

Ladysmith eBook

Ladysmith

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ON THE EDGE

Newcastle, Natal, *Thursday, October 5, 1899.*

Late last Sunday night I found myself slowly crawling towards the front from Pretoria in a commandeered train crammed full of armed Boers and their horses. I had rushed from the Cape to quiet little Bloemfontein, the centre of one of the best administered States in the world, where the heads of the nation in the intervals of discussing war proudly showed me their pianos, their little gardens, little libraries of English books, little museums of African beasts and Greek coins, and all their other evidences of advancing culture. Then on to Pretoria, the same kind of a town on a larger and richer scale—trim bungalow houses, for the most part, spread out among gardens full of roses, honeysuckle, and syringa. But at the station all day and night the scene was not idyllic. Every hour train after train moved away—stores and firewood in front, horses next, and luggage vans for the men behind. The partings from lovers and wives and children must be imagined. They are bad enough to witness when our own soldiers go to the front. But these men are not soldiers at all. Each of them came direct from his home in the town or on some isolated farm. They rode up, dressed just in their ordinary clothes, but for the slung Mauser and the full cartridge belt over the shoulder or round the waist. Except for a few gunners, there is no uniform in the Boer Army. Even the officers can hardly be distinguished from ordinary farmers. The only thing that could be called uniform is the broad-brimmed soft hat of grey or brown. But all Boers wear it. It is generally very stained and dirty, and invariably a rusty crape band is wound about the crown. For the Boer, like the English poorer classes, has large quantities of relations, and one of them is always dying.

By the courtesy of the Pretorian Government I had secured room in the guard's van for myself and a companion, who was equally anxious to cross the Natal frontier before the firing began, and that was expected at any moment. In the van with us were a score of farmers from Middleburg way, their contingent occupying four trains with about 800 men and horses. For the most part they were fine tall men with shaggy light beards, reminding one of Yorkshire farmers, but rougher and not so well dressed. Most of them could speak some English, and many had Scotch or English relatives. They lay on the floor or sat on the edge of the van, talking quietly and smoking enormous pipes. All deeply regretted the war, regretted the farm left behind just when spring and rain are coming, and they were full of foreboding for the women and children left at the mercy of Kaffirs. There was no excitement or shouting or bravado of any kind. So we travelled into the night, the monotony only broken by one violent collision which shook us all flat on the floor, while arms and stores fell crashing upon us. In the silent pause which followed, whilst we wondered if we were dead, I could hear the Kaffirs chattering in their mud huts close by, and in the distance a cornet was playing "Home, Sweet Home," with variations.

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It must have been the next evening, as we were waiting three or four hours, as usual, for the line to clear, that General Joubert came up in a special train. A few young men and boys in ordinary clothes formed his “staff.” The General himself wore the usual brown slouch hat with crape band, and a blue frock coat, not luxuriously new. His beard was quite white, but his long straight hair was still more black than grey. The brown sallow face was deeply wrinkled and marked, but the dark brown eyes were still bright, and looked out upon the world with a kind of simplicity mingled with shrewdness, or perhaps some subtler quality. He spoke English with a piquant lack of grammar and misuse of words. When I travelled with him next day, almost the first thing he said to me was, “The heart of my soul is bloody with sorrow.” His moderating influence on the Kruger Government is well known, and he described to me how he had done his utmost for peace. But he also described how bit by bit England had pushed the Boers out of their inheritance, and taken advantage of them in every conference and native war. He was particularly hurt that the Queen had taken no notice of the long letter or pamphlet he wrote to her on the situation. And, by the way, I often observed what regard most Boers appear to feel for the Queen personally. They constantly couple her name with Gladstone’s when they wish to say anything nice about English politics. As to the General’s views on the crisis, there would be little new to say. Till the present war his hope had been for a South African Confederacy under English protection—the Cape, Natal, Free State, and Transvaal all having equal rights and local self-government. He knows well enough the inner causes of the present evils. “But now,” he said, “we can only leave it to God. If it is His will that the Transvaal perish, we can only do our best.”

At Zandspruit, the scene of the old Sand River Convention, the whole Boer camp crowded to the station to greet the national hero, and he was at once surrounded by a herd of farmers, shaking his hands and patting him warmly on the back. It was a respectful but democratic greeting. The Boer Army—if for a moment we may give that name to an unorganised collection of volunteers—is entirely democratic. The men are nominally under field cornets, commanders, and the General. But they openly boast that on the field the authority and direction of officers do not count for much, and they go pretty much as they please. The camp, though not in the least disorderly, was confused and irregular—stores, firewood, horses, cattle, and tents strewn about the enormous veldt, almost haphazard, though the districts were kept fairly well separate. Provisions were plenty, but the cooking was bad. It took three days to get bread made, and some detachments had to eat their meat raw. I think there were not more than 10,000 or less than 7,000 men in the camp at that time, but the commandeered trains crawled up every two or three hours with their new loads.

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By a piece of good fortune we succeeded in crossing the frontier in an open coal-truck. The border-line runs about six miles north of Majuba and Laing's Nek, the last Boer village being Volksrust, and Charlestown the first English. The scenery changes rapidly; the high, bare veldt of the Southern Transvaal is at once left behind, and we enter the broad valley of Natal, sloping steadily down to the sea and becoming richer and more tropical as it descends. All regular traffic had stopped three days before, but now and then a refugee train came up to the frontier and transhipped its miserable crowd. Fugitives of every nation have been hurrying to the railway in hopes of escape. The stations far down into Natal are constantly surrounded with patient groups, waiting, waiting for an empty truck. Hindoos from Bombay and Madras with their golden nose-rings and brilliant silks sit day and night waiting side by side with coal-black Kaffirs in their blankets, or "blue-blooded" Zulus who refuse to hide much of their deep chocolate skin, showing a kind of purple bloom like a plum. The patient indifference with which these savages will sit unmoved through any fortune and let time run over them, is almost like the solemn calm of nature's own laws. The whites are restless and probably suffer more. Many were in extreme misery. Three or four young children died on the journey. One poor woman became a mother in the train just after the frontier, and died, leaving the baby alive. At the border I found many English and Scotch families, who had driven across the veldt from Ermelo, surrendering all their possessions. All spoke of the good treatment the Boers had shown them on the journey, even when the waggon had outspanned for the night close to the Boer camp. I came down to Newcastle with a Caithness stonemason and his family. They had lost house, home, and livelihood. They had even abandoned their horses and waggon on the veldt. The woman regretted her piano, but what really touched her most was that she had to wash her baby in cold water at the lavatory basin, and he had always been accustomed to warm. So we stand on the perilous edge and suffer variously.

CHAPTER II

AT THE BRITISH FRONT

Ladysmith, Natal, Wednesday, October 11, 1899.

Ladysmith breathes freely to-day, but a week ago she seemed likely to become another Lucknow. Of line battalions only the Liverpools were here, besides two batteries of field artillery, some of the 18th Hussars, and the 5th Lancers. If Kruger or Joubert had then allowed the Boers encamped on the Free State border to have their own way, no one can say what might have happened. Our force would have been outnumbered at least four to one, and probably more. In event of disaster the Boers would have seized an immense quantity of military stores accumulated in the camp, and at the railway station. What is

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worse, they would have isolated the still smaller force lately thrown forward to Dundee, so as to break the strong defensive position of the Biggarsberg, which cuts off the north of Natal, and can only be traversed by three difficult passes. Dundee was just as much threatened from the east frontier beyond the Buffalo River, where the Transvaal Boers of the Utrecht and Vryheid district have been mustered in strong force for nearly a fortnight now. With our two advanced posts “lapped up” (the phrase is a little musty here), our stores lost, and our reputation among the Dutch and native populations entirely ruined, the campaign would have begun badly.

For the Boers it was a fine strategic opportunity, and they were perfectly aware of that. But “the Old Man,” as they affectionately call the President, had his own prudent reasons for refusing it. “Let the enemy fire first,” he says, like the famous Frenchman, and so far he has been able to hold the most ardent of the encamped burghers in check. “If he should not be able!” we kept saying. We still say it morning and evening, but the pinch of the danger is passed. Last Thursday night the 1st Devons and the 19th Hussars began to arrive and the crisis ended. Yesterday before daybreak half the Gordons came. We have now a mountain battery and three batteries of field artillery, the 19th Hussars (the 18th having gone forward to Dundee), besides the 5th Lancers (the “Irish Lancers”), who are in faultless condition, and a considerable mixed force of the Natal Volunteers. Of these last, the Carbineers are perhaps the best, and generally serve as scouts towards the Free State frontier. But all have good repute as horsemen, marksmen, and guides, and at present they are the force which the Boers fear most. They are split up into several detachments—the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Mounted Rifles (from Durban), the Imperial Light Horse, the Natal Police, and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, who are chiefly Dutch. Then of infantry there are the Natal Royal Rifles (only about 150 strong), the Durban Light Infantry, and the Natal Field Artillery. As far as I can estimate, the total Natal Volunteer force will not exceed 2,000, but they are well armed, are accustomed to the Boer method of warfare, and will be watched with interest. Unhappily, many of them here are already suffering from the change of life and food in camp. That is inevitable when volunteers first take the field.

But Ladysmith has an evil reputation besides. Last year the troops here were prostrated with enteric. There is a little fever and a good deal of dysentery even now among the regulars. The stream by the camp is condemned, and all water is supplied in tiny rations from pumps. The main permanent camp is built of corrugated iron, practically the sole building material in South Africa, and quite universal for roofs, so that the country has few “architectural features” to boast of. The cavalry are quartered in the

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tin huts, but the Liverpools, Devons, Gordons, and Volunteers have pitched their own tents, and a terrible time they are having of it. Dust is the curse of the place. We remember the Long Valley as an Arcadian dell. Veterans of the Soudan recall the black sand-storms with regretful sighs. The thin, red dust comes everywhere, and never stops. It blinds your eyes, it stops your nose, it scorches your throat till the invariable shilling for a little glass of any liquid seems cheap as dirt. It turns the whitest shirt brown in half an hour, it creeps into the works of your watch and your bowels. It lies in a layer mixed with flies on the top of your rations. The white ants eat away the flaps of the tents, and the men wake up covered with dust, like children in a hayfield. Even mules die of it in convulsions. It was in this land that the ostrich developed its world-renowned digestive powers; and no wonder.

[Illustration: *Map of Ladysmith and neighbourhood*]

The camp stands on a barren plain, nearly two miles north-west of the town—if we may so call the one straight road of stores and tin-roofed bungalows. Low, flat-topped hills surround it, bare and rocky. But to understand the country it is best to climb into the mountains of the long Drakensberg, which forms the Free State frontier in a series of strangely jagged and precipitous peaks, and at one place, by the junction with Basutoland, runs up to 11,000 feet. Last Sunday I went into the Free State through Van Reenen's Pass, over which a little railway has been carried by zigzag "reverses." The summit is 5,500 feet above the sea, or nearly 2,000 feet above Ladysmith. From the steep slopes, in places almost as green as the Lowlands or Yorkshire fells, I looked south-east far over Natal—a parched, brown land like the desert beyond the Dead Sea, dusty bits of plain broken up by line upon line of bare red mountain. It seemed a poor country to make a fuss about, yet as South Africa goes, it is rich and even fertile in its way. Indeed, on the reddest granite mountain one never fails to find multitudes of flowering plants and pasturage for thinnish sheep. Across the main range, Van Reenen's is the largest and best known pass. The old farmer who gave it the name is living there still and bitterly laments the chance of war. But there are other passes too, any of which may suddenly become famous now—Olivier's Hoek, near the gigantic Mont aux Sources, Bezuidenhout, Netherby, Tintwa, and (north of Van Reenen's) De Beer's Pass, Cundycleugh, Muller's, and Botha's, beyond which the range ends with the frontier at Majuba. Three or four of these passes are crossed by waggon roads, but Van Reenen's has the only railway. The frontier, marked by a barbed wire fence across the summit of the pass, must be nearly forty miles from Ladysmith, but from the cliffs above it, the little British camp can be seen like a toy through this clear African air, and Boer sentries watch it

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all day, ready to signal the least movement of its troops, betrayed by the dust. Their own main force is distributed in camps along the hills well beyond the nine-miles' limit ordained by the Convention. The largest camp is said to be further north at Nelson's Kop, but all the camps are very well hidden, though in one place I saw about 500 of the horses trying to graze. The rains are late, and the grass on the high plateau of the Free State is not so good as on the Natal slopes of the pass. The Boer commandoes suffer much from want of it. When all your army consists of mounted infantry, forage counts next to food.

At present the Van Reenen Railway ends at Harrismith, an arid but cheerful little town at the foot of the great cliffs of the Plaatburg. It boasts its racecourse, golf-links, musical society, and some acquaintance with the German poets. The Scotch made it their own, though a few Dutch, English, and other foreigners were allowed to remain on sufferance. Now unhappily the place is almost deserted, and Burns himself would hardly find a welcome there. In the Free State every resident may be commandeered, and I believe forty-eight hours counts as "residence." You see the advantage of an extended franchise. The penalty for escape is confiscation of property, and five years' imprisonment or £500 fine, if caught. The few British who remained have had all their horses, carts, and supplies taken. Some are set to serve the ambulance; a few will be sent to watch Basutoland; but most of them have abandoned their property and risked the escape to Natal, slipping down the railway under bales or built up in the luggage vans like nuns in a brick wall. In one case the Boers commandeered three wool trucks on the frontier. Those trucks were shunted on to a siding for the night, and in the morning the wool looked strangely shrunk somehow. Yet it was not wool that had been taken out and smuggled through by the next train. For Scot helps Scot, and it is Scots who work the railway. It pays to be a Scot out here. I have only met one Irishman, and he was unhappy.

But for the grotesque side of refugee unhappiness one should see the native train which comes down every night from Newcastle way, and disappears towards Maritzburg and safety. Native workers of every kind—servants, labourers, miners—are throwing up their places and rushing towards the sea. The few who can speak English say, "Too plenty bom-bom!" as sufficient explanation of their panic. The Government has now fitted the open trucks with cross-seats and side-bars for their convenience, and so, hardly visible in the darkness, the black crowd rolls up to the platform. Instantly black hands with pinkish palms are thrust through all the bars, as in a monkey-house. Black heads jabber and click with excitement. White teeth suddenly appear from nowhere. It is for bread and tin-meats they clamour, and they are willing to pay. But a loaf costs a shilling. Everything costs a shilling here, unless it costs

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half-a-crown; and Natal grows fat on war. A shilling for a bit of bread! What is the good of Christianity? So the dusky hands are withdrawn, and the poor Zulu with untutored maw goes starving on. But if any still doubt our primitive ancestry, let them hear that Zulu's outcries of pain, or watch the fortunate man who has really got a loaf, and gripping it with both hands, gnaws it in his corner, turning his suspicious eyes to right and left with fear.

The air is full of wild rumours. A boy riding over Laing's Nek saw 1,000 armed Boers feeding their horses on Manning's farm. The Boers have been seen at a Dutch settlement this side Van Reenen's. Yesterday a section of the Gordons on their arrival were sent up to look at them in an armoured train. It is thought that war will be proclaimed to-day. That has been thought every day for a fortnight past, and the land buzzes with lies which may at any moment be true.

Half the Manchesters have just marched in to trumpet and drum. When I think of those ragged camps of peasants just over the border the pomp and circumstance seem all on one side.

Friday, October 13, 1899.

So it has begun at last, for good or evil. Here we think it began yesterday, just at the very moment when Sir George White arrived. Late at night scouts brought news of masses of Boers crossing the Tintwa Pass, and going into laager with their waggons only fifteen miles away to the west. The men stood to their arms, and long before light we were marching steadily forward along the Van Reenen road. First came the Liverpools, then the three batteries of Field Artillery with a mountain battery, then the Devons and the Gordons. The Manchesters acted as rear-guard, and the Dublin Fusiliers, who were hurried down from Dundee by train, came late, and then were hurried back again. The column took all its stores and forage for five days in a train of waggons (horses, mules, and oxen) about two miles long. When day broke we saw the great mountains on the Basuto border, gleaming with snow like the Alps. Far in front the cavalry—the 5th Lancers and 19th Hussars with the Natal Volunteers—were sweeping over the patches of plain and struggling up the hills in search of that reported laager. But not a Boer of it was to be seen. At nine o'clock, having advanced eight or nine miles, the whole column took up a strong position, with all its baggage and train in faultless order, and went to sleep. About one we began to return, and now just as the mail goes, we are all back again in camp for tea. And so ends the first day of active hostilities.

[Illustration: *General sir George Stewart white*, V.C., G.C.I.E., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.]

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST WEEK'S WAR

Ladysmith, Thursday, October 19, 1899.

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It is a week to-day since the Boers of the Transvaal and Free State began their combined invasion of Natal. So far all action has been on their side. They have crept down the passes with their waggons and half-organised bands of mounted infantry, and have now advanced within a short day's march of the two main British positions which protect the whole colony. It will be seen on a map that North Natal forms a fairly regular isosceles triangle, having Charlestown, Majuba, and Laing's Nek at the apex, the Drakensberg range separating it from the Free State on the one side, and the Buffalo River with its lower hills separating it from the Transvaal on the other. A base may be drawn a few miles below Ladysmith—say, from Oliver's Hoek Pass in the Drakensberg to the union of the Tugela River with the Buffalo. Newcastle will then lie about thirty miles from the apex of the triangle, nearly equi-distant from both sides. Dundee is about twelve miles from the middle point of the right side, and Ladysmith about the same distance from the middle point of the base. Evidently a "tight place" for a comparatively small force when the frontiers to right and left are openly hostile and can pour large bodies of men through all the passes in the sides and apex at will. That is exactly what the Boers have spent the week in doing, and they have shown considerable skill in the process. They have occupied Charlestown, Newcastle, and all the north of Natal almost to within reach of the guns at Dundee on the west and Ladysmith on the east and centre. Yet as far as I can judge they have hardly lost a man, whereas they have gained an immense amount of stores, food and forage, which were exactly the things they wanted. "Slim Piet" is the universal nickname for old Joubert among friends and enemies alike, and so far he has well deserved it. For the Dutch "slim" stands half way between the German "schlimm" and our description of young girls, and it means exactly what the Cockney means by "artful." Artful Piet has managed well. He has given the Boers an appearance of triumph. Their flag waves where the English flag waved before. The effect on the native mind, and on the spirits of his men is greater than people in England probably think. Before the war the young Boers said they would be in Durban in a month, and the Kaffirs half believed it. Well, they have got nearly a third of the way in a week.

But to-day they are brought within touch of British arms, and the question is whether they will get any further. So far they have been unopposed. Their triumphs have been the bloodless capture of a passenger train, the capture of a few police, and the driving in of patrols who had strict orders to retire. So far we have sought only to draw them on. But here and at Dundee we must make a stand, and all yesterday and this morning we have thought only of one question: Will they venture to come on? They have numbers on their side—an advantage certainly of three to one, possibly more.

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The rough country with its rocky flat-topped lines of hill is just suited for their method of warfare—to lie behind stones and take careful shots at any one in range. Besides, if they are to do anything, they know they must be quick. The Basutos are chanting their war-song on the Free State frontier. The British reinforcements are coming, and all irregulars have a tendency to melt away if you keep them waiting. But on the other hand it is against Boer tradition to attack, especially entrenched positions. Their artillery is probably far inferior to ours in training and skill, and they don't like artillery in any case. Nor do they like the thought of Lancers and Hussars sweeping down upon their flanks wherever a little bit of plain has to be crossed. So the chances of attack seem about equally balanced, and only the days can answer that one question of ours: Will they come on?

Yesterday it seemed as though they were coming. The advance of two main columns from the passes in the north-west had been fairly steady; and last night our outposts of the Natal Carbineers were engaged, as the 5th Lancers had been the night before. Heavy firing was reported at any distance short of fifteen miles. There was no panic. The few ladies who remain went riding or cycling along the dusty, blazing road which makes the town. The Zulu women in blankets and beads walked in single file with the little black heads of babies peering out between their shoulder-blades, and roasting in the sun. Huge waggon-loads of stores—compressed forage, compressed beef, jam, water-proof sheets, ammunition, oil, blankets, sardines, and all the other necessities of a soldier's existence—came lumbering up from the station behind the long files of oxen urged slowly forward by savage outcries and lashes of hide. Orderlies were galloping in the joy of their hearts. The band of the Gloucesters were practising scales in unison to slow time. Suddenly a kind of feeling came into the air that something was happening. I noticed the waggon stopped; the oxen at once lay down in the dust; the music ceased and was packed away. I met the Gordons coming into town and asking for their ground. Riding up the mile or two to camp, I found the whole dusty plateau astir. Tents were melting away like snow. Kits lay all naked and revealed upon the earth. The men were falling in. The waggons were going the wrong way round. The very headquarters and staff were being cleared out. The whole camp was, in fact, in motion. It was coming down into the town. In a few hours the familiar place was bare and deserted. I went up this morning and stood on Signal Hill where the heliograph was working yesterday, just above the camp. The whole plain was a wilderness. Straw and paper possessed it merely, except that here and there a destitute Kaffir groped among the *debris* in hopes of finding a shiny tin pot for his furniture or some rag of old uniform to harmonise with his savage dress. In one corner of the empty iron huts a few of the cavalry were still trying to carry off some remnants of forage. It was a pitiful sight, and yet the rapidity of the change was impressive. If the Boers came in, they would find those tin huts very luxurious after their accustomed bivouacs. Is it possible that tin huts might be their Capua?

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The camp was thought incapable of defence. Artillery could command it from half a dozen hills. Whoever placed it there was neither strategist nor humanitarian. It is like the bottom of a frying-pan with a low rim. The fire is hot, and sand is frying. But, indeed, the whole of Ladysmith is like that. The flat-topped hills stand round it reflecting the heat, and in the middle we are now all frying together, with sand for seasoning. The main ambulance is on the cricket ground. The battalion tents are pitched among the rocks or by the river side, where Kaffirs bathe more often and completely than you would otherwise suppose. The river water, by the way, is a muddy yellow now and leaves a deep deposit of Afric's golden sand in your glass or basin. The headquarters staff has seized upon two empty houses, and can dine in peace. The street is one yelling chaos of oxen in waggons and oxen loose, galloping horses, sheep, ammunition mules, savages, cycles, and the British soldier. He, be sure, preserves his wonted calm, adapts himself to oxen as naturally as to camels, puts in a little football when he can, practises alliteration's artful aid upon the name of the Boers, and trusts to his orders to pull him through. His orders are likely to be all right now, for Colonel Ward has just been put in command of the whole town, and already I notice a method in the oxen, to say nothing of the mules. What is it all but a huge military tournament to be pulled together, and got up to time?

This morning most people expected the attack would begin. I rode five miles out before breakfast to see what might be seen, but there were only a few Lancers pricking about by threes, and never a Boer or any such thing. So we have waited all day, and nothing has happened till this afternoon the rumour comes with authority that a train has been captured at Elands Laagte, about sixteen miles on the way to Dundee. The railway stopped running trains beyond there yesterday, and had better have stopped altogether. Anyhow, the line of communication between us and the splendid little brigade at Dundee is broken now. Dundee is pretty nearly fifty miles N.N.E. of this. The camp is happily on a stronger position than ours, and not mixed up with the town. But at present it is practically besieged, and no one can say how long the siege of Ladysmith also will be delayed. For the moment, it seems just possible that the great force, which we vaguely hear is coming out from England (all English news is hopelessly vague), will have to send the bulk of its troops to fight up Natal for our relief. But the south of Natal having few rocks is not suited for Boer warfare. When the Boers boasted they were coming to Durban, a wit replied: "Then you will have to bring the stones with you." For a Boer much prefers to have a comforting stone in front of him in the day of battle. In these districts every hill is for him a natural fortress. His hope is that we shall venture into the mountains; ours that he will venture down to the plains. So far hope's flattery has kept us fairly well apart. The day after to-morrow is now fixed by popular judgment for battle and attack. But only one thing is certain: we can stand still if we choose, and the Boers cannot.

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To be under martial law, as we now are, does not make much difference to the ordinary man, but to the ordinary criminal it appears slightly advantageous. For his case is very likely to be overlooked in the press of military offences, and it is doubtful if any civil suits can be brought. At all events, a legal quarrel I had with a farmer about some horses has vanished into thin air; and so, indeed, have the horses. The worst offenders now are possible spies. A few Dutch have been arrested, but the commonest cases are out-of-work Kaffirs, who are wandering in swarms over the country, coming down from Johannesburg and the collieries, and naturally finding it rather hard to give account of themselves. The peculiarity of the trials which I have attended has been that if a Kaffir could give the name of his father it was taken as a sufficient guarantee of respectability. With one miserable Bushman, for instance—a child's caricature of man—it was really going hard till at last he managed to explain that his father's name was Nicodemus Africa, and then every one looked satisfied, and he left the court without a stain upon his character.

So we live from day to day. The air is full of rumours. One can see them grow along the street. One traces them down. Perhaps one finds an atom of truth somewhere at the root of them. One puts that atom into a telegram. The military censor cuts it out with unfailing politeness, and a good day's work is done. Heat, dust, and a weekly deluge with stupendous thunder complete the scene.

CHAPTER IV

BATTLE OF ELANDS LAAGTE

Ladysmith, October 22, 1899.

It was a fair morning yesterday, cool after rain, the thin clouds sometimes letting the sun look through. At half-past ten I was some six or seven miles out along the Newcastle road—a road in these parts being merely a worn track over the open veldt, distinguishable only by the ruts and mud. Close on the left were high and shapely hills, like Welsh mountains, but on the right the country was more open. A Mr. Malcolm's farm stood in the middle of a waving plain, with a few fields, aloe hedges, and poplars. The kraal of his Kaffir labourers was near it, and about a mile away the plain ended in a low ridge of rocky "kopjes," which ran to join the mountainous ground on the left at a kind of "nek" or low pass over which the railway runs. Beyond that low ridge lay Elands Laagte, an important railway station with a few collieries close by, a store, a hotel, and some houses.

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The Boers had occupied it two days before, had captured a train there, and torn up the rail in two places, making a number of prisoners and seizing 100 head of cattle and quantities of other private stores and the luggage going to Dundee. Early in the morning we had gone out with four companies of the Manchesters in an armoured train with an ordinary train behind it, a battery of Natal Field Artillery, and the Imperial Light Horse under Colonel Scott Chisholme, to reconnoitre with a view to repairing the line. They seized the station and released a number of prisoners, but were compelled to withdraw by three heavy Nordenfeldt guns, which the Boers had posted on a hill about 2,500 yards beyond the station. At half-past ten they had reached the point I describe, and were very slowly coming back towards Ladysmith, the trains moving backwards, and the cavalry walking on each side the line. The point is called Modder's Spruit, from some early Dutchman, and there is a little station there, the first out from Ladysmith town. At that moment another train was seen coming up with the 1st Devons, and within an hour a fourth arrived with five companies of the Gordons. The 42nd Field Battery then came, and the 21st later; the 5th Lancers with a few 5th Dragoon Guards, and a large contingent of Natal mounted volunteers. That was our force. It took up a strong and fairly concealed position behind a rise in the road to the left of the railway and waited. Meantime the Boer scouts crept along that rocky ridge on our right front and down into the plain, firing into us at long range, quite without effect.

At half-past one General French, who had taken command, sent out a few Lancers to watch our left, and a large force of mixed cavalry to the right. By a long circuit these swept up the whole length of the ridge and cleared out the Boer sharpshooters, who could be seen galloping away over the top. The infantry then detrained and advanced across the plain and up the ridge in extended order, half a battery meantime driving out a small Boer party, which was firing upon our Lancers on our left.

[Illustration: *Plan of the battle of Elands Laagte*]

When we reached the top of that long ridge, we found it broad as well as long, and we were moving rapidly across it when, with the usual whirr and crash and scream, one of the enemy's big shells fell in the midst of our right centre, killing two horses at a gun. It was at once followed by another, and a dozen or two more. They had our range exactly, and the art of knowing what was going on behind the hill, but though the shells burst all right and hot fragments or bullets went shrieking through the midst of us, I did not see anything but horses actually struck. I think six or seven horses were killed at that place, and later on I heard of a bugler having his head cut off, and two or three others killed by shell, but otherwise I believe the artillery did us no damage, though to most men it is more terrifying than rifle fire. When we reached the edge of the ridge we looked across a broad low valley, with one small wave in it, to the enemy's main position on some rocky hills nearly 4,000 yards away. The place was very strong and well chosen.

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Opposite our right ran a long high ridge covered with rocks and leading up to a rocky plateau. In their centre was a pointed hill, at the foot of which stood their camp, with tents and waggons. Opposite our left was a small detached kopje, and beyond that a fairly flat plain, with a river running through it, and the railway beyond Elands Laagte Station. Their three guns stood on the rocky ridge to our right of their camp—two together half-way down, one a little higher up. Flash—flash—they went, and then came the whirr, the crash, and the screaming fragments.

Suddenly our guns opened in answer from our right centre, and we could watch the shrapnel bursting right over their gunners' heads. They say the gunners were German. At all events, they were brave fellows, and worked the guns with extraordinary skill and courage. The official account admits that they returned several times to their posts after being driven out by our shell. The afternoon was passing, and if we were to take the place before dark we could not spare time to shake it with our artillery much longer. At about half-past four the infantry were ordered to advance, the Gordons and Manchesters on the right, the Devons on the left. They went down the long slope and across the valley with perfect intervals and line, much better than they go in the hollows of the old Fox Hills.

In the advance the Gordons and Manchesters gradually changed direction half right and crept up towards that plateau on the right of the ridge, so as to take the enemy in flank. The Devons went straight forward, coming into infantry fire as they crossed that low wave of ground in the middle of the valley. On the further slope they were ordered to lie down and wait till the flanking movement was developed. Happily the slope, as is usual in South Africa, was thickly spotted over with great ant-hills, beneath which the ant-eater digs his den. Ant-heaps, hardened almost to brick, make excellent cover, and we lay down behind them on any bit of rock we could find, the fire being very hot, and the Mauser bullets making their unpleasant whiffle as they passed. I think the first man hit was a private, who got a ball through his head by the ear. He was carried away, but died before he got off the field. A young officer was struck soon afterwards, and then the bearers began to be busy. There were far too few of them, and no one could find the ambulance carts. As a matter of fact they had not left Ladysmith—twelve miles at least away. Most of the wounded tried to creep back out of fire. Some lay quite still. I heard only two or three call out for help. Meantime the rest were keeping up a steady fire, not by volleys, but as each could sight a Boer among the rocks, and my own belief is that very few Boers were hit that way.

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Climbing up a heap of loose stones a little to the right of the Devons, I could now see the Boers at the top of their position in the centre, moving about rapidly, taking cover, resting their rifles on the stones, and firing both at us and at the men who were pushing up the slope threatening their flank. Meantime the artillery pumped iron and lead upon them without mercy. Their own guns were quite silenced about this time, being unable to stand the combined shell and rifle fire. But the ordinary Boers—the armed and mounted peasants—still clung to their rocks as though nothing could drive them out.

One big man in black I watched for what seemed a very long time. He was standing right against the sky line, sometimes waving his arm, apparently to give directions. Shells burst over his head, and bullets must have been thick round him. Once or twice he fell, as though slipping on the rocks, for the rain had begun again. But he always reappeared, till at last shrapnel exploded right in his face, and he sank together like a dropped rag. Just after that the Manchesters and Gordons began to force their way along the top of the ridge on the Boers' left. They had the dismounted Imperial Light Horse with them, and it was there that the loss was most terrible. Sometimes the advance hardly seemed to move, sometimes it rushed forward, and then appeared to swing back again. It was six o'clock, rain was falling in torrents, and it was getting dark. Perhaps the Gordons suffered most. Fourteen officers were killed and wounded there, and next day the killed men lay thick among the rocks. The Boer prisoners say the Gordon kilts made them easy marks. But the Light Horse lost, too—lost their Colonel, Scott Chisholme, who had been so eager for their success. Still the Boers kept up their terrible fire, and the attack crept forward, rock by rock. At the same time the Devons were called on to advance, and, getting up from the ant-hills without a moment's pause, they strode forward to the foot of the hill, keeping up an incessant fire as they went. Then we heard the bugler sounding the charge high up on our right, and we could just see the flank attack rushing forward and cheering. The Boers were galloping away or running from the top. The Devons also sounded the charge and rushed up the front of the position, but from that isolated hill on our left they met so obstinate a fire that the order for magazine firing was given, and for a few minutes the rifles rattled without a second's pause, in a long roar of fire. Then, with a wild cheer, the Devons cleared the position. It is due to them to say that they were first at the guns. Meantime, the "Cease Fire!" had sounded several times on the summit, but the firing did not cease. I don't know why it was. Perhaps the Boers were still resisting in parts. Certainly many of our men were drunk with excitement. "Wipe out Majuba!" was a constant cry. But the Boers had gone.

