact and skill she exercised, and by the energy she threw into her undertaking, every difficulty was mastered. At this present time many hundreds of men, who were ten years ago facing a desperate foe, can reflect gratefully, if sadly, that they owe their lives to the generous and unselfish efforts of a brave woman who is no longer with us; for, after all, Lady Georgiana Curzon was human, and had to pay the price of all she did. Her great exertions seriously told upon her health, as was only to be expected, and long before the conclusion of her strenuous labours she felt their effects, although she ignored them. Lady Chesham was no less energetic a worker, and had as an additional anxiety the fact of her husband and son[42] being both at the front. It was imperative that one of these two ladies, who were responsible for starting the fund, should personally superintend the erection and the opening of the large base hospital at Deelfontein, and as Lady Georgiana Curzon had made herself almost indispensable in London by her adroitness in managing already sorely harassed War Office officials, and in keeping her committee



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unanimous and contented, it was decided that Lady Chesham should proceed to the scene of the war. My sister gladly gave up this stirring role for the more prosaic, but equally important, work in London, and when I returned home, in July, 1900, I found her still completely absorbed by her self-imposed task. Already her health was failing, and overtaxed nature was having its revenge. During the next two years, in spite of repeated warnings and advice, she gave herself no rest, but all the while she cherished the wish to pay a visit to that continent which had been the theatre of her great enterprise. At length, in August, 1902, in the week following the coronation of Their Majesties, we sailed together for Cape Town, a sea-voyage having been recommended to her in view of her refusal to try any of the foreign health-resorts, which might have effected a cure. By the death of her father-in-law, my sister was then Lady Howe, but it will be with her old name of Lady Georgiana Curzon or "Lady Georgie"—as she was known to her intimates—that the task she achieved will ever be associated.

More than seven years had elapsed since my first visit, and nearly twenty-six months from the time I had left South Africa in the July following the termination of the Mafeking siege, when I found myself back in the old familiar haunts. Groot Schuur had never looked more lovely than on the sunny September morning when we arrived there from the mail-steamer, after a tedious and annoying delay in disembarking of several hours, connected with permits under martial law. This delay was rendered more aggravating by the fact that, on the very day of our arrival,[43] the same law ceased to exist, and that our ship was the last to have to submit to the ordeal. Many and sad were the changes that had come to pass in the two years, and nowhere did they seem more evident than when one crossed the threshold of Mr. Rhodes's home. The central figure, so often referred to in the foregoing pages, was no more, and one soon perceived that the void left by that giant spirit, so inseparably connected with vast enterprises, could never be filled. This was not merely apparent in the silent, echoing house, on the slopes of the mountain he loved so well, in the circle of devoted friends and adherents, who seemed left like sheep without a shepherd, but also in the political arena, in the future prospects of that extensive Northern Territory which he had practically discovered and opened up. It seemed as if Providence had been very hard in allowing one individual to acquire such vast influence, and to be possessed of so much genius, and then not to permit the half-done task to be accomplished.

That this must also have been Mr. Rhodes's reflection was proved by the pathetic words he so often repeated during his last illness: "So little done, so much to do."



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Groot Schuur was outwardly the same as in the old days, and kept up in the way one knew that the great man would have wished. We went for the same rides he used to take. The view was as glorious as ever, the animals were flourishing and increasing in numbers, the old lions gazed placidly down from their roomy cage on a ledge of Table Mountain, the peacocks screamed and plumed themselves, and the herd of zebras grazed in picturesque glades. Nothing was changed there to outward appearances, and one had to go farther afield to see evidences of the dismay caused by the pillar being abruptly broken off. Cape Town itself, I soon noted, was altered by the war almost beyond recognition. From the dull and uninteresting seaport town I remembered it when we came there in 1895, it seemed, seven years later, one of the busiest cities imaginable, with the most enormous street traffic. The pavements were thronged, the shops were crowded, and numerous were the smart, khaki-clad figures, bronzed and bearded, that were to be seen on all sides. The Mount Nelson Hotel, which had been opened just before the war, was crowded with them—some very youthful, who had early acquired manhood and selfreliance in a foreign land; others grey-headed, with rows of medal ribbons, dimmed in colour from exposure to all weathers, whose names were strangely familiar as recording heroic achievements.

At that time Sir Gordon Sprigg, of the Progressive Party, was in power and Prime Minister; but he was only kept in office by the Bond, who made the Ministers more or less ridiculous in the eyes of the country by causing them to dance like puppets at their bidding. It was in the House of Assembly—where he was a whale amongst minnows—that the void was so acutely felt surrounding the vacant seat so long occupied by Mr. Rhodes, and it was not an encouraging sight, for those of his supporters who tried to carry on his traditions, to gaze on the sparsely filled ranks of the Progressive Party, and then at the crowded seats of the Bond on the other side.

We were told, by people who had met the Boer Generals on their recent visit to the colony, that these latter were not in the least cast down by the result of the war; that they simply meant to bide their time and win in the Council Chamber what they had lost on the battle-field; that the oft-reiterated sentence, "South Africa for the Dutch," was by no means an extinct volcano or a parrot-cry of the past. It was evident that political feeling was, in any case, running very high; it almost stopped social intercourse, it divided families. To be a member of the Loyal Women's League was sufficient to be ostracized in any Dutch village, the Boers pretending that the name outraged their feelings, and that distinctions between loyal and disloyal were invidious. Federation—Mr. Rhodes's great ideal—which has since come rapidly and triumphantly to be an accomplished fact, was then temporarily relegated to the background;



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the Bond, apparently, had not made up their minds to declare for it, but they were hard at work in their old shrewd way, obtaining influence by getting their own men appointed to vacancies at the post-office and in the railway departments, while the Loyalists appeared to be having almost as bad a time as in the old days before the war. At the present moment, in spite of all the good-will borne to the new Union of South Africa by great and small in all lands where the British flag flies, it is well to remember, without harbouring any grudge, certain incidents of the past. A thorough knowledge of the people which are to be assimilated with British colonists is absolutely necessary, that all may in the end respect, as well as like, each other.

From Cape Town, where my sister transacted a great deal of business connected with the winding-up of the Yeomanry Hospital, we went to Bloemfontein, and were the guests at Government House of my old Mafeking friend, Sir Hamilton Gould Adams, promoted to the important post of Governor of the Orange River Colony. From that town we drove across to Kimberley, taking two days to accomplish this somewhat tedious journey. We stayed one night with a German farmer, who had surrendered to the English when Bloemfontein was occupied by Lord Roberts, and his case was typical of many similar awkward predicaments which occurred frequently during the ups and downs of the war. When Lord Roberts's army swept on from Bloemfontein, the Boers in a measure swept back, and our host was for months persecuted by his own people, finally made a prisoner, and was within an ace of being shot; in fact, it was only the peace that saved his life.

Next day we made our noonday halt at Poplar Grove, the scene of one of Lord Roberts's fights, and farther on we passed Koodoos Rand Drift, where General French had cut off Cronje and forced him back on Paardeberg. All along these roads it was very melancholy to see the ruined farms, some with the impoverished owner in possession, others still standing empty. A Boer farmhouse is not at any time the counterpart of the snug dwelling we know in England, but it was heartbreaking to see these homes as they were at the conclusion of the war, when, in nearly every instance, the roof, window-frames, and doors, were things of the past. When a waggon could be espied standing near the door, and a few lean oxen grazing at hand, it was a sign that the owner had returned home, and, on closer inspection, a whole family of children would probably be discovered sheltered by a tin lean-to fixed to the side of the house, or huddled in a tent pitched close by. They all seemed wonderfully patient, but looked despairing and miserable. At one of these houses we spoke to the daughter of such a family who was able to converse in English. She told us her father had died during the war, that two of her brothers had fought for the English, and had returned with khaki uniforms and nothing else, but that the third had thrown in his lot with the Boers, and had come back the proud possessor of four horses.