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The remnants of them were struggling to get away in the twilight over a bit of rocky plain on our left. There the Dragoon Guards got them, and three times went through. A Dragoon Guards corporal who was there tells me the Boers fell off their horses and rolled among the rocks, hiding their heads in their arms and calling for mercy—calling to be shot, anything to escape the stab of those terrible lances. But not many escaped. “We just gave them a good dig as they lay,” were the corporal’s words. Next day most of the lances were bloody.

The victory was ours. We had gained a stony and muddy little hill strewn with the bodies of dead and wounded peasants, clerks, lawyers, and other kinds of men. Most were from Johannesburg. Nearly all spoke English like their native language. In one corner on the slope of the hill towards their little camp and waggons I counted fourteen dead together. In one of the tents were three dead men, all killed by the same shell, apparently whilst asleep. Yet I do not think there were more than thirty actually killed among the rocks in all. It is true that darkness fell rapidly, and the rain was blinding; but I was nearly two hours on the ground moving about. The wounded lay very thick, groaning and appealing for help. In coming down I nearly trod on the upturned white face of an old white-bearded man. He was lying quite silent, with a kind of dignity. We asked who he was. He said: “I am Kock, the father of Judge Kock. No, I am not the commandant. *He* is the commandant.” But the old man was wrong. He himself had been in command, though instead of fighting he had read the Bible and prayed. One bullet had passed through his shoulder, another through his groin. So he lay still and read no more. Near him was a boy with a hand just a mixture of shreds and bones and blood. But he too was very quiet, and only asked for a handkerchief to bind it together. Others were gradually dying. Many were not found till daylight. The dead of both sides lay unburied till Monday.

In the mud and stones just above the captured guns, General French stood giving directions for the bivouac, and dictating a message to Sir George White praising the troops, especially the infantry who had been commanded by Colonel Ian Hamilton. The assemble kept sounding over the hill, and Gordons tried to sift themselves from Manchesters, and Light Horse from Devons. All were shouting and questioning and calling to each other in the dark. Soon they settled down; the Boers had left scores of saddles, coats, and Kaffir blankets, provisions, too, water-bottles, chickens, and in one case a flask of carbolic disinfectant, which a British soldier analysed as “furrin wine.” So, on the whole, the fellows made themselves fairly comfortable in spite of the cold and wet. Then I felt my way down over the rocks, taking care, if possible, not to tread on anything human, and then sought out the difficult twelve-mile track to Ladysmith over the veldt and hills, lighted towards midnight by a waning and clouded moon.

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CHAPTER V

BATTLE OF TINTA INYONI

Ladysmith, October 27, 1899.

If you want to “experience a shock,” as the doctors say, be with the head of a column advancing leisurely along a familiar road only six miles from camp, and have a shell flung almost at your feet from a neighbouring mountain top. That was my fortune about the breakfast time of peaceable citizens last Tuesday morning. A squadron of Lancers and some of the Natal Carbineers were in front. Just behind me a battery was rumbling along. A little knot of the staff was close by, and we were all just preparing to halt. We stood on the Newcastle road, north of the town, not far from our first position at the Elands Laagte battle of the Saturday before. The road is close to the railway there, and I was watching an engine and truck going down with a white-flag flying, bringing back poor Colonel Chisholme’s body for burial. Suddenly on the left from the top of a mountain side beyond a long rocky ridge I saw the orange flash of a big gun. The next moment came the familiar buzz and scream of a great shell, the crash, the squealing fragments, the dust splashing up all round us as they fell. I have never seen men and horses gallop faster than in our rapid right-wheel over the open ground towards a Kaffir kraal. I think only one horse was badly hurt, but at no military tournament have I seen artillery move in such excellent style. It was all over in a minute. The Boers must have measured the range to a yard, and just have kept that gun loaded and waiting.

But in tactics jokes may be mistakes. That shot revealed the enemy’s position. Within ten minutes our gunners had snipt the barbed wire fences along the railway, had dashed their guns across, and were dragging them up that low rocky ridge—say, 300ft. to 400ft. high—which had now so suddenly become our front and fighting position. Three field batteries went up, and close behind them came the Gloucesters on the right, a few companies of the second 60th (K.R.R.) the Liverpools and the Devons in order on the centre and left. On our right we had some of the 19th Hussars and 5th Lancers; on our left a large mixed force of the mounted Natal Volunteers, who were soon strongly engaged in a small valley at the end of the ridge, and suffered a good deal all day. But the chief work and credit lay with our guns. Till they got into position, found the range and began to fire, the enemy’s shells kept dropping over the ridge and plumping into the ground. None were so successful as the first, and only few of them burst, but shells are very unpleasant, and it was a relief when at the second or third shot from our batteries we found the enemy’s shells had ceased to arrive. We had destroyed the limber, if not the gun, and after that the shells were all on one side. Some say the Boers had two guns, but I only saw one myself, and I watched it as a mouse watches a cat. One does.

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The Boers, however, had many cats to watch. Climbing up the ridge towards its left end, I sat among the rocks with the Liverpools and Devons beside one of the batteries, and got a good view of the Boer position. They were in irregular lines and patches among the rocks of some low hills across a little valley in our front, and were stationed in groups upon the two higher mountains (as one may call them) upon our right and left. Both of these points looked down upon our position, and it was only by keeping close among the stones under the edge of our ridge that we got any cover, and that indifferent. But, happily, the range was long, and for hour after hour those two hills were simply swept by our shrapnel. On our right the long mountain edge, where the enemy's gun had been, is called Mattowan's Hoek. The great dome-like hill (really the end of a flat-topped mountain in perspective), on our left, was Tinta Inyoni.

Our infantry lay along the ridge, keeping up a pretty constant fire, and sometimes volleying by sections, whenever they could get sight of their almost invisible enemy. Sometimes they advanced a little way down towards the valley. On the right the Gloucesters about eleven o'clock came over the ridge on to a flat little piece of grass land in front. I suppose they expected to get a better range or clearer view, but within a few minutes that patch of grass was spotted with lumps of khaki. Two officers—one their colonel—and six men were killed outright, and the official list of wounded runs to over fifty. When they had withdrawn again to the ridge the doctors and privates went out to bring the wounded back. Behind the cover of the rocks the dhoolies were waiting with their green-covered stretchers. In the sheltered corner on the flat ground below stood the ambulance waggons ready. All the ambulance service was admirably worked that day, but I think perhaps the highest credit remains with the mild Hindoos.

By twelve o'clock the low hills in our front were burning from our shells, and the smoke of the grass helped still more to conceal this baffling enemy of ours. It was all very well for the gunners, with their excellent glasses, but the ordinary private could hardly see anything to aim at, and yet he was more or less under fire all the time. As to smoke, of course the smokeless powder gives the Boers an immense advantage in their method of fighting. It is hardly ever possible to tell exactly where the shots come from. But I noticed one man near the top of Tinta, who evidently had an old Martini which he valued much more than new-fangled things. Whenever he fired a little puff of grey smoke followed, and I always thought I heard the growl of his bullet particularly close, as though he steadily aimed at some officer near by. He sat under a bush, and had built himself a little wall of rocks in front. Shell after shell was showered upon that rocky hillside, for it concealed many other sharpshooters besides. But at each flash he must have thrown himself behind the stones, and when the shower of lead was over up he got, and again I saw the little puff of grey smoke and heard the growl of a bullet close by.

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The firing ceased about three. There was no apparent reason why it should. The Boers had killed a few of us. Probably we had killed more of them. But mere loss of life does not make victory or defeat, and to all appearance we were both on much the same ground as at first, except that the Boers had lost a gun, and were not at all comfortable on the positions they had held. Our withdrawal, however, was due to deeper reasons. A messenger had brought news of the column which had unhappily been driven from Dundee—whether by the Boers' 40-pounder, "Long Tom," or by failing ammunition I will not try to decide. Anyhow, the messenger brought the news that the column was safe and returning unmolested on Ladysmith by the roundabout road eastward, near Helpmakaar. We had held back the enemy from intercepting them on their march. Our long and harassing fight, then, had been worth the sacrifice. It was a victory in strategy. Sir George White gave the order for the infantry to withdraw from the ridge by battalions and return to Ladysmith. By evening we were all in the town again.

Next day I determined to meet the Dundee force on its way. They were reported to have halted about twenty-five miles off the night before, near Sunday's river, which, like all the rivers and spruits just here, runs southward through mountains into the Tugela and Buffalo. About six miles out we had a small force ready to give them assistance if they were pursued. Passing through that column halted by a stream, I went on into more open country, where there was an occasional farm with the invariable tin roof and weeping willows of South Africa. For many miles I saw small parties of our Lancers and Carbineers scouring the country on both sides of the track.

Then soon after I had crossed a wide watershed I came down into broken and rocky country again, well suited for Boers, and there the outposts ended. I had a wide view of distant mountains, far away to the Zulu border on the east, and northwards to the Biggarsberg and Dundee, a terrible country to cross with a retiring column, harassed by three days' fighting. The few white farmers had gone, of course, but, happily, I came upon a Kaffir kraal, and a Kaffir chief himself came out to look at me. The Cape boy who was with me asked if he had seen any English troops that way. "Yes, there were many, many, many, hardly an hour's ride further on. But he was hungry, hungry—he, the chief—and so were his wives—four of them—all of them." He spoke the pretty Zulu language—it is something like Italian.

We went on. The track went steep down hill to a spruit where the water lay in pools. And there on the opposite hill was that gallant little British Army, halted in a position of extreme danger, absolutely commanded on all sides but one, and preparing for tea as unconcernedly as if they were in a Lockhart's shop in Goswell Road. Almost as unconcernedly—for, indeed, some of the officers showed signs of their

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long anxiety and sleeplessness. When I came among them, some mounted men suddenly showed themselves in the distance. They took them for Boers. I could hardly persuade them they were only our own Carbineers—the outposts through whom I had just ridden. Three of our own scouts appeared across a valley, and never were Boers in greater peril of being shot. I think I may put their lives down to my credit.

The British private was even here imperturbable as usual. He sat on the rocks singing the latest he knew from the music-halls. He lighted his fires and made his tea, and took an intelligent interest in the slaughter of the oxen, for all the world as if he were at manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain. He is really a wonderful person. Filthy from head to foot, drenched with rain, baked with sun, unshorn and unwashed for five days, his eyes bloodshot for want of sleep, hungry and footsore, fresh from terrible fighting, and the loss of many friends, he was still the same unmistakable British soldier, that queer mixture of humour and blasphemy, cheerfulness and grumbling, never losing that imperturbability which has no mixture of any other quality at all. The camping ground was arranged almost as though they were going to stay there for ever. Here were the guns in order, there the relics of the 18th Hussars; there the Leicesters, the 60th, the Dublins, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the rest. The guards were set and sentries posted. But only two hours later the whole moved off again for three miles' further advance to get them well out of the mountains. Why, on that perilous march through unknown and difficult country, the Dutch did not spring upon them in some pass and blot them out is one of the many mysteries of this strange campaign.

Among them I greeted many friends whom I had come to know at Dundee ten days before. But General Symons and Colonel Gunning, whom I had chosen out as the models of what officers should be, were not there. Nor was the young officer who had been my host—young Hannah of the Leicesters—who at his own cost came out in the ship with us rather than “miss the fun.” A shell struck his head. I think he was the first killed in Friday's battle.

I got back to Ladysmith late that night. Early next morning the column began to dribble in. They were received with relief. I cannot say there was much enthusiasm. The road by which I went to meet them is now swarming with Boers.

CHAPTER VI

THE REVERSE AT NICHOLSON'S NEK

LADYSMITH, *October 31, 1899.*

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On Sunday we were all astir for a big battle. But no village Sabbath in the Highlands could have been quieter, though it might have been more devotional. We rode about as usual, though our rides are very limited now, and the horse that took me forty miles last Wednesday is pining because the Boers have cut off his exercise. We sweated and swore, and suffered unfathomable thirst, but still there was no more battle than the evening hymn. Next day we knew it would be different. At night I heard the guns go out eastward along the Helpmakaar road to take up a position on our right. At three I was up in the morning darkness, and riding slowly northward with the brigade that was to form our centre, up the familiar Newcastle road. We had not far to go. The Boers save us a lot of exertion. A mile and a half—certainly less than two miles—from the outside of the town was our limit. But as we went the line of yellow behind our two nearest mountains, Lombard's Kop and Bulwan (Mbulwani, Isamabulwan—you may spell it almost as you like), was suddenly shot with red, and the grey night clouds showed crimson on all their hanging edges. The crimson caught the vultures soaring wide through the air, and then the sun himself came up with that blaze of heat which was to torture us all day long.

The central rendezvous beside the Newcastle road was well protected by a high rocky hill, which one can only call a kopje now. There were the 5th Dragoon Guards, the Manchesters, the Devons, the Gordons, with their ambulance and baggage, some of the Natal Volunteers, and when the train from Maritzburg arrived about six the Rifle Brigade marched straight out of it to join us. I climbed the kopje in front of them, and from there could get a fine view of the whole position except the extreme flanks.

At 5.10 the first gun sounded from a battery on the right of our centre—a battery that was to do magnificent work through the day. The enemy's reply was an enormous puff of smoke from a flat-topped hill straight in front of me. A huge shell shrieked through the air, and, passing high above my head, burst slap in the middle of the town behind me. Again and again it came. The second shot fell close to the central hospital; the third in a private garden, where the native servants have been busy digging for fragments ever since, as in a gold mine, not considering how cheap such treasure is now likely to become. The range was something over four miles. One of the shells passed so near the balloon that the officer in the car felt it like a gust of wind. (I ought to have told you about that balloon, by the way. We sent it up first on Sunday morning, our Zulu savages opening their mouths at it, beating their lips, and patting their stomachs with peculiar cries.)

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“Long Tom” had come. “Long Tom,” the hero of Dundee, able to hurl his vast iron cylinder a clean six miles as often as you will. I saw him and his brother gun on trucks at Sand River Camp on the Transvaal border just before the war began. They say he is French—a Creusot gun—throwing, some say 40lbs., some 95lbs., each shot. Anyhow, the shell is quite big enough, whatever its weight, and it bangs into shops, chapels, ladies’ bedrooms without any nice distinctions. I could see “Tom’s” ugly muzzle tilted up above a great earthwork which the Boers had heaped near a tree on the edge of that flat-topped hill, which we may call Pepworth, from a little farm hard by.

Our battery was at once turned on to him, and though short at first, it got the range, and poured the deadly shrapnel over that hill for hour after hour. But other guns were there—perhaps as many as six—and they replied to our battery, whilst “Tom” reserved his attention for the town. Often we thought him silenced, but always he began again, just when we were forgetting him, sometimes after over an hour’s pause. The Boer gunners, whoever they may be, are not wanting in courage. So the artillery battle went on, hour after hour. I sat on the rocks and watched. At my side the Gordons on picket duty were playing with two little white kids. On the plain in front no one was to be seen but one lone and dirty soldier, who was steadily marching in across it, no one knew from where. He must have lost his way in the night, and now was making for the nearest British lines, hanging his rifle unconcernedly over his shoulder, butt behind.

So we watched and waited. At one moment Dr. Jameson came up to get a look at his old enemy. Then we heard heavy rifle fire far away on our left, where the Gloucesters and Royal Irish Fusiliers had been sent out the night before, and were now on the verge of that terrible disaster which has kept us all anxious and uncertain to-day. The rumour goes that both battalions have disappeared, and what survives of them will next be found in Pretoria. At eight o’clock I saw a new force of Boers coming down a gully in a great mountain behind Pepworth Hill. But for my glass, I should have taken them for a black stream marked with white rocks. But they were horses and men, and the white rocks were horses too. Heavy firing began far away on our right. At nine the Manchesters were called off to reinforce. At half-past nine the Gordons followed, and I went with them. About a mile and a half from the centre we were halted again on the top of another rocky kopje covered with low bush and trees, out of which we frightened several little brown deer and some strange birds.

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From the top I could see the whole position of the right flank fairly well, but it puzzled me at first. The guns shelling Pepworth Hill—there were two batteries of them now—were still at their work, just in front of our left now and about half a mile away. Away to our right and further advanced, but quite exposed in the open, were two other batteries, shelling some distant kopjes on our right at the foot of the great mountain lump of Lombard's Kop. I heard afterwards they were shelling an empty and deserted kopje for hours, but I know that only from hearsay. Between the batteries and far away to the right the infantry was lying down or advancing in line, chiefly across the open, against the enemy's position. But what was that position? Take Ladysmith as centre and a radius of five miles, the Boers' position extended round a semicircle or more, from Lombard's Kop on the east to Walker's Hoek on the west, with Pepworth Hill as the centre of the arc on the north. I believe myself that the position was not a mile less than fifteen miles long, and for the most part it was just what Boers like—rocky kopjes and ridges, high and low, always giving cover and opportunity for surprise and ambushade.

[Illustration: LOMBARD'S KOP]

It was against the left flank of that position that our right was now hurling itself. The idea, I suppose, was to roll their left back upon their centre and take Pepworth Hill and "Long Tom" in the confusion of retreat. That may or may not have been the General's plan, but from my post with the Gordons I soon saw something was happening to prevent it. On a flat piece of green in front of the rocky kopjes, where the enemy evidently was, I could see men, not running, but walking about in different directions. They were not crowded, but they seemed to be moving about like black ants, only in a purposeless kind of way. "They are Boers, and we've got them between our men and our battery," said a Gordon officer. But I knew his hope was a vain one. Very slowly they were coming towards us—turning and firing and advancing a little, one by one—but still coming towards us, till at last they began to dribble through the intervals in our batteries. Then we knew it was British infantry retiring—a terrible sight, no matter how small the loss or how wise the order given. Chiefly they were the 60th (K.R.R.) and the Leicesters. I believe the Dublins were there too. Behind them the enemy kept up the incessant crackle of their rifles.

They came back slowly, tired and disheartened and sick with useless losses, but entirely refusing to hurry or crowd. With bullet and shell the enemy followed them hard. Our batteries did what they could to protect them, and Colonel Coxhead, in command of the guns, received the General's praise afterwards. The Natal Volunteers and Gordons, and at least part of the Manchesters were there to cover the retreat, but nothing could restore the position again. Battalions and ranks had got hopelessly mingled, and

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as soon as they were out of range the men wandered away in groups to the town, sick and angry, but longing above all things for water and sleep. The enemy's shells followed hard on their trail nearly into the town, plumping down in the midst whenever any body of men or horses showed themselves among the ridges of the kopjes. Seeing what was happening on the right the centre began to withdraw as well, and as their baggage train climbed back into the town up the Newcastle road a shell from "Long Tom" fell among them at a corner of the hill, blowing a poor ambulance and stretcher to pieces, and killing one of the Naval Brigade just arrived from the *Powerful*.

It was the Naval Brigade that saved the day, though, to be sure, a retirement like that is in itself a check, though no disaster. Captain Lambton had placed two of his Elswick wire guns on the road to the town, and sent shot after shot straight upon "Long Tom's" position four miles away. Only twelve-pounders, I believe, they were, but of fine range and precision, and at each successful shot the populace and Zulus standing on the rocks clapped their hands and laughed as at a music-hall. For a time, but only for a time, "Long Tom" held his tongue, and gradually the noise of battle ceased—the bang and squeal of the shells, the crackle of the rifle, the terrifying hammer-hammer of the enemy's two Krupp automatic guns. It was about half-past two and blazing hot. The rest of the day was quiet, but for rumours of the lamentable disaster of which one can hardly speak at present. The Gloucesters and Royal Irish prisoners—1,100 at least after all losses! They say two Boers were brought in blindfold last night to tell the General. This morning an ambulance party has gone out to bring in the wounded, and whilst they are gone with their flag of truce we have peace.

I take the opportunity to write, hurriedly and without correction, for the opportunity is short. "Long Tom" sent two shells into us this morning as we were dressing (I should have said washing, only the water supply is cut), and at any moment he may begin again.

November 1, 1899.

I may add that the retirement of the battalions of the 60th, with the Leicesters, is the theme of every one's praise to-day. Its success was chiefly due to General Hunter, and the dogged courage of the men themselves.

But the second part of the despatch is after all the main point of interest. Such a disaster has, I suppose, seldom befallen two famous and distinguished battalions. After heavy loss they are prisoners. They are wiped out from the war. The Gloucesters and the Royal Irish Fusiliers—they join the squadron of the 18th Hussars in Pretoria gaols. Two Boers came in blindfolded to tell the news last night. All day long we have been fetching in the wounded. Their wounds are chiefly from Martini rifles, and very serious. I know the place of the disaster well, having often ridden there when the Boers were at

a more respectful distance. It is an entangled and puzzling country, full of rocks and hills and hidden valleys. It was only some falling boulders that caused the ruin—a few casual shots—and the stampeding mules. That ammunition mule has always a good deal to bear, but now the burden put on him officially is almost too heavy for any four-legged thing.

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CHAPTER VII

HEMMED IN

LADYSMITH, *November 2, 1899.*

“Long Tom” opened fire at a quarter-past six from Pepworth Hill, and was replied to by the Naval Brigade. Just as I walked up to their big 4.7 in. gun on the kopje close to the Newcastle road, a shell came right through our battery’s earthwork, without bursting. Lieutenant Egerton, R.N., was lying close under the barrel of our gun, and both his legs were shattered. The doctors amputated one at the thigh, the other at the shin. In the afternoon he was sitting up, drinking champagne and smoking cigarettes as cheery as possible, but he died in the night. “Tom” went on more or less all day. In the afternoon Natal correspondents dashed down to the Censor with telegrams that he had been put out of action. They had seen him lying on his side. I started to look for myself, and at the first 100 yards he threw a shell right into the off-side of the street, as though to save me the trouble of going further. Another rumour, quite as confidently believed by the soldiers, was that the Devons had captured him with the bayonet and rolled him down the hill. I heard one of them “chipping” a Gordon for not being present at the exploit. Now “Tom” is a 15-centimetre Creusot gun of superior quality.

All morning I spent in the Manchesters’ camp on the top of the long hill to the south-west, called Caesar’s Camp. There had been firing from a higher flat-topped mountain—Middle Hill—about 3,000 yards beyond, where the Boers have taken up one of their usual fine positions, overlooking Ladysmith on one side and Colenso on the other. At early morning a small column under General Hunter had attacked a Boer commando on the Colenso road unawares and gave them a bad time, till an order suddenly came to withdraw. Sir George White had heard Boer guns to the west of their right rear, and was afraid of another disaster such as befell the Gloucesters and Royal Irish Fusiliers. The men came back sick with disappointment, and more shaken than by defeat.

I found the Manchesters building small and almost circular sangars of stones and sandbags at intervals all along the ridge. The work was going listlessly, the men carrying up the smallest and easiest stones they could find, and spending most of the time in contemplating the scenery or discussing the situation, which they did not think hopeful. “We’re surrounded—that’s what we are,” they kept saying. “Thought we was goin’ to have Christmas puddin’ in Pretoria. Not much Christmas puddin’ we’ll ever smell again!” A small mounted party rode past them, and the enemy instantly threw a shell over our heads from the front. Then the guns just set up on the long mountain of Bulwan, threw another plump into the rocks by the largest picket. “It’s like that Bally Klarver,” sighed a private, getting up and looking round with apprehension. “Cannon to right of ’em, cannon to left

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of 'em!" Then we went on building at the sangar, but without much spirit. They laughed when I told them how a shell from "Long Tom" fell into the Crown Hotel garden this morning, and all the black servants rushed out to pocket the fragments. But the only thing which really cheered them was the thought that they had only to "stick it out" till Buller's force went up to the Free State and drew the enemy off—that and a supply of cigarettes.

Early in the afternoon I took my telegram to the Censor as usual, and after the customary wanderings and waste of time I found him—only to hear that the wires were bunched and the line destroyed. So telegrams are ended; mails neither come nor go. The guns fired lazily till evening, doing little harm on either side. A queer Boer ambulance, with little glass windows—something between a gipsy van and a penny peep-show—came in under a huge white flag, bringing some of our wounded to exchange for wounded Boers. The amenities of civilised slaughter are carefully observed. But one of the ambulance drivers was Matthey, "Long Tom's" skilled gunner, in disguise.

November 3, 1900.

The bombardment continued, guns on Bulwan throwing shells into various camps, especially the Natal Volunteers. Many people chose the river bed as the most comfortable place to spend a happy day. They hoped the high banks or perhaps the water would protect them. So there they sat on the stones and waited for night. I don't know how many shells pitched into the town to-day—say 150, not more. Little harm was done, but people of importance had one grand shock. Just as lunch was in full swing at the Royal, where officers, correspondents, and a nurse or two congregate for meals in hope of staying their intolerable thirst—bang came a shell from "Long Tom" straight for the dining-room window. Happily a little house which served as bedroom to Mr. Pearce, of the *Daily News*, just caught it on its way. Crash it came through the iron roof, the wooden ceiling, into the brick wall. There it burst, and the house was in the past. Happily Mr. Pearce was only on his way to his room, and had not reached it. Some of the lunchers got bricks in their backs, and one man took to his bed of a shocked stomach.

At the time I was away on the Maritzburg road, which starts west from the town and gradually curves southward. The picket on the ridge called Range Post is a relic of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, now in the show-ground at Pretoria. Major Kincaid was there, only returned the night before from the Boer camp behind "Long Tom." He had been ill with fever and was exchanged. He spoke with praise of the Boer treatment of our wounded and prisoners. When our fellows were worn out, the Boers dismounted and let them ride. They brought them water and any food they had. Joubert came round the ambulance, commanding there should be no distinction between the wounded of either

race. Major Kincaid had seen a good deal of the so-called Colonel Blake and his so-called Irish Brigade. He found that the very few who were not Americans were English. He had not a single real Irishman among them. Blake, an American, had come out for the adventure, just as he went to the Chili War.

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As we were talking, up galloped General Brocklehurst, Ian Hamilton, and the Staff, and I was called upon to give information about certain points in the country to our front—names and directions, the bits of plain where cavalry could act, and so on. The Intelligence Department had heard a large body of Free State Boers was moving westward from the south, as though retiring towards the passes. The information was false. The only true point about it was the presence of a large Boer force along a characteristic Boer position of low rocky hills about three miles to our front. There the General thought he would shell them out with a battery, and catch them as they retired by swinging cavalry round into the open length of plain behind the hills. So at 11 a.m. out trotted the 19th Hussars with the remains of the 18th. Then came a battery, with the 5th Dragoon Guards as escort. In half an hour the guns were in full action against those low hills. The enemy's one gun there was silenced, but not before it had blown away half the head of a poor fellow among the Dragoon Guards. For an hour and a half we poured shrapnel over the rocks, till, except for casual rifle fire, there was no reply. Then another battery came up to protect the line to our rear, across which the Boers were throwing shells from positions on both sides, though without much effect. Soon after one, up cantered the Volunteers—Imperial Light Horse and Border Mounted Infantry—and they were sent forward, dismounted, to take the main position in front and occupy a steep hill on our left. To front and left they went gaily on, but they failed.

At their approach the rocks we had so persistently shelled, crackled and hammered from end to end with rifle fire. The Boers had hidden behind the ridge, and now crept back again. Perhaps no infantry could have taken that position only from the front. I watched the Volunteers advance upon it in extended lines across a long green slope studded with ant-hills. I could see the puffs of dust where bullets fell thick round their feet. It was an impossible task. Some got behind a cactus hedge, some lay down and fired, some hid behind ant-hills or little banks. Suddenly that moment came when all is over but the running. The men began shifting uneasily about. A few turned round, then more. At first they walked and kept some sort of line. Then some began to run. Soon they were all running, isolated or in groups of two or three. And all the time those puffs of dust pursued their feet. Sometimes there was no puff of dust, and then a man would spring in the air, or spin round, or just lurch forward with arms outspread, a mere yellowish heap, hardly to be distinguished from an ant-hill. I could see many a poor fellow wandering hither and thither as though lost, as is common in all retreats. A man would walk sideways, then run back a little, look round, fall. Another came by. The first evidently called out and the other gave him a hand. Both stumbled on together, the puffs of dust splashing round them. Then down they fell and were quiet. A complacent correspondent told me afterwards, with the condescending smile of higher light, that only seven men were hit. I only know that before evening twenty-five of the Light Horse alone were brought in wounded, not counting the dead, and not counting the other mounted troops, all of whom suffered.

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It was all over by a quarter-past three. The Dragoon Guards, who had been trying to cover the retreat, galloped back, one or two horses galloping riderless. Under the Red Cross flag the dhoolies then began to go out to pick up the results of the battle. For an hour or so that work lasted, the dead and dying being found among the ant-hills where they fell. Then we all trailed back, the enemy shelling our line of retreat from three sides, and we in such a mood that we cared very little for shells or anything else.

November 4, 1899.

This morning Sir George White sent Joubert a letter by Major Bateson, asking leave for the non-combatants, women and children to go down to Maritzburg. The morning was quiet, most people packing up in hopes of going. But Joubert's answer put an end to that. The wounded, women, children, and other non-combatants might be collected in some place about four miles from the town, but could go no further. All who remained would be treated as combatants. I don't know what other answer Joubert could have given. It was a mistake to ask the favour at all. But the General advised the town to accept the proposal. At a strange and unorganised public meeting on the steps of the Ionic Public Hall, now a hospital, the people indignantly rejected the terms. Leave our women and children at Intombi's Spruit—the bushy spot fixed upon, five miles away—with Boers creeping round them, perhaps using them as a screen for attack! Britons never, never will! The Mayor hesitated, the Archdeacon was eloquent, the Scotch proved the metaphysical impossibility of the scheme. Amid shouts and cheers and waving parasols the people raised the National Anthem, and for once there was some dignity in that inferior tune. Everybody's life was in danger for "The Queen." The proposal to leave the town was flung back with defiance. Rather let our homes be flattened out!

To-night my grey-haired Cape-boy and my Zulu came to me in silence and tears. They had hoped for escape. They longed for the peace of Maritzburg, and now, like myself, they were bottled up amid "pom-poms." Had I not promised never to bring them into danger—always to leave them snug in the rear? They were devoted to my service. Others ran. Them no thought of safety could induce to leave me. But one had a wife and descendants, the other had ancestors. It was pitiful. Better savages never loomed out of blackness. In sorrow I promised a pension for the widow if the old man was killed. "But how if you get pom-pom too, boss?" he plaintively asked. I pledged the *Chronicle* to take over the obligation. The word "obligation" consoled him. The lady's name is Mrs. Louis Nicodemus, now of Maritzburg. For the Zulu's ancestry I promised no provision.

CHAPTER VIII

TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Sunday, November 5, 1899.

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The armistice lasted all day, except that the enemy threw two shells at a waggon going up the Helpmakaar road and knocked it to pieces, and, I hear, killed a man or two—I don't know why. The townspeople were very busy building shelters for the bombardment. The ends of bridges and culverts were closed up with sandbags and stones. Circular forts were piled in the safest places among the rocks. The Army Service Corps constructed a magnificent work with mealy-bags and corn-beef cases—a perfect palace of security. But, as usual, the Kaffirs were wisest. They have crept up the river banks to a place where it flows between two steep hills of rock, and there is no access but by a narrow footpath. There they lie with their blankets and bits of things, indifferent to time and space. Some sort of Zulu missionary is up there, too, and I saw him nobly washing a cooking-pot for his family, dressed in little but his white clerical choker and a sort of undivided skirt. A few white families have gone to the same place, and I helped some of them to construct their new homes in the rocks amidst great merriment. The boys were as delighted as children with a spade and bucket by the sea, and many an impregnable redoubt was thrown up with a dozen stones. What those homes will be like at the end of a week I don't know. A picnic where love is may be endurable for one afternoon, when there are plenty of other people to cook and wash up. But a hungry and unclean picnic by day and night, beside a muddy river, with little to eat and no one to cook, nowhere to sleep but the rock, and nothing to do but dodge the shells, is another story. "I tell you what," said a serious Tory soldier to me, "if English people saw this sort of thing, they'd hang that Chamberlain." "They won't hang him, but perhaps they'll make him a Lord," I answered, and watched the women trying to keep the children decent while their husbands worked the pick.

In the afternoon the trains went out, bearing the wounded to their new camp across the plain at Intombi's Spruit. The move was not well organised. From dawn the ambulance people had been at work shifting the hospital tents and all the surgical necessities, but at five in the afternoon a note came back from the officer in camp urging us not to send any more patients. "There is no water, no rations," it said; "not nearly enough tents are pitched. If more wounded come, they will have to spend the night on the open veldt." But the long train was already made up. The wounded were packed in it. It was equally impossible to leave them there or to take them back. So on they went. In all that crowd of suffering men I did not hear a single complaint. Administration is not the strong point of the British officer. "We are only sportsmen," said one of them with a sigh, as he crawled up the platform, torn with dysentery and fever.

In front of the wounded were a lot of open trucks for such townspeople as chose to go. They had hustled a few rugs and lumps of bedding together, and, sitting on these, they made the best of war. But not many went, and most of those had relations among the Boers or were Boers themselves.

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When the trains had gone, Captain Lambton, of the *Powerful*, showed me the new protection which his men and the sappers had built round the great 4.7 in. gun, which is always kept trained on “Long Tom.” The sailors call the gun “Lady Anne,” in compliment to Captain Lambton’s sister, but the soldiers have named it “Weary Willie”—I don’t know why. The fellow gun on Cove Hill is called “Bloody Mary”—which is no compliment to anybody. The earthwork running round the “Lady Anne” is eighteen feet deep at the base. Had it been as deep the first day she came, Lieutenant Egerton would still be at her side.

November 6, 1899.

When the melodrama doesn’t come off, an indignant Briton demands his money back. Our melodrama has not come off. We were quite ready to give it a favourable reception. The shops were shut, business abandoned. Many had taken secure places the night before, so as to be in plenty of time. Nearly all were seated expectant long before dawn. The rising sun was to ring the curtain up. It rose. The curtain never stirred. From whom shall we indignant Britons demand our money back?

With the first glimmer of light between the stars over Bulwan, those few who had stayed the night under roofs began creeping away to the holes in the river bank or the rough, scrubby ground at the foot of the hills south-west of the town, where the Manchesters guard the ridge. Then we all waited, silent with expectation. The clouds turned crimson. At five the sun marched up in silence. Not a gun was heard. “They will begin at six,” we said. Not a sound. “They are having a good breakfast,” we thought. Eight came, and we began to move about uneasily. Two miserable shells whizzed over my head, obviously aimed only at the balloon which was just coming down. “Call that a performance?” we grumbled. We left our seats. We went on to the stage of the town. What was the matter? Was “Long Tom” ill? Had the Basutos overrun the Free State? Had Buller really advanced? Lieutenant Hooper, of the 5th Lancers, had walked through from Maritzburg, passing the Royal Irish sentries at 2 a.m. He brought news of a division coming to our rescue. Was that the reason of the day’s failure? So speculation chattered. The one thing certain was that the performance did not come off, and there was no one to give us our money back.

[Illustration: IMPERIAL LIGHT HORSE SHELTERS]

So we spent the day wandering round the outposts, washing ourselves and our rags in the yellow river, trying to get the horses to drink the water afterwards, contemplating the picturesque, and pretending to cook. Perhaps the greatest interest was the work upon a series of caves in the river-bank, behind the Intelligence Office. They are square-topped, with straight sides, cut clean into the hard, sandy cliff. The Light Horse have made them for themselves and their ammunition. On the opposite side the Archdeacon

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has hollowed out a noble, ecclesiastical burrow. On the hills the soldiers are still at work completing their shelter-trenches and walls. I think the Rifle Brigade on King's Post (the signal hill of a month ago) have built the finest series of defences, for they have made covered pits against shrapnel. But perhaps they are more exposed than all the others except the Devons, who lie along a low ridge beside the Helpmakaar road, open to shell from two points, and perhaps to rifle-fire also. The Irish Fusiliers, under Major Churchill, have a very ingenious series of walls and covers. The main Manchesters' defences are circular like forts; so are the Gordons' and the K.R.R.'s. All are provisioned for fourteen days.

I spent the afternoon searching for a runner, a Kaffir the colour of night, who would steal through the Boer lines in the dark with a telegram. In my search I lost two hours through the conscientiousness of the 5th Lancers, who arrested me and sent me from pillar to post, just as if I was seeking information at the War Office. At last they took me—the Colonel himself, three privates with rifles and a mounted orderly with a lance—took me to the General Staff, and there the absurdity ended. But seriously, what is the good of having the very highest and most authoritative passes possible—one from the War Office and one from the head of the Intelligence Department here—if any conscientious colonel can refuse to acknowledge them, and drag a correspondent about amid the derision of Kaffirs and coolies, and of Dutchmen who are known perfectly well to send every scrap of intelligence to their friends outside? I lost two hours; probably I lost my chance of getting a runner through. I had complied with the regulations in every possible respect. My pass was in my hand; and what was the good of it?

But after all we are in the midst of a tragedy. Let us not be too serious. Dishevelled women are peering out of their dens in the rocks and holes in the sand. They crawl into the evening light, shaking the dirt from their petticoats and the sand from their back hair. They rub the children's faces round with the tails of their gowns. They tempt scraps of flame to take the chill off the yellow water for the children's tea. After sundown a steady Scotch drizzle settles down upon us.

November 7, 1899.

To-day the melodrama has begun in earnest. "Long Tom" and four or five smaller guns from Bulwan, and a nearer battery to the north-west, began hurling percussion shell and shrapnel upon the Naval batteries at half-past seven. Our "Lady Anne" answered, but after flinging shells into the immense earthworks for an hour or two without much effect, both sides got tired of that game. But the Boer fire was not quite without effect, for one of the smaller shells burst right inside the "Lady Anne's" private chamber and carried away part of the protecting gear, not killing any men. Then "Long Tom" was deliberately turned

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upon the town, especially upon the Convent, which stands high on the ridge, and is used as a hospital. His shells went crashing among the houses, but happily land is cheap in South Africa still, and the houses, as a rule, are built on separate plots, so that as often as not the shells fall in a garden bush or among the clothes-lines. Only two Indian bearers were wounded and a few horses and cattle killed. Things went pretty quietly through the morning, except that there was a good deal of firing—shell and rifle—on the high ridge south-west, where the Manchesters are. About two o'clock I started for that position, and being fond of short cuts, thought I would ford the river at a break in its steep banks instead of going round by the iron bridge. Mr. Melton Prior was with me, for I had promised to show him a quiet place for sketching the whole view of the town in peace. As we came to the river a shell pitched near us, but we did not take much notice of it. In the middle of the ford we took the opportunity of letting the horses drink, and they stood drinking like the orphan lamb. Suddenly there was something more than the usual bang, crash, scream of a big shell, and the water was splashed with lumps and shreds of iron, my hat was knocked off and lay wrecked in the stream, and the horses were dashing this way and that with terror. "Are you killed?" shouted Mr. Prior. "I don't think so," I said. "Are you?" And then I had to lash my horse back to the place lest my hat should sail down-stream and adorn a Queen's enemy. There is nothing like shell-fire for giving lessons in horsemanship.

[Illustration: THE DRIFT AND WATERING PLACE]

The Manchesters had been having an uncomfortable time of it, and I found Sir George White and his staff up on their hill. As we walked about, the little puffs of dust kept rising at our feet. We were within rifle-fire, though at long range. Now and then a very peculiar little shell was thrown at us. One went straight through a tent, but we could not find it afterwards. It was a shell like a viper. I left the Manchesters putting up barbed-wire entanglements to increase their defence, and came back to try to find another runner. The shells were falling very thick in the town, and for the first time people were rather scared. As I write one bursts just over this little tin house. It is shrapnel, and the iron rain falls hammering on the roof, but it does not come through. Two windows only are broken. Probably it burst too high.

November 8, 1899.

Fairly quiet day. The great event was the appearance of a new "Long Tom" on the Bulwan. He is to be called "Puffing Billy," from the vast quantity of smoke he pours out. Nothing else of great importance happened. Major Grant, of the Intelligence, was slightly wounded while sketching on the Manchesters' ridge. Coolies wandered about the streets all day with tin boxes or Asiatic bundles on their heads. Joubert had sent them in as a present from Dundee. They were refugees from that unhappy town, and after a visit to Pretoria, they are now dumped down here to help devour our rations.

Some Europeans have come, too—guards, signalmen and shopkeepers—who report immense reinforcements coming up for the Boers. Is there not something a little mediaeval in sending a crowd of hungry non-combatants into an invested town?

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CHAPTER IX

INCIDENTS, ACCIDENTS, AND REALITIES

LADYSMITH, *November 9, 1899.*[1]

A day of furious and general attack. Just before five I was wakened by a shell blustering through the eucalyptus outside my window, and bursting in a gully beyond. "Lady Anne" answered at once, and soon all the Naval Brigade guns were in full cry. What should we have done without the Naval guns? We have nothing else but ordinary field artillery, quite unable to reply to the heavy guns which the Boers have now placed in position round the town. Yet they only came up at the last moment, and it was a mere piece of luck they got through at all. Standing behind them on the ridge above my tin house, I watched the firing till nine o'clock, dodging behind a loose wall to avoid the splinters which buzz through the air after each shot, and are sometimes strangely slow to fall. Once after "Long Tom" had fired I stood up, thinking all was over, when a big fragment hummed gently above my head, went through the roof and ceiling of a house a hundred yards behind, and settled on a shell-proof spring mattress in the best bedroom. One of the little boys running out from the family burrow in the rocks was delighted to find it there, and carried it off to add to his collection of moths and birds' eggs. The estimate of "Long Tom's" shell has risen from 40lbs. to 96lbs. and I believe that to be the true weight. One of them to-day dug a stupendous hole in the pavement just before one of the principal shops, and broke yards of shutter and plate glass to pieces. It was quite pleasant to see a shop open again.

So the bombardment went on with violence all the morning. The troglodytes in their burrows alone thought themselves safe, but, in fact, only five men were killed, and not all of those by shell. One was a fine sergeant of the Liverpools, who held the base of the Helpmakaar road where it leaves the town eastward. Sergeant Macdonald was his name, a man full of zeal, and always tempted into danger by curiosity, as most people are. Instead of keeping under shelter of the sangar when the guns on Bulwan were shelling the position, he must needs go outside "to have a look." The contents of a shell took him full in front. Any of his nine wounds would have been fatal. His head and face seemed shattered to bits; yet he did not lose consciousness, but said to his captain, "I'd better have stopped inside, sir." He died on the way to hospital.

A private of the Liverpools was killed too. About twenty-four in all were wounded, chiefly by rifle fire, Captain Lethbridge of the Rifle Brigade being severely injured in the spine. Lieutenant Fisher, of the Manchesters, had been shot through the shoulder earlier in the day, but did not even report himself as wounded until evening.

After all, the rifle, as Napoleon said, is the only thing that counts, and to-day we had a great deal of it at various points in our long line of defence. That line is like a horseshoe, ten to twelve miles round.

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The chief attacks were directed against the Manchesters in Caesar's Camp (we are very historic in South Africa) and against a mixed force on Observation Hill, two companies of the Rifle Brigade, two of the King's Royal Rifles, and the 5th Lancers dismounted. The Manchesters suffered most. Since the investment began the enemy has never left them in peace. They are exposed to shells from three positions, and to continual sniping from the opposite hill. It is more than a week since even the officers washed or took their clothes off, and now the men have been obliged to strike their tents because the shells and rifles were spoiling the stuff.

The various companies get into their sangars at 3 a.m., and stay there till it is dark again. Two companies were to-day thrown out along the further edge of their hill in extended order as firing line, and soon after dawn the Boers began to creep down the opposite steep by two or three at a time into one of the many farms owned by Bester, a notorious traitor, now kept safe in Ladysmith. All morning the firing was very heavy, many of the bullets coming right over the hill and dropping near the town. Our men kept very still, only firing when they saw their mark. Three of them were killed, thirteen wounded. Before noon a field battery came up to support the battalion, and against that terrifying shrapnel of ours the Boers attempted no further advance. In the same way they came creeping up against Observation Hill (a barren rocky ridge on the north-west of the town), hiding by any tree or stone, but were completely checked by four companies of Rifles, with two guns and the dismounted Lancers. They say the Boer loss was very heavy at both places. It is hard to know.

In the afternoon things were fairly quiet, but in walking along the low ridge held by the Liverpools and Devons, I was sniped at every time my head showed against the sky. At 4 p.m. there was a peculiar forward movement of our cavalry and guns along the Helpmakaar road, which came to nothing being founded on false information, such as comes in hourly.

The great triumph of the day was certainly the Royal salute at noon in honour of the Prince of Wales. Twenty-one guns with shotted charge, and all fired slap upon "Long Tom"! It was the happiest moment in the Navy's life for many a year. One after another the shot flew. "Long Tom" was so bewildered he has not spoken since. The cheering in the camps was heard for miles. People thought the relief division was in sight. But we were only signifying that the Prince was a year older.

[Footnote 1: Despatched by runner on November 20, but returned to the writer on December 23, and despatched again on January 1.]

November 10, 1899.

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Another morning of unusual quiet. People sicken of the monotony when shells are not flying. We don't know any reason for the calm, except that the Dutch are burying their dead of yesterday. But the peace is welcome, and in riding round our positions I found nearly all the men lying asleep in the sun. The wildest stories flew: General French had been seen in the street; his brigade was almost in sight; Methuen was at Colenso with overwhelming force. The townspeople took heart. One man who had spent his days in a stinking culvert since the siege began now crept into the sun. "They are arrant cowards, these Boers," he cried, stamping the echoing ground; "why don't they come on and fight us like men?" So the day wears. At four o'clock comes an African thunderstorm with a deluge of rain, filling the water tanks and slaking the dust, grateful to all but the men of both armies uncovered on the rocks.

November 11, 1899.

A soaking early morning with minute rain, hiding all the circle of the hills, for which reason there is no bombardment yet, and I have spent a quiet hour with Colonel Stoneman, arranging rations for my men and beasts, and taking a lesson how to organise supplies and yet keep an unruffled mind. The rest of the morning I sat with a company of the 60th (K.R.R.) on the top of Cove Hill (another of the many Aldershot names). The men had been lining the exposed edge of Observation Hill all night, without any shelter, whilst the thick cold rain fell upon them. It was raining still, and they lay about among the rocks and thorny mimosa bushes in rather miserable condition.

It would be a good thing if the Army could be marched through Regent Street as the men look this morning. It would teach people more about war than a hundred pictures of plumed horsemen and the dashing charge. The smudgy khaki uniforms soaked through and through, stained black and green and dingy red with wet and earth and grass; the draggled great-coats, heavy with rain and thick with mud; the heavy sopping boots, the blackened, battered helmets; the blackened, battered faces below them, unwashed and unshaved since the siege began; the eyes heavy and bloodshot with sun and rain and want of sleep; the peculiar smell—there is not much brass band and glory about us now.

At noon the mist lifted, and just before one the Boer guns opened fire nearly all round the horseshoe, except that the Manchesters were left in peace. I think only one new gun had been placed in position, but another had been cleverly checked. As a rule, it has been our polite way to let the Boers settle their guns comfortably in their places, and then to try in vain to blow them out. Yesterday the enemy were fortifying a gun on Star Hill, when one of our artillery captains splashed a shell right into the new wall. We could see the Boer gunners running out on both sides, and the fort has not been continued.

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To-day “Long Tom’s” shells were thrown pretty much at random about the town. One blew a mule’s head off close to the bank, and disembowelled a second. One went into the “Scotch House” and cleared the shop. A third pitched close to the Anglican Church, and brought the Archdeacon out of burrow. But there was no real loss, except that one of the Naval Brigade got a splinter in the forehead. My little house had another dose of shrapnel, and on coming in I found a soldier digging up the bits in the garden; but the Scotch owner drove him away for “interfering with the mineral rights.” At 3.30 the mist fell again, and there was very little firing after 4. Out on the flat beyond the racecourse our men were engaged in blowing up and burning some little farms and kraals which sheltered the Boer scouts. As I look towards the Bulwan I see the yellow blaze of their fires.

Sunday, November 12, 1899.

Amid all the estimable qualities of the Boer race there is none more laudable than their respect for the Sabbath day. It has been a calm and sunny day. Not a shot was fired—no sniping even. We feel like grouse on a pious Highland moor when Sunday comes, and even the laird dares not shoot. The cave dwellers left their holes and flaunted in the light of day. In the main street I saw a perambulator, stuffed with human young. Pickets and outposts stretched their limbs in the sun. Soldiers off duty scraped the clods off their boots and polished up their bayonets. Officers shaved and gloried over a leisurely breakfast. For myself, I washed my shirt and hung it on the line of fire to dry.

In the morning one of the Irish Brigade rode in through the Liverpools’ picket. He was “fed up” with the business, as the soldiers say. He reported that only about seventy of the Brigade were left. He also said the Boer commandants were holding a great meeting to-day—whether for psalms or strategy I don’t know; probably both. We heard the usual rumours that the Boers were going or had gone. Climbing to the Manchesters’ post for the view, I could see three Boer trains waiting at Modder’s Spruit station, about six miles up the Newcastle line. Did they bring reinforcements, or were they waiting to take “Long Tom” home by return ticket? We shall know to-morrow. Over the valley where we repulsed Thursday’s attack, the vultures flew as thick as swifts upon the Severn at twilight. Those were the only signs of war—those and the little forts which hid the guns. Otherwise the enormous landscape lay at peace. I have never seen it so clear—the precipitous barrier of the Basuto mountains, lined with cloud, and still touched with snow: the great sculptured mountains that mark the Free State border: and then the scenes which have become so familiar to us all—Elands Laagte, Tinta Inyoni, Pepworth Hill, Lombard’s Kop, and the great Bulwan. Turning to the south we looked across to the nearer hills, beyond which lie Colenso, Estcourt, and the road to Maritzburg and the sea. It is from beyond those hills that our help is coming.

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The Boers have many estimable qualities. They are one of the few admirable races still surviving, and they conduct this siege with real consideration and gentlemanly feeling. They observe the Sabbath. They give us quiet nights. After a violent bombardment they generally give us at least one day to calm down. Their hours for slaughter are six to six, and they seldom overstep them. They knock off for meals—unfashionably early, it is true, but it would be petty to complain. Like good employers, they seldom expose our lives to danger for more than eight hours a day. They are a little capricious, perhaps, in the use of the white flag. At the beginning of the siege our “Lady Anne” killed or wounded some of “Long Tom’s” gunners and damaged the gun. Whereupon the Boers hoisted the white flag over him till the place was cleared and he was put to rights again. Then they drew it down and went on firing. It was the sort of thing schoolboys might do. Captain Lambton complained that by the laws of war the gun was permanently out of action. But “Long Tom” goes on as before.

I think the best story of the siege comes from a Kaffir who walked in a few days ago. In the Boer camp behind Pepworth Hill he had seen the men being taught bayonet exercise with our Lee-Metfords, captured at Dundee. The Boer has no bayonet or steel of his own, and for an assault on the town he will need it. Instruction was being given by a prisoner—a sergeant of the Royal Irish Fusiliers—with a rope round his neck!

November 13, 1899.

The Boer method of siege is quite inexplicable. Perhaps it comes of inexperience. Perhaps they have been studying the sieges of ancient history and think they are doing quite the proper thing in sitting down round a garrison, putting in a few shells and waiting. But they forget that, though the sieges of ancient history lasted ten years, nowadays we really can’t afford the time. The Boers, we hope, have scarcely ten days, yet they loiter along as though eternity was theirs.

To-day they began soon after five with the usual cannonade from “Long Tom,” “Puffing Billy,” and three or four smaller guns, commanding the Naval batteries. The answers of our “Lady Anne” and “Bloody Mary” shook me awake, and, seated on the hill, I watched the big guns pounding at each other for about three hours, when there came an interval for breakfast. As far as I could make out, neither side did the other the least harm. It was simply an unluccrative exchange of so much broken iron between two sensible and prudent nations. The moment “Tom” or “Billy” flashed, “Anne” or “Mary” flashed too. Our shells do the distance about two and a-half seconds quicker than theirs, so that we can see the result of our shot just before one has to duck behind the stones for the crash and whiz of the enormous shells which started first. To-day most of “Tom’s” shells passed over the batteries, and plunged down the hill into the town beyond. It is supposed that he must be wearing out. He has been firing here pretty steadily for over a fortnight, to say nothing of his work at Dundee. But I think his fire upon the town is quite deliberate. He might pound away at “Lady Anne” for ever, but there is always a chance that 96lbs. of iron exploding in a town may, at all events, kill a mule.

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So the bombardment went on cheerily through the early morning, till about 10.30 it slackened down in the inexplicable Boer fashion, and hardly one shot an hour was fired afterwards. The surmise goes that Joubert cannot get his men up to the attacking point. Their loss last Saturday was certainly heavy.

Yesterday the Boers, with fine simplicity, sent to our ambulance camp for some chlorodyne because they had run short of it, and were troubled with dysentery like ourselves. Being at heart a kindly people, we gave them what they wanted and a little brandy besides. The British soldier thereupon invents the satire that Joubert asked for some forage because his horses were hungry, and Sir George White replied: "I would very gladly accede to your request, but have only enough forage myself to last three years."

The day passed, and we did not lose a single man. Yet the enemy must have enjoyed one incident. I was riding up to spend an hour in the afternoon with Major Churcher and the 200 Royal Irish Fusiliers left at Range Post, when on an open space between me and their little camp I saw a squadron of the 18th Hussars circling and doubling about as though they were practising for the military tournament. Almost before I had time to think, bang came a huge shell from "Puffing Billy" just over my head, and pitched between me and them. Happily, it fell short, but it gave the Dutch gunners a wonderful display of our cavalry's excellence. Even before I could come up men and horses had vanished into air.

All day strange rumours have been afloat about the Division supposed to be coming to our relief. It was expected to-morrow. Now it is put off till Thursday. It is even whispered it will sit quiet at Estcourt, and not come to our relief at all. To-night is bitterly cold, and the men are chilled to the stomach on the bare hillsides.

November 14, 1899.

The siege is becoming very tedious, and we are losing heart. Depression was to-day increased by one of those futile sorties which only end in retirement. In the early morning a large Boer convoy of waggons was seen moving along the road beyond Bluebank towards the north, about eight miles away. Ninety waggons were reported. One man counted twenty-five, another thirteen. I myself saw two. At all events, waggons were there, and we thought of capturing them. But it was past ten before even the nucleus of a force reached Range Post, and the waggons were already far away. Out trotted the 18th and 19th Hussars, three batteries, and the Imperial Light Horse on to the undulating plain leading up to the ridge of Bluebank, where the Boers have one gun and plenty of rocks to hide behind. That gun opened fire at once, and was supported by "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity," three black-powder guns along Telegraph Hill, besides the two guns on Surprise Hill. In fact, all the Boer guns chimed in round the circle, and for two hours it was difficult to trace where each whizzing shell came from, familiar though we are with their peculiar notes.

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Meantime our batteries kept sprinkling shrapnel over Bluebank with their usual steadiness and perfection of aim. The enemy's gun was soon either silenced or withdrawn. The rifle fire died down. Not a Boer was to be seen upon the ridge, but three galloped away over the plains behind as though they had enough of it. The Light Horse dismounted and advanced to Star Point. All looked well. We expected to see infantry called up to advance upon the ridge, while our cavalry swept round upon the fugitives in the rear. But nothing of the kind happened.

Suddenly the Light Horse walked back to their horses and retired. One by one the batteries retired at a walk. The cavalry followed. Before two o'clock the whole force was back again over Range Post. The enemy poured in all the shells and bullets they could, but our men just came back at a walk, and only four were wounded. I am told General Brocklehurst was under strict orders not to lose men.

The shells did more damage than usual in the town. Three houses were wrecked, one "Long Tom" shell falling into Captain Valentine's dining-room, and disturbing the breakfast things. Another came through two bedrooms in the hotel, and spoilt the look of the smoking-room. But I think the only man killed was a Carbineer, who had his throat cut by a splinter as he lay asleep in his tent.

Just after midnight a very unusual thing happened. Each of the Boer guns fired one shot. Apparently they were trained before sunset and fired at a given signal. The shells woke me up, whistling over the roof. Most of the townspeople rushed, lightly clad, to their holes and coverts. The troops stood to arms. But the rest of the night was quiet.' Apparently the Boers, contrary to their character, had only done it to annoy, because they knew it teased us.

CHAPTER X

ENNUI ENLIVENED BY SUDDEN DEATH

LADYSMITH, *November 15, 1899.*

This drama is getting too long for the modern stage, and so far the Dutch have obeyed none of the dramatic rules. To-day was one monotony of rain, and may be blotted out from the memory of all but the men who lay hour after hour miserably soaking upon the edges of the hills. After the early morning not a shell was fired. The mist was too thick to allow even of wild shots at the town.

I had another try at getting a Kaffir runner to carry a telegram through to Estcourt.

November 16, 1899.



The sun came back to cheer us up and warm our bones. At the Liverpools' picket, on the Newcastle road, the men at six o'clock were rejoicing in a glorious and soapy wash where the rain had left a pool in a quarry. The day passed very quietly, shells only falling on an average of one every half-hour. Unhappily a shrapnel scattered over the station, wounded three or four natives, and killed an excellent railway guard—a sharp fragment tearing through his liver and intestines. There was high debate whether the shell was thrown by “Silent Susan,” or what other gun. Some even stuck out for “Long Tom” himself. But to the guard it makes no difference, and he was most concerned.

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Relief was to have come to us to-day for certain, but we hear nothing of it beyond vague rumours of troops at Estcourt and Maritzburg. We are slowly becoming convinced that we are to be left to our fate while the main issue is settled elsewhere. Colonel Ward has organised the provisions of the town and troops to last for eighty days. He is also buying up all the beer and spirits, partly to cheer the soldiers' hearts on these dreary wet nights; partly to prevent the soldier cheering himself too much.

In the evening I sent off another runner with a telegram and quite a mail of letters from officers and men for their mothers', wives, and lovers over seas. He was a bony young Kaffir, with a melancholy face, black as sorrow. At six o'clock I saw him start, his apish feet padding through the crusted slush. One pocket bulged with biscuits, one with a tin of beef. Between his black chest and his rag of shirt he had tucked that neat packet which was to console so many a woman, white-skinned and delicately dressed. Fetching a wide compass, he stole away into the eastern twilight, where the great white moon was rising, shrouded in electric cloud.

November 17, 1899.

A few shells came in early, and by nine o'clock there was so much firing on the north-west that I rode out to the main position of the 60th (King's Royal Rifles) on Cove Hill. I found that our field battery there was being shelled from Surprise Hill and its neighbour, but nothing unusual was happening. The men were in a rather disconsolate condition. Even where they have built a large covered shelter underground the wet comes through the roof and trickles down upon them in liquid filth. But they bear it all with ironic indifference, consoling themselves especially with the thought that they killed one Boer for certain yesterday. "The captain saw him fall."

Crossing the open valley in front I came to the long ridge called Observation Hill. There the rifle fire hardly ever ceases. It is held by three companies of the K.R.R. and the 5th Lancers dismounted. It looks out over the long valley of Bell's Spruit; that scene of the great disaster where we lost our battalions, being less than three miles away at the foot of the rugged mountain beyond—Surprise Hill. Close in front is one of the two farms called Hyde's, and there the Boers find shelter at nights and in rain. The farm's orchard, its stone walls, the rocks, and all points of cover swarm with Boer sharpshooters, and whenever our men show themselves upon the ridge the bullets fly. An immense quantity of them are lost. In all the morning's firing only one Lancer had been wounded. As I came over the edge the bullets all passed over my head, but our men have to keep behind cover if they can, and only return the fire when they are sure of a mark. I found a detachment of Lancers, with a corporal, lying behind a low stone wall. It happened to be exactly the place I had wished to

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find, for at one end of the wall stood the Lancer dummy, whose fame has gone through the camp. There he stood, regarding the Dutch with a calm but defiant aspect, his head and shoulders projecting about three feet over the wall. His legs were only a sack stuffed with straw, but round his straw body a beautiful khaki tunic had been buttoned, and his straw head was protected by a regulation helmet, for which a slouch hat was sometimes substituted, to give variety and versimilitude. In his right hand he grasped a huge branch of a tree, either as rifle or lance. He was withdrawn occasionally, and stuck up again in a fresh attitude. To please me the corporal crept behind him and jogged him up and down in a life-like and scornful manner. The hope was that the Boers would send a bullet through that heart of straw. In the afternoon they did in fact pierce his hat, but at the time they were keeping their ammunition for something more definitely human, like myself. As I retired, after saluting the dummy for his courage, the bullets flew again, but the sights were still too high.

[Illustration: BULWAN]

On my return to the old Scot's house, I found an excited little crowd in the back garden. They were digging out an enormous shell which had plumped into the grass, taking off the Scot's hat and knocking him down with the shock as it fell. The thing had burst in the ground, and it was as good as a Chinese puzzle to fit the great chunks of iron together. At first we could not find the solid base, but we dug it out with a pick from the stiff, black clay. It had sunk 3 ft. 8 in. down from the surface, and had run 7 ft. 6 in. from the point of contact. It was a 45-pounder, thrown by a 4.7 in. gun—probably one of the four howitzers which the Boers possess, standing half-way down Lombard's Kop, about four miles away, and is identical with "Silent Susan." But with smokeless powder it is almost impossible to say where a shot comes from. "Long Tom" and "Puffing Billy," with their huge volumes of smoke, are much more satisfactory.

Rain fell heavily for the rest of the day, and the bombardment ended, but it was bitter cold.

November 18, 1899.

The bombardment was continued without much energy. The balloon reported that the Boers were occupied in putting up more guns on Bulwan. Rumour says there will be thirteen in all, a goodly number for a position which completely commands the town from end to end. All day the shells had a note of extra spite in them as they came plunging among the defenceless houses. But they did no great harm till evening. As a rule the Boers cease fire about half-past six, and some twenty of us then settled down to dinner at the hotel—one or two officers, some doctors, and most of the correspondents. We had hardly begun to-night when a shell from "Silent Susan"

whistled just over the roof and burst in the yard. Within five minutes came the louder scream of another. It crashed over us, breaking

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its way through the hotel from roof to floor. We all got up and crowded to the main entrance on the street. The shell had struck a sidewall in the bar, and glanced off through the doorway without exploding. Dr. Stark, of Torquay, was standing at the door, waiting for a place at dinner, and talking to Mr. Machugh, of the *Daily Telegraph*. The shell struck him full in the thigh, leaving his left leg hanging only by a piece of flesh, and shattering the right just at the knee. "Hold me up," he said, and did not lose consciousness. We moved him to the hospital, but he died within an hour. I have little doubt that the shells were aimed at the hotel, because the Boers know that Dr. Jameson and Colonel Rhodes are in the town. But the man killed was Dr. Stark, a strong opponent of the Chamberlain policy, and a vigorous denouncer of the war's injustice.

The havoc of the siege is gradually increasing, and the prospect of relief grows more and more distant. Just after midnight the Boers again aroused us by discharging all their guns into the forts or the town, and again the people hurried away to their caves and culverts for protection. The long Naval guns replied, and then all was quiet.

Sunday, November 19, 1899.

Another day of rest, for which we thank the Fourth Commandment. After the Sabbath wash, I went up to Caesar's Camp for the view. On the way I called in upon the balloon, which now dwells in a sheltered leafy glade at the foot of the Gordons' hill, when it is not in the sky, surrounded by astonished vultures. The weak points of ballooning appear to be that it is hard to be sure of detail as distinguished from mass, and even on a clear day the light is often insufficient or puzzling. It is seldom, for instance, that the balloonist gets a definite view towards Colenso, which to us is the point of greatest interest. I found that the second balloon was only used as a blind to the enemy, like a paper kite flown over birds to keep them quiet. Going up to the Manchesters' position on the top of Caesar's Camp, I had a view of the whole country almost as good as any balloon's. The Boer laagers have increased in size, and are not so carefully hidden.

Beside the railway at the foot of "Long Tom's" hill near Modder Spruit, there was quite a large camp of Boer tents and three trains as usual. They say the Boers have put their prisoners from the Royal Irish Fusiliers here, but it is unlikely they should bring them back from Pretoria. The tents of another large camp showed among the bushes on Lombard's Nek, where the Helpmakaar road passes between Lombard's Kop and Bulwan, and many waggon laagers were in sight beyond. At the foot of the flat-topped Middle Hill on the south-west, the Boers have placed two more guns to trouble the Manchesters further. But our defences along the whole ridge are now very strong.

In the afternoon they buried Dr. Stark in the cemetery between the river and the Helpmakaar road. I don't know what has become of a kitten which he used to carry

about with him in a basket when he went to spend the day under the shelter of the river bank.

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November 20, 1899.