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At Kimberley we had motors placed at our disposal by Mr. Gardner Williams, manager of the De Beers Company, and were amused to hear how excited the Kaffirs had been at the first automobile to appear in the Diamond City, and how they had thrown themselves down to peer underneath in order to discover the horse. These motors, however, were not of much use on the veldt, and we soon found Kimberley very dull, and decided to make a flying tour through Rhodesia to Beira, taking a steamer at that port for Delagoa Bay, on our road to Johannesburg. Our first halting-place was at Mafeking, where we arrived one bitterly cold, blowy morning at 6 a.m. I do not think I ever realized, during all those months of the siege, what a glaring little spot it was. When I returned there two years later: the dust was flying in clouds, the sun was blinding, and accentuated the absence of any shade.

Six hours spent there were more than sufficient, and it was astounding to think of the many months that it had been our home. It has often been said, I reflected, that it is the people you consort with, not the place you live at, that constitute an agreeable existence; and of the former all I could find to say was, "Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?" Beyond the Mayor of the town, who called to reiterate warm thanks for the Mafeking Fund, and a nigger coachman who used to take me out for Sunday drives, I failed to perceive one face I knew in the town during the siege; but at the convent we received the warmest welcome from the Mother Superior and the nuns. This community appeared to be in quite affluent circumstances: the building was restored, the chapel rebuilt and plentifully decorated with new images; there was a full complement of day-boarders, who were energetically practising on several pianos, and many new Sisters had made their appearance; upstairs, the room where was located the Maxim gun was filled by thirty snowwhite beds. It was quite refreshing to find one circle who had recovered from their hardships, and who, if anything, were rather more prosperous than before the war. We paid a flying visit to the little cemetery, which was beautifully kept, and where many fairly recent graves were in evidence, chiefly due to enteric fever after the siege. There we particularly noted a very fine marble cross, erected to the memory of Captain Ronald Vernon; and as we were admiring this monument we met an old Kimberley acquaintance in the person of Mrs. Currey, who had been our hostess at the time of the Jameson Raid. Her husband had since died, and this lady was travelling round that part of Africa representing the Loyal Women's League, who did such splendid work in marking out and tending the soldiers' graves.

At Mafeking we picked up the Rhodesian *train de luxe*, and travelled in the greatest comfort to Bulawayo, and on to Salisbury. At that town we met a party, comprising, amongst others, Dr. Jameson and the late Mr. Alfred Beit, who were making a tour of inspection connected with satisfying the many wants of the Rhodesian settlers. These pioneers were beginning to feel the loss of the great man to whom they had turned for everything. His faithful lieutenants were doing their best to replace him, and the role of the first-named, apparently, was to make the necessary speeches, that of the latter to write the equally important cheques.

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With these gentlemen we continued our journey to Beira, stopping at a few places of interest on the way. The country between Salisbury and Beira is flat and marshy, and was, till the advent of the railway, a veritable Zoological Garden as regards game of all sorts. The climate is deadly for man and beast, and mortality was high during the construction of the Beira Railway, which connected Rhodesia with an eastern outlet on the sea. Among uninteresting towns, I think Beira should be placed high on the list; the streets are so deep in sand that carriages are out of the question, and the only means of transport is by small trucks on narrow rails. As may be imagined, we did not linger there, but went at once on board the German steamer, which duly landed us at Lorenzo Marques forty-eight hours later, after an exceedingly rough voyage.

The following day was Sunday, and having been told there was a service at the English Church at 9.30 a.m., we duly went there at that hour, only to find the church apparently deserted, and not a movement or sound emanating therefrom. However, on peeping in at one of the windows, we discovered a clergyman most gorgeously appalled in green and gold, preparing to discourse to a congregation of two persons! Evidently the residents found the climate too oppressively hot for church that Sunday morning.

In the afternoon we were able to see some portions of that wonderful harbour, of worldwide reputation. Literally translated, the local name for the same means the "English River," and it is virtually an arm of the sea, stretching inland like a deep bay, in which three separate good-sized streams find an outlet. Some few miles up these rivers, we were told, grand shooting was still to be had, the game including hippopotami, rhinoceroses, and buffalo, which roam through fever-stricken swamps of tropical vegetation. The glories of the vast harbour of Delagoa Bay can better be imagined than described. In the words of a resident, "It would hold the navies of the world," and some years back it might have been purchased for £12,000. With the war just over, people were beginning to realize how trade and development would be facilitated if this great seaport belonged to the British Empire. A "United Africa" was already looming in the distance, and it required but little imagination on the part of the traveller, calling to mind the short rail journey connecting it with the mining centres of the Transvaal, to determine what a thriving, busy place Lorenzo Marques would then become. During the day the temperature was tropical, but by evening the atmosphere freshened, and was almost invigorating as the fierce sun sank to rest and its place was taken by a full moon. From our hotel, standing high on the cliff above the bay, the view was then like fairyland: an ugly old coal-hulk, a somewhat antiquated Portuguese gunboat, and even the diminutive and unpleasant German steamer which had brought us from Beira, all were tinged with silver and enveloped in romance, to which they could certainly lay no claim in reality.



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Early in the morning of the next day we left for Johannesburg. The line proved most interesting, especially after passing the almost historical British frontier town, Koomati Poort. It winds like a serpent round the mountains, skirting precipices, and giving one occasional peeps of lovely fertile valleys. During a greater part of the way the Crocodile River follows its sinuous course in close proximity to the railway, while above tower rocky boulders. To describe their height and character, I can only say that the steepest Scotch mountains we are familiar with fade into insignificance beside those barren, awe-inspiring ranges, and one was forced to wonder how the English soldiers—not to speak of heavy artillery—could have safely negotiated those narrow and precipitous passes. For the best part of twelve hours our train slowly traversed this wild and magnificent scenery, and evening brought us to Waterfall Onder, where, at the station restaurant, kept by a Frenchman, we had a most excellent dinner, with a cup of coffee that had a flavour of the Paris boulevards. This stopping-place was adjacent to Noitgedacht, whose name recalled the unpleasant association of having been the home, for many weary weeks, of English prisoners, and traces of high wire palings which had been their enclosure were still to be seen. From Waterfall Onder the train puffed up a stupendous hill, the gradient being one foot in twenty, and to assist its progress a cogwheel engine was attached behind. In this fashion a two-thousand-foot rise was negotiated, the bright moonlight enhancing the beauty of the sudden and rocky ascent by increasing the mystery of the vast depths below. We then found ourselves at Waterfall Boven, in a perfectly cool atmosphere, and also, as regards the landscape, in a completely different country, which latter fact we only fully appreciated with the morning light, as we drew near to Pretoria. The stranger landing at Delagoa Bay, and travelling through those bleak and barren mountains, might well ask himself the reason of the late prolonged and costly war; but as he approaches the Rand, and suddenly sees the rows and rows of mining shafts and chimneys, which are the visible signs of the hidden wealth, the veil is lifted and the recent events of history are explained. At that time, owing to the war, there were no signs of agriculture, and in many districts there appeared to be absolute desolation.