"Gentlemen," said Sir George White to his Staff, "we have two things to do—to kill time and to kill Boers—both equally difficult." The siege is becoming intolerably tedious. It is three weeks to-day since "Black Monday," when the great disaster befell us, and we seem no nearer the end than we were at first. We console ourselves with the thought that we are but a pawn on a great chessboard. We hope we are doing service by keeping the main Boer army here. We hope we are not handed over for nothing to *ennui* enlivened by sudden death. But the suspicion will recur that perhaps the army hedging us in is not large after all. It is a bad look-out if, as Captain Lambton put it, we are being "stuck up by a man and a boy."

Nothing is so difficult to estimate as Boer numbers, and we never take enough account of the enemy's mobility. They can concentrate rapidly at any given point and gain the appearance of numbers which they don't possess. However, the balloon reports the presence of laagers of ten commandoes in sight. We may therefore assume about as many out of sight, and consider that we are probably doing our duty as a pawn.

This morning the Boers hardly gave a sign of life, except that just before noon "Puffing Billy" shelled a platelayer's house on the flat beyond the racecourse, in the attempt to drive out our scouts who were making a defended position of it.

In the afternoon I rode up to the Rifle Brigade at King's Post, above the old camp, and met Captain Paley, whom I last saw administering a province in Crete. Suddenly the Boer guns began firing from Surprise Hill and Thornhill's Kop, just north of us, and the shells passing over our heads, crashed right into the 18th Hussar camp beside a little bridge over the river below. Surprise Hill alone dropped five shells in succession among the crowded tents, horses, and men. The men began hurrying about like ants. Tents were struck at once, horses saddled, everything possible taken up, and the whole regiment sought cover in a little defile close by. Within half an hour of the first shell the place was deserted. The same guns compelled the Naval Brigade to shift their position last night. We have not much to teach the Boer gunners, except the superiority of our shells.

The bombardment then became general; only three Gordons were wounded, but the town suffered a good deal. Three of "Long Tom's" shells pitched in the main street, one close in front of a little girl, who escaped unhurt. Another carried away the heavy stone porch of the Anglican Church, and, at dinner-time, "Silent Susan" made a mark on the hotel, but it was empty. Just before midnight the guns began again. I watched them flashing from Bulwan and the other hills, but could not mark what harm they did. It was a still, hot night, with a large waning moon. In the north-west the Boers were flashing an electric searchlight, apparently from a railway truck on the Harrismith line. The nation of farmers is not much behind the age. They will be sending up a balloon next.



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November 21, 1899.

The desultory bombardment went on as usual, except that “Long Tom” did not fire. The Staff is said to have lost heliographic communication with the south. To-day they sent off two passenger pigeons for Maritzburg. The rumour also went that the wounded Dublins, taken to Intombi Spruit, from the unfortunate armoured train, had heard an official report of Buller’s arrival at Bloemfontein after heavy losses. Another rumour told that many Boer wives and daughters were arriving in the laagers. They were seen, especially on Sunday, parading quite prettily in white frocks. This report has roused the liveliest indignation, which I can only attribute to envy. In our own vulgar land, companies would be running cheap excursions to witness the siege of Ladysmith—one shilling extra to see “Long Tom” in action.

In the morning they buried a Hindoo bearer who had died of pneumonia. The grave was dug among the unmarked heaps of the native graveyard on the river bank. It took five hours to make it deep enough, and meantime the dead man lay on a stretcher, wrapped in a clean white sheet. His friends, about twenty of them, squatted round, almost motionless, and quite indifferent to time and space. In their midst a thin grey smoke rose from a brazen jar, in which smouldered scented wood, spices, lavender, and the fresh blossom of one yellow flower like an aster. At intervals of about a minute, one of the Hindoos raised a short, wailing chant, in parts of which the others joined. On the ground in front of him lay a sweetly-scented manuscript whose pages he never turned. It was written in the Oriental characters, which seem to tell either of Nirvana or of the nightingale’s cry to the rose. At times the other friends tapped gently on three painted drums, hardly bigger than tea cups. The enemy, seeing from Bulwan the little crowd of us engaged upon a heathen rite, threw shrapnel over our heads. It burst and sprinkled the dusty ground behind us with lead. Not one of the Hindoos looked up or turned his face. That low chant did not pause or vary by a note. Close by, a Kaffir was digging a grave for a Zulu woman who had died in childbed. In the river beyond soldiers were bathing, Zulus were soaping themselves white, and one of the Liverpool Mounted Infantry was trying to prevent his horse rolling in four feet of water.

November 22, 1899.

A day only relieved by the wildest rumours and a few shells more dangerous than usual. Buller was reported as being at Hellbrouw; General French was at Dundee; and France had declared war upon England. Shells whiffled into the town quite indiscriminately. One pitched into the Town Hall, now the main hospital. In the evening “Long Tom” threw five in succession down the main street. But only one man was killed. A Natal policeman was cooking his dinner in a cellar when “Silent Susan’s” shot fell upon him and he died. For myself, I

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spent most of the day on Waggon Hill west of the town, where the 1st K.R. Rifles have three companies and a strong sangar, very close to the enemy. I found that, as became Britons, their chief interest lay in sport. They had shot two little antelopes or rehbuck, and hung them up to be ready for a feast. Their one thought was to shoot more. From the hill I looked down upon one of Bester's farms. The owner-a Boer traitor-was now in safe keeping. A few days ago his family drove off in a waggon for the Free State. White were their parasols and in front they waved a Red Cross flag. On a gooseberry bush in the midst of the farm they also left a white flag, where it still flew to protect a few fat pigs, turkeys, and other fowl. The white flag is becoming a kind of fetish. To-day all our white tents were smeared with reddish mud to make them less visible. Beyond Range Post the enemy set up a new gun commanding the Maritzburg road as it crossed that point of hill. The Irish Fusiliers who held that position were shelled heavily, but without loss.

November 23, 1899.

The schoolmaster's wife had a fine escape. She was asleep in her bedroom when a 45lb. shell came through the fireplace and burst towards the bed. The room was smashed to pieces, but she was only cut about the head, one splinter driving in the bone, but not making a very serious wound. Two days before she had given a soldier 10s. for a fragment. Now she had a whole shell for nothing. At five o'clock "Long Tom" threw seven of his 96lb. shells straight down the street in quick succession, smashing a few shops and killing some mules and cattle, but without further harm. We watched them from the top of the road. They came shrieking over our heads, and then a flare of fire and a cloud of dust and stones showed where they fell. At every explosion the women and children laughed and cheered with delight, as at the Crystal Palace fireworks.

Both yesterday and to-day the Boers on Bulwan spent much time and money shelling a new battery which Colonel Knox has had made beside the river near the racecourse. It is just in the middle of the flat, and the enemy can see its six embrasures and the six guns projecting from them. The queer thing is that these guns never reply, and under the hottest fire their gunners neither die nor surrender. A better battery was never built of canvas and stick on the stage of Drury. It has cost the simple-hearted Boers something like L300 in wasted shell.

All day waggons were reported coming down from the Free State and moving south. They were said to carry the wives and daughters of the Free Staters driven by Buller from their own country and content to settle in ours, now that they had conquered it. A queer situation, unparalleled in war, as far as I know.

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In the evening I heard the Liverpools and Devons were likely to be engaged in some feat of arms before midnight. So I stumbled out in the dark along the Helpmakaar road, where those two fine regiments hold the most exposed positions in camp, and I spent the greater part of the night enjoying the hospitality of two Devon officers in their shell-proof hut. Hour after hour we waited, recalling tales of Indian life and Afridi warfare, or watching the lights in the Boer laagers reflected on a cloudy sky. But except for a hot wind the night was peculiarly quiet, and not a single shell was thrown: only from time to time the sharp double knock of a rifle showed that the outposts on both sides were alert.

November 24, 1899.

Though there was no night attack a peculiar manoeuvre was tried, but without success. On the sixty miles of line between here and Harrismith the Boers have only one engine, and it struck some one how fine it would be to send an empty engine into it at full speed from our side. Accordingly, when the Free State train was seen to arrive at the Boer rail-head some eight miles off, out snorted one of our spare locomotives. Off jumped the driver and stoker, and the new kind of projectile sped away into the dark. It ran for about two miles with success, and then dashed off the rails in going round a curve. And there it remains, the Boers showing their curiosity by prodding it with rifles. Unless it is hopelessly smashed up, the Free State has secured a second engine for the conveyance of its wives and daughters.

It is a military order that all cattle going out to graze on the flats close to the town should be tended by armed and mounted drivers, but no one has taken the trouble to see the order carried out. The Empire in this country means any dodge for making money without work. All work is left to Kaffirs, coolies, or Boers. Two hundred cattle went out this morning beyond the old camp, accompanied only by Kaffir boys, who, like all herdsmen, love to sleep in the shade, or make the woods re-echo Amarylli's. Suddenly the Boers were among them, edging between them and the town, and driving the beasts further and further from defence. The Kaffirs continued to sleep, or were driven with the cattle. Then the Leicester Mounted Infantry came galloping out, and, under heavy rifle fire, gained the point of Star Hill, hoping to head the cattle back. At once all the guns commanding that bit of grassy plain opened on them—"Faith," "Hope," and "Charity"—from Telegraph Hill, the guns on Surprise Hill, and Thornhill Kopje, and the two guns now on Bluebank Ridge. Two horses were killed, and the party, not being numerous enough for their task, came galloping back singly. Meantime the Boers, with their usual resource, had invented a new method of calling the cattle home by planting shells just behind them. The whole enterprise was admirably planned and carried out. We only succeeded in saving thirty or forty out of the drove. The lowest estimate of loss is L3,000, chiefly in transport cattle.

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But who knows whether by Christmas we shall not be glad even of a bit of old trek-ox? Probably the Dutch hope to starve us out. At intervals all morning they shelled the cattle near the racecourse, just for the sake of slaughter. To-day also they tried their old game of sending gangs of refugee coolies into the town to devour the rations. Happily, Sir George White turned at that, and sent out a polite note reminding the commandants that we live in a polite age. So in the afternoon the Boers adopted more modern methods. I had been sitting with Colonel Mellor and the other officers of the Liverpools, who live among the rocks close to my cottage, and they had been congratulating themselves on only losing two men by shell and one by enteric since Black Monday, when they helped to cover the retirement with such gallantry and composure. I had scarcely mounted to ride back, when "Puffing Billy" and other guns threw shells right into the midst of the men and rocks and horses. One private fell dead on the spot. Three were mortally wounded. One rolled over and over down the rocks. Several others were badly hurt, and the bombardment became general all over our end of the town.

November 25, 1899.

Almost a blank as far as fighting goes. It is said that General Hunter went out under a flag of truce to protest against the firing upon the hospital. There were no shells to speak of till late afternoon. Among the usual rumours came one that Joubert had been wounded in the mouth at Colenso. The Gordons held their sports near the Iron Bridge, sentries being posted to give the alarm if the Bulwan guns fired. "Any more entries for the United Service mule race? Are you ready? Sentry, are you keeping your eye on that gun?" "Yes, sir." "Very well then, go!" And off the mules went, in any direction but the right, a soldier and a sailor trying vainly to stick on the bare back of each, whilst inextinguishable laughter arose among the gods.

Sunday, November 26, 1899.

Another day of rest. I heard a comment made on the subject by one of the Devons washing down by the river. Its seriousness and the peculiar humour of the British soldier will excuse it. "Why don't they go on bombardin' of us to-day?" said one. "'Cos it's Sunday, and they're singin' 'ymns," said another. "Well," said the first, "if they do start bombardin' of us, there ain't only one 'ymn I'll sing, an' that's 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me 'ide myself in thee.'" It was spoken in the broadest Devon without a smile. The British soldier is a class apart. One of the privates in the Liverpools showed me a diary he is keeping of the war. It is a colourless record of getting up, going to bed, sleeping in the rain with one blanket (a grievance he always mentions, though without complaint), of fighting, cutting brushwood, and building what he calls "sangers and travises." From first to last he makes but one comment, and that is: "There is no peace for the wicked." The Boers were engaged in putting up a new 6 in. gun on the hills beyond Range Post, and the first number of the *Ladysmith Lyre* was published.

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November 27, 1899.

The great event of the day was the firing of the new “Long Tom.” The Boers placed it yesterday on the hill beyond Waggon Hill, where the 60th hold our extreme post towards the west. The point is called Middle Hill. It commands all the west of the town and camp, the Maritzburg road from Range Post on, and the greater part of Caesar’s Camp, where the Manchesters are. The gun is the same kind as “Long Tom” and “Puffing Billy”—a 6 in. Creusot, throwing a shell of about 96lbs. The Boers have sixteen of them; some say twenty-three. The name is “Gentleman Joe.” He did about L5 damage at the cost of L200. From about 8 to 9 a.m. the general bombardment was rather severe. There are thirty-three guns “playing” on us to-day, and though they do not concentrate their fire, they keep one on the alert. This morning a Kaffir was working for the Army Service Corps (being at that moment engaged in kneading a pancake), when a small shell hit him full in the mouth, passed clean through his head, and burst on the ground beyond. I believe he was the only man actually killed to-day.

A Frenchman who came in yesterday from the Boer lines was examined by General Hunter. He is a roundabout little man, who says he came from Madagascar into the Transvaal by Delagoa Bay, and was commandeered to join the Boer army. He came with a lot of German officers, who drank champagne hard. On his arrival it was found he could not ride or shoot, or live on biltong. He could do nothing but talk French, a useless accomplishment in South Africa. And so they sent him into our camp to help eat our rations. The information he gave was small. Joubert believes he can starve us out in a fortnight. He little knows. We could still hold out for over a month without eating a single horse, to say nothing of rats. It is true we have to drop our luxuries. Butter has gone long ago, and whisky has followed. Tinned meats, biscuits, jams—all are gone. “I wish to Heaven the relief column would hurry up,” sighed a young officer to me. “Poor fellow,” I thought, “he longs for the letters from his own true love.” “You see, we can’t get any more Quaker oats,” he added in explanation.

In the afternoon I took copies of the *Ladysmith Lyre* to some of the outlying troops. It is but a single page of four short columns, and with a cartoon by Mr. Maud. But the pathetic gratitude with which it was received, proved that to appreciate literature of the highest order, you have only to be shut up for a month under shell fire.

November 28, 1899.

Hopeful news came of British successes, both at Estcourt and Mooi River. The relief column is now thought to be at Frere, not far below Colenso. A large Boer convoy, with 800 mounted men, was seen trending away towards the Free State passes, perhaps retiring. Everybody was much cheered up. The Boer guns fired now and then, but did little damage. At night we placed two howitzers on a nek in Waggon Hill, where the 60th have a post south-west of the town.

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November 29, 1899.

A few more Kaffirs came through from Estcourt, but brought no later news. Their report of the fighting on the Mooi River was: "The English burnt the Dutch like paraffin. The Dutch have their ears down." Did I not say that Zulu was the future language of opera? Riding past the unfinished hospital I saw a private of the 18th Hussars cut down by a shell splinter—the only casualty to-day resulting from several hundred pounds' worth of ammunition. The two greatest events were, first, the attempt of our two old howitzers on Waggon Hill to silence the 6 in. gun on Middle Hill beyond them. They fired pretty steadily from 4 to 5 p.m., sending out clouds of white smoke. For their big shells (6.3 in.) are just thirty years old, and the guns themselves have reached the years of discretion. They fired by signal over the end of Waggon Hill in front of them, and it was difficult to judge their effect. The other great event was the kindling of a great veldt fire at the foot of Pepworth Hill, in such a quarter that the smoke completely hid "Long Tom" for two or three hours of the morning. Captain Lambton at once detected the trick, and sent two shells from "Lady Anne" to check it. But it was none the less successful. There could be little doubt "Long Tom" was on the move, "doing a guy," the soldiers said. We hoped he was packing up for Pretoria.

In the evening Colonel Stoneman held the first of his Shakespeare reading parties, and again we found how keenly a month of shell-fire intensifies the literary sense.

November 30, 1899.

At night the Boer searchlight near Bester's, north-west of the town, swept the positions by Range Post, the enemy having been informed by spies (as usual) that we intended a forward movement before dawn. Three battalions with cavalry and guns were to have advanced on to the open ground beyond Range Post, and again attack the Boer position on Bluebank, where there are now two guns. The movement was to prepare the way for the approach of any relieving force up the Maritzburg road, but about midnight it was countermanded. Accurately informed as the Boers always are, they apparently had not heard of this change from any of the traitors in town, and before sunrise they began creeping up nearer to our positions by the Newcastle road on the north. They hoped either to rush the place, or to keep us where we were. The 13th Battery, stationed at the railway cutting, opened upon them, and the pickets of the Gloucesters and the Liverpools checked them with a very heavy fire. As I watched the fighting from the hill above my cottage, the sun appeared over Bulwan, and a great gun fired upon us with a cloud of purple smoke. A few minutes after there came the sharp report, the screaming rush and loud explosion, which hitherto have marked "Long Tom" alone. Our suspicions of yesterday were true, and Pepworth Hill knows him no more. He now reigns on Little Bulwan, sometimes called Gun Hill, below Lombard's Kop. His range is nearer, he can even reach the Manchesters' sangars with effect, and he is far the most formidable of the guns that torment us.

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[Illustration: HOSPITAL IN TOWN HALL AFTER A SHELL]

All day the bombardment was severe, as this siege goes. I did not count the shells thrown at us, but certainly there cannot have been less than 250. They were thrown into all parts of the town and forts. No one felt secure, except the cave-dwellers. Even the cattle were shelled, and I saw three common shell and a shrapnel thrown into one little herd. Yet the casualties were quite insignificant, till the terrible event of the day, about half-past five p.m. During the afternoon "Long Tom" had chiefly been shelling the Imperial Light Horse camp, the balloon, and the district round the Iron Bridge. Then he suddenly sent a shell into the library by the Town Hall. The next fell just beyond the Town Hall itself. The third went right into the roof, burst on contact, flung its bullets and segments far and wide over the sick and wounded below. One poor fellow—a sapper of the balloon section—hearing it coming, sprang up in bed with terror. A fragment hit him full in the chest, cut through his heart, and laid him dead. Nine others were hit, some seriously wounded. About half of them belonged to the medical staff. The shock to the other wounded was horrible. There cannot be the smallest doubt that the Boer gunners deliberately aimed at the Red Cross flag, which flies on the turret of the Town Hall, visible for miles. They have now hit twenty-one people in that hospital alone. This last shell has aroused more hatred and rage against the whole people than all the rest of the war put together. When next the Boers appeal for mercy, as they have often appealed already, it will go hard with them. Overcome with the horror of the thing, many good Scots have refused to take part in the celebration of St. Andrew's Day, although the Gordons held some sort of festival, and there was a drinking-concert at the Royal. But the dead were in the minds of all.

About midnight we again observed flash-signaling over the star-lit sky. It came from Colenso way, and was the attempt of our General to give us news or instructions. It began by calling "Ladysmith" three times. The message was in cipher, and the night before a very little of it was made out. Both messages ended with the words "Buller, Maritzburg." It is said one of the Mountain Battery is to be hanged in the night for signalling to the enemy.

CHAPTER XI

FLASHES FROM BULLER

December 1, 1899.

A kaffir came in to-day, bringing the strange story that the old "Long Tom" of Pepworth Hill was hit full in the muzzle by "Lady Anne," that the charge inside him burst, the gun was shattered, and five gunners killed. The Kaffir swore he himself had been employed to bury them, and that the thing he said was true. If so, our "Lady Anne" has made the great shot of the war. The authorities are inclined to believe the story.

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The new gun on Gun Hill is perhaps too vigorous for our old friend, and the rifling on his shells is too clean. Whatever the truth may be, he gave us a lively time morning and afternoon. I think he was trying to destroy the Star bakery, about one hundred yards below my cottage. The shells pitched on every side of it in succession. They destroyed three houses. A Natal Mounted Rifle riding down the street was killed, and so was his horse. In the afternoon shrapnel came raining through our eucalyptus trees and rattling on the roof, so I accepted an invitation to tea in a beautiful hole in the ground, and learnt the joys spoken of by the poet of the new *Ladysmith Lyre*:—

“A pipe of Boer tobacco 'neath the blue, A tin of meat, a bottle, and a few Choice magazines like *Harmsworth's* or the *Strand*— sometimes think war has its blessings too.”

But one wearies of the safest rabbit-hole in an afternoon tea-time, and I rode to the other end of the town trying to induce my tenth or twelfth runner to start. So far, three have gone and not returned, one did not start, but lay drunk for ten days, the rest have been driven back by Boers or terror.

As I rode, the shells followed me, turning first upon Headquarters and then on the Gordons' camp by the Iron Bridge, where they killed two privates in their tents. I think nothing else of importance happened during the day, but I was so illusioned with fever that I cannot be sure. Except “Long Tom,” the guns were not so active as yesterday, but some of them devoted much attention to the grazing cattle and the slaughter-houses. We are to be harried and starved out.

December 2, 1899.

To me the day has been a wild vision of prodigious guns spouting fire and smoke from uplifted muzzles on every hill, of mounted Boers, thick as ants, galloping round and round the town in opposite directions, of flashing stars upon a low horizon, and of troops massed at night, to no purpose, along an endless road. But I am inspired by fever just now, and in duller moments I am still conscious that we have really had a fairly quiet day, as these days go.

“Long Tom” occupied the morning in shelling the camp of the Imperial Light Horse. He threw twelve great shells in rapid succession into their midst, but as I watched not a single horse or man was even scratched. The narrowest escape was when a great fragment flew through an open door and cut the leg clean off a table where Mr. Maud, of the *Graphic*, sat at work. Two shells pitched in the river, which half encircles the camp, and for a moment a grand Trafalgar Square fountain of yellow water shot into the air. A house near the gaol was destroyed, but no damage to man or beast resulted.

Soon afterwards, from the highest point of the Convent Hill, looking south-west over the Maritzburg road by Bluebank, I saw several hundred Boers cantering in two streams

that met and passed in opposite directions. They were apparently on the move between Colenso and Van Reenen's Pass; perhaps their movements implied visits to lovers, and a pleasant Sunday. They looked just like ants hurrying to and fro upon a garden track.

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The reality of the day was a flash of brilliant light far away beyond the low gorge, where the river turns southward. My old Scot was the first to see it. It was about half-past three. The message came through fairly well, though I am told it is not very important. The important thing is that communication with the relieving force is at last established.

About 8.30 p.m. there was a great movement of troops, the artillery massing in the main street, the cavalry moving up in advance, the infantry forming up. Being ill, I fell asleep for a couple of hours, and when I turned out again all the troops had gone back to camp.

Sunday, December 3, 1899.

Long before sunrise I went up to the examining post on the Newcastle road, now held by the Gloucesters instead of the Liverpools. The positions of many regiments have been changed, certain battalions being now kept always ready as a flying column to co-operate with the relieving force. Last night's movement appears to have been a kind of rehearsal for that. It was also partly a feint to puzzle the Boers and confuse the spies in the town.

Signalling from lighted windows has become so common among the traitors that to-day a curfew was proclaimed—all lights out at half-past eight. Rumours about the hanging and shooting of spies still go the round, but my own belief is the authorities would not hurt a fly, much less a spy, if they could possibly help it.

Nearly all day the heliograph was flashing to us from that far-off hill. There is some suspicion that the Boers are working it as a decoy. We lost three copies of our code at Dundee, and it is significant that it was a runner brought the good news of Methuen's successes on Modder River to-night. But at Headquarters the flash signals are now taken as genuine, and the sight of that star from the outer world cheers us up.

At noon I rode out to see the new home of the 24th Field Ambulance from India. It is down by the river, near Range Post, and the silent Hindoos have constructed for it a marvel of shelter and defence. A great rampart conceals the tents, and through a winding passage fenced with massive walls of turf you enter a chamber large enough for twenty patients, and protected by an impenetrable roof of iron pipes, rocks, and mounds of earth. As I admired, the Major came out from a tent, wiping his hands. He had just cut off the leg of an 18th Hussar, whose unconscious head, still on the operating table, projected from the flaps of the tent door. The man had been sitting on a rock by the river, washing his feet, while "Long Tom" was shelling the Imperial Light Horse, as I described yesterday. Suddenly a splinter ricocheted far up the valley, and now, even if he recovers, he will have only one foot to wash.

A civilian was killed yesterday, working in the old camp. The men on each side of him were unhurt. So yesterday's shelling was not so harmless as I supposed.

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Early in the afternoon I met Mr. Lynch, known as one of the *Daily Chronicle* correspondents in Cuba last year. He was riding his famous white horse, "Kruger," which we captured after the fight at Elands Laagte. One side of this bony animal is dyed khaki colour with Condyl's fluid, as is the fashion with white horses. But the other side is left white for want of material. Mr. Lynch showed me with pride a great white umbrella he had secured. Round it he had written, "Advt. Dept. *Ladysmith Lyre*" In his pocket was a bottle of whisky—a present for Joubert. And so he rode away, proposing to exchange our paper for any news the Boers might have. Eluding the examining posts, he vanished into the Boer lines under Bulwan, and has not re-appeared. Perhaps the Boers have not the humour to appreciate the finely Irish performance. They have probably kept him prisoner or sent him to Pretoria. On hearing of his disappearance, Mr. Hutton, of Reuter's, and I asked leave to go out to the Boer camp to inquire after him. But the General was wroth, and would not listen to the proposal.

December 4, 1899.

This morning the General offered the use of the heliograph to all correspondents in rotation by ballot. Messages were to be limited to thirty words. One could say little more than that we are doing as well as can be expected under the circumstances. But the sun did not come out all day, and not a single word got through.

In the afternoon I rode out to Waggon Hill, south-west of our position, to call upon the two howitzers. They are heavy squat guns about twenty years old, their shells being marked 1880, though they are said in reality to date from 1869. They were brought up from Port Elizabeth where the Volunteers used them, and certainly they have done fine service here. Concealed in the hollow of a hill, they are invisible to the enemy, and after many trials have now exactly got the range of the great 6 in. gun on Middle Hill. At any moment they can plump their shells right into his sangar, and the Boer gunners are frightened to work there. In fact, they have as effectually silenced that gun as if they had smashed it to pieces. They are worked by the Royal Artillery, two dismounted squadrons of the I.L.H. acting as escort or support. Then I found on picket at the extreme end of the hill. They told me they had seen large numbers of Boers moving slowly with cattle and waggons towards the Free State passes. The Boers whom I saw were going in just the opposite direction, towards Colenso. I counted twenty-seven waggons with a large escort creeping steadily to the south along some invisible road. They were carrying provisions or the ammunition to fight our relieving column.

We hear to-day there will be no attempt to relieve us till the 15th, if then. A Natal newspaper, with extracts from the *Transvaal Standard and Diggers' News*, brought in yesterday, exaggerates our situation almost as much as the Boers themselves. If all Englishmen now besieged were asked why most they desired relief, there is hardly one would not reply, "For the English mail!"

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CHAPTER XII

THE NIGHT SURPRISE ON GUN HILL

December 5, 1899.

We have now been shut up nearly five weeks. Some 15,000 people or more have been living on a patch of ground roughly measuring three miles each way. On that patch of ground at the lowest estimate 3,500 cases of explosive iron have been hurled at high velocity, not counting an incalculable number of the best rifle bullets. One can conceive the effect on a Londoner's mind if a shell burst in the city. If another burst next day, the 'buses would begin to empty. If a hundred a day burst for five weeks, people would begin to talk of the paralysis of commerce. Yet who knows? The loss of life would probably be small. The citizen might grow as indifferent to shells as he is to shooting stars. Here, for instance, the killed do not yet amount to thirty, the wounded may roughly be put down at 170, of whom, perhaps, twenty have died, and all except the confirmed cave-dwellers are beginning to go about as usual, or run for cover only when it shells particularly hard.

To-day has not been hard in any sense. It opened with a heavy Scotch mist, which continued off and on, though for the most part the outlines of the mountains were visible. "Long Tom" of Gun Hill did not speak. The bombardment was almost entirely left to "Puffing Billy" and "Silent Susan." They worked away fairly steadily at intervals morning and afternoon, but did no harm to speak of.

Again large numbers of Boers were seen moving along the south-west borders, and a Kaffir brought in the story of a great conference at Bester's on the Harrismith line. Whether the conference is to decide on some future course of action, or to compare the difference between the allied states, we do not know. Probably the Dutch will not abandon the siege without a big fight.

On our side we contented ourselves with sending a shot or two from "Bloody Mary" to Bulwan, but the light was bad and the shells fell short. Sir George White now proposes to withdraw the curfew law, in hopes that any traitors may be caught red-handed. The Town Guard, consisting of young shop assistants with rifles and rosettes, are displaying an amiable activity. Returning from dinner last night, I was arrested four times in the half mile. I may mention that it is now impossible to procure anything stronger than lime-juice or lemonade.

December 6, 1899.

"Long Tom" of Gun Hill surprised us all by beginning a fairly rapid fire about 10 a.m. "Lady Anne" and "Bloody Mary" replied within a few moments of each other, and the second of the two shots exploded right on the top of "Tom's" earthworks, but he fired

again within a few minutes, aiming at the new balloon, the old one having been torn to pieces in a whirlwind nearly a week ago. When the balloon soared out of reach, he turned a few shots upon the town and camps, and then was silent.

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Since the siege began one farmer has steadily continued to plough his acres on the plain near the racecourse. He reminded one of the French peasant ploughing at Sedan. His three ploughs went backwards and forwards quite indifferent to unproductive war. But to-day the Boers deliberately shelled him at his work, the shells following him up and down the field, and ploughing up the earth all wrong. Neither the farmer nor his Kaffir labourers paid the least attention to them. The plough drove on, leaving the furrow behind, just as the world goes forward, no matter how much iron two admirable nations pitch at each other's heads.

Of course percussion-fused shells falling on ploughed land seldom burst, as a boy here found by experiment. Having found an eligible little shell in the furrows, he carried it home, and put it to soak in his washing basin. When it had soaked long enough, he extracted the fuse and proceeded to knock out the powder with a hammer. Then the nasty thing exploded in his face, and he lost one eye and is otherwise a good deal cut about.

In the afternoon I rode out again to the howitzers on Waggon Hill. The 6 in. gun which they command from their invisible station has not fired for six days. The Boer gunners dare not set it to work for fear of the 85lb. shells which are fired the moment Boers are seen in the sangar. Two were fired just as I left.

From the end of the hill there was a magnificent view of the great precipices in Basutoland, but hardly a Boer could be seen. Ninety-seven waggons had been counted the evening before, moving towards the Free State passes, but now I saw hardly a dozen Boers. Yet if their big gun had sent a shrapnel over us, what a bag they would have made! Colonel Rhodes and Dr. Jameson were at my side, General Ian Hamilton, with Lord Ava and Captain Valentine were within six yards, to say nothing of Captain Clement Webb, of Johannesburg fame, and other Imperial Light Horse officers.

In the evening the Natal Carbineers gave an open-air concert to a big audience. A good many women and girls came. As usual the sailors had the best of it in the comic songs, but the event of the evening was "The Queen." Though the Boers must have seen our lights, and perhaps heard the shout of "Send her victorious," they did not fire, not even when the balloon, fresh charged at the gas-works, stalked past us like a ghost.

December 7, 1899.

A glorious day for the heliograph, which flashed encouragement on us from that far-off mountain. But little else was done. The bombardment was only half-hearted. Some of the shells pitched about the town, smashing walls and windows, and two of the Irish Fusiliers were wounded by shrapnel. Towards evening a lot of children in white dresses were playing among the rocks opposite my window, when "Puffing Billy," of Bulwan, sent a huge shell over my roof right into the midst of them as it seemed. Fortunately it

pitched a few yards too high. The poor little creatures scuttled away like rabbits. They are having a queer education—a kindergarten training in physical shocks.

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During the day I rode nearly all over the camp and outposts, even getting to Waggon Hill again to see the enemy at their old trick of calling the cattle home with shells. There I heard that the 6 in. gun on Middle Hill was removed last evening, and that was the cause of the two shots I had heard as I left. Our gunners detected the movement too late to prevent it, and the destination of the gun is unknown.

December 8, 1899.

The brightest day of the siege so far. The secret was admirably kept. Outside three or four of the General Staff, not a soul knew what was to happen. At 10 p.m. on Thursday an officer left me for his bed; a quarter of an hour later he was marching with his squadron upon the unknown adventure. It was one of the finest and most successful things done in the war, but what I most admire about it is its secrecy. The honours go to the Volunteers. One regrets the exclusion of the Regulars after all their splendid service and cheery temper, but the Volunteers are more distinctly under Headquarter control, and it was thought best not to pass the orders through the brigades. Accordingly just after ten certain troops of the Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Edwards, the Natal Carbineers, and Border Mounted Rifles, all under the command of Colonel Royston, suddenly received orders to march on foot along the Helpmakaar road. About 600 went, though only 200 of them actually took part in the final enterprise.

The moon was quarter full, but clouded, giving just enough light to see the road and no more. The small column advanced in perfect silence. Not a whisper was heard or a light seen. After long weeks of grumbling under the steady control of Regular officers, the Volunteers are learning what discipline means. The Cemetery was passed, the gorge of Bell's Spruit, the series of impregnable defences built by the Liverpools and Devons along the Helpmakaar road. At the end of those low hills the Devons were found drawn up in support, or to cover retreat. General Hunter then took command of the whole movement, and the march went on. Three-quarters of a mile further the road enters rough and bushy ground, thinly covered with stunted thorns and mimosa. It rises gradually to the foot of the two great hills, Lombard's Kop and Bulwan, the road crossing the low wooded nek between them. Lombard's Kop, which is the higher, lies in the left. The kop itself rises to about 1,200 or 1,300 feet, in a square-topped pyramid; but in front of it, forming part of the same hill, stands a broad and widely-expanded base, perhaps not higher than 600 or 700 feet. It is called Little Bulwan by the natives and Gun Hill by our troops. Near its centre on the sky-line the Boers placed the new "Long Tom" 6 in. Creusot gun, throwing a 96lb. shell, as I described before, and about 150 yards to the left was a howitzer generally identified with "Silent Susan." Those are the two guns which for the last fortnight have caused most damage to the troops and town. Their capture was the object of the night's adventure.

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Leaving two-thirds of his force in the bush nearly half-way up the slope, General Hunter took about 100 Light Horse, nearly 100 Carbineers and Mounted Rifles, with ten sappers under Captain Fowke, and began the main ascent. Major Henderson, of the Intelligence Department, acted as guide, keeping the extreme left of the extended line pretty nearly under the position of the big gun. So they advanced silently through the rocks and bushes under the uncertain light of the moon, which was just setting. It was two o'clock.

The Boer sentries must have been fast asleep. There was only one challenge. An old man's voice from behind suddenly cried in Dutch: "Halt! who goes there?" One of the Volunteers—a Carbineer—answered, "Friend." "Hermann," cried the sentry. "Who's that? Wake up. It's the Red-necks" (the Boer name for English). "Hold your row!" cried the Carbineer, still in Dutch. "Don't you know your own friends?" The sentry either ran away, or was satisfied, and the line crept on. The first part of the slope is gentle, but the face of the hill rises steep with rocks, and must be climbed on hands and knees, especially in the dark. Up went the 200, keeping the best line they could, and spreading out well to the right so as to outflank the enemy when the top was reached. Within about 100 yards of the summit they came under rifle fire, the Boer guard having taken alarm. A picket in rear also began firing up at random. It was impossible to judge the number of the enemy. Anything between twenty and fifty was a guide's estimate at the time. The slope was so steep that the Boers were obliged to lean over the edge and show themselves against the sky as they fired. Some of our men returned their fire with revolvers. At sixty yards from the top they were halted for the final assault. The Volunteers, like the Boers, carry no bayonets. Their orders were not to fire, but to club the enemy with the butt if they stood. The orders were now repeated. Then some inspired genius (Major Carey-Davis [? Karri Davis], of the I.L.H., it is said) raised the cry: "Fix bayonets. Give 'em cold steel, my lads." All appreciated the joke, and the shout rang down the line, as the men rose up and rushed to the summit. Four bayonets were actually present, but I am not sure whether they were fixed or not.

That shout was too much for the Boer gunners. They scattered and fled, heading across the broad top of the hill, even before our men had reached the edge. Swinging round from the right, our line rushed for the big gun. The Light Horse and the Sappers were first to reach it, Colonel Edwards himself winning the race. They found the splendid gun deserted in his enormous earthwork, the walls of which are 30 ft. to 35 ft. thick. One Boer was found dead outside it, shot in the assault.

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Captain Fowke and his sappers at once got to work. The breech-block was unscrewed and taken out, falling a prize to the Light Horse, who vied with each other in carrying it home (it weighs 137lbs.) Then gun-cotton was thrust up the breech into the body of the gun. A vast explosion told the Boers that “Tom” had gone aloft, and his hulk lay in the pit, rent with two great wounds, and shortened by a head. The sappers say it seemed a crying shame to wreck a thing so beautiful. The howitzer met the same fate. A Maxim was discovered and dragged away, and then the return began. It was now three o’clock, and by four daylight comes. The difficulty was to get the men to move. The Carbineers especially kept crowding round the old gun like children in their excitement. At last the party came scrambling down the hill, joined the supports, and all straggled back into camp together, with exultation and joy. They just, and only just, got in before the morning gave the enemy light enough to fire on their line of march.

[Illustration: BREECH BLOCK FROM GUN HILL]

The whole movement was planned and executed to perfection. One man was killed, three or four were slightly wounded. Our worse loss was Major Henderson, wounded in the shoulder and leg during the final advance. He went through the rest of the action, and returned with the party, but must now retire for a week or so to Intombi Camp, for the Roentgen rays to discover the ball in his leg. It is thought to be a buckshot, or, rather, the steel ball of a bicycle bearing, fired from a sporting gun.

General Hunter found a letter in the gun-pit. It is in Dutch, and half-finished, scribbled by a Boer gunner to his sister in Pretoria. I give a literal translation:—

“MY DEAR SISTER,—It is a month and seven days since we besieged Ladysmith, and I don’t know what will happen further. We see the English every day walking about the town, and we are bombarding the place with our cannon. They have built breastworks outside the town. To attack would be very dangerous. Near the town they have set up two naval guns, from which we receive a very heavy fire we cannot stand. I think there will be much blood spilt before they surrender, as Mr. Englishman fights hard, and our burghers are a bit frightened. I should like to write more, but the sun is very hot, and, what’s more, the flies are so troublesome that I don’t get a chance of sitting still.—Your affectionate Brother.”

In the afternoon the General publicly congratulated the Volunteers on their achievement. The Boers added their generous praise—communicated to some doctors left behind to look after our wounded, who returned to us in the course of the day, after being given a good breakfast. Unhappily the above account is necessarily second-hand. No correspondent had a chance of going with the party. The only one who even started was sent back by General Hunter to await the column’s return in a guard-room. I have been obliged to build up the story from my knowledge of the ground and from what has been told me by Major Henderson and other officers or privates who were present.

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Before that party returned in triumph another important movement was already in progress, of which, I believe, I was the only outside spectator. Just before four I was awakened by the trampling of cavalry going up the Newcastle road. They were the 5th Lancers, the 5th Dragoon Guards, and the 18th Hussars. The 19th Hussars had been out all night burning a kraal and distracting attention from Gun Hill. Just as the stars vanished, the 18th, followed by the others, galloped forward towards the Boer lines in the general direction of Pepworth Hill, though our main force was on the left of the direct line. General Brocklehurst was in command. It is described at Headquarters as a reconnaissance or demonstration. But there are rumours that more was originally intended—perhaps an attack on the Boer rail head, with its three heavy trains this side of Modder Spruit; perhaps the destruction of the Modder Spruit Bridge. If the object was only to discover whether the Boers are still in force, and to demonstrate the coolness of the British cavalry, the movement was entirely successful.

Directly the cavalry advanced across the fairly open valley of Bell's Spruit, passing Brook's Farm and making for the left of Limit Hill on the main road, they were met by a tremendous rifle fire from every ridge and hillock and rock commanding the scene. At the same time, guns opened upon them from Surprise Hill on our left rear, and from some spot which I could not locate on our left front. Still they advanced, squadron after squadron sweeping across Bell's Spruit, and up into the tortuous little valleys and ravines beyond, towards Macpherson's Farm. That was the limit. It is about two and three-quarter miles (not more) from our picket on the Newcastle road, and lies not far from the left foot of Pepworth Hill. The 18th Hussars, through some mistake in orders, attempted to push still further forward towards the hill, but just before five a general retirement began.

Except perhaps at the close of Elands Laagte fight, or in one brief assault of Turks upon a Greek position in Epirus, I have never heard anything to compare to the rifle fire under which the withdrawal was conducted. The range was long, but the roll of the rifle was incessant. The whole air screamed with bullets, and the dust rose in clouds over the grass as they fell. Then the 6 in. gun on Bulwan ("Puffing Billy") and an invisible gun on our right opened fire, throwing shells into the thick of our men wherever the ravines or rocks compelled them to crowd together. They came back fast, but well in hand, wheeling to right or left at word of command, as on parade. The B Squadron of the 18th had a terrible gallop for it, right across the front of fire along a ridge such as Boers rejoice in. Their loss was two killed and seventeen wounded. The others only lost three or four slightly wounded. It proves how lightly a highly-disciplined cavalry can come off where one would have said hardly any could survive.

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As we retired the Boers kept following us up, though with great caution. Riding along the valleys, dismounting, and creeping from kopje to kopje among the stones, a large body of them came up to Brooks Farm, and began firing at our sangars and outposts at ranges of 800 to 1,000 yards, the bullets coming very thick over our heads, even after we had reached the protection of the Gloucesters' walls and earthworks. There our infantry opened fire, while two guns of the 13th Battery near the railway cutting, and two of the 69th on Observation Hill, threw shrapnel over the kopjes, and checked any further advance.

But the Boers still held their positions, pouring a tremendous fire into any of the cavalry who had still to pass within their range. As to their number, their magazine rifles, firing five shots in rapid succession, makes any estimate difficult. I have heard it put as low as 600. Perhaps 1,000 is about right. I myself saw some 300 from first to last. By seven the whole of our force was again within the lines. Splendid as the behaviour of all the cavalry was, one man seemed to me conspicuous. Towards the end of the retirement he quietly cantered out across the most exposed bit of open ground, and went round among the kopjes as though looking for something. For a time he disappeared down a gully. Then he came cantering back again, and reached the high road along a watercourse, which gave a little cover. At least 300 bullets must have been fired at him, but he changed neither his pace nor direction. Whether he was looking for wounded or only went out for diversion I have not heard, but one could not imagine more complete disregard of death.

The rest of the day passed quietly. The Boers gathered in crowds on Gun Hill and stood around the carcass of "Long Tom" as though in lamentation. His absence gave us an unfamiliar sense of security. Some called it dull. "Lay it on where you like, there's no pleasing you," said the gaoler.

December 9, 1899.

The Dutch left us pretty much alone. Sickness is becoming serious. The cases average thirty a day, chiefly enteric. A Natal newspaper only a week old was brought in by a runner. It contained a few details of Methuen's fight on Modder River, but hardly any English news. Captain Heath, of the balloon, told me he could see the Boers concentrating in much larger camps than before, especially about Colenso and at Springfield further up the Tugela.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CAPTURE OF SURPRISE HILL

Sunday, December 10, 1899.

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Just as we were lazily washing our clothes and otherwise enjoying the Sabbath rest and security at about eight in the morning, "Puffing Billy," of Bulwan, began breaking the Fourth Commandment with extraordinary recklessness and rapidity. He sent nine of his shells into the town, as fast as he could fire them. "Bloody Mary" flung two over his head and one into his earthwork, but he paid no attention to her protests. The fact was, the 5th Dragoon Guards, trusting to Boer principles, had left their horses fully exposed to view instead of leading them away under cover as usual at sunrise. The gunners, probably Germans, thought this was presuming too much on their devotion to the Old Testament, and set their scruples aside for twenty minutes under the paramount duty of slaughtering men and horses. Happily no serious harm was done, and the rest of the day was as quiet as Sunday usually is.

On our side we were engaged all day in preparing a new home for "Lady Anne" on Waggon Hill, south-west of the town. The position, as I have often described, gives a splendid view of the country towards Basutoland and the Free State mountains. It also commands some four miles of the Maritzburg road towards Colenso and the guns which the Boers have set up there to check the approach of a relieving force. By late afternoon the enormous sangar was almost finished. The gun will be carried over on a waggon at night. I watched the work in progress from Rifleman's Post, an important outpost and fort, held by the 2nd K.R.R. (60th). It also commands the beginning of the Maritzburg road, where it passes across the "Long Valley," between Range Post and Bluebank.

The doctors and ambulance men who went out after the brief cavalry action on Friday morning report they were fired on while carrying the dead and wounded in the dhoolies. The Boers retaliate with a similar charge against us in Modder River. Unhappily, there can be no doubt that one of our doctors was heavily fired on whilst dressing a man's wounds on the field.

December 11, 1899.

Soon after two in the night I heard rifle-firing, then two explosions, and heavier rifle-firing again, apparently two or three miles away. It was too dark to see anything, even from the top of the hill, but in the morning I found we had destroyed another gun—the 4.7 in. howitzer on Surprise Hill. For weeks past it had been one of the most troublesome guns of the thirty-two that surround us. It had a long range and accurate aim. Its position commanded Observation Hill, part of the Newcastle road, Cove Hill, and Leicester Post, the whole of the old camp and all the line of country away to Range Post and beyond. It was this gun that shelled the 18th Hussars out of their camp and continually harassed the Irish Fusiliers. It was constantly dropping shells into the 69th Battery and on the K.R.R. at King's Post. Surprise Hill is a square-topped kopje, from 500 feet to 600 feet high, between Thornhill's Kopje and Nicholson's Nek. It overlooks Bell's Spruit and the scene of "Mournful Monday's" worst disaster. From Leicester Post, where two guns were always kept turned on it, the distance is 4,100 yards—just the full

range of our field guns. From Observation Hill it is hardly 2,500 yards. The destruction of its gun was therefore of the highest importance.

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At ten o'clock last night four companies of the 2nd Rifle Brigade started from their camp on Leicester Post, with six sappers, under Mr. Digby Jones, and five gunners under Major Wing, of the 69th Battery. The whole was commanded by Colonel Metcalfe of the battalion. They marched across the fairly open grassland toward Observation Hill, and there halted because the half-moon was too bright. About midnight they again advanced, as the moon was far down in the west. They marched in fours towards the foot of the hill, but had to cross the Harrismith Railway two deep through a gap where the wire fences were cut with nippers. One deep donga and a shallower had to be crossed as well. At the foot of the hill two companies were left, extended in a wedge shape, the apex pointing up the hill. The remaining two companies began the ascent. The front of the hill is steep and covered with boulders, but is greener than most South African hills. About half-way up half a company was left in support. The small assaulting party then climbed up in extended line. Not a word was spoken, and the Boers gave no sign till our men were within twenty yards of the top. Then a sentry cried, "Who's there? Who's there?" in English, and fired. Our men fixed swords and charged to the top with a splendid cheer. They made straight for the sangar and formed in a circle round it, firing outwards without visible target. To their dismay they found the gun-pit empty. The gun had been removed perhaps for security, perhaps for the Sabbath rest. But it was soon discovered a few yards off, and the sappers set to work with their gun-cotton. Meantime a party was sent to the corner of the hill on the left to clear out a little camp, where the Boer gunners slept and had their meals under a few little trees. They fired into it, and then carried everything away, some of the men bringing off some fine blankets, which they are very proud of this morning. The great-coats were in such a disgusting condition that the soldiers had to leave them.

The fuse was long in going off. Some say the first fuse failed, some that it was very slow. Anyhow, the party was kept waiting on the hill-top almost half an hour, when the whole thing ought to have been done in a quarter. Those extra fifteen minutes cost many lives. At last the shock of the explosion came. Two great holes were made in the gun's rifling near the muzzle, and the breech was blown clean out, the screw being destroyed. Major Wing secured the sight, the sponge, and an old wideawake, which the gunner used always to wave to him very politely just before he fired. Some say there was a second explosion, and I heard it myself, but it may have been a Boer gun which threw one round of shrapnel high over the hill, the bullets pattering down harmlessly, and only making a blue bruise when they hit. As soon as the sappers and gunners had made sure the gun was destroyed, the order to retire was given, and the line began climbing down in the

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darkness. The half company in support was taken up, the two companies at the foot were reached by some, when a heavy fire flashed out of the darkness on both sides. The Boers, evidently by a preconcerted scheme, were crowding in from Thornhill's farm on our left—Mr. Thornhill, by the way, was acting as our guide—and from Bell's farm on our right. They came creeping along the dongas, right into the midst of our men, as well as cutting off retreat. Then it was that we wanted that quarter of an hour lost by the fuse. The men hastily formed up into their four companies and began the retirement in succession. Each company had simply to fight its way through with the sword-bayonet. They did not fire much, chiefly for fear of hitting each other, which unfortunately happened in some cases. The Boers took less precaution, and kept up a tremendous fire from both flanks, many of the bullets probably hitting their own men. Under shelter of the dongas some got right among our companies and fired from a few yards' distance.

Then came the horror of a war between two nations familiar with the same language. "Second R.B.! Second R.B.!" shouted our fellows as a watchword and rallying-cry. "Second R.B.!" shouted every Boer who was challenged or came into danger. "B Company here!" cried an officer. "B Company here!" came the echo from the Dutch. "Where's Captain Paley?" asked a private. "Where's Captain Paley?" the question passed from Boer to Boer. In the darkness it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe. The only way was to stoop down till you saw the edge of a broad-brimmed hat. Then you drove your bayonet through the man, if he did not shoot you first. Many a poor fellow was shot down by some invisible figure who was talking to him in English and was taken for a friend. One Boer fired upon a private at two or three yards—and missed him! The private sprang upon him. "I surrender! I surrender!" cried the Boer, throwing down his rifle. "So do I," cried the private, and plunged his bayonet through the man's stomach and out at his back.

One by one the companies cut their way into the open ground by the railway, and to Observation Hill, where the enemy dare not pursue. By half-past three a.m. the greater part were back at Leicester Post again. It was a triumph, even for the Rifle Brigade: as fine and gallant an achievement as could be done. But the cost was heavy.

Eleven were dead, including one or perhaps two officers. Six are prisoners. Forty-three are wounded, some severely. The ambulance was out all the morning bringing them in. Again they complained that the Boers fired on them and wanted to keep them prisoners. Nothing has so embittered our troops against the enemy as this continual firing on the wounded and hospitals. It was sad in any case to see the stretchers coming home this morning. Meeting a covered dhoolie, I asked the bearers who was in it. "Captain Paley," they said, and put him down for water.

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He had been reported missing. In fact, he had stayed behind to look after some of his men who were down or lost. He is known for his excellent government of a district in Crete. I gave him the water. He recognised me at once and was conscious, but his singularly blue eyes looked out of a deadly yellow and bloodless face, and his hands seemed to have the touch of death on them. When I said I was sorry, he answered, "But we got the gun." He was shot through the chest, though, as he pointed out, he was not spitting blood. Another bullet had entered the left hip and passed out, breaking the right hip-bone. That is the dangerous wound. He said he did not feel much pain.

The wounded were taken down to the tents set up in the ravine of the Port Road between the Headquarters and the old camp. That is the main hospital (11th and 18th) since the wounded were shifted out of the Town Hall, because the Boers shelled it so persistently. Since the Geneva flag was removed from the hall's turret not a single shell has been fired near the building. The ravine—"kloof" is the word here, like "cleft"—is fairly safe from shells, though the Bulwan gun has done its best to get among the tents ever since spies reported the removal.

It is fully exposed to those terrible dust storms which I described in an earlier letter. In the afternoon we had one of the worst I have seen. The sand and dust and dry filth, gathered up by the hot west wind from the plain of the old camp, swept in a continuous yellow cloud along the road and down into the ravine. It blotted out the sun, it blinded horses and men, it covered the wounded with a thick layer. I have described its horrible effects before. Imagine what it is like to have a hospital under such conditions, practically unsheltered—to extract bullets, to staunch blood, to amputate. One admires the Boers as a race fighting for their freedom, soon to be overthrown on behalf of a mongrel pack of speculators and other scoundrels. But I did not like them any better when I saw our wounded in the dust-storm to-day, and remembered why they were there.

In the afternoon a white woman was killed by a shell as she was washing clothes in the river. She is the first woman actually killed, though others have died from premature child birth. I don't know which gun killed her, but parts of the town and river hitherto safe were to-day exposed to fire from the 6 in. gun which was removed from Middle Hill a few days ago, and is now set up on Thornhill's farm, due west of the town. It commands a very wide district—the old camp, the Long Valley which the Maritzburg road crosses, the Great Plain behind Bluebank, and most of our western positions. It began firing early in the morning and continued at intervals all day. For an hour or two people were surprised at seeing a free balloon sailing away towards Bulwan. It turned out to be one of Captain Heath's dummies, which had got away. He tells me it will be entirely useless to the enemy in any case.

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December 12, 1899.

I was so overcome with fever that again my aspect of things was not quite straight. After dawn the Bulwan gun shelled the Star bakery, close to my cottage, and the stones and earth splashing on my roof woke me up too early. Another cottage was wrecked. The heat was intense, but the sun so splendid that I have hopes my heliograph message got through at last. None have gone yet, but I took up my sixth version in faith to the signal station near the Convent. On inquiry about Captain Paley I found he had been sent down to Intombi Camp with other serious cases, but the doctors think he has a chance. Lieut. Bond, who has a similar wound, went with him. Lieut. Fergusson, who died, had four bad wounds, three from bullets and one from a small shell of the automatic "pom-pom," which shattered his thigh. The rest of the day was a delirium of fever till the evening, when the wind suddenly changed to east, and it became cool and then bitterly cold. At half-past eight the proposed Flying Column, which is to co-operate with the relieving force, had a kind of dress rehearsal, all turning out with field equipment and transport for three days' rations. The Irish Fusiliers under Major Churcher formed the head of the column at Range Post, a body of Natal Volunteers coming next, followed by the Gordons. I waited at Range Post in the eager and refreshing wind till the column gradually dissolved into its camps, and all was still. By eleven the rehearsal was over and I rode back to my end of the town. To-night the civilians of the Town Guard went on picket by the river, and bore their trials boldly, though one of them got a crick in the neck.

December 13, 1899.

The early part of the day was distinguished by a violent fire from the big gun of Bulwan upon the centre of the town and the riverside camps. "Lady Anne" answered, for she has not yet been removed to her destined station on Waggon Hill. In the intervals of their fire we could distinctly hear big guns far away near Colenso and the Tugela River. They were chiefly English guns, for the explosion followed directly on the report, proving they were fired towards us. The firing stopped about 10 a.m.

All morning our two howitzers, which have been brought down from Waggon Hill, pounded away at their old enemy, the 6 in. gun now placed on Telegraph Hill as I described. They are close down by the Klip River, west of the old camp. Their object is to drive the gun away as they drove him before, and certainly they gave him little rest. He had hardly a chance of returning the fire; but when he had his shot was terribly effective, coming right into the top of our earthworks. Equally interesting was the behaviour of two Boers who crept down from Thornhill's farm among the rocks and began firing into our right rear. I detected them by the little puffs of white smoke, for both had Martini's. But no one took the trouble to shoot them, though they harassed our gunners. If there had been 50 instead of two they might have driven out our handful of men and tumbled the guns into the river. For we had no support nearer than the steep top of King's Post. Happily Boers do not do such things.

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A Kaffir brought in a newspaper only two days old. It said Gatacre had suffered a reverse on the Free State frontier. There was nothing about the German Emperor, and no football news.

In the late afternoon I rode up to the Manchesters' lines on Caesar's Camp, our nearest point to Colenso. But they knew no more than the rest of us, except that an officer had counted the full tale of guns fired in the morning—137. The view on all sides was as varied and full of growing association as usual, but had no special interest to-day, and I hurried back to inquire again after Mr. George Steevens, who is down with fever, to every one's regret.

December 14, 1899.

After the high hopes of the last few days we seem to be falling back, and to get no nearer to the end. Very little firing was heard from Colenso. The Bulwan gun gave us his morning salute of ten big shells in various parts of the town. They made some troublesome pits in the roads, and one destroyed a house, but nobody was killed.

The howitzers and the Telegraph Hill Gun pounded away at each other without much effect. Sickness is now our worst enemy. Next to sickness comes want of forage for the horses. The sick still average thirty a day, and there were 320 cases of enteric at Intombi Camp last night. Mr. Steevens has it, and his friends were busy all morning, moving him to better quarters. Major Henderson is about again. The Roentgen Rays did not discover the bicycle shot in his leg, and the doctors have decided to leave it there.

It was disappointing to hear that the Kaffir runner I sent with an account of the night attack on Surprise Hill had been captured by the Boers and robbed of his papers. I had hopes of that boy; he wore no trousers. But it is perhaps unsafe to judge character from dress alone. This runner business is heart-breaking. I tried to make up by getting another short heliogram through, but the sun was uncertain, and the receivers on the distant mountain sulky and wayward. They showed one faint glimmer of intelligence, and then all was dark again.

In the heat of the day a four-wheeled hooded cart drove from the Boer lines under a white flag bringing a letter for the General. The envoy was a Dutchman from Holland. He was met outside our lines by Lieutenant Fanshawe, of the 19th Hussars, who conversed with him for about two hours, till the answer returned. Seated under the shade of the cart, he enjoyed the enemy's hospitality in brandy and soda, biltong, and Boer biscuit. "But for that white rag," said the Dutchman, "we two would be trying to kill each other. Very absurd!" He went on to repeat how much the Boers admired the exploits of the night attacks. "If you had gone for the other guns that first night, you would have got them all." He said the gunners on Gun Hill were all condemned to

death. He examined the horse and its accoutrements, thinking them all very pretty, but maintaining the day for cavalry was

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gone. He was perfectly intimate with the names and character of all the battalions here. Of the Boer army he said it contained all nationalities down to Turks and Jews. He had no doubt of their ultimate success, and looked forward to Christmas dinner in Ladysmith. What we regard as our victories, he spoke of as our defeats. Even Elands Laagte he thought unsuccessful. Finally, after all compliments, he drove away, bearing a private letter from Mr. Fanshawe to be posted through Delagoa Bay and Amsterdam.

December 15, 1899.

In my own mind I had always fixed to-day as the beginning of our deliverance from this grotesque situation. It may be so still. Very heavy firing was heard down Colenso way from dawn till noon. Colonel Downing, commanding the artillery, said some of it was our field-guns, and it seemed nearer than two days ago.

The Bulwan gun gave us his customary serenade from heaven's gate. He did rather more damage than usual, wrecking two nice houses just below my cottage. One was a boarding house full of young railway assistants, who had narrow escapes. The brother gun on Telegraph Hill was also very active, not being so well suppressed by our howitzers as before. When I was waiting at Colonel Rhodes' cottage by the river, it dropped a shell clear over Pavilion Hill close beside it. Otherwise the Boer guns behaved with some modesty and discretion.

In the morning I rode up to Waggon Hill, and found that "Lady Anne" had at last arrived there, and was already in position. She was hauled up in the night in three pieces, each drawn by two span of oxen. Some thirty yards in front of her, in an emplacement of its own, stands the 12lb. naval gun which has been in that neighbourhood for some days. Both are carefully concealed, even the muzzles being covered up with earth and stones. They both command the approach to the town across the Long Valley by the Maritzburg road, as well as Bluebank or Rifleman's Ridge beyond, and Telegraph Hill beyond that.

While I was on the hill I saw one mounted and four dismounted Boers capture five of our horses which had been allowed to stray in grazing.

In the afternoon a South African thunderstorm swept over us. In a few minutes the dry gully where the main hospital tents are placed, as I described, became a deep torrent of filth. The tents were three feet deep in water, washing over the sick. "Sure it's hopeless, hopeless!" cried unwearying Major Donegan, the medical officer in charge. "I've just seen me two orderlies swimmin' away down-stream." The sick, wet and filthy as they were, had to be hurried away in dhoolies to the chapels and churches again. They will probably be safe there as long as the Geneva flag is not hoisted.

December 16, 1899.

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This is Dingaan's Day, the great national festival of the Boers. It celebrates the terrible battle on the Blood River, sixty-one years ago, when Andreas Pretorius slaughtered the Zulus in revenge for their massacre of the Dutch at Weenen, or Lamentation. In honour of the occasion, the Boers began their battle earlier than usual. Before sunrise "Puffing Billy" of Bulwan exploded five 96lb. shells within fifty yards of my humble cottage, disturbing my morning sleep after a night of fever. I suppose he was aiming at the bakery again, but he killed nobody and only destroyed an outbuilding. Farther down the town unhappily he killed three privates. He also sent another shell into the Town Hall, and blew Captain Valentine's horse's head away, as the poor creature was enjoying his breakfast. After seven o'clock hardly a gun was fired all day. Opinion was divided whether the Boers were keeping holiday for that battle long ago, or were burying their dead after Buller's cannonade of yesterday. But raging fever made me quite indifferent to this and all other interests.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SEASON OF PEACE AND GOODWILL

Sunday, December 17, 1899.

We are sick of the siege. Enteric and dysentery are steadily increasing. Food for men and horses is short and nasty. Ammunition must be used with care. The longing for the English mail has almost become a disease. Only two days more, we thought, or perhaps we could just stick it out for another week. Now we are thrown back into vague uncertainty, and seem no nearer to the end.

All the correspondents were summoned at noon to the Intelligence Office. That the Intelligence should tell us anything at all was so unprecedented that we felt the occasion was solemn. Major Altham then read out the General Order, briefly stating that General Buller had failed in "his first attack at Colenso," and we could not be relieved as soon as was expected. All details were refused. We naturally presume the situation is worse than represented. Each of us was allowed to send a brief heliogram, balloting for turn. Then we came away. We were told it was our duty to keep the town cheerful.

The suffering among the poor who had no stores of their own to fall back upon is getting serious. Bread and meat are supplied in rations at a fair and steady price. Colonel Ward and Colonel Stoneman have seen to that, and as far as possible they check the rapacity of the Colonial contractor. But hundreds have no money left at all. They receive Government rations on a mere promise to pay. Outside rations, prices are running up to absurdity. Chickens and most nice things are not to be obtained. But in the market last week eggs were half a guinea a dozen, potatoes 1s. 6d. a pound, carrots 5s., candles 1s. each, a tin of milk 6s., cigarettes 5s. a dozen. Nothing can be bought to drink, except lemonade and

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soda-water, made with enteric germs. The Irishman drinks the rinsings of his old whisky bottles. One man gave L5 yesterday for a bottle of whisky, but then he was a contractor, and our necessity is his opportunity. Of our necessity the Colonial storekeepers and dealers of all kinds are making their utmost. Having spent their lives hitherto in "besting" every one on a small scale, they are now besting the British nation on the large. Happily their profit is not so easily made now as in the old days of the Zulu war, when a waggon-load of food would be sold three times over on the way to the front and never reached the troops at all in the end. A few days ago one contractor thought the Army would have to raise its price for mealies (maize) to 30s. a sack. He at once bought up all the mealies in the town at 28s., only to discover that the army price was 25s. So, under the beneficent influence of martial law he was compelled to sell at that price, and made a fine loss. The troops received this morning's heavy news with cheerful stoicism; not a single complaint, only tender regrets about the whisky and Christmas pudding we shall have to do without.

December 18, 1899.

How is one to treat an indeterminate situation? The siege is already too long for modern literature. It was all very well when we thought it must end by Christmas at the furthest. But since last Sunday we are thrown back into the infinite, and can fix no limit on which hope can build even a rainbow. So now the only way to make this account of our queer position readable will be to dwell entirely in the glaring events of adventure or bloodshed, and let the flat days slide, though the sadness and absurdity of any one of them would fill a paper.

We have had such luck in escaping shells that we grow careless. The Bulwan gun began his random fire, as usual, before breakfast. He threw about fifteen shells, but most of us are quite indifferent to the 96lb. explosive thunder-bolts dropping around us. Indeed, fourteen of them did little harm. But just one happened to drop in the Natal Carbineer lines while the horses were being groomed. Two men were killed outright and three mortally wounded. A sapper was killed 200 yards away. Three others were wounded. Eleven horses were either killed or hopelessly disabled. All from one chance shell, while fourteen hit nobody! One man had both legs cut clean off, and for a time continued conscious and happy. Five separate human legs lay on the ground, not to speak of horses' legs. The shell burst on striking a horse, they say (it was shrapnel), and threw forwards. While the Carbineers were carrying away one of their dead another shell burst close by. They rightly dropped the body and lay flat. The only fragment which struck at all almost cut the dead man in half. Another shell later in the day killed a Kaffir woman and her husband in a back garden off the main street. Several women have died from premature childbirth owing to shock.

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Most of my day was again spent in trying to get a Kaffir runner for a telegram, but none would go. My last two had failed. All are getting frightened. In the evening I rode out to Waggon Hill and found "Lady Anne" and the 12lb. naval gun had gone back to their old homes. They are not wanted to keep open the approach for Buller now, and perhaps Captain Lambton was afraid the position might be rushed.