At Johannesburg we stayed at Sunnyside, as the guests of Lord Milner. This residence is small and unpretentious, but exceedingly comfortable, and has the advantage of commanding wide views over the surrounding country. Our host was then engrossed in his difficult task of satisfying the wants and desires of many communities and nationalities, whose countless differences of opinion seemed wellnigh irreconcilable. During our stay the visit of the Right Hon. J. Chamberlain was announced as likely to take place during the next few months, and the advent of this distinguished Colonial Minister was a subject of great satisfaction to the harassed High Commissioner. As at Cape Town, his staff was composed of charming men, but all young and with no administrative experience. Among its members were included Colonel W. Lambton, who was Military Secretary; Captain Henley and Lord Brooke, A.D.C.'s; and Mr. Walrond.



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The Golden City itself was, to all outward appearances, as thriving as ever, with its busy population, its crowded and excellent shops, and its general evidences of opulence, which appeared to overbalance—or, in any case, wish to conceal—any existing poverty or distress. Among many friends we met was a French lady, formerly the Marquise d’Herve, but who had married, as her second husband, Comte Jacques de Waru. This enterprising couple were busy developing some mining claims which had been acquired on their behalf by some relatives during the war. In spite of having been deserted at Cape Town by all the servants they had brought from Paris, this clever lady, nothing daunted, had replaced them by blacks, and one night she and her husband offered us, at the small tin-roofed house where they were residing, a sumptuous dinner which was worthy of the best traditions of Parisian hospitality. Notwithstanding the fact of her having no maid, and that she had herself superintended most of the cooking of the dinner, our hostess was charmingly attired in the latest Paris fashion, with elaborately dressed hair, and the pleasant company she had collected, combined with an excellent cuisine, helped to make the entertainment quite one of the pleasantest we enjoyed during our stay. Among the guests was General “Bully” Oliphant, who had just been recalled to England to take up an important appointment, much to the regret of his Johannesburg friends, with whom he had made himself exceedingly popular; and the witty conversation of this gentleman kept the whole dinner-table convulsed with laughing, to such an extent that his colleague-in-arms, our quondam Mafeking commander, General Baden-Powell, who was also of the party, was reduced to mere silent appreciation. This impromptu feast, given under difficulties which almost amounted to siege conditions, was again an evidence of the versatility and inherent hospitality of the French nation, and the memory of that pleasant evening lingers vividly in my recollections.

The duration of our two months’ holiday was rapidly approaching its close. My sister was recalled to England by social and other duties, and was so much better in health that we were deluded into thinking the wonderful air and bracing climate had effected a complete cure. After a short but very interesting visit to the Natal battle-fields, whither we were escorted by General Burn-Murdoch and Captain Henry Guest, we journeyed to Cape Town, and, regretfully turning our backs on warmth and sunshine, we landed once more in England on a dreary December day.

### FOOTNOTES:

[42] Lieutenant the Hon. C.W.H. Cavendish, 17th Lancers, was killed at Diamond Hill, June 11, 1900.

[43] Peace had been declared in the previous June.



## CHAPTER XVIII

FOURTH VOYAGE TO THE CAPE—THE VICTORIA FALLS AND SIX WEEKS  
NORTH OF THE ZAMBESI[44]



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“We propose now to go on and cross the Zambesi just below the Victoria Falls. I should like to have the spray of the water over the carriages.”—*Letter from the Right Hon. C.J. Rhodes to E.S. Grogan, Esq., September 7, 1900.*[45]

These words came to my mind as I sat under the verandah of one of the newly thatched huts which formed the camp of the Native Commissioner at Livingstone, Victoria Falls, on a glorious morning early in July, 1903, gazing at one of the fairest landscapes to be seen on God’s earth. I was ostensibly occupied with my mail home, but the paper lay in all its virgin whiteness before me, while my eyes feasted on the marvellous panorama stretching away to the south, east, and west. My heart sank as I realized how difficult—nay, impossible—it would be for anyone with only a very limited vocabulary and very moderate powers of description to convey to those far away even a limited idea of this glorious vision—of these vivid colourings intensified by the lonely grandeur of the whole scene and the absence of human habitations.

“Constitution Hill,” as the aforesaid camp had been christened, was situated on high ground, four miles to the north of the then drift of the Zambesi River, which, again, was several miles above the actual falls themselves. With the advent of the railway and of the magnificent bridge now spanning the mighty river, that drift has actually fallen into disuse, but at the time of our visit it was the scene of much activity, and quite a nest of stores, houses, and huts, had sprung up near the rough landing-stage on the north side. As transport, not only for individuals and for every ounce of food required by the vast country stretching away to the north, but also for the huge and valuable machinery, boilers, boats in sections, *etc.*, destined for the various mining companies, the only means of maintaining communication with the struggling but promising new colony were one very rickety steam-launch and one large rowing-boat, beside a few canoes and native dug-outs. A fine steam-barge, which would greatly have facilitated the passage of all kinds of merchandise, had most disastrously slipped its moorings during one stormy night of last wet season, and had not since been seen, the presumption being that the relentless stream had carried it to the mighty cataract, which, like a huge ogre, had engulfed it for all time. But this disaster had not caused anything like consternation among the small community to whom it meant so much, and the thought occurred to one how remarkable are the qualities of dogged perseverance, calm disregard of drawbacks and of any difficult task before them, which makes Englishmen so marvellously successful as pioneers or colonists. The precious barge for which they had waited many weary months had disappeared, and there was nothing more to be said. Such means as remained were made the most of.



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Owing to this calamity, however, the stores on the north bank were wellnigh run out of their usual stock, but I was amazed to find such luxuries of life as eau de Cologne, scented soaps, ladies' boots and shoes, and brightly coloured skirts. Leaving the small river township—the embryo Livingstone—we followed a very sandy road uphill till we reached the summit of Constitution Hill, already mentioned. There our buggy and two small, well-bred ponies swept into a smartly-kept compound surrounded by a palisade, the feature of the square being a flagstaff from which the Union Jack was proudly fluttering. As a site for a residence Constitution Hill could not well be surpassed, and many a millionaire would cheerfully have given his thousands to obtain such a view as that which met our eyes from the humble huts, and held me enthralled during the whole of my stay. It must be remembered we had been travelling, since leaving the rail-head, eighty miles north of Bulawayo, through a thickly wooded and mountainous country where any extensive views were rare. Even when nearing the Zambesi, with the roar of the Falls in one's ears, so little opening-up had hitherto been done that only an occasional peep of coming glories was vouchsafed us; hence the first glimpse of a vast stretch of country was all the more striking. I must ask my readers to imagine the bluest of blue skies; an expanse of waving grass of a golden hue, resembling an English cornfield towards the harvest time, stretching away till it is lost in far-distant tropical vegetation of intense green, which green clearly marks the course of the winding Zambesi; again, amid this emerald verdure, patches of turquoise water, wide, smooth, unruffled, matching the heavens in its hue, are to be seen—no touch of man's hand in the shape of houses or chimneys to mar the effect of Nature and Nature's colouring. If you follow with your eyes this calm, reposeful river, now hiding itself beneath its protecting banks with their wealth of branching trees, tall cocoanut palms, and luxuriant undergrowth, now emerging like a huge blue serpent encrusted with diamonds, so brightly does the clear water sparkle in the sun, you note that it finally loses itself in a heavy, impenetrable mass of green forest. And now for a few moments the newcomer is puzzled to account for a dense white cloud, arisen apparently from nowhere, which is resting where the forest is thickest and most verdant, now larger, then smaller, anon denser or more filmy, but never changing its place, never disappearing, while the distant thunder, to which you had almost got accustomed, strikes upon your ear and gives the explanation you are seeking.