December 19, 1899.

Another black day. Details of Buller's defeat at Colenso began to leak out and discouraged us all. It would be much better if the truth about any disaster, no matter how serious, were officially published. Now every one is uncertain and apprehensive. We waste hours in questions and speculations. To-day there was something like despair throughout the camp. The Boers are putting up new guns on Gun Hill in place of those we destroyed. Through a telescope at the Heliograph Station I watched the men working hard at the sangar. Two on the face of the hill were evidently making a wire entanglement. On Pepworth Hill the sappers think they are putting up one of the 8.7 in. guns, four of which the Boers are known to have ordered, though it is not certain whether they received them. They throw a 287lb. shell. We are all beginning to feel the pinch of hunger. Bit by bit every little luxury we had stored up has disappeared. Nothing to eat or drink is now left in any of the shops; only a little twist tobacco.

What is even worse, the naval guns have too little ammunition to answer the enemy's fire; so that the Boers can shell us at ease and draw in nearer when they like. The sickness increases terribly. Major Donegan sent out thirty-six cases of enteric to Intombi Camp from the divisional troops' hospital alone. Probably over fifty went in all. Everything now depends on Buller's winning a great victory. It seems incredible that two British armies should be within twenty miles of each other and powerless to move.

I cannot induce a Kaffir runner to start now. Even the Intelligence Officer cannot do it. The heliograph has failed me, too. Sunday's message has not gone, and this afternoon was clouded with storms and rain. The temperature fell 30 deg.. Yesterday it was 102 deg.; the day before 106 deg. in the shade.

December 20, 1899.

From dawn till about seven the mutter of distant guns was heard near Colenso. But no news came through, for the sky was clouded nearly all day long. The new 4.7 in. howitzer which the Boers have put up on Surprise Hill opened fire in the morning, and will be as dangerous as its predecessor which we blew up. From every point of the compass it shelled hard nearly all day. I connect this feverish activity with the apparition of a chaise and four seen driving round the Boer outposts, and to-day quite visible on the Bulwan. Four outriders accompany it, and queer little flags are set up where it halts. Can the

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black-coated old gentleman inside be Oom Paul himself? It is significant that the big gun of Bulwan did some extraordinary shooting during the day. It threw one shell right into the old camp; another sheer over the Irish at Range Post; both were aimed at nothing but simply displayed the gun's full range; another pointed out the position of the Naval battery, and whilst I was at lunch in the town, another whizzed past and carried away one side of the Town Hall turret. I envy the gunner's feelings, though for the moment I thought he had killed my horse at the door. The Town Hall is now really picturesque, just the sort of ruin visitors will expect to see after a bombardment. With a little tittifying it will be worth thousands to the Colonials.

[Illustration: A PICTURESQUE RUIN.]

The day was cool and cloudy; fair shelling weather, but bad for heliographs. So my Christmas message is still delayed. A certain lieutenant (whom I know, but may not name) went out under flag of truce with a letter to the Boer General, and was admitted even into Schalk Burger's tent. The Boer gave him some details of Buller's disaster last Friday, and of the loss of the ten guns, which they said came up within heavy rifle fire and were disabled. They especially praised one officer who refused to surrender, fired all his revolver's cartridges, drew his sword, and would have fallen had not the Boers attacked him only with the butt, determined to spare the life of so brave a man. I give the story: its truth will be known by this time.

Sickness continues. There are 900 cases of enteric in Intombi. A sister from the camp came and besought Colonel Stoneman with tears to stop the shameful robbery of the sick which goes on in the camp. The blame, of course, does not lie with him or the authorities here. The supplies are sent out regularly day by day. It is in the careless or corrupt distribution that the sick are robbed and murdered by a mob of cowardly Colonials of the rougher class, who had not enough courage to stay in the town, and now turn their native talent for swindling to the plunder of brave men who are suffering on their behalf.

A deputation of mayor and town councillors waited on Colonel Ward to-day. The petitioners humbly prayed that the bathing parties of soldiers below the town on Sundays might be stopped, because they shocked the feelings of the women. For a mixture of hypocrisy and heartlessness I take that deputation to be unequalled. The soldiers are exposed all the week long, day and night, to sun and cold and dirt, on rocks and hill-tops where it is impossible even to dip their hands in water. On Sunday the Boers seldom fire. The men are marched down in companies under the officers to bathe, and to any decent man or woman the sight of their pleasure is one of the few joys of the campaign. But those who think nothing of charging a soldier 6d. for a penny bottle of soda-water, or 2s. for twopenn'orth of cake, tremble for the feelings of their wives and daughters. Why do the women go to look? as Colonel Ward asked, in his

indignant refusal even to listen to the petition. Sunday is the one day when they can stay at home with safety, and leave their husbands to skulk in the river holes if they please.

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December 21, 1899.

"Puffing Billy," of Bulwan, distinguished himself this morning by sending one shot into Colonel Ward's house and the next into the general's just beyond. In Colonel Ward's was a live Christmas turkey, over which a sentry is posted day and night. At first the rumour spread that the bird was mortally wounded; its thigh fractured, its liver penetrated. But about midday public alarm was allayed by the news that the invaluable creature could be seen strutting about and stiffening its feathers as usual. It had not even suffered from shock. The second shot went through Sir Henry Rawlinson's office, which he had just left, and shattered the Headquarters' larder, depriving the Staff of butter for the rest of the siege. It has made a model ruin for future sightseers. Unhappily the general was ill in bed with slight fever, and had to be carried to another house up the hill in a dhoolie. This may have encouraged the Boers to think they had killed him.

It was again a bad day for the heliograph, and the Boers have purposely kindled a veldt fire across the line of light. But I think I got through my thirty words of Christmas greeting to the *Chronicle*. I tried in vain all day for a Kaffir runner, but in the late afternoon I rode away over the plain, past the racecourse, and through the thorns at the foot of Caesar's Camp, till I almost came in touch with the enemy's piquets at Intombi. I saw a flock of long-billed waders, like small whimbrel, a great variety of beautiful little doves, and many of that queer bird the natives call Sakonboota, whose tail grows so long in the breeding season that his little wings can hardly lift it above the ground, and he flutters about in the breeze like a badly made kite. Riding back at sunset over the flat I felt like Montaigne when he desired to wear away his life in the saddle. The difference is that in the end I may have to eat my own horse. The shells from four guns kept singing their evening hymn above my head as I cantered along.

[Illustration: HEADQUARTERS AFTER A 96LB. SHELL]

December 22, 1899.

The morning opened with one of those horrible disasters which more than balance our general good luck. The Bulwan gun began his morning shell rather later than usual. His almost invariable programme is to fire five or six shots at the bakery or soda-water shed beside my cottage; then to give a few to the centre of the town, and to finish off with half a dozen at the Light Horse and Gordons down by the Iron Bridge. Having earned his breakfast, he usually stops then, and cools down a bit. The performance is so regular that when he has finished with our end of the town the men cease to take precautions even at the sound of the whistle or bugle which gives notice of danger whenever the special sentry sees the gun flash.

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But this morning the routine was changed. Having waked me up as usual with the crash of shells close by on my left, the gun was turned down town, smashed into a camp or two without damage, and then suddenly whipped round on his pivot and sent a shell straight into the Gloucester lines, about 300 yards away to my right. It pitched just on the top of a traverse at the foot of the low hill now held by the Devons. The men were quite off their guard, busy with breakfast and sharing out the kettles. In an instant five lay dead and twelve were wounded. The shell burst so close that three of the dead were horribly scorched. One got covered by a tarpaulin, and was not found at first. His body was split open, one leg was off, his head was burnt and smashed to pulp. The cries of the wounded told me at once what had happened. Summoned by telephone, the dhoolies came quickly up and bore them away, together with the remains of the dead. Three of the wounded died before the night. Eight dead and nine wounded—it is worse than the disaster to the King's (Liverpools) almost exactly on the same spot a few weeks ago. In the middle of the morning much the same thing nearly happened to the 5th Lancers. The 6 in. gun on Telegraph Hill, usually more noisy than harmful, was banging away at the Old Camp and the Naval battery on Cove Hill, when one of the shells ricocheted off the hill-top, and plunged into the Lancers' camp at the foot. Four officers were hit, including the colonel, who had a bit of finger blown off, and a segment through both legs. A sergeant lost an eye. One officer ducked his head and got a fragment straight through his helmet. The shell was a chance shot, but that made it no better. The men are sick of being shot at like rabbits, and sicker still of running into rabbit holes for shelter. The worst of all is that we can no longer reply for fear of wasting ammunition.

There was no sound of Buller's guns all day. I induced another Kaffir to make the attempt of running the Boer lines. Mr. McCormick, a Colonial correspondent, also started. I should go myself, but have no wish to be shut up in Pretoria for the rest of the campaign, cut off from all letters, and more useless even than I am here. So I spent the afternoon with others, building a sand-bag fort round the tent where Mr. Steevens is to be nursed, beside the river bank. The five o'clock shells came pretty close, pitching into the Light Horse camp and the main watering ford. But the tent itself is fairly safe. The feeding of the horses is our greatest immediate difficulty. Every bit of edible green is being seized and turned to account. I find vine-leaves a fair substitute for grass, but my horses are terribly hungry all the same.

December 23, 1899.

The bombardment was violent at intervals, and some hundreds of shells must have been thrown at us. But there was no method or concentration in the business.

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Buller's guns were heard for about two hours in the morning, and wild rumours filled the air. Roberts and Kitchener were coming out. Buller was across the Tugela. Within the week our relief was certain. At night the 18th Hussars gave another concert among the rocks by the riverside. In the midst of a comic song on the inner meaning of Love came a sound as of distant guns. The inner meaning of Love was instantly forgotten. All held their breaths to listen. But it was only some horses coming down to water, and we turned to Love again, while the waning moon rose late beside Lombard's Kop, red and shapeless as a potsherd.

December 24, 1899.

Nothing disturbed the peace of Christmas Eve except three small shells thrown into the town about five o'clock tea-time, for no apparent reason. The main subject of interest was the chance of getting any Christmas dinner. Yesterday twenty-eight potatoes were sold in the market for 30s. A goose fetched anything up to L3, a turkey anything up to L5. But the real problem is water. The river is now a thick stream of brown mud, so thick that it cannot be filtered unless the mud is first precipitated. We used to do it with alum, but no alum is left now. Even soda-water is almost solid.

December 25, 1899.

The Boer guns gave us an early Christmas carol, and at intervals all day they joined in the religious and social festivities. Our north end of the town suffered most, and we beguiled the peaceful hours in digging out the shells that had nearly killed us. They have a marketable value. One perfect specimen of a 96lb. shell from Bulwan fell into a soft flower bed and did not burst or receive a scratch. I suppose it cost the Boers about L35, and it would still fetch L10 as a secondhand article. A brother to it pitched into a boarding house close by us, and blew the whole gable end sky high. Unhappily two of the inmates were wounded, and a horse killed.

But such little contretemps as shells did not in the least interfere with the Christmas revels. About 250 children are still left in the town or river caves (where one or two have recently been born), and it was determined they should not be deprived of their Christmas tree. The scheme was started and organised by Colonel Rhodes and Major "Karri" Davis, of the Imperial Light Horse. Four enormous trees were erected in the auction rooms and decked with traditional magnificence and toys ransacked from every shop. At half-past eight p.m. fairyland opened. A gigantic Father Christmas stalked about with branches of pine and snowy cap (the temperature at noon was 103deg. in the shade). Each child had a ticket for its present, and joy was distributed with military precision. When the children had gone to their dreams the room was cleared for a dance, and round whirled the khaki youths with white-bloused maidens in their arms. It was not exactly the Waterloo Ball with sound of revelry by night, but I think it will have more effect on the future of the race.

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Other festivities, remote from the unaccustomed feminine charm, were a series of mule races, near the old camp, for soldiers and laughing Kaffir boys. The men's dinner itself was enough to mark the day. It is true everything was rather skimped, but after the ordinary short rations it was a treat to get any kind of pudding, any pinch of tobacco, and sometimes just a drop of rum.

Almost the saddest part of the siege now is the condition of the animals. The oxen are skeletons of hunger, the few cows hardly give a pint of milk apiece, the horses are failing. Nothing is more pitiful than to feel a willing horse like mine try to gallop as he used, and have to give it up simply for want of food. During the siege I have taught him to talk better than most human beings, and his little apologies are really pathetic when he breaks into something like his old speed and stops with a sigh. It is the same with all.

CHAPTER XV

SICKNESS, DEATH, AND A NEW YEAR

LADYSMITH, *December 26, 1899.*

Good news came through the heliograph about General Gatacre's force at Dordrecht. There were rumours about Lord Methuen, too, for which Dr. Jameson was quoted as authority. But the best evidence for hope was the unusual violence of the bombardment. It began early, and before the middle of the afternoon the Boers had thrown 178 shells at us. They were counted by a Gordon officer on Moriden's Castle, and the total must have reached nearly 200 before sunset. Such feverish activity is nearly always a sign of irritation on the part of the Dutch, and one can always hope the irritation is due to bad news for them.

I have not heard of any loss in town or camp. Our guns, with the exception of the howitzers and Major Wing's field guns, which can just reach the new howitzer on Surprise Hill, have hardly replied at all.

The milk question was the most serious of the day. I saw a herd of thirty-five cows which had only yielded sixteen pints at milking time. It is now debated whether we shall not have to feed the cows and starve the horses; or kill the thinnest horses and stew them down into broth for the others. The reports about the condition of Intombi Camp were particularly horrible to-day. But General Hunter will not allow any one to visit the camp, and it is no good repeating secondhand reports.

December 27, 1899.

The side of Tunnel Hill, at the angle of the Helpmakaar road, where Liverpools and Gloucesters have suffered in turn, was to-day the scene of an exactly similar disaster to the Devons.

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The great Bulwan gun began shelling us later than usual. It must have been past eight. The Devon officers had long finished breakfast, and after inspecting the lines were gathered for orderly room in their mess. It is a fairly large shed on a platform of beaten earth, levelled in the side of the hill. The roof, of corrugated iron and earth, covered with tarpaulin, would hardly even keep out splinters, and is only supported on rough wooden beams. It is impossible to construct sufficient head shelter. The ground is so rocky that all you can do with it is to build walls and traverses. Along one side of the mess tent a great traverse runs, some eight or ten feet thick, and about as high. When the sentry blows the warning whistle at the flash of a big gun, officers are supposed to come under the shelter of this traverse, till the shell has passed or declared its direction. At the first shot this morning I heard no whistle blow, but it was sounded at the second and third. It was the third that did the damage. Striking the top of the traverse, it plunged forward in huge fragments into the messroom, tearing an enormous hole in the tarpaulin screen. Unhappily Mr. Dalzell, a first lieutenant with eight years' service, had refused to come under the wall, and was sitting at the table reading. The main part of the shell struck him full on the side of the face, and carried away nearly all his head. He passed painlessly from his reading into death. The state of the messroom when I saw it was too horrible to describe. The wounds of the other officers prove that the best traverse is insufficient unless accompanied by head shelter. Though their backs were against the wall, seven were wounded, and three others badly bruised. Two cases are serious: Lieutenant P. Dent had part of his skull taken off, and Lieutenant Caffin had a compound fracture of the shoulder-blade. Lieutenant Cane, an "orlicer boy," who only joined on Black Monday, was also wounded in the back. The dhoolies quickly came and bore the wounded away to the Wesleyan Chapel. Mr. Dalzell was buried in the afternoon. "Well, well," sighed the old gravedigger, "I never thought I should live to bury a man without a head."

To-day, for the first time, we heard that Lord Roberts had lost his only son at Colenso. The whole camp was sad about it. The scandal over the robbery of the sick by the civilians at Intombi has grown so serious that at last General Hunter is sending out Colonel Stoneman to investigate. I have myself repeatedly endeavoured to telegraph home known facts about the corruption and mismanagement, but all I wrote has been scratched out by the Censorship. One such little fact I may mention now. The 18th Hussar officers at Christmas gave up a lot of little luxuries, such as cakes and things, which count high in a siege, and sent them down to their sick at Intombi. Not a crumb of it all did the sick ever receive. Everything disappeared *en route*—stolen by officials, or sold to greedy Colonials for whom the sick had fought. It is a small point, but characteristic of the whole affair.

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December 28, 1899.

The night was wet and pitchy dark. Only by the help of the lightning I had stumbled and plunged home to bed, when at about eleven a perfect storm of rifle-fire suddenly swept along the ridges at our end of the town. Rushing out I saw the edges of the hills twinkle with lines of flashes right away to Gun Hill and Bulwan. Alarmed at the darkness, and hearing strange sounds in the rain the Boers had taken a scare and were blazing away at vacancy, in terror of another night attack. The uproar lasted about five minutes. Then all was quiet until, as dawn was breaking, “Lady Anne” and “Bloody Mary” shook me off my camp bed with the crash of seven reports in quick succession just over my roof. For some days it had been an idea of Captain Lambton’s to catch the Boer gunners on Bulwan just as they were going up to their big gun, or were occupied with early breakfast. Five of our shells burst on the face of the hill where many Boers spend the night, probably to protect the gun. The two last fell on the top, close to the gun itself. The latter did not fire at all to-day, and I saw the Boers standing about it in groups evidently excited and disturbed.

The bombardment continued much as usual in other parts, and I spent the afternoon with the 69th Battery on Leicester Post, watching Major Wing reply to the new howitzer on Surprise Hill. Rain fell heavily at times, and the Boers never like firing in the wet.

The day was chiefly marked by Colonel Stoneman’s visit to Intombi Camp to inquire into the reported scandals. He thinks that the worst of the corruption and swindling is already over, being killed by the very scandal. But he found a general want of organisation in the distribution of food and other stores. There are now 2,557 inhabitants of the camp, of whom 1,015 are sick and wounded soldiers. Of late the numbers have been increasing by forty or fifty a day, allowing for those who return or die. The graves to-day number eighty-three, and a gang of forty Kaffirs is always digging. Outside the military, the majority of the refugees are Kaffirs and coolies, the white civilians only numbering 600 or 700. Colonel Stoneman had all, except the sick, paraded in groups, and assigned separate tasks to each—nursing for the whites, digging and sanitation for the Kaffirs, cooking and skilled labour for the coolies. One important condition he made—every one required to work is also required to take his day’s wage. The medical authority has objected to certain improvements on the ground of expense, but, as Colonel Stoneman says, what will England care about a few thousands at such a crisis in her history? Or what would she say if we allowed her sick and wounded to die in discomfort for the want of a little money? By to-morrow all the sick will have beds and even sheets, food will be distributed on a better organised plan, and civilians will be raised from a two-months’ slough of feeding, sleeping, grumbling, and general swinishness unredeemed even by shells.

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[Illustration: EFFECT OF A 96LB. SHELL ON A PRIVATE HOUSE]

At night the British flashlight from Colenso was throwing signals upon the cloudy sky, and it was amusing to watch the Boers trying to confuse the signals by flashing their two searchlights upon the same cloud. They have one light west of us near Bester's Station, and to-night they showed a very brilliant electric light on the top of Bulwan. When our signalling stopped, they turned it on the town, and very courteously lighted me home. It was like the clearest moonlight, the shadows long and black, but all else distinct in colourless brilliance. The top of Bulwan is four miles from our main street. To make up for yesterday the shells were particularly lively to-day. Before breakfast one fell on the railway behind our house, one into the verandah next door, and two into our little garden. Unhappily, the last killed one of our few remaining fowls—shivered it into air so that nothing but a little cloud of feathers was seen again. In the middle of the afternoon old "Puffing Billy" again opened fire with energy. I was at the tailor's on the main street, and the shells were falling just round his shop. "Thirty-eight, thirty-four," said the little Scot measuring. "There's the Dutch church gone. Forty-two, sixteen. There's the bank. Just hold the tape, mon, while I go and look. Oh, it's only the Town Hall!" Among other shells one came in painted with the Free State colours, and engraved "With the compliments of the season." It is the second thus adorned, but whereas the first had been empty, this was charged with plum-pudding. Can it be a Dutchman who has such a pleasant wit? The condition of the horses becomes daily more pitiful. Some fall in the street and cannot get up again for weakness. Most have given up speed. The 5th Lancers have orders never to move quicker than a walk. The horses are just kept alive by grass which Hindoos grub up by the roots. A small ration of ground mealies and bran is also issued. Heavy rain came on and fell all night, during which we heard two far-off explosions.

December 30, 1899.

Going up to Leicester Post in the early morning, I found the K.R. Rifles drying themselves in the African sun, which blazed in gleams between the clouds. Without the sun we should fare badly. As it is, the rain, exposure, and bad food are reducing our numbers fast. Passing the 11th Field Hospital on my way up, I saw stretcher after stretcher moving slowly along with the sick in their blankets. "Dysentery, enteric; enteric, dysentery," were the invariable answers. All the thousands of shells thrown at us in the last two months count for nothing beside the sickness.

On the top of the hill I found the two guns of Major Wing's battery trained on Surprise Hill as usual. In accordance with my customary good fortune all the enemy's guns opened fire at once. But only the howitzer, the automatic, and the Bluebank were actually aimed our way. The Bluebank was most effective.

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It was amusing to see the men of the 60th when a shell pitched among them to-day. How they regarded it as a busy man regards the intrusion of the housemaid—just a harmless necessary nuisance, and no more. The cattle took the little automatic shells in much the same spirit, but with an addition of wonder—staring at them and snuffing with bovine astonishment. The Kaffir herdsmen first ran yelling in every direction, and then rushed back to dig the shell up, amid inextinguishable laughter. The Hindoo grass-cutter neither ran nor laughed, but awaited destiny with resignation. By the way, there is a Hindoo servant in the 19th Hussar lines, who at the approach of a “Long Tom” shell always falls reverently on his face and prays to it.

At sundown, in hopes of adding to our starvation rations, I went out among the thorns at the foot of Caesar's Camp to shoot birds and hares. But the thorns are fast disappearing as firewood, and the appalling rain almost drowned me in the rush of the spruits. So we dined as usual on lumps of trek-ox thinly disguised. Talking of rain, I forgot to mention that the deluge on Friday night drowned six horses of the Leicester Mounted Infantry, carried away twenty-seven of their saddles, broke down the grand shelter-caves of the Imperial Light Horse, carried their bridge away to the blue, and flooded out half the poor homes of natives and civilians dug in the sand of the river banks.

Sunday, December 31, 1899.

Most of my day was wasted in an attempt to get leave to visit Intombi. Colonel Exham (P.M.O.) and Major Bateson had asked me to go down and give a fair account of what I saw. General Hunter took my application to the Chief, but Sir George thought it contrary to his original agreement with Joubert, that none but medical and commissariat officers should enter the camp. So Intombi remains unvisited—a vision of my own. In high quarters I gather that, considering the great difficulties of the case, the camp is thought a successful piece of work, very creditable to the officers in charge. Otherwise the day was chiefly remarkable for the unusual amount of firing at the outposts, and the arrival by runner of a Natal newspaper with the news that Lord Roberts was coming out. As it was New Year's eve, we expected a midnight greeting from the Boer guns, and sure enough, between twelve and one, all the smaller guns in turn took one shot into vacancy and then were still.

January 1, 1900.

The Bulwan gun began the New Year with energy. He sent thirty of his enormous shells into the camps and town, eight or nine of which fell in quick succession among the Helpmakaar fortifications, now held by the Liverpools.

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Three or four houses in the town were wrecked by shells, the most decisive ruin being at Captain Valentine's. The shell went through the iron verandah, pierced the stone wall above the front door without bursting, and exploded against the partition wall of the passage and drawing-room. Throwing forward, it cleared away the kitchen wall, and swept the kitchen clean. Down a passage to the right the expansion of the air blew off a heavy door, and threw it across the bed of a wounded Rifle Brigade officer. He escaped unhurt, but a valued servant from the Irish Rifles got a piece of shell through back and stomach as he was preparing breakfast in the kitchen. He died in a few hours. His last words were, "I hope you got your breakfast all right, sir."

The house had long been a death-trap. Perhaps the Boers aim at the telegraph-office across the road, or possibly spies have told them Colonel Rhodes goes there for meals. The General has now declared the place too dangerous for habitation.

In the afternoon we were to have had a military tournament on the Islington model, but the General stopped it, because the enemy would certainly have thrown shells into our midst, and women and children would have been there. At night, however, the Natal Volunteers gave another open-air concert. In the midst we heard guns—real guns—from Colenso way. Between the reflected flash on the sky and the sound of the report one could count seventy-eight seconds, which Captain Lambton tells me gives a distance of about fifteen and a half miles. All day distant guns were heard from time to time. Some said the direction was changed, but I could hear no difference.

The mayor and councillors relieve the monotony of the siege with domestic solicitude. To-day they are said to be preparing a deputation to the General imploring that the first train which comes up after the relief shall be exclusively devoted—not to medical stuff for the wounded, not to food for the hungry troops and fodder for the starving horses, not to the much-needed ammunition for the guns—but to their own women.

January 2, 1900.

Soon after daylight dropping bullets began to whiz past my window and crack upon the tin roof in quite a shower. The Boer snipers had crept up into Brooks's Farm, beyond the Harrismith railway, and were firing at the heads of our men on Junction Hill. Whenever they missed the edge of the hill the bullets fell on my cottage. At last some guns opened fire from our Naval battery on Cove Redoubt. Captain Lambton had permitted the Natal Naval Volunteers to blaze away some of their surplus ammunition at the snipers. And blaze they did! Their 3-pounders kept up an almost continuous fire all the morning, and hardly a sniper has been heard since. There was nothing remarkable about the bombardment.

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“Puffing Billy” gave us his four doses of big shell as usual. Whilst I was at the Intelligence Office a shell lit among some houses under the trees in front, killed two and wounded others. The action of another shell would seem incredible if I had not seen it. The thing burst among the 13th Battery, which stands under shelter of Tunnel Hill, in a straight line with my road, less than 300 yards away. I was just mounting my horse and stopped to see the burst, when a fragment came sauntering high through the air and fell with a thud in the garden just behind me. It was a jagged bit of outer casing about three inches thick, and weighing over 6 lbs. The extraordinary thing about it was that it had flung off exactly at right angles from the line of fire. Gunners say that melinite sometimes does these things.

I rode south-west, over Range Post and a bit of the Long Valley to Waggon Hill, our nearest point to the relief column and the English mail. At no great distance—ten miles or so—I could see the hills overlooking the Tugela, where the English are. Far beyond rose the crags and precipices of the Drakensberg, illuminated by unearthly gleams of the setting sun, which found their way beneath the fringes of a purple thunder-shower and turned to amber-brown a cloud of smoke rising from the burning veldt.

January 3, 1900.

The quiet hour before sunrise was again broken by the crash of our Naval guns. “Bloody Mary” (now politely called the “Princess Victoria”) threw five shells along the top of Bulwan. A Naval 12-pounder sent three against the face of the hill. Again it was intended to catch the Boer gunners and guard as they were getting up and preparing breakfast.

January 4, 1900.

No news came in, and it was a day as dull as peace, but for some amenities of bombardment.

The Surprise Hill howitzer tried a longer range. At lunch “Bulwan Billy” made some splendid shots close to our little mess and burst the tanks at Taylor’s mineral water works. In the wet afternoon the big gun’s work was less dignified. He threw five shrapnel over the cattle licking up what little grass was left on the flat, and did not kill a single cow.

The guides boast that to-day they killed one Boer by strategy used for tigers in India. Two or three of them went out to Star Kopje and loosed two miserable old ponies, driving them towards the Boer lines to graze. A Boer or two came for the prize and one was shot dead.

At night the flash signals from Colenso were very brilliant on a black and cloudy sky. They only said, “Dearest love from your own Nance,” or “Baby sends kisses,” but the



Bulwan searchlight tried hard to thwart their affectionate purpose by waving his ray quickly up and down across the flashing beam.

January 5, 1900.

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There was little to mark the day beyond the steady shelling of snipers by the Natal Navals, and a great 96lb. shell from Bulwan which plunged through a Kaffir house, where black labourers live stuffed together, took off a Kaffir's foot, ricocheted over our little mess-room, just glancing off the roof, and fell gasping, but still entire, beside our verandah. I rode up to Caesar's Camp in the morning sun. It was a scene of sleepy peace, only broken by the faint interest of watching where the shells burst in the town far below.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT ATTACK

January 6, 1900.

It has been a commonplace of the war that the Boers could cling to a position of their own choosing from behind stones, but would never venture to attack a position or fight in the open. Like all the comforting commonplaces about the Boers, this is now overthrown. The untrained, ill-equipped farmers have to-day assaulted positions of extraordinary strength, have renewed the attack again and again, have rushed up to breastworks, and died at the rifle's mouth, and have only been repulsed after fifteen hours of hard and gallant fighting on the part of the defence.

Waggon Hill is a long, high spur of Caesar's Camp, running out south-west between Long Valley and Bester's Farm. At the extremity, as I have described, are the great gun-pits prepared for "Lady Anne" and a Naval 12-pounder some weeks ago. "Lady Anne" was for the second time being brought up into position there last night, and ought to have been fixed the night before, but was stopped half-way by the wet.

The Boer attack was probably not merely an attempt on the gun, but on the position, and the gun is being taken back to her usual position to-night. Besides the gun-pits, the hill has no defences except a few low walls, only two or three stones high, piled up at intervals round the edge, as shelters from long-range fire. The place was held only by three dismounted squadrons of Imperial Light Horse, but the 1st K.R.R. (60th) were in support in a large sangar about three-quarters of a mile along the same ridge, separated from Waggon Hill proper by the low "nek" where the two howitzers used to stand. From the 60th the ridge turns at an angle eastward, and becomes the long tableland of Caesar's Camp, held by the Manchesters and 42nd Battery (Major Goulburn). The top is broad and flat, covered with grass and loose stones. The whole position completely overlooks the town to the north, and if it fell into the enemy's hands we should either have to retake it or quit the camps and town. The edge measures 4,000 yards, and the Manchesters had only 560 men to hold it.



At a quarter to three a.m., while it was still dark, a small party of Boer sharpshooters climbed up the further (south-east) face of Waggon Hill, just left of the “nek.” They were picked men who had volunteered for the exploit. Nearly all came from Harrismith. We had posted a picket of eight at the point, but long security had made them careless, or else they were betrayed by a mistake which nearly lost the whole position. From the edge of the hill the whole face is “dead” ground. It is so steep that an enemy climbing up it cannot be seen. It was almost a case of Majuba again.

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The Dutch crept up quite unobserved. At last a sentry challenged, and was answered with "Friend." He was shot dead, and was found with rifle raised and still loaded. The alarm was given, but no one realised what had happened. Captain Long (A.S.C.), who was superintending the transport of "Lady Anne," told me he could not understand how it was that bullets kept whistling past his nose. He thought the firing was from our own sentries. But the Dutch had reached the summit, and were enfilading the "nek" and the whole extremity of the hill from our left. As light began to dawn it was impossible to show oneself for a moment on the open top. The furthest range was not over 300 yards, and the top of a helmet, the corner of an arm, was sufficient aim for those deadly marksmen. Unable to stand against the fire, the Light Horse withdrew behind the crest of the hill, whilst small parties continued a desperate defence from the two big gun-pits.

Nearly all the officers present have been killed or wounded, and it is difficult to get a clear account of what happened from any eye-witness. Four companies from each battalion of the K.R. Rifles came up within the hour, but no one keeps count of time in such a struggle. The Boers were now climbing up all along the face of the hill, and firing from the edge. All day about half the summit was in their possession. Three times they actually occupied the gun-pits and had to be driven out again. Leaning their rifles over the parapets they fired into the space inside. It was so that Major Miller-Wallnutt, of the Gordons, was killed. Old De Villiers, the Harrismith commandant, shot him over the wall, and was in turn shot by Corporal Albrecht, of the Light Horse, who was himself shot by a Field-Cornet, who was in turn shot by Digby-Jones, the sapper. So it went on. The Boers advanced to absolutely certain death, and they met it without hesitation—the Boers who would never have the courage to attack a position! One little incident illustrates their spirit. A rugged old Boer finding one of the I.L.H. wounded on the ground, stopped under fire and bound him up. "I feel no hatred towards you," he said, "but you have no reason to fight at all. We are fighting for our country." He turned away, and a bullet killed him as he turned.

Before six o'clock the defence was further reinforced by a party of Gordons from Maiden Castle. They did excellent work throughout the day, though they, too, were once or twice driven from the top. But the credit of the stand remains with the I.L.H. and a few sappers like Digby-Jones, who held one of the little forts alone for a time, killed three Boers with his revolver, and went for a fourth with the butt. He would have had the V.C. if he had not fallen. So perhaps would Dennis, of the Sappers, though I am told he was present without orders. Lord Ava, galloper to General Ian Hamilton, commanding the defences, was shot through the head early in the day, about

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six o'clock. Sent forward with a message to the Light Horse, he was looking through glasses over a rock when the bullet took him. While I write he is still alive, but given up. A finer fellow never lived. "You'd never take him for a lord," said an Irish sergeant, "he seems quite a nice gentleman." Equally sad was the loss of Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, of the Gordons. A spent bullet struck him in the back as he was leaving camp. The wound is mortal, and he had only just recovered from his wound at Elands Laagte.

So the fight began. The official estimate of the Boers who gained the top is 600. Eyewitnesses put the number at anything between 100 and 1,000. The struggle continued from 3 a.m. till nearly seven at night. It must be remembered that our men had nothing to eat from five the afternoon before, and got nothing till nine at night. Twenty-eight hours they were without food, and for about sixteen they were fighting for life and death. At 4 p.m. a tremendous thunderstorm with rain and hail came on, but the fire never slackened. The 21st and 67th Batteries were behind the position in front of Range Post, but were unable to give assistance for fear of killing our men. The 18th Hussars and 5th Dragoon Guards and some 5th Lancers came up dismounted to reinforce, but still the enemy clung to the rocks, and still it was death to creep out on the narrow level of the summit.

It was now evident that the position must be retaken at all costs, or the enemy would hold it all night. The General sent for three companies of the Devons. Up they came, tramping through the storm—that glorious regiment of Western Englishmen. Colonel Park and four other officers led them on. It was about six o'clock when they reached the summit. Keeping well to the left of the "nek," between the extremity held by the Light Horse and the 60th's sangar, they took open order under cover of the ridge. Then came the command to sweep the position with the bayonet. They fixed, and advanced at the quick till they reached the open. Then, under a steady hail of bullets, they came on at the double—180 men, with the steel ready. Colonel Park himself led them. The Boers kept up an incessant fire till the line was within fifteen yards. Then they turned and ran, leaping down the steep face of the hill, and disappearing in the dead ground. Their retreat was gallantly covered by their comrades, who swept the ridge with an oblique fire from both sides.

The Devons, edging a little to the right in their charge, got some cover from a low wall near the "nek" just quitted by the Boers. Even there the danger was terrible. It was there that four officers fell, three stone dead. It will be long before such officers as Lafone (already twice wounded in this war) and Field can be replaced. Lieutenant Masterson, formerly a private, and later a colour-sergeant in the Irish Fusiliers, was ordered back over the exposed space cleared by the first charge to bring up a small reinforcement further on the left. On the way he was shot at least three times, but staggered on and gave his order. He still survives, and is recommended for the Victoria Cross. He comes of a fighting Irish stock, and his great-grandfather captured the

French Eagle at Barossa in the Peninsular War. He received his commission for gallantry in Egypt.

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But the day was won. The position was cleared. That charge finished the business. The credit for the whole defence against one of the bravest attacks ever made rests with the Light Horse, the Gordons, and the Devons. Yet it is impossible to forget the unflinching self-devotion of the King's Royal Rifle officers. They suffered terribly, and the worst is they suffered almost in vain. At one moment, when the defenders had been driven back over the summit's edge, Major Mackworth (of the Queen's, but attached to the King's Royal Rifles) went up again, calling on the men to follow him. Just with his walking-stick in his hand he went up, and with the few brave men who followed him he died.

The attack on the main position of Caesar's Camp was much the same in plan and result. At 3 a.m. the Manchester pickets along the extremity's left edge (*i.e.*, north-east) were surprised by the appearance of Boers in their very midst. Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe, who was visiting the pickets, mistook them for volunteers. "Hullo! Boers!" he cried out. They laughed and answered, "Yes, burghers!" He was a prisoner in their hands for some hours. The whole of one section was shot dead at their post. The alarm was given, but the outlying sentries and piquets could not move from the little shelters and walls which alone protected them from the oblique fire from an unknown direction. Many were shot down. Some remained hidden at the bottom of their defence pits till late in the afternoon without being able to stir. Creeping up the dead ground on the cliffs face, which is covered with rocks and thick bushes, the Boers lined the left edge of the summit in great numbers. Probably about 1,000 attacked that part alone, and about 200 advanced on to the top. They were all Transvaal Boers, chiefly volunteers from the commandoes of Heidelberg and Wakkerstroom. This main body was attempting to take our left (north) side of the hill in flank, and kept edging through the thorns and dongas near the foot. The Natal Police, supported by the Natal Mounted Rifles, had been set to prevent such a movement, but had left a gap of 500 yards between their right and three companies of Gordons stationed in front of "Fly" kraal on that side of the hill. At last, observing the enemy in a donga, they challenged, and were met by the answer, "For God's sake, don't fire; we're the Town Guard." At once they were undeceived by a volley which killed one of them and wounded a few others. How far they avenged this act of treachery I have not discovered. The Boers flanking movement was only checked by the 53rd Battery (Major Abdy), which was posted on the flat across the river from the show ground, and did splendid service all day. It shelled the side and top of the hill almost incessantly, though the big Bulwan gun kept pouring shrapnel and common shell right in front of it, making all the veldt look like a ploughed field.

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Meantime the Boers on the summit held their ground. Their movement was backed by three field guns and two automatics across the Bester's valley at ranges of 2,000 yards and 4,000 yards. Their further advance along the edge was really checked by two Manchester privates, Scott and Pitts, who kept up an incessant fire from their little wall at the extremity after all their comrades were shot. Three companies of the Rifle Brigade at last came up to reinforce. Then the G Company of the Gordons, under Captain Carnegie. But for a long time no one knew where the gap in our line really was. About half-past nine one could see the enemy still thick among the rocks and trees on the left of the extremity, though the shrapnel was dropping all among them from the 53rd Battery. It was just before this that Lieutenant Walker, watching with a telescope from the signal station on the Convent, saw two Boers creeping along the edge alone for about 150 yards under tremendous fire. Suddenly a shrapnel took them, and both fell down. They were father and son. About half-past ten the first assault was repulsed, and for a time the Boers disappeared, but one could see reinforcements massing behind a hill called the "Red Kopje," across the deep stream of the Bester's valley. The second main attack was delivered about one, and the third during the storm at five. I think, after the first assault, the Boer line never advanced beyond the cover of the edge. But their incessant fire was supported by a storm of long-range bullets from the heights across the valley. The position was not finally cleared till nearly seven.

The attack and the defence were equally gallant, as at Waggon Hill. Our guns were of far more service than theirs, but probably the loss by rifle fire was not so great, the range being longer. The total force of the attack on both positions was probably about 7,000. Some 2,000 Volunteers led the way—old Boer farmers and picked men who came forward after a prayer meeting on Friday. For immovable courage I think it would be impossible to beat our gunners—especially of the 42nd and 53rd Batteries. All through the action they continued the routine of gunnery just as if they were out for exercise on the sands.

By seven o'clock the main positions on the south side of our defences were safe. On the north, fighting had been going on all day also. At about 4 a.m. the artillery and rifle fire was so violent around Observation Hill that I thought the main attack was on that point. Originally the Boers no doubt intended a strong attack there. The hill has always been one of the weakest points of our defence.

The Boers began their attack on Observation Hill just before dawn with a rapid fire of guns and rifles at long range. At first only our guns replied, the two of the 69th doing excellent work with shrapnel over the opposite ridges. By about six we could see the Boers creeping forward over Bell Spruit and making their way up the dongas and ridges in our front. At about eight there was a pause, and it seemed as if the attack was abandoned, but it began again at nine with greater violence. The shell fire was terrific. Every kind of shell, from the 45-pounder of the 4.7 in. howitzer down to the 1-1/2-pounder of the automatic, was hurled against those little walls, while shrapnel burst almost incessantly overhead.

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It is significant for our own use of artillery that not a single man 'was killed by shells, though the air buzzed with them. The loose stone walls were cover enough. But the demoralising effect of shell fire is well known to all who have stood it. A good regiment is needed to hold on against such a storm. But the Devons are a good regiment—perhaps the best here now—and, under the command of Major Curry, they held. At half-past nine the rifle fire at short range became terrible.

Boers were crawling up over what little dead ground there was, and one group of them reached an edge from which they began firing into our breastwork at about fifteen yards. One or two of them sprang up as though to charge. With bayonets they might have come on, but, standing to fire, they were at once shot down. Among them was Schutte, the commandant of the force. He was killed on the edge, with about ten others. Then the attacking group fell back into the dead ground. Our men got the order not to fire on them if they ran away. It was the best means of clearing them off the hill, and they made off one by one. The long-range fire continued all day, but there was no further rush upon our works. Our loss was only two men killed and a few wounded. The Boer loss is estimated at fifty, but it is impossible to know.

The King's (Liverpools), who now hold the works built by the Devons on the low Helpmakaar ridge, were also under rifle and shell fire all day. About 3 p.m. about eighty Boers came down the deep ravine or donga at the further end of the ridge. A mounted infantry picket of three men was away across the donga, watching the road towards Lombard's Nek. Instead of retiring, they calmly lay down and fired into the thick of the Boers whenever they saw them. Apparently the Boers had intended some sort of attack or feint, but, instead of advancing, they remained hidden in the donga, firing over the banks. At last Major Grattan, fearing the brave little picket might be cut off, sent out two infantry patrols in extended order, and the Boers did not await their coming; they hurried up the donga into the shelter of the thorns, which just now are all golden with balls of sweet-smelling blossom.

Soon after the sun set behind the storm of rain the fighting ceased. The long and terrible day was done. I found myself with the Irish Fusiliers at Range Post, where the road crosses to the foot of Waggon Hill. The stream of ambulance was incessant—covered mule-waggons, little ox-carts, green dhoolies carried by indomitable Hindoos, knee-deep in water, and indifferent to every kind of death. In the sixteen hours' fighting we have lost fourteen officers and 100 men killed, twenty-one officers and 220 men wounded. The victory is ours. Our men have done what they were set to do. But two or three more such victories, and where should we be?

Sunday, January 7, 1900.

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The men remained on the position all night under arms, soaked through and hardly fed. Rum was issued, but half the carts lost their way in the dark, because the officers in charge had preferred to go fighting on the loose and got wounded. The men lay in pools of rain among the dead. Lieutenant Haag, 18th Hussars, kept apologising to the man next him for using his legs as a pillow. At dawn he found the man was a Rifleman long dead, his head in a puddle of blood, his stiff arms raised to the sky. Many such things happened. Under the storm of fire it had been impossible to recover all the wounded before dark. Some lay out fully twenty-four hours without help, or food, or drink. One of the Light Horse was used by a Boer as a rest for his rifle. When I reached Waggon Hill about nine this morning the last of the wounded were being brought down. Nearly all the Light Horse dead (twenty of them) had been taken away separately, but at the foot of the hill lay a row of the Gordons, bloody and stiff, their Major, Miller-Wallnutt, at their head, conspicuous by his size. The bodies of the Rifles were being collected. Some still lay curled up and twisted among the dripping rocks. Slowly the waggons were packed and sent off to the place of burial.

The broad path up the hill and the tracks along the top were stained with blood. It lay in sticky pools, which even the rain could not wash out. It was easy to see where the dead had fallen. Most had lain behind some rock to fire and there met their end. On the summit some Kaffirs were skinning eight oxen which had been spanned to the "Lady Anne's" platform, and stood immovable during the fight. Four had been shot in the action, the others had just been killed as rations. Passing to the further edge where the Boers crept up I saw a Boer ambulance and an ox-waggon waiting. Bearded Boers in their slouch hats stood round them with an English doctor from Harrismith, commandeered to serve. Our men were carrying the Boer wounded and dead down the steep slope. The dead were laid out in line, and put in the ox-waggon. At that time there were seventeen of them waiting, but eight others were still on the hill, and I found them where they fell. Most were grey-bearded men, rough old farmers, with wrinkled and kindly faces, hardened by a grand life in sun and weather. They were dressed in flannel shirts, rough old jackets of brown cloth, rough trousers with braces, weather-stained slouch hats, and every variety of boot. Only a few had socks. Some wore the yellow "veldt-shoes," some were bare-footed; their boots had probably been taken. They lay in their blood, their glazed blue eyes looking over the rocks or up to the sky, their ashen hands half-clenched, their teeth yellow between their pale blue lips.

Beside the outer wall of "Lady Anne's" sangar, his head resting on its stones, lay a white-bearded man, poorly dressed, but refined in face. It was De Villiers, the commandant of the Harrismith district—a relation, a brother perhaps, of the Chief Justice De Villiers, who entertained me at Bloemfontein less than four months ago. Across his body lay that of a much younger man, with a short brown beard. He is thought to have been one of the old man's field cornets, and had fought up to the sangar at his side till a bullet pierced his eye and brain.

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Turning back from the extremity of our position, I went along the whole ridge. The ground told one as much as men could tell. Among the rocks lay blood-stained English helmets and Dutch hats; piles of English and Dutch cartridge-cases, often mixed together in places which both sides had occupied; scraps of biltong and leather belts; handkerchiefs, socks, pieces of letters, chiefly in Dutch; dropped ball cartridges of every model—Lee-Metford, Mauser, Martini, and Austrian. I found a few hollow-nosed bullets, too, expanding like the Dum-Dum. The effect of such a bullet was seen on the hat of some poor fellow in the Light Horse. There was a tiny hole on one side, but the further side was all rent to pieces. I hear some “express” sporting bullets have also been taken to the Intelligence Office, but I have not seen them. Beside one Boer was found one of the old Martini rifles taken from the 52nd at Majuba.

On the top of Caesar’s Camp our dead were laid out for burial—Manchesters, Gordons, and Rifle Brigade together. The Boers turned an automatic Maxim on the burying party, thinking they were digging earthworks. In the wooded valley at the foot of the hill they themselves, under Geneva flags, were searching the bushes and dongas for their own dead, and disturbing the little wild deer beside the stream. On the summit parties of our own men were still engaged unwillingly in finding the Boer dead and carrying them down the cliff. Just at the edge of the summit, to which he had climbed in triumph, lay the body of a man about twenty. A shell had almost cut him in half.... Only his face and his hands were untouched. Like most of the dead he had the blue eyes and light hair of the well-bred Boer. When first he was found, his father’s body lay beside him, shattered also, but not so horribly. They were identified by letters from home in their pockets.

CHAPTER XVII

A PAUSE AND A RENEWAL

January 8, 1900.

All was ready to receive another attack, but the Boers made no sign beyond the usual bombardment. One of the wounded—a Harrismith man—says there is a strong party in favour of peace, men who want to get back to their farms and their families. We have heard that tale before, but still, here the Boers are fighting for freedom and existence if ever men did.

To-day’s bombardment nearly destroyed the tents and dhoolies of our field hospital, but did little else save beheading and mangling some corpses. The troops were changed about a good deal, half the K.R.R. being sent to the old Devon post on Helpmakaar road; half the Liverpools to King’s Post, and the Rifle Brigade to Waggon Hill.

At night there was a thanksgiving service in the Anglican Church. I ought to have mentioned earlier that on the night before the attack the Dutch held a solemn supplication, calling on God to bless their efforts.

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January 9, 1900.

One long blank of drenching rain unrelieved by shells, till at sunset a stormy light broke in the west, and a few shots were fired.

January 10, 1900.

In the night the authorities expected an attack on Observation Hill. They hurried out two guns of the 69th Battery to a position outside King's Post. The guns were dragged through the heavy slush, but when they arrived it was found no guns could live in such a place, fully exposed to all fire, and unsupported by infantry. So back came the weary men and horses through the slush again, getting to their camp between 2 and 3 a.m.

At intervals in the night the two mountain guns on Observation Hill kept firing star-shell to reveal any possible attack. But none came, and the rest of the day was very quiet. My time was occupied in getting off a brief heliogram, and sending out another Kaffir with news of Saturday's defence. Two have been driven back. The Boers now stretch wires with bells across the paths, and it goes hard with any runner caught.

January 11, 1900.

The enemy was ominously quiet. Bulwan did not fire all day. From King's Post, whilst visiting the new fortifications and the guns in their new positions all about it, I watched the Boers dragging two field guns hastily southward along the western track, perhaps to Springfield Drift, over the Tugela. Then a large body—500 or 600—galloped hurriedly in the same direction.

A sadness was thrown over the day by Lord Ava's death early in the afternoon. If he could have recovered the doctors say he would have been paralysed or have lost his memory. He was the best type of Englishman—Irish-English, if you will—excellently made, delighting in his strength and all kinds of sport, his eye full of light, his voice singularly beautiful and attractive. His courage was extraordinary, and did not come of ignorance. At Elands Laagte I saw him with a rifle fighting side by side with the Gordons. He went through the battle in their firing line, but he told me afterwards that the horror of the field had sickened him of war. In manner he was peculiarly frank and courteous. I can imagine no one speaking ill of him. His best epitaph perhaps is the saying of the Irish sergeant's which I have already quoted.

The ration of sugar was increased by one ounce to-day, the mealies by two ounces, so as to give the men porridge in the morning. For a fortnight past all the milk has been under military control, and can only be obtained on a doctor's certificate. We began eating trek-oxen three days ago. Some battalions prefer horse-flesh, and get it. Dysentery and enteric are as bad as ever, but do not increase in proportion to the length of siege. There are 1,700 soldiers at Intombi sick camp now. A great many horses die

every day, but not of the “horse-sickness.” Their bodies are thrown on waste ground along the Helpmakaar road, and poison the air for the Liverpools and Rifles there. To-night the varied smell all over the town is hardly endurable.

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January 12, 1900.

A quiet day again. Hardly a gun was fired. Wild rumours flew—the Boers were trekking north in crowds—they were moving the gun on Bulwan—all lies!

I spent the whole day trying to induce a Kaffir to risk his life for L15. A Kaffir lives on mealie-pap, varied by an occasional cow's head. He drinks nothing but slightly fermented barley-water. Yet he will not risk death for L15! After four false starts, my message remains where it was. The last Kaffir who tried to get through the Boers with it was shot in the thigh by our pickets as he was returning. That does not encourage the rest.

January 13, 1900.

Between seven and eight in the morning the Bulwan gun hurled three shells into our midst, and repeated the exploit in the afternoon. But somehow he seemed to have lost form. He was not the Puffing Billy whom we knew. We greeted him as one greets an enemy who has come down in the world—with considerate indulgence. The sailors think that his carriage is strained.

A British heliograph began flashing to us from Schwarz Kop, a hill only one and a half miles over Potgieter's or Springfield Drift on the Tugela. It is that way we have always expected Buller's main advance. Can this be the herald of it? Most of us have agreed never to mention the word "Buller," but it is hard to keep that pledge.

In the afternoon I was able to accompany Colonel Stoneman (A.S.C.) over the scene of battle on Caesar's Camp. His duties in organising the food supply keep him so tied to his office—one of the best shelled places in the town—that he has never been up there before. All was quiet—the mountains silent in the sunset. The Boers had been moving steadily westward and south. They had taken some of their guns on carts covered with brushwood. We had not more than half a dozen shots fired at us all round that ridge which had blazed with death a week ago. In his tent on the summit we found General Ian Hamilton. It was to his energy and personal knowledge of his men that last Saturday's success was ultimately due. Not a day passes but he visits every point in his brigade's defences.

All in camp were saddened by the condition of Mr. Steevens, of the *Daily Mail*. Yesterday he was convalescent. To-day his life hangs by a thread. That is the way of enteric.

Sunday, January 14, 1900.

Absolute silence still from the Tugela. On a low black hill beyond its banks I could see the British heliograph flashing. On a spur beside it I was told a British outpost was

stationed. In the afternoon we thought we heard guns again, but it was only thunder. With a telescope on Observation Hill I saw the Boers riding about their camps. On the Great Plain they were digging long trenches and stretching barbed wire entanglements. To-day all was peaceful. The sun set amid crimson thunder-clouds behind the Drakensberg; there was no sign of war save the whistle of a persistent sniper's bullet over my head. Our weather-beaten soldiers were trying to make themselves comfortable for the night in their little heaps of stones.

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January 15, 1900.

This is the day I had fixed upon long ago for our relief. There were rumours of fighting by the Tugela, and some said they had seen squadrons of our cavalry and even Staff officers galloping on the further limits of the Great Plain. But beyond the wish, there is no need to believe what they said.

In the morning Steevens, of the *Daily Mail*, was so much worse that we sent off a warning message to Mrs. Steevens by heliograph. At least I climbed to all the new signal stations in turn, trying to get it sent, but found the instruments full up with official despatches. Major Donegan (R.A.M.C.) was called in to consult with Major Davis, of the Imperial Light Horse, who has treated the case with the utmost patience and skill. Strychnine was injected, and about noon we recovered hope. A galloper was sent to stop the message, and succeeded. Steevens became conscious for a time, and Maud, of the *Graphic*, explained to him that now it was a fight for life. "All right," he answered, "let's have a drink, then." Some champagne was given him, and he seemed better. When warned against talking, he said, "Well, you are in command. I'll do what you like. We are going to pull through." Maud then went to sleep at last, and between four and five Steevens passed quietly from sleep into death.

Everything that could possibly be done for him had been done. For five weeks Maud had nursed him with a devotion that no woman could surpass. Two days ago we thought him almost well. He talked of what it would be best to do when the siege was raised, so as to complete his recovery. And now he is dead. He was only thirty. What is to most distinguished men the best part of life was still before him. In eight working years he had already made a name known to all the Army and to thousands beyond its limits. Beyond question he had the touch of genius. The individuality of his power perhaps lay in a clear perception transfused with an imaginative wit that never failed him. The promise of that genius was not fulfilled, but it was felt in all he said and wrote. And beyond this power of mind he possessed the attractiveness of courtesy and straightforward dealing. No one ever knew him descend to the tricks and dodges of the trade. There was not a touch of "smartness" in his disposition. On the field he was too reckless of his life. I saw him often during the fighting at Elands Laagte, Tinta Inyoni, and Lombard's Kop. He was usually walking about close to the firing line, leading his grey horse, a conspicuous mark for every bullet. Veteran officers used to marvel that he was not hit. In the midst of it all he would stand quite unconcerned, and speak in his usual voice—slow, trenchant, restrained by a cynicism that came partly from youth and an English horror of fuss. How different from the voice of unconsciousness which I heard raving in his room only this morning!

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To-night we buried him. The coffin was not ready till half-past eleven. All the London correspondents came, and a few officers, Colonel Stoneman (A.S.C.) and Major Henderson, of the Intelligence Department, representing the Staff. Many more would have come, but nearly the whole garrison was warned for duty. About twenty-five of us, all mounted, followed the little glass hearse with its black and white embellishments. The few soldiers and sentries whom we passed halted and gave the last salute. There was a full moon, covered with clouds, that let the light through at their misty edges. A soft rain fell as we lowered the coffin by thin ropes into the grave. The Boer searchlight on Bulwan was sweeping the half circle of the English defences from end to end, and now and then it opened its full white eye upon us, as though the enemy wondered what we were doing there. We were laying to rest a man of assured, though unaccomplished genius, whose heart had still been full of hopes and generosity. One who had not lost the affections and charm of youth, nor been dulled either by success or disappointment.

“From the contagion of the world’s slow stain
He is secure; and now can never mourn
A heart grown old, a head grown grey, in vain—
Nor when the spirit’s self has ceased to burn
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.”

January 16, 1900.

A day of unfulfilled expectation, unrelieved even by lies and rumours. From the top of Observation Hill I again watched the Dutch in their clustered camps, fourteen miles away across the great plain, whilst our heliograph flashed to us from the dark hill beyond them. But there was no sound of the expected guns, and every one lost heart a little.

At the market, eggs were a guinea a dozen. Four pounds of oatmeal sold for 11s. 6d. A four-ounce tin of English tobacco fetched 30s. Out of our original numbers of about 12,000 nearly 3,000 are now sick or wounded at Intombi, and there are over 200 graves there. More helpers are wanted, and to-day Colonel Stoneman summoned 150 loafers from their holes in the river-bank, and called for twenty volunteers. No one came, so he has stopped their rations till they can agree among themselves to produce the twenty ready to start.

January 17, 1900.

The far-off mutter of Buller’s guns began at half-past five a.m., and lasted nearly all day. From King’s Post I watched the stretch of plain—Six Mile Flats, the official map calls it—leading away to Potgieter’s Drift, where his troops are probably crossing. I could see three of the little Dutch camps, and here and there bodies of Boers moving over the country. Suddenly in the midst of the plain, just our side of the camp near “Wesse’s Plantation,” a great cloud of smoke and dust arose, and slowly drifted away.

Beyond doubt, it was the bursting of a British shell. Aimed at the camp it overshot the mark, and landed on the

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empty plain. As a messenger of hope to us all it was not lost. The distance was only fourteen miles from where I stood—a morning's walk—less than an hour and a half's ride. Yet our relief may take many days yet, and it will cost hundreds of lives to cross that little space. The Boers have placed a new gun on the Bluebank ridge. It is disputed whether it faces us or Buller's line of approach over the Great Plain. The whole ridge is now covered from end to end with walls, traverses, and sangars.

January 18, 1900.

In the early morning the welcome sound of Buller's guns was not so frequent as yesterday. But it continued steadily, and between four and five increased to an almost unbroken thunder. From the extremity of Waggon Hill, I watched the great cloud of dust and smoke which rose from the distant plain as each shell burst. The Dutch camps were still in position, and we could only conjecture that the British were trying to clear the river-bank and the hills commanding it, so as to secure the passage of the ford.

While I was there the enemy threw several shrapnel over the Rifle Brigade outpost. Major Brodiewald, Brigade Major to the Natal Volunteers under Colonel Royston, was sitting on the rocks watching Buller's shells like myself. A shrapnel bullet struck him in the mouth and passed out at the back of his neck. He was carried down the hill, his blood dripping upon the stones along the track. In the afternoon one of the bluejackets was also seriously wounded by shrapnel. The bombardment was heavy all day, the Bulwan gun firing right over Convent Hill and plunging shells into the Naval Camp, the Leicesters, and the open ground near Headquarters. It looks as if a spy had told where the General and Staff are to be found.

The market quotations at this evening's auction were fluctuating. Eggs sprang up from a guinea to 30s. a dozen. Jam started at 30s. the 6lb. jar. Maizena was 5s. a pound. On the other hand, tobacco fell. Egyptian cigarettes were only 1s. each, and Navy Cut went for 4s. an ounce. During a siege one realises how much more than bread, meat, and water is required for health. Flour and trek-ox still hold out, and we receive the regulation short rations. Yet there is hardly one of us who is not tortured by some internal complaint, and many die simply for want of common little luxuries. In nearly all cases where I have been able to try the experiment I have cured a man with any little variety I had in store or could procure—rice, chocolate, cake, tinned fruit, or soups. I wonder how the enemy are getting on with the biltong and biscuit.

January 19, 1900.

Before noon, as I rode round the outposts, I found the good news flying that good news had come. It was thought best not to tell us what, lest, like children, we should cry if disappointed. But it is confidently said that Buller's force has crossed the Tugela in

three places—Wright's Drift eastward, Potgieter's Drift in the centre, and at a point further west, perhaps Klein waterfall, where there is a nine-mile plain leading to Acton Homes. The names of the brigades are even stated, and the number of losses. It is said the Boers have been driven from two positions. But there may not be one word of truth in the whole story.

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I was early on Observation Hill, watching that strip of plain to the south-west. No shells were bursting on it to-day, and the sound of guns was not so frequent. Our heliograph flashed from the far-off Zwartz Kop, and high above it, looking hardly bigger than a vulture against the pale blue of the Drakensberg precipices, rose Buller's balloon, showing just a point of lustre on its skin.

The view from Observation Hill is far the finest, but the whiz of bullets over the rocks scarcely ever stops, and now and again a shell comes screaming into the rank grass at one's feet.

To-day we enjoyed a further variety, well worth the risk. At the foot of Surprise Hill, hardly 1,500 yards from our position, the Boers have placed a mortar. Now and then it throws a huge column of smoke straight up into the air. The first I thought was a dynamite explosion, but after a few seconds I heard a growing whisper high above my head, as though a falling star had lost its way, and plump came a great shell into the grass, making a 3ft. hole in the reddish earth, and bursting with no end of a bang. We collected nearly all the bits and fitted them together. It was an eight or nine-inch globe, reminding one of those "bomb-shells" which heroes of old used to catch up in their hands and plunge into water-buckets. The most amusing part of it was the fuse—a thick plug of wood running through the shell and pierced with the flash-channel down its centre. It was burnt to charcoal, but we could still make out the holes bored in its side at intervals to convert it into a time-fuse. This is the "one mortar" catalogued in our Intelligence book. It was satisfactory to have located it. Two guns of the 69th Battery threw shrapnel over its head all morning; then the Naval guns had a turn and seem to have reduced it to silence.

In the afternoon there was an auction of Steevens's horses and camp equipment. Many officers came, and the usual knot of greedy civilians on the look-out for a bargain. As auctioneer I had great satisfaction in running the prices up beyond their calculation. But in another way they got the best of the old country to-day. Colonel Stoneman, having discovered a hidden store of sugar, was selling it at the fair price of 4d. a pound to any one who pledged his word he was sick and in need of it. Round clustered the innocent local dealers with sick and sorry looks, swearing by any god they could remember that sugar alone would save their lives, paid their fourpences, and then sold the stuff for 2s. outside the door.

January 20, 1900.

Again I was on Observation Hill two or three times in the day. It is impossible to keep away from it long. The rumble of the British guns was loud but intermittent, but the Boer camps remain where they were. With us the bombardment continued pretty steadily. After a silence of two days "Puffing Billy," of Bulwan, threw one shell into the town and six among the Devons. His usual answer to

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the report that he has worn himself out or been carried away. Whilst he was firing I tried to get sight of a small mocking bird, which has learnt to imitate the warning whistle of the sentries. In the Gordons the Hindoo, Purriboo Singh, from Benares, stands on a huge heap of sacks under an umbrella all day and screams when he sees the big gun flash. But in the other camps, as I have mentioned, a sentry gives warning by blowing a whistle. The mocking bird now sounds that whistle at all times of the day, and what is even more perplexing, he is learning to imitate the scream and buzzle of the shell through the air. He may learn the explosion next. I mention this peculiar fact for the benefit of future ornithologists, who might otherwise be puzzled at his form of song.

Another interesting event in natural history occurred a short time ago up the Port road. A Bulwan shell, missing the top of Convent Hill, lobbed over and burst at random with its usual din and circumstance. People rushed up to see what damage it had done, but they only found two little dead birds—one with a tiny hole in her breast, the other with an eye knocked out. Ninety-six pounds of iron, brass, and melinite, hurled four miles through the air, at unknown cost, just to deal a true-lovers' death to two sparrows, five of which are sold for one farthing!

Sunday, January 21, 1900.

After varying my trek-ox rations by catching a kind of barbel with a worm in the yellow Klip, I went again to Observation Hill, and with the greater interest because every one was saying two of the Boer camps were in flames. Of course it was a lie. The camps stood in their usual places quite undisturbed. But I saw one of our great shells burst high up the mountain side of Taba Nyama (Black Mountain) instead of on the plain at its foot, and with that sign of forward movement I was obliged to be content.

CHAPTER XVIII

“WITHIN MEASURABLE DISTANCE”

January 22, 1900.

Twelve weeks to-day since Black Monday, when our isolation really began! A heliogram came from Buller to say all was going well, and in this evening's Orders we were officially informed that relief is “within measurable distance.” I don't know about time, but in space that measurable distance is hardly more than fifteen miles. From Observation Hill I again watched the British shells breaking over the ridge above the ford. The Boers had moved one of their waggon laagers a little further back, but the main camps were unchanged. With a telescope I could make out where their hospital was—in a cottage by a wood—and I followed an ambulance waggon driving at a trot to

three or four points on ridge and plain, gathering up the sick or wounded, and returning to hospital.

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The mass of Boers appeared to be lying under the shelter of Taba Nyama (or Intaba Mnyama—Black Mountain). It is a nine-mile range of hills running east and west, nearly parallel to the Tugela, and having Potgieter's Drift on its left. The left extremity, looking over the Drift, rises into double peaks, and is called Mabedhlane, or the Paps, by Zulus. The main Boer position appears to be halfway up these peaks and along the range to their right. To-day it is said that the relieving force intends to approach the mountain by parallels, sapping and mining as it goes, and treating the positions like a mediaeval fortress, or one of those ramparted and turreted cities which "Uncle Toby" used to besiege on the bowling green.