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Yes, that white cloud has been there for centuries, and will be there while the world lasts, in spite of trains, bridges, *etc.* It marks the Victoria Falls, and is a landmark for many miles round. How amazed must the great Livingstone and his intrepid followers have been to see this first sign of their grand discovery after their weary march through a country of dense forests and sandy wastes, the natural features of which could not in the least have suggested such marvels as exist in the stupendous river and the water-power to which it gives birth! When mentioning that great explorer—whose name in this district, after a lapse of nearly fifty years, remains a household word among the natives, handed down from father to son—it is a curious fact, and one that should prove a lesson to many travellers from the old world as well as from the new, that only on one tree is he believed to have cut his initials in Africa, and that tree stands on the island in the centre of the Zambesi, the island that bears his name, and that absolutely overhangs and stems the centre of the awe-inspiring cataract.

I must now try in a few words to give a short account of what we saw at the Victoria Falls in July, 1903, when the breath of civilization had scarcely touched them. To-day they are easy of access, and the changes that have been wrought have come so swiftly that, no doubt, recent visitors will scarcely recognize the localities of which I write. I must first ask such to be lenient with me, and to follow me down the sandy road leading from the Constitution Hill Compound to the Controller's Camp on the bank of the river, about two miles nearer the Falls. There were to be seen a collection of huts and offices, where the Controller conducted his important business of food-purveyor to the community, and a Government inspector of cattle had equally arduous duties to perform. I must mention that, owing to disease in the south, cattle were then not allowed to cross the Zambesi, and horses and dogs had to be disinfected before they were permitted to leave the south bank. Their troubles were not even then over, as they had to be swum across the river, and, owing to its enormous width, the poor horses were apt to become exhausted halfway over, and had to be towed the rest of the way, their heads being kept out of the water—an operation attended with a certain amount of risk. It followed that very few horses were crossed over at all, and that these animals in North-Western Rhodesia were at a premium.

From the Controller's Camp I had another opportunity to admire the river itself, just as wonderful in its way as the Falls, and I remember thinking of the delights that might be derived from boating, sailing, or steaming, on its vast surface. Since that day the enterprising inhabitants have actually held regattas on the mighty stream, in which some of the best-known men in the annals of rowing in England have taken part. But seven years ago our river trip was attended with



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mild excitements; the small skiff, carrying our party of six, was an excessively leaky canoe, which had to be incessantly baled out to keep it afloat, and wherein, notwithstanding our efforts, a deep pool of water accumulated, necessitating our sitting with feet tucked under us in Oriental fashion. Hence I cannot say we realized to the full the enjoyments of boating as we know it at home in far less beautiful surroundings, or as others know it there at the present time.

The principal features that struck me were, first, the colossal width of the river. As we gazed across the translucent surface, reflecting as in a looking-glass the fringe of trees along the edge, the first impression was that your eyes actually perceived the opposite bank; but we were undeceived by one of the residents, who observed that was only an island, and that there were several such between us and the north side. Secondly, we marvelled at the clearness of the water, reflecting the blueness above; and, thirdly, at the rich vegetation and the intense green of the overhanging foliage, where the graceful and so rarely seen palms of the Borassus tribe were growing to an immense height. All was enhanced by the most intense solitude, which seemed to accentuate the fact that this scene of Nature was indeed as God left it. These reflections were made as we floated on in our rickety canoe to a creek, where we landed to walk to the actual Falls. A new path had just been cut in the wooded part of the north bank, and we were almost the first visitors to profit by it. Formerly the enterprising sight-seers had to push their way through the scrubby undergrowth, but we followed a smooth track for two miles, the roar of the cataract getting louder and louder, with only occasional peeps of the river, which was fast losing its calm repose and degenerating into restless rapids hurrying on to their bourne. Now and then a buck would dance across our path, pause affrighted for an instant at the unusual sight of man, and bound away again into the thickness beyond; and once three fine wart-hogs almost stumbled into our party, only to gallop away again like greyhounds, before the rifles, which were carried by the black boys behind, could be made use of.

At last we emerged suddenly, without any warning, on the northern extremity of the cataract, which at this point measures over a mile from bank to bank, but of which only about a quarter of that distance is visible, owing to the blinding spray. It is wellnigh impossible to describe a scene of such wonder, such wildness. It is awe-inspiring, almost terrible in its force and majesty, and the accompanying din prevents speech from being heard. Standing on a point flush with the river before it makes its headlong leap, we gazed first on the swirling water losing itself in snowy spray, which beat relentlessly on face and clothes, while the great volume was nosily disappearing to unknown and terrifying depths. The sight-seer



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tries to look across, to strain his eyes and to see beyond that white mist which obscures everything; but it is an impossible task, and he can but guess the width of the Falls, slightly horseshoe in shape, from the green trees which seem so far away on the opposite bank, and are only caught sight of now and then as the wind causes the spray to lift. At the same time his attention is fixed by a new wonder, the much-talked-of rainbow. Never varying, never changing, that perfect-shaped arc is surely more typical of eternity there than anywhere else. Its perfection of colours seems to be reflected again and yet again in the roaring torrent, and to be also an emblem of peace where all is turmoil. We were hurried away to remove our wet rainproof coats and to dry our hats and faces in the brilliant sunshine. It seemed as if the Falls guard their beauties jealously, and do not allow the spectator to gaze on them without paying the price of being saturated by their spray. For the next two hours we were taken from one point of vantage to the other, and yet felt we had not seen half of even what is known as the north side. We were shown the barely commenced path leading right away down to the edge of the foaming, boiling gorge, which is to be known as "The Lovers' Walk," and from its steepness it occurred to me that these same lovers will require to possess some amount of endurance. We examined from afar the precipitous Neck jutting right out opposite the main cataract, its sides running sheer down to unfathomable depths of water, which has caused this rocky formation to be called "The Knife's Edge," and along which, up to the date of our visit, only two men had ventured. We saw the actual site for the existing railway-bridge, which site had only been finally selected a few days before by two of the party who were with us.[46] The travellers over this great work now see all we saw on that long morning, and a great deal more besides, while the carriage windows are soused by the all-pervading spray, thus carrying out one of Mr. Rhodes's cherished sentiments. Finally—musing at the marvellous and confusing twists and turns of the river, changing in character and appearance so as to be wellnigh unrecognizable—we walked on a hundred yards, and came upon a deep, deep gorge, rocky, barren, and repelling, at the bottom of which, sluggish and dirty in colour, a grey stream was winding its way, not a hundred yards wide, but of unfathomable depths; and this represented the Zambesi *after* it has taken its great leap, when, bereft of all life and beauty, it verily looks tired out. This gorge continues for forty miles, and so desolate is the surrounding country, that not only is it uninhabited by man, but even game cannot live there. The shadows were lengthening and the day was approaching its close. Early on the morrow we were to leave for the northern hunting grounds. We regained our canoe, and paddled away to our temporary camp.



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Again we were delighted with the calm beauty of that river scene, and found it difficult to decide when it was most beautiful—whether the morning light best gilded its glories or whether the evening lent additional calm. We passed island after island in bewildering succession. Away towards the drift three huge black masses were splashing in the water, which we easily made out to be hippopotami taking their evening bath, and as we glided along a sleepy crocodile slipped back into the water from a muddy eminence where it had been basking in the sun. Then our canoe ran into a creek where leaves and ferns grew in delightful confusion, and we landed in soft marshy ground just as the sun was sinking like a red ball into the river, and giving way to the sovereignty of a glorious full moon, which soon tinged everything with a silver light, making glades of palms look delightfully romantic.

Civilization has since found its way to Livingstone. Engines are whistling and trains are rumbling where then the only tracks were made by the huge hippos and the shy buck, but they can never efface the grandeur of the river in its size and calmness; the incomparable magnificence of the cataract itself; the rainbow, which one cannot see without retaining a lasting impression of its beauty; and, lastly, that cloud of white spray, seemingly a sentinel to watch over the strength and might of the huge river, for so many ages undiscovered.

Many who knew the Falls in their pristine solitude have gladly welcomed there the advent of twentieth-century developments, of sign-posts, of advertisements, of seats, of daily posts and papers; but others, some of the older pioneers, still, perchance, give a passing sigh for the days when they paddled about the river in a leaky canoe, and letters and telegrams were not events of everyday occurrence.

In spite of the railway constructed since our visit, few people, comparatively, have been to North-Western Rhodesia, and yet it is a country of over 400,000 square miles. It was in October, 1897, that the then administrator of the country,[47] with five policemen, crossed the Zambesi and declared the territory to be under the protection of Her Late Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria. For many years previously the natives, who are not of a particularly warlike disposition, had been decimated, and the country laid waste, by the fierce Matabele, who were in the habit of making periodical raids into this fair land, and of killing the old men and the young warriors, who made but a slight resistance; of annexing the attractive ladies as wives and the fat cattle as prized booty, and then of retreating again south of the mighty river without fear of reprisals. For this reason there was, in 1903, a very meagre population for many hundreds of miles north of the Zambesi in this direction; and of cattle, for which there is pasture in abundance, there was hardly one to be seen. One has to travel much farther north and west to find the densely populated valleys, whose inhabitants own Lewanika, Chief of the Barotse, as their ruler, who look to the great white British King as their protector, and to the Chartered Company as the immediate purveyor of their wants.



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Of these natives the chief tribes are, first, the Barotse themselves, who are the most numerous, and who inhabit the low-lying country along the Zambesi Valley north of Sesheke, and up to Lia-Lui, their capital.

The second in importance are the Mushukulumbwe, which, translated literally, means "naked people." This designation was given them as a reproach by their friends, as the male element wear no clothes; and should they possess a blanket, they would only throw it round their shoulders whilst standing still or sitting down. When remonstrated with by the well-meaning missionaries on the absence of any attire, they are wont to reply: "Are we women or children, that we should fear the cold? Our fathers needed no clothes, nor do we." They are keen hunters and trackers, essentially a warlike people, tall and good-looking, while the women also are of more than average height, and gracefully made. What the men lack in clothes they make up for in their head-dress, which has been so often illustrated, and which is sometimes 5 feet in height. It is the result of much care and trouble, and the cause of great pride to the wearer. Ruled over by a number of small chiefs, they mostly own Lewanika as their paramount chief, and to him they pay tribute. They are withal a curious, wild kind of people, but are now becoming less afraid of, and in consequence less hostile to, the white man, the first of whose race they saw in 1888, when Mr. Selous<sup>[48]</sup> penetrated into their country, and very nearly lost his life at their hands. Now they are well-disposed, and it is safe to travel through their land with a comparatively small escort.

Thirdly, the Batokas. These are, and always have been, a servile race. They are lazy in disposition, for the most part of unprepossessing appearance, and their country has the Kafue River on the east, and the Zambesi on the south, as natural boundaries. As carriers they do fairly well, and, while also owning Lewanika's authority, they are well aware of the fact that this chief only rules in virtue of the support of the "Great King" in a far-off land, whom they often hear of, but can never hope to see.

In consequence of having lived for so many generations in terror of being raided by their more bellicose neighbours, all these tribes acclaimed with joy the advent of their English protectors, and their demeanour is strikingly expressive of gratitude and respect. This is evinced by their native greeting, which consists of sitting down and clapping their hands together in a slow rhythm whenever a white man passes. Sometimes a traveller hears this clapping proceeding out of the immensely high and thick grass which encloses the road, and he is by this sound alone made aware of the presence of a human being. Their food consists entirely of grain, which they greatly prefer to meat, even when this is offered to them. They boil this grain, which resembles millet or canary seed, into a sort of porridge, which they eat with the greatest gusto, and one meal a day seems to suffice them.



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And now to describe the fatherland of these natives, just emerging as it is from darkness and strife to prosperity, peace, and, quite possibly, riches beyond the dreams of avarice, but in any case riches, sufficiently proved to enable it to take its place ere long among the treasure-producing territories of God's earth. Once north of the Zambesi, and with the thunder of those magnificent Falls still ringing in one's ears, two things were evident even to the most casual traveller—viz., the changed aspect of the country and of its inhabitants. Of the latter and of their quaint greeting I have already spoken. And as regards the road itself and the surrounding landscape there is a still greater change. Instead of a track of deep sand blocked with huge stones or by veritable chasms of soft, crumbling earth, one finds there good roads, while numerous streams of clear running water constantly intersect the highway. In England it is difficult to realize the inestimable boon this plentiful supply of water is to the traveller and his beasts, who are thereby saved the very serious necessity of frequently having to push on, weary and thirsty, another stretch of eight or ten miles, simply because of the oft-heard cry, "No water." The scenery itself is fair and restful to the eye; there are no huge mountains, no precipitous dongas, yet an ever-changing kaleidoscope which prevents any monotony. Now the road winds for several miles through woods and some small trees; again, these are left behind, and the traveller emerges on plains of yellow waving grass (so high as to hide both horse and rider), resembling from afar an English barleyfield, and broken up by clumps of symmetrically arranged trees. In these clumps the tropical euphorbia sends up its long and graceful shoots, reminding one of Gargantuan candelabra, and the huge "baobab," of unwieldy bulk, seems to stand as the sentinel stretching out its bare arms to protect those who shelter beneath. These trees are the great feature of the country, owing to the enormous size they attain, and to the fact that, being the slowest-growing trees known, their ages can only be reckoned by thousands of years. Except these kings of the forest, the trees indigenous to the land are somewhat dwarfed, but cacti of all kinds flourish, clinging to and hanging from the branches of the mahogany and of the "m'pani" trees, looking now and then for all the world like long green snakes. The "m'hoba-hoba" bush, with its enormous leaves, much loved by the elephant, forms patches of vivid green summer and winter. This shrub is supposed to have been introduced by the Phoenicians, when these wonderful people were occupied with their mineral workings in this land, the remains of which are to be seen in many places. In the grass itself, and round the edge of these groups so artistically assorted by the hand of Nature, lies slyly hidden the "wait-a-bit" bush,[49] according to the literal translation from the Dutch, whose thorny entanglements no one can gauge unless fairly caught.



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During July and August, which is mid-winter, the grass plains are set on fire, in parts purposely, but sometimes accidentally. They are usually left intact near the road, for transport oxen find plenty of pasture in the coarse high grass which no other animal will touch; but the seeker after game will burn miles and miles of this grass when it is sufficiently dry at the roots. It has acted as a sheltering mantle for its four-footed population for many months, and now the “hunters’ moon” is fairly risen and the buck must beware. Therefore, if one leaves the road for two or three miles to the right or left, vast black plains are discovered, on which only about a fortnight after burning a very vivid green, and, it is said, a very sweet, grass springs up, which game of all sorts greatly love. Here they graze in herds morning and evening, and here probably they meet their death—but of this more anon. It took our party ten days to reach Kalomo,[50] then the capital of North-Western Rhodesia. This included a six days’ halt in quest of game on a rocky kopje eight miles off the road—a veritable Spion Kop, rising from a flat country and commanding views for miles round.

As regards travelling, I can only say it was very comfortable as we did it. Riding ourselves, our baggage (divided into loads each weighing about 30 pounds) was carried by natives, who generally preceded us out of camp. The day’s journey was divided as follows: Up before the sun, and dressing by the uncertain light of a candle lantern. It was cold enough to render no dawdling possible, and one hurried one’s toilet in order to get to the already brightly burning fire and steaming hot coffee. The sun would just then be showing its red head in the far east, and already the camp was in commotion; tents were being struck, bedding rolled up, while a certain amount of scrambling would be going on amongst the cunning blacks, each wishing to possess himself of the lightest load. To prevent shirking, one or two of the native police who accompanied us watched the proceeding with lynx-like eyes, and, amid much arguing, chattering, and apparent confusion, a long line of carriers would emerge like a black snake from the camping-ground into an orderly string—quaint figures, some of them wrapped in gaudy blankets, and even then shivering in the keen morning air; some with their load on their heads, others carrying it on long sticks, all with the inevitable native vessel, fashioned from a gourd, containing their daily ration of grain. As a supplement to these carriers, we were also accompanied by the (in Africa) familiar “Scotch cart.” In other words, this is a strong cart on two wheels, drawn by bullocks, and its usual pace is about two and a half miles an hour. It apparently possesses the delightful qualification of being able to travel on any road, no matter how rough, without breaking down or turning over; in fact, when travelling by road in Africa, it facilitates matters as much as the employment of a charwoman oils the wheels in an English household, and it is therefore as much to be recommended.



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We ride for an hour or so with coats tightly buttoned up, blue noses, and frozen fingers—for the hoar-frost still lingers on the ground—but the air is delightfully exhilarating, and we know that we shall not have to complain of the cold long. By degrees the sun makes itself felt, and we discard first one wrap and then another, till by ten o'clock even light overcoats are not required. And now it is time to “off-saddle” and breakfast. The carriers straggle in more or less in the order they left, but they gladly “dump” down their loads, and before many minutes the fire is burning and the breakfast frizzling. After breakfast comes the midday rest of two or three hours, beguiled by some ancient newspapers or some dust-begrimed book. It is remarkable that, when far away from home, the date of a newspaper is of little import, while none are voted dull, and one finds oneself reading the most obscure publications, and vaguely wondering how or why they reached this distant land. At two o'clock marching orders come again. This is the hot trek, but there is generally a cool breeze to temper the fierce rays of the winter's sun; and when that sun gets low down on to the horizon, and becomes a crimson ball, tingeing the world with its rosy hue, we look about for our evening resting-place. During our journey to Kalomo, as well as on our southward route a month later, we enjoyed the light of a glorious moon, whose assistance to the traveller cannot be exaggerated when the short twilight is remembered. By the moon we frequently made our camp, by the moon we dined. Those were never-to-be-forgotten evenings, spent on that lonely veldt all bathed in silver light. We also had excitements—much lions' spoor on the roads by day, many scares of lions round the camps by night, when the danger is that the horses may be taken while the camp is asleep. Every evening our animals were put into a “skerm,” or high palisade, constructed of branches by the ubiquitous carriers with marvellous rapidity.

One dark night before the moon had risen, just as we had finished dinner and were sitting round the fire listening to thrilling stories of sport and adventure, a terrific noise suddenly disturbed our peaceful circle—a noise which proceeded from a dark mass of thick bush not 200 yards away, and recalled one's childish recollections of “feeding-time” at the Zoo. Not one, but five or six lions, might have been thus near to us from the volume of growls and snarls, varied by short deep grunts, which broke the intense stillness of the night in this weird fashion. Each man rushed for his rifle, but it was too dark to shoot, and gradually the noise died away. The natives opined it was a slight difference of opinion between some wolves and a lion, which animals, curiously enough, very often hunt in company, the lion doing the killing, and the wolf prowling along behind and picking up the scraps. It was but an incident, but it served as an uncanny reminder of the many eyes



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of the animal world, which, though unseen, are often watching travellers in these solitudes. Another night, when we were encamped in the very heart of a rumoured "lion country," ourselves and our beasts securely protected by an unusually high and thick "skerm," we were, to our regret, left undisturbed; but the aforementioned Scotch cart, which rumbled away from the sleeping camp about midnight, had a series of adventures with *Leo felis*. Sniffing the fat oxen, no less than three lions followed the waggon all night, charging close up at times, and finally causing the oxen to stampede, in consequence of which, instead of finding the precious vehicle, containing grain for carriers and forage for horses, at the next outspan, we did not come up with it till evening, nearly thirty miles farther on, when we learnt the adventures it had had.

The truth regarding lion-shooting in these parts is, that the animals are exceedingly difficult to locate, and the finding of them is a matter of pure luck. The traveller may, of course, meet a lion on the road by broad daylight; but many experienced hunters, who count their slain lions by the dozen, will tell you they were years in the country before they ever saw the kings of beasts, and these are men who do not belittle the danger incurred in hunting them. One old hunter is supposed to have said to an enthusiastic newcomer, who had heard of a lion in the vicinity, and immediately asked the old stager if he were going after it: "I have not lost any lions, therefore I am not looking for any"; but, all the same, to kill one or more fine specimens will ever remain the summit of the ambition of the hunter, and unquestionably the spice of danger is one of the attractions.

At the time of which I write the township of Kalomo consisted of about twenty white people, including the Administrator, his secretary and staff; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Accountant, who controlled the purse; a doctor, whose time was fairly well taken up; an aspiring light of the legal profession, who made and interpreted the laws; and, finally, the gallant Colonel and officers of the North-Western Rhodesia Native Police, a smart body of 380 natives, officered by eleven or twelve Englishmen. To Colonel Colin Harding, C.M.G., was due the credit of recruiting and drilling this smart corps, and it was difficult to believe that these soldierly-looking men, very spruce in their dark blue tunics and caps, from which depend enormous red tassels, were only a short time ago idling away their days in uninviting native kraals.

I was much impressed in a Kalomo house with the small details of a carefully arranged dinner-table, adorned with flowers and snowy linen; the cooking was entirely done by black boys, and of these the "Chinde" boys from the Portuguese settlements are much sought after, and cannot be excelled as cooks or servants, so thoroughly do the Portuguese understand the training of natives. The staple meat was buck of all kinds;



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sheep were wellnigh unknown, oxen were scarce and their meat tough; but no one need grumble at a diet of buck, wild-pig, koran,[51] guinea-fowl, and occasionally wild-duck. As regards other necessities of life, transport difficulties were enormous; every ounce of food besides meat, and including precious liquids, had then to be dragged over nearly 250 miles of indifferent roads; and not only groceries, but furniture, roofs of houses, clothes—all had to be ordered six to eight months before they were required, and even then disappointments occurred in the way of waggons breaking down, of delays at the rail-head and at the crossing of the river. To us who are accustomed to the daily calls of the butcher, the baker, and the grocer, the foresight which had to be exercised is difficult to realize, and with the best management in the world great philosophy was required to put up with the minor wants.

As to the climate of North-Western Rhodesia in the dry season—which lasts from April or May to November, or even later—it is ideal. Never too hot to prevent travelling or doing business in the heat of the day, it is cold enough morning and evening to make fur coats by no means superfluous; rain is unknown, and of wind there is just enough to be pleasant, although now and then, especially towards sunset or before dawn, a very strong breeze springs up from a cloudless horizon, lasts about thirty minutes, making the trees bend and tents flap and rattle, and then dies away again as suddenly as it has come. Sometimes, in the early morning, this breeze is of an icy coldness, and might be blowing straight from the South Pole. During the dry season the traveller should not contract fever, unless he happens to have the germs in his system, and in this case he may have been immune the whole wet season, and then the first cold weather brings out the disease and lays him low.

I must now devote a few words to the veldt and to its animal life as we learnt to know it during some delightful weeks spent in camp eight miles from the township, where game was then still abundant. There we lived in comfortable tents, and our dining-room was built of grass held in place by substantial sticks. The delight of those days is fresh in my memory. Up and on our horses at dawn, we would wander over this open country, intersected with tracks of forest. The great charm was the uncertainty of the species of game we might discover. It might be a huge eland, or an agile pig, or a herd of beautiful zebra. Now and then a certain amount of stalking was required, and on one occasion a long ride round brought us to the edge of a wood, from whence we viewed at twenty yards a procession of wildebeeste—those animals of almost mythical appearance, with their heads like horses and their bodies like cattle—roan antelope, and haartebeeste; but as a rule, the game having been so little shot at, with an ordinary amount of care the hunter can ride to within shooting distance



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of the animal he would fain lay low. Should they take fright and be off, we found to gallop after them was not much use, owing to the roughness of the veldt and the smallness of the ponies. Occasionally we had to pursue a wounded animal, and one day we had an exciting chase after a wildebeeste, the most difficult of all bucks to kill, as their vitality, unless absolutely shot through the heart, is marvellous. When we at last overtook and finished off the poor creature, we had out-distanced all our "boys," and it became necessary for my fellow-sportsman to ride off and look for them (as the meat had to be cut up and carried into camp), and for me to remain behind to keep the aasvogels from devouring the carcass. These huge birds and useful scavengers, repulsive as they are to look at, always appear from space whenever a buck is dead, and five minutes suffices for a party of them to be busily employed, while a quarter of an hour later nothing is left but the bones. Therefore I was left alone with the dead wildebeeste and with the circling aasvogels for upwards of two hours, and I realized, as I had never done before, the intense loneliness of the veldt, and something of what the horror must be of being lost on it. Even residents have to dread this danger.

At that season the veldt boasted of few flowers, but birds were plentiful, especially the large ones I have mentioned as forming a valuable addition to the daily menu, and flocks of guinea-fowl, which run along the ground making a peculiar chuckling noise, rarely flying, but very quick at disappearing in the long grass. The quaint secretary-bird was often to be seen stalking majestically along, solitary and grotesque, with its high marching action. Then the honey-birds must not be forgotten. They give voice to their peculiar note as soon as they see a human being, whom they seem to implore to follow them; and if they succeed in attracting attention, they fly from tree to tree reiterating their call, till they lead the man whose assistance they have sought to the spot where the honey is hidden, but which they cannot reach unaided. As a rule, it is the natives who take the trouble to obey their call and turn it to account.

The weeks slipped by all too quickly, and it was soon time to bid farewell to Kalomo and its game-haunted flats, over which the iron horse now winds its prosaic course on its way to the dim, mysterious North, bringing noise and bustle in its train. In consequence the hunter and the animal-lover have to travel farther on, but there will always be room for all on that vast continent.



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No matter what paths of life it may be the fortune of my readers to tread, let me recommend those wearied with social bustle and the empty amenities of present-day existence to pass a few weeks in the comparative solitude of several pleasant companions “under the stars” in North-Western Rhodesia, where they can still catch a glimpse of the elusive zebras, with coats shining in the sun like burnished steel, and hear the persistent call of the honey-bird. At night the roar of lions may now and then cause them to turn in their sleep, and in their dreams they may have visions of the animals that have charmed them during the day—the stately eland, the graceful roan and sable antelopes, the ungainly wildebeeste, and the funny old wart-hog, trotting along with high action and tail erect. Besides gaining health and experiencing the keenest enjoyment, they will know some of the pleasures vouchsafed to those of their countrymen whose fate it is to live, and sometimes to die, in far-off climes—men who have helped to make England famous, and are now, step by step, building up our mighty Empire. Curious are the lives these men, and many like them, lead, cut off as it were from the bustling, throbbing world. A handful of white men, surrounded by thousands of blacks, with calm complacency they proceed, first to impress on the natives the importance, the might, and the justice, of the great Empire which they represent in their various capacities; then to establish beyond question their own dignity and wisdom; and finally to make themselves as comfortable, and their surroundings as attractive and homelike, as possible, with such means as they can command. They are to be seen superintending a court of justice, looked up to and trusted by the natives, who have quickly found out that the “boss” is just, firm, and that he will not believe a falsehood. The blacks have their native names for all these officials, most of them showing great discernment, and some of quite an affectionate nature.

The Commissioners, whose work is entirely among the native population, requiring the greatest tact and patience, besides a perfect knowledge of the language, lead, perhaps, the most arduous, as well as the most lonely, existences. Most of the year is occupied in making tours of inspection through their vast districts; they live continually in the open, in constant contact with Nature, and for weeks together they never see a white man. Almost unattended, they move fearlessly in little-known places, among an uncivilized if friendly people, and to some extent they have their lives in their hands. And yet they do not regard their solitary existence as anything to occasion surprise or admiration; they realize the importance of their mission, and wet seasons, bad attacks of fever, and impaired health, do not quench their energy or their keenness for the great work of development. It is true, indeed, that one and all live in anticipation of the biennial holiday, of the seven months spent



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“at home,” and that all events in their lives are dated from those precious days in England; and then, when the time comes to return to duty, they probably depart without a murmur, and very few, if any, would exchange a life in an office, or that of any ordinary profession in England, for the one, untrammelled and free, they lead in the wilds of Africa. As distractions in this life which they love, they can only look to the weekly mail and the goodly supply of illustrated papers from home, the attentive perusal of which has made them almost as conversant as the veriest Cockney with all the people of note and the fair women of the time, besides giving them an intimate knowledge of passing events. As hosts they are perfection, and all they have is at their guests’ disposal. Their incentive to the great work for ever going on, not only in their district, but in so many far-away localities where the Union Jack flies, is the knowledge that the dark clouds of oppression, plunder, and crime, are, in consequence of their efforts, rolling away as mists disappear before the rising sun.

### FOOTNOTES:

[44] Some parts of this chapter appeared in the Christmas number of the *Pall Mall Magazine*, 1903, and in the *Bulawayo Chronicle* of the same date.

[45] Introduction to Mr. Grogan’s work, “From the Cape to Cairo.”

[46] Sir Charles Metcalfe, Bart., consulting engineer of the Chartered Company, and Mr. G. Pauling, contractor for the same company.

[47] R.T. Coryndon, Esq.

[48] “Life and Adventures in South-East Africa,” by F.C. Selous.

[49] *Wacht-eeen-bietze*.

[50] The seat of government has since been transferred to Livingstone, on the Zambesi.

[51] A kind of pheasant.

### APPENDIX I

#### MAFEKING RELIEF FUND

*Distribution Committee.*

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL C.B. VYVYAN, Commandant of Mafeking.



MR. C.G. BELL, Resident Magistrate.

MR. A.H. FREND, Mayor.

Total amount made available for distribution L29,267

Of which the Committee allotted to: L

Widows and orphans 6,536

Refugees 4,630

Town relief 3,741

Seaside Fund 2,900

Churches, convent, schools, *etc.* 2,900

Wounded men 2,245

Small tradesmen 1,765

Hospital staff, nuns, *etc.* 1,115

Colonel Plumer's Rhodesian Column, *etc.* 1,000

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L26,832

*June 6, 1909.*

The "Rainy Day Fund," formed from the balance of the Relief Fund, still exists, and though the amount now in it is small, it is sufficient to enable the Trustees (Mayor of Mafeking and Civil Commissioner) to make occasional grants in cases of distress among those who suffered during the siege, or who have fallen on evil days since.



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MAFEKING FUND, 1900.

L

Collected by Lady Georgiana Curzon 24,000

Collected by Colonel Baden-Powell's school comrades at Charterhouse (in addition to gifts in kind) 1,150

Collected by Lady Snagge (L643) and *Birmingham Argus* (L350) for sending nurses, women, and children, to seaside 993

The following sent over L100 each:

Conservative Club, Liverpool.

Melbourne Club.

Luton.

Mr. Butler, of Wellington, New Zealand.

Tunbridge Wells Imperial Association.

Right Hon. C.J. Rhodes.

Swansea, Wales.

Salisbury, Mashonaland.

Mr. J. Garlick, of Cape Town.

Mayor of Brighton.

Raleigh Club, London.

Ilfracombe.

Mr. William Nicol.

Sent by Lord Mayor of London from Mansion House Fund 200

Mr. Leonard Rayne, theatrical impresario, of South Africa, inaugurated the "Rayney Day Fund," with a view to ultimate calls for relief by members of the garrison in years to come.

## APPENDIX II

IMPERIAL YEOMANRY HOSPITALS, 1900-1902.

December 29, appeal signed by Lady Georgiana Curzon and Lady Chesham sent from Blenheim Palace.

*President:* THE QUEEN.

*Vice-Presidents:* THE PRINCESS OF WALES and DUCHESS OF CONNAUGHT.

*Chairman of Committee:* COUNTESS HOWE.



*Vice-Chairmen of Committee:* COUNTESS OF WARWICK and VISCOUNTESS VALENTIA.

*Hon. Secretary:* EARL HOWE.

*Treasurer:* LUDWIG NEUMANN, ESQ.

*Military Adviser:* MAJOR-GENERAL LORD CHEYLESMORE.

*Hon. Civilian Director and Treasurer in South Africa:* J.G. HAMILTON, ESQ.

&nb

sp;

L s. d.

Subscriptions received between issue of first appeal and issue of interim report in April, 1900, L127,000. During the whole time the subscriptions (including the first) totalled 145,325 15 7

Sale of base hospital realized 15,000 0 0

Government subsidy for prolonging maintenance of field-hospital and bearer company, January 1 to March 31, 1901 3,000 0 0

Sale of Elandsfontein Hospital 9,051 9 6

Bankers' interest to December 31, 1901                      1,635 12 9

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L174,012 17 10

From first to last, various staffs numbered over 1,400 persons, and 20,000 patients received medical aid in the different Yeomanry Hospitals.

When the staff returned to England, medals were presented to them at Devonshire House by the Queen.

DEELFONTEIN BASE HOSPITAL: Opened March 5, 1900; closed March 31, 1901. Originally with 500 beds, subsequently increased to 1,000 beds. 6,093 in-patients, including 351 officers, were treated there.



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MACKENZIE'S FARM, MAITLAND CAMP, BASE HOSPITAL: Opened August 2, 1900; closed March 31, 1901. Originally with 100 beds, subsequently increased to 150. 1,066 patients treated.

EASTWOOD, PRETORIA, BASE HOSPITAL: Opened August 18, 1900; closed September 30, 1901. Originally with 400 beds, subsequently increased to 564 beds. 5,227 in-patients, including 466 officers, and 1,095 out-patients, treated.

ELANDSFONTEIN BASE HOSPITAL: Opened June 29, 1901; closed December 19, 1901. Originally with 50 beds, subsequently increased to 138 beds. 823 in-patients, including 27 officers, and 900 out-patients, treated.

CHESHAM CONVALESCENT HOME AT JOHANNESBURG (for Officers only): Opened March 1, 1901; closed October 10, 1901. 8 beds. 79 patients received.

FIELD-HOSPITAL AND BEARER COMPANY, with 100 beds, left England in March, 1900; opened at the seat of war in South Africa on April 12, 1900; closed April 1, 1901, having remained three months longer than was originally arranged for. Subsidy of £3,000 received from Government for this purpose.

### IMPERIAL YEOMANRY HOSPITALS.

#### *General Committee:*

Ninety ladies, whose names are given in the first volume of the Imperial Yeomanry Hospitals Report.

#### *General Working Committee:*

Lady Georgiana Curzon (Chairman).

Adeline, Duchess of Bedford.

The Duchess of Marlborough.

The Countess of Dudley.

The Countess of Essex.

The Ladies Tweedmouth and Chesham (went to Deelfontein in early days of Imperial Yeomanry Hospitals).

Mrs. S. Neumann.

Mrs. A.G. Lucas.

Mrs. Blencowe Cookson.

Mrs. Julius Wernher (now Lady Wernher).

Madame von Andre.

#### *Finance Committee:*

Viscount Curzon, M.P. (now Earl Howe).

Mr. Ludwig Neumann.

Adeline, Duchess of Bedford.



Lady Chesham.  
Lady Georgiana Curzon.

*Press Committee:*

The Countess of Dudley.  
The Countess of Essex.  
Madame von Andre.  
The Duchess of Marlborough.  
Lady Georgiana Curzon.

*Transport Committee:*

Lady Tweedmouth. }  
Mrs. Julius Wernher. } Assisted by Major Haggard  
Mrs. S. Neumann. } and General Eaton.  
Mrs. A.G. Lucas. }  
Lady Georgiana Curzon. }

*Gifts and Purchase Committee:*

The Countess of Essex. }  
Lady Tweedmouth. } Assisted by General  
Mrs. A. G. Lucas. } Eaton, Colonel Sloggett  
Mrs. S. Neumann. } and Mr. Fripp, and  
Lady Georgiana Curzon. } Mr. Oliver Williams.

*Medical, Nursing, and General Staffs Committee:*

The Duchess of Marlborough. }  
Adeline, Duchess of Bedford. } Assisted by General  
The Countess of Warwick. } Eaton, Colonel Sloggett  
Lady Chesham. } and Mr. A. Downing  
Madame von Andre. } Fripp.  
Lady Georgiana Curzon. }

The chief workers in Ireland were: The Countess of Longford, Lady Annette La Touche, and Mrs. Pirrie; but they were only on the General Committee, not on any of the subcommittees.

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**THE END**