One's only fear is about the delay. The population at Intombi is now approaching 4,000, nearly 3,000 being sick. I doubt if we could put 4,000 men in the field to-day. Men and horses crawl feebly about, shaken with every form of internal pain and weakness. Women suffer even more. The terror of the shells has caused thirty-two premature births since the siege began. It is true a heliogram to-day tells us there are seventy-four big waggons waiting at Frere for our relief—milk, vegetables, forage, eleven waggons of rum, fifty cases of whisky, 5,000 cigarettes, and so on. But all depends upon those parallels, so slowly advancing against Taba Nyama, and our insides are being sapped and mined far more quickly.

Towards noon a disaster occurred, which has depressed the whole town. Two of the *Powerful's* bluejackets have lately been making what they called a good thing by emptying unexploded Boer shells of their charges, so that the owners might display them with safety and pride when the siege is over. For this service they generally received 10s. each. It is only two days since they were in my cottage—chiselling out the melinite from a complete "Long Tom" shell which alighted in my old Scot's garden. I watched them accomplish that task safely, and this morning they set to work upon a similar shell by order of the Wesleyan minister, who wished to keep it in his window as a symbol of Christianity. One of the men was holding it between his knees, while the other was quietly chipping away, when suddenly it exploded. Fragments of one of the men strewn the minister's house—the other lay wondering upon the ground, but without his legs. Whilst I write he is still nominally alive, and keeps asking for his mate. One of his legs has been picked up near the Town Hall—about 150 yards away.

[Illustration: SPECIMENS OF BOER SHELLS]

A lesser disaster this morning befel Captain Jennings Bramley, of the 19th Hussars. Whilst on picket he felt something slide over his legs, and looking up he saw it was a snake over 5ft. long. The creature at once raised its head also, and deliberately spat in his face, filling both eyes with poison. That is the invariable defence of the "Spitting Snake" (*Rinkholz* in Dutch, and *Mbamba Twan* or child catcher in Zulu). The pain is agonising. The eye turns red and appears to run with blood, but after a day or two the poison passes off and sight returns. The snake is not otherwise poisonous, but apparently can count on success in its shots at men, leopards, or dogs.

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January 23, 1900.

Soon after dawn our own guns along the northern defences from Tunnel Hill to King's Post woke me with an extraordinary din. They could not have made more noise about another general attack, but there was no rifle fire. Getting up very unwillingly at 4.30 a.m., I climbed up Junction Hill and looked up the Broad valley, but not a single Boer was in sight. The firing went on till about six, and then abruptly ceased. I heard afterwards that Buller had asked us to keep as many Boers here as possible. I suppose we expended about 200 rounds of our precious ammunition. A cool and cloudy sky made the heliograph useless, but in the night the clouds had served to reflect the brilliance of Buller's searchlight.

So far the Boers have passed us all round in strategy, but in searchlights they are nowhere, though Bulwan makes a grand attempt. All day from King's Post or Waggon Hill I watched the Great Plain of Taba Nyama as usual. Now and then we could see the shells bursting, but the Boer camps have not moved.

The ration coffee has come to an end, except a reserve of 3 cwt, which would hardly last a day. The tea ration is again reduced. The flour mixed with mealy meal makes a very sour bread. The big 5th Lancers horses are so hungry that at night they eat not only their picket ropes but each other's manes and tails. They are so weak that they fall three or four times in an hour if the men ride them. Enteric is not quite so bad as it was, but dysentery increases. The numbers of military sick alone at Intombi, not counting all the sick in the camps and hospitals here, are 2,040 to-day.

January 24, 1900.

The entire interest of the day was centred on Taba Nyama—that black mountain, commanding the famous drift in its front and the stretch of plain behind. It is fifteen miles away. From Observation Hill one could see the British shells bursting along this ridge all morning, as well as in the midst of the Boer tents half-way down the double peaks, and at the foot of the hill. The firing began at 3 a.m., and lasted with extreme severity till noon, the average of audible shells being at least five a minute. We could also see the white bursts of shrapnel from our field artillery. In the afternoon I went to Waggon Hill, and with the help of a telescope made out a large body of men—about 1,000 I suppose—creeping up the distant crest and spreading along the summit. I could only conjecture them to be English from their presence on the exposed ridge, and from their regular though widely extended formation. They were hardly visible except as a series of black points. Thunderclouds hung over the Drakensberg behind, and the sun was obscured. Yet I had no doubt in my own mind that the position was won. It was five o'clock, or a little later.

Others saw large parties of Boers fleeing for life up dongas and over plains, the phantom carriage-and-four driving hastily north-westward after an urgent warning, and

other such melodramatic incidents, which escaped my notice. The position of the falling shells, and the movement of those minute black specks were to me enough of drama for one day's life.

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In the evening, I am told, the General received a signal from Buller: "Have taken hill. Fight went well." No one thought or talked of anything but the prospect of near relief. Yet (besides old Bulwan's violent bombardment of the station) there was one other event in the day deserving record. Hearing an unhappy case of an officer's widow left destitute, Colonel Knox, commanding the Divisional Troops, has offered twelve bottles of whisky for auction to-morrow, and hopes to make L100 by the sale. I think he will succeed, unless Buller shakes the market.

January 25, 1900.

Before 6 a.m. I was on Observation Hill again, watching. One hopeful sign was at once obvious. The Boer waggon-laagers were breaking up. The two great lines of waggons between the plantations near Pinkney's farm were gone. By 6.30 they were all creeping away with their oxen up a road that runs north-west among the hills in the direction of Tintwa Pass. It was the most hopeful movement we had yet seen, but one large laager was still left at the foot of Fos Kop, or Mount Moriah.

The early morning was bright, but a mist soon covered the sun. Rain fell, and though the air afterwards was strangely clear, the heliograph could not be used till the afternoon. We were left in uncertainty. Shells were bursting along the ridge of Taba Nyama, on the double peaks and the Boer tents below. Only on the highest point in the centre we could see no firing, and that in itself was hopeful. About 8 a.m. the fire slackened and ceased. We conjectured an armistice. Through a telescope we could see little black specks on the centre of the hill; they appeared to be building sangars. The Naval Cone Redoubt, having the best telescope, report that the walls are facing this way. In that case the black specks were probably British, and yet not even in the morning sun did we get a word of certainty. We hardly know what to think.

In the afternoon the situation was rather worse. We saw the shelling begin again, but no progress seemed to be made. About 4 p.m. we witnessed a miserable sight. Along the main track which crosses the Great Plain and passes round the end of Telegraph Hill, almost within range of our guns, came a large party of men tramping through the dust. They were in khaki uniforms, marched in fours, and kept step. Undoubtedly they were British prisoners on their way to Pretoria. Their numbers were estimated at fifty, ninety, and 150 by different look-out stations. In front and rear trudged an unorganised gang of Boers, evidently acting as escort. It was a miserable and depressing thing to see.

At last a cipher message began to come through on the heliograph. There was immense excitement at the Signal Station. The figures were taken down. Colonel Duff buttoned the precious paper in his pocket. Off he galloped to Headquarters. Major De Courcy Hamilton was called to decipher the news. It ran as follows: "Kaffir deserter from Boer lines reports guns on Bulwan and Telegraph Hills removed!"

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It was dated a day or two back. To-day both guns mentioned have been unusually active. Their shells have been bursting thick among us, and the sound of their firing must have been quite audible below. Yet this was the message.

Eggs to-night fetched 30s. 6d. per dozen; a sucking pig 35s.; a chicken 20s. In little over a week we shall have to begin killing our horses because they will have nothing to eat.

January 26, 1900.

Full of hopes and fears, I rode early up to Observation Hill as usual, and saw at once that the Boer waggon-laagers, which I watched departing yesterday, had returned in the night. Perhaps there were not quite so many waggons, and the site had been shifted a few hundred yards. But still there they stood again. Their presence is not hopeful, but it does not imply disaster. They may have gone in haste, and been recalled at leisure. Buller may have demanded their return under the conditions of a possible armistice. They may even have found the passes blocked by our men. Anyhow, there they are, and their return is the only important news of the day.

No message or tidings came through. The day was cloudy, and ended in quiet rain. We saw a few shells fall on the plain at the foot of Taba Nyama, and what looked like a few on the summit. But nothing else could be made out, except that the Boer ambulances were very busy driving round.

Among ourselves the chief event was the feverish activity of the Telegraph Hill big gun. Undeterred by our howitzers, he continued nearly all morning throwing shells at every point within sight. By one supreme effort, tilting his nose high up into the air, he threw one sheer up to the Manchesters on Caesar's Camp—a range of some 12,000 yards, the gunners say. Perhaps he was trying to make up for the silence of his Bulwan brother. It is rumoured that Pepworth Hill is to have a successor to the "Long Tom" of earlier and happier days. Six empty waggons with double spans of oxen were seen yesterday wending towards Bulwan.

Our hunger is increasing. Men and horses suffer horribly from weakness and disease. About fifteen horses die a day, and the survivors gasp and cough at every step, or fall helpless.

Biscuits are to be issued to-night instead of bread, because flour is running short. It is believed that not 500 men could be got together capable of marching five miles under arms, so prevalent are all diseases of the bowels. As to luxuries, even the cavalry are smoking the used tea-leaves out of the breakfast kettles. "They give you a kind of hot taste," they say.

January 27, 1900.

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I was again on Observation Hill, watching. Nothing had changed, and there was no sign of movement. The Boers rode to and fro as usual, and their cattle grazed in scattered herds. Now and then a big gun fired, but I could see no bursting shells, and the sound seemed further away. I crossed the broad valley to Leicester Post. Our cattle and horses were trying to pick up a little grass there, while the howitzer and automatic “pom-pom” shelled them from Surprise Hill. “Pom-poms” are elegant little shells, about five inches long, and some with pointed heads were designed for the British Navy, but rejected. The cattle sniff at them inquisitively, and Kaffirs rush for a perfect specimen, which fetches from 10s. to 30s. For they are suitable presents for ladies, but unhappily all that fell near me to-day exploded into fragments.

The telescope on Leicester Post showed me nothing new. Not a single man was now to be seen on Spion Kop or the rest of Taba Nyama. At two o'clock the evil news reached us. The heliograph briefly told the story; the central hill captured by the British on Wednesday afternoon, recaptured at night by the Boers, and held by them ever since. Our loss about five hundred and some prisoners.

It was the worst news we have yet received, all the harder to bear because our hopes had been raised to confidence. It is harder to face disappointment now than six weeks ago. Even on biscuit and trek-oxen we can only live for thirty-two days longer, and nearly all the horses must die. The worst is that in their sickness and pain the men could hardly resist another assault. The sickness of the garrison is not to be measured by hospital returns, for nearly every one on duty is ill, though he may refuse to “go sick.” The record of Intombi Camp is not cheering. The total of military sick to-day is 1,861, including 828 cases of enteric, 259 cases of dysentery, and 312 wounded. The numbers have slightly diminished lately because an average of fourteen a day have been dying, and all convalescents are hurried back to Ladysmith. The number of graves down there now is 282 for men and five for officers, but deaths increase so fast that long trenches are dug, and the bodies laid in two rows, one above the other. “You see,” said the gravedigger, “I’m goin’ to put Patrick O’Connor here with Daniel Murphy.”

Sunday, January 28, 1900.

From my station on Observation Hill I could see a new Boer laager drawn up, about six miles away, at the far end of the Long Valley. Otherwise all remains quiet and unmoved. Three or four distant guns were heard in the afternoon, but that was all.

On the whole the spirit of the garrison was much more cheerful. We began to talk again of possible relief within a week. The heliograph brought a message of thanks from Lord Roberts for our “heroic, splendid defence.” Every one felt proud and happy. The words were worth a fresh brigade.

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In the morning a consultation was held on the condition of the cavalry horses. At first it was determined to kill three hundred, so as to save food for the rest, but afterwards the orders were to turn them out on the flat beyond the racecourse, and let them survive if they could. The artillery horses must be fed as long as possible. The unfortunate walers of the 19th Hussars will probably be among the first to go. Coming straight from India, they were put to terribly hard work on landing, and have never recovered. Walers cannot do on grass which keeps local horses and even Arabs fat enough. What the average horse is chiefly suffering from now is a kind of influenza, accompanied by a frightful cough. My own talking horse kept trying to lie down to-day, and said he felt languid and queer. When he endeavoured to trot or canter a cough took him fit to break his mother's heart.

CHAPTER XIX

HOPE DEFERRED

January 29, 1900.

The only change to-day was the steady passage of Boers westward, to concentrate afresh round Taba Nyama. Their new laager up the Long Valley had disappeared. Large bodies of men had been seen coming up from Colenso. The crisis of the war in Natal is evidently near. Meantime Kaffir deserters brought in a lot of chatter about the recent fighting. On one point they generally agreed—that Kruger himself was with his men. It is very likely. The staunch old prophet and patriot would hardly stay away when the issue involves the existence of his people.

But when the Kaffirs go on to say that Kruger, Joubert, and Steyn stood together on Mount Moriah (Loskop) to witness the battle, the addition may be only picturesque. It would be well if that were the worst fiction credulity swallowed. One of the head nurses from Intombi told me to-day that the Boers had bribed an old herbalist—she thought at Dundee or somewhere—to reveal a terrible poison, into which they dipped their cartridges, and even the bullets inside their shrapnel! To this she attributed the suppuration of several recent wounds. Of the garrison's unhealthy condition she took no account whatever. No, it was poison. She had heard the tale somewhere—from a railway official, she thought—and believed it with the assurance of the Christian verity. Nearly every one is like that, and the wildest story finds disciples.

Rations are again reduced to-day to the following quantities: tinned meat 1/2 lb., or fresh meat 1 lb.; biscuit 1/2 lb., or bread 1 lb.; tea, 1/6 oz.; sugar, 1-1/2 ozs.; salt, 1/2 oz., and pepper 1/36 oz.

It has also been decided to turn all the horses out to grass, except the artillery, three hundred from the cavalry, seventy officers' chargers, and twenty engineers' draught.



These few are to be kept fed with rations of 3 lbs. of mealies, 4 lbs. of chaff, 16 lbs. of grass, 1-1/2 ozs. of salt. The artillery horses will get 2 lbs. of oats or bran besides. In the Imperial Light Horse they are killing one of their horses every other day, and eating him.

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January 30, 1900.

Mortals depend for their happiness not only on their circulation but on the weather. To-day was certainly the gloomiest in all the siege. It rained steadily night and morning, the steaming heat was overpowering, and we slugged about, sweating like the victims of a foul Turkish bath. Towards evening it suddenly turned cold. Black and dismal clouds hung over all the hills. The distance was fringed with funereal indigo. The wearied garrison crept through their duties, hungry and gaunt as ghosts. There was no heliograph to cheer us up, and hardly a sound of distant guns. The rumour had got abroad that we were to be left to our fate, whilst Roberts, with the main column, diverted all England's thoughts to Bloemfontein. Like one man we lost our spirits, our hopes, and our tempers.

The depression probably arose from the reduction of rations which I mentioned yesterday. The remaining food has been organised to last another forty-two days, and it is, of course, assumed we shall have to use it all, whereas the new arrangement is only a precaution. Colonel Ward and Colonel Stoneman are not to be caught off their guard. One of their chief difficulties just now is the large body of Indians—bearers, sais, bakers, servants of all kinds—who came over with the troops, and will not eat the sacred cow. Out of about 2,000, only 487 will consent to do that. The remainder can only get very little rice and mealies. Their favourite ghi, or clarified butter, has entirely gone, and their hunger is pitiful. The question now is whether or not their religious scruples will allow them to eat horse.

Most of us have been eating horse to-day with excellent result. But one of the most pitiful things I have seen in all the war was the astonishment and terror of the cavalry horses at being turned loose on the hills and not allowed to come back to their accustomed lines at night. All afternoon one met parties of them strolling aimlessly about the roads or up the rocky footpaths—poor anatomies of death, with skeleton ribs and drooping eyes. At about seven o'clock two or three hundred of them gathered on the road through the hollow between Convent Hill and Cove Redoubt, and tried to rush past the Naval Brigade to the cavalry camp, where they supposed their food and grooming and cheerful society were waiting for them as usual. They had to be driven back by mounted Basutos with long whips, till at last they turned wearily away to spend the night upon the bare hillside.

[Illustration: INDIAN BAKERY]

January 31, 1900.

Again the sky was clouded, and except during an hour's sunshine in the afternoon no heliograph could work. But below the clouds the distance was singularly clear, and one could see all the Dutch camps, and the Boers moving over the plain. The camps are a

little reduced. Only four tents are left in the white string that hung down the side of Taba Nyama.

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Two parties, of forty Boers apiece, passed north along the road behind Telegraph Ridge whilst I was on Observation Hill in the morning. But there was no special meaning in their movements, and absolutely no news came in. Only rumours, the rumours of despair—Warren surrounded, Buller's ammunition train attacked and cut to pieces, the whole relieving force in hopeless straits.

In the town and camps things went on as usual, under a continued weight of depression. The cold and wet of the night brought on a terrible increase of dysentery, and I never saw the men look so wretched and pinched. When officers in high quarters talk magnificently about the excellent spirits of the troops, I think they do not always realise what those excellent spirits imply. I wish they had more time to visit the remnants of battalions defending the hills—out in cold and rain all night, out in the blazing sun all day, with nothing to look forward to but a trek-ox or a horse stewed in unseasoned water, two biscuits or some sour bread, and a tasteless tea, generally half cold. No beer, no tobacco, no variety at all. To me, one of the highest triumphs of the siege is the achievement of MacNalty, a young lieutenant of the Army Service Corps. For nights past he has been working in the station engine shed at an apparatus of his own invention for boiling down horses into soup. After many experiments in process and flavouring, and many disappointments, he has secured an admirable essence of horse. This will sound familiar and commonplace to people who can get a bottle of such things at grocer's, but it may save many a good soldier's life none the less. I hope to see the process at work, and describe it later on.

Mr. Lines, the town clerk, who has quietly stuck to his duties in spite of confusion and shells, gave me details to-day of the rations allowed to civilians. During the siege there has been a fairly steady white population of 560 residents and 540 refugees, or 1,100 in all. This does not include the civilians at Intombi, whose numbers are still unpublished. Practically all the civilians are drawing rations, for which they apply at the market between 5 and 7 p.m. They get groceries, bread or biscuit, and meat in the same quantities as the soldiers. Children under ten receive half rations. Each applicant has to be recommended by the mayor or magistrate, and brings a check with him. I suppose the promise to pay at the end of the siege is only a nominal formula.

The civilian Indians and Kaffirs number 150 and 300 respectively, and draw their rations at the station, the organisation being under Major Thompson, A.C.G., as is the whole of the milk supply, now set aside for the sick. The Indian ration is atta, 4 oz.; rice, 3 oz.; mealie meal, 9 oz.; salt, 1/2 oz.; goor, 1-1/4 oz.; amchur, 1/4 oz. And those who will eat meat get 8 oz. twice a week instead of mealies. The Kaffir ration is simpler: fresh meat, 1 lb.; mealie meal, 3/4 lb.; salt, 1/2 oz.

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February 1, 1900.

How we should have laughed in November at the thought of being shut up here till February? But here we are, and the outlook grows more hopeless. People are miserably depressed. It would be impossible to get up sports or concerts now. Too many are sick, too many dead. The laughter has gone out of the siege, or remains only as bitter laughter when the word relief is spoken. We are allowed to know nothing for certain, but the conviction grows that we are to be left to our fate for another three weeks at least, while the men slowly rot. A Natal paper has come in with an account of Buller's defeat at Taba Nyama on the 25th. We read with astonishment the loud praises of a masterly retreat over the Tugela without the loss of a single man. When shall we hear of a masterly advance to our aid? Do we lose no men?

To-day the morning was cold and cloudy, as it has been since Monday, but the sun broke out for an hour or two, in the afternoon, and official messages could be sent through by heliograph. For information and relief we received the following words, and those only:—

“German specialist landed Delagoa Bay pledges himself to dam up Klip River and flood Ladysmith out.”

That was all they deigned to tell us.

February 2, 1900.

After a misty dawn, soaked with minute rain, the sky slowly cleared at last, letting the merry sunshine through. At once the heliograph began to flash. I sent off a brief message, and soon afterwards the signal “Line clear” was sent from Zwartz Kop over the Tugela. The “officials” began to arrive, and we hoped for news at last. Three or four messages came through, but who could have guessed the thrilling importance of the first? It ran:—

“Sir Stafford Northcote, Governor of Bombay, has been made a peer.”

The other messages were vague and dull enough—something about the Prince of Wales reviewing Yeomanry, and the race for some hunt cup in India. But that peerage! To a sick and hungry garrison!

We were shot at rather briskly all day by the enemy's guns. The groups of wandering horses were a tempting aim. The poor creatures still try to get back to their lines, and some of them stand there motionless all day, rather than seek grass upon the hills. The cavalry have made barbed-wire pens, and collect most of them at night. But many are lost, some stolen, and more die of starvation and neglect. An increasing number are killed for rations, and to-day twenty-eight were specially shot for the chevrol factory. I



visited the place this afternoon. The long engine-shed at the station has been turned to use. Only one engine remains inside, and that is used as a “bomb-proof,” under which all hands run when the shelling is heavy. Into other engine-pits cauldrons have been sunk, constructed of iron trolleys without their wheels, and plastered round with clay. A wood fire is laid along under the cauldrons, on the same principle as in a camp kitchen. The horseflesh is brought up to the station in huge red halves of beast, run into the shed on trucks, cut up by the Kaffirs, who also pound the bones, thrown into the boiling cauldron, and so—“Farewell, my Arab steed!”

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There is not enough hydrochloric or pepsine left in the town to make a true extract of horse, but by boiling and evaporation the strength is raised till every pint issued will make three pints of soup. A punkah is to be fitted to make the evaporation more rapid, and perhaps my horse will ultimately appear as a jelly or a lozenge. But at present the stuff is nothing but a strong kind of soup, and at the first issue to-day the men had to carry it in the ordinary camp-kettles.

Every man in the garrison to-night receives a pint of horse essence hot. I tasted it in the cauldron, straight from the horse, and found it so sustaining that I haven't eaten anything since. The dainty Kaffirs and Colonial Volunteers refuse to eat horse in any form. But the sensible British soldier takes to it like a vulture, and begs for the lumps of stewed flesh from which the soup has been made. With the joke, "Mind that stuff; it kicks!" he carries it away, and gets a chance, as he says, of filling—well, we know what he says. The extract has a registered label:—

[Illustration: Superior Ladysmith

CHEVRIL

RESURGAM

Trade Mark

"The Iron Horse"]

Under the signature of Aduncus Bea and Co. acute signallers will recognise the official title of Colonel Ward.

Since the beginning of the siege one of the saddest sights has been the Boer prisoners lounging away their days on the upper gallery of the gaol. They have been there since Elands Laagte, nearly four months now, with no news, nothing to do, and nothing to see except one little bit of road visible over the wall.

The solitude has so unnerved them that when the shells fall near the gaol or whiz over the roof the prisoners are said to howl and scream. On visiting them to-day I found that only seven real prisoners of war are left here, the others being suspects or possible traitors, arrested on suspicion of signalling or sending messages to the enemy. Among them is the French deserter I mentioned weeks ago. The little man is much reduced in girth, and terribly lonely among the Dutch, but he appears to grow no wiser for solitude and low living.

Among the twenty-three suspects it was pleasant to see one new arrival who has been the curse of the town since the beginning of the siege, when he went about telling the terrified women and children that if they were not blown to bits by the shells the Boers



would soon get them. So he has gone on ever since, till to-day Colonel Park, of the Devons, had him arrested for the military offence of "causing despondency." He had kept asking the Devons when they were going to run away, and how they would like the walk to Pretoria when Ladysmith surrendered. There are about thirty Kaffirs also in the prison, chiefly thieves, but some suspects. They are kept in the women's quarters, for the kind of woman who fills Kaffir gaols has lifted up her blankets and gone to Maritzburg or Intombi Camp.

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CHAPTER XX

SUN AND FEVER

February 3, 1900.

The day was fairly quiet. Old "Bulwan Billy" did not fire at us at all, and there was no movement in the distant Boer camps, though the universal belief is that the enemy is concentrating round Ladysmith for a fresh attack.

In the evening the rations were issued to the civilians under Major Thompson's new regulations in the Market House. Each child, or whoever else is sent, now brings his ticket; it is verified at a table, the cost is added daily to each account, the child is sent on down the shed to draw his allowance of tea and sugar, his loaf, and bit of horse. The organisation is admirable, but one feels it comes a little late in the day. The same is true of the new biscuit tins which are to be put up as letter-boxes about the camp for a local post, and of the new plan of making sandals for the men out of flaps of saddles and the buckets for cavalry carbines. For a fortnight past, 120 of the Manchesters have gone barefoot among the rocks.

Sunday, February 4, 1900.

The sun shone. Women and children went up and down the street. I even saw two white-petticoated girls climbing the rocks of Cove Redoubt to get a peep at "Princess Victoria"—otherwise "Bloody Mary." It was a day of peace, but every one believes it to be the last. To-night an attack is confidently expected. The Boers are concentrating on the north-west. A new gun was seen yesterday moving towards Thornhill's Kopje, and sounds of building with stones were heard there last night. It is thought the attack will be upon the line from Observation Hill to Range Post. Every available man is warned. Even the military prisoners are released and sent on duty again. The pickets are doubled and pushed far out. A code of signals by rocket has been arranged to inform Buller of what is going on. It is felt that this is the enemy's last chance of doing so big a thing as capturing this garrison.

But all that is still uncertain, and in the quiet afternoon I harnessed up my cart for a gentle drive with Sergeant-Gunner Boseley, of the 53rd Battery. He is a red Irishman, born at Maidstone, and has done eleven years' service. During the attack on the 6th he was sitting beside his gun waiting for Major Abdy's word to fire in his turn, when a 96lb. shell from "Bulwan" struck him in its flight, and shattered his left arm and leg. He says he was knocked silly, and felt a bit fluttered, but had no pain till they lifted him into the dhoolie. He broke the record, I believe, by surviving a double amputation on the same side, which left him only about 6 in. of thigh and 4 in. of arm. For every movement he is helpless as a log. Four of us hoisted him into the cart, and then we drove round to see



his old battery, where the greetings of his mates were brief, emphatic, and devoid of all romance. We then went up to the tin camp, and round the main positions, which he regarded with silent equanimity. I thought he was bored by the familiar scene, but at the end he told me he had enjoyed it immensely, never having seen Ladysmith by daylight before! The man is now in magnificent health, rosy as a rose, and no doubt has a great career before him as a wonder from the war.

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February 5, 1900.

The noise of guns boomed all day from the Tugela. It sounded as though a battle was raging along miles of its banks, from Colenso right away west to Potgieter's Drift. I could see big shells bursting again on Taba Nyama and the low nek above the ford. Further to the left they were bursting around Monger's Hill, nearly half-way along the bank to Colenso. From early morning the fire increased in intensity, reaching its height between 3 and 4 p.m. At half-past four the firing suddenly slackened and stopped. That seems like victory, but we can only hope.

February 6, 1900.

Firing was again continuous nearly all day along the Tugela, except that there appeared to be a pause of some hours before and after midday. The distance was hazy, and light was bad. The heliograph below refused to take or send messages, and we had no definite news. But at night it was confidently believed that relief was some miles nearer than in the morning. For myself, the sun and fever had hold of me, and I could only stand on Observation Hill and watch the far-off bursting of shells and the flash of a great gun which the Boers have placed in a mountain niche upon the horizon to our left of Monger's Hill, overlooking the Tugela. Sickness brought despondency, and I seemed only to see our countrymen throwing away their lives in vain against the defences of a gallant people fighting for their liberty.

One cannot help noticing the notable change of feeling towards the enemy which the war has brought. The Boers, instead of being spoken of as "ignorant brutes" and "cowards" have become "splendid fellows," admirable alike for strategy and courage. The hangers-on of Johannesburg capitalism have to keep their abusive contempt to themselves now, but happily only one or two of them have cared to remain in the beleaguered town.

At a mess where I was to-night, all the officers but one agreed there was not much glory in this war for the British soldier. It would only be remembered as the fine struggle of an untrained people for their liberty against an overwhelming power. The defence of the Tyrol against Ney was quoted as a parallel. The Colonel, it is true, pathetically anxious to justify everything to his mind and conscience, and trying to hate the enemy he was fighting, stuck to his patriotic protests; but he was alone, and the conversation was significant of a very general change. Not that this prevents any one from longing for Buller's victory and our relief, though the field were covered with the dead defenders of their freedom.

February 7, 1900.

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We have now but one thought—is it possible for Buller to force his way across that line of hills overlooking the Tugela? The nearest summits are not more than ten miles away. We could ride out there in little more than an hour and join hands with our countrymen and the big world outside. Yet the barrier remains unbroken. Firing continued nearly all day, except in the extreme heat of afternoon. We could watch the columns of smoke thrown up by the Boers' great gun, still fixed above that niche upon the horizon. The Dutch camps were unmoved, and at the extremity of the Long Valley a large new camp with tents and a few waggons appeared and increased during the day. Some thought it was a hospital camp, but it was more likely due to a general concentration in the centre. Here and there we could see great shells bursting, and even shrapnel. The sound of rifles and "pom-poms" was often reported. Yet I could not see any real proof of advance. Perhaps fever and sun blind me to hope, for the staff are very confident still. They even lay odds on a celebration of victory next Sunday by the united forces, and I hear that Sir George is practising the Hundredth Psalm.

February 8 to February 24, 1900.

I had hoped to keep well all through the siege, so as to see it all from start to finish. But now over a fortnight has been lost while I have been lying in hospital, suffering all the tortures of Montjuich, "A touch of sun," people called it, combined with some impalpable kind of malaria. On the 8th I struggled up Caesar's Camp again, and saw parties of Boers burning all the veldt beyond Limit Hill, apparently to prevent us watching the movements of the trains at their railhead. On the 9th I could not stand, and the bearers, with their peculiar little chant, to keep them out of step, brought me down to the Congregational Chapel in a dhoolie. There I still lie. The Hindoo sweepers creep about, raising a continual dust; they fan me sleepily for hours together with a look of impenetrable vacancy, and at night they curl themselves on the ground outside and cough their souls away. The English orderlies stamp and shout, displaying the greatest goodwill and a knowledge of the nervous system acquired in cavalry barracks. Far away we hear the sound of Buller's guns. I did not know it was possible to suffer such atrocious and continuous pain without losing consciousness.

Of course we have none of the proper remedies for sunstroke—no ice, no soda-water, and so little milk that it has to be rationed out almost by the teaspoonful. Now that the fever has begun to subside I can only hope for a tiny ration of tea, a brown compound called rice pudding, flavoured with the immemorial dust of Indian temples, and a beef-tea which neighs in the throat. That is the worst of the condition of the sick now; when they begin to mend it is almost impossible to get them well. There is nothing to give them. At Intombi, I believe it is even worse than here. The letters I have lately seen from officers recovering from wounds or dysentery or enteric are simply heart-rending in their appeals.

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February 25, 1900.

Nearly all the patients who have passed through the field hospital during the fortnight have been poor fellows shot by snipers in arms or legs. Except when their wounds are being dressed, they lie absolutely quiet, sleeping, or staring into vacancy. They hardly ever speak a word, though the beds are only a foot apart. On my left is the fragment of the sergeant gunner whom I took for a drive. His misfortunes and his cheerful indifference to them make him a man of social importance. He shows with regret how the shell cut in half a marvellous little Burmese lady, whose robes once swept down his arm in glorious blues and reds, but are now lapped over the bone as “flaps.”

Another patient was a shaggy, one-eyed old man, between whose feet a Bulwan shell exploded one afternoon as he was walking down the main street. Beyond the shock he was not very seriously hurt, but his calves were torn by iron and stones. He said he was the one survivor of the first English ship that sailed from the Cape with settlers for Natal. He was certainly very old.

On the night of the 22nd a man was brought into the hospital where I lay—also attacked by sunstroke—his temperature 107 degrees, and all consciousness happily gone. It was Captain Walker, the clever Irish surgeon, who has served the Gordons through the siege as no other regiment has been served, making their bill of health the best, and their lines a pleasure to visit. His skill, especially in dysentery, was looked to by many outside the Gordons themselves. Nothing could save him. He was packed in cold sheets, fanned, and watched day and night. For a few moments he knew me, and reminded me of a story we had laughed over. But yesterday evening, after struggling long for each breath, he died—one of the best and most useful men in camp.

If it was fated that I should be laid up for a fortnight or more of the siege it seems that this was about the best time fate could choose. From all the long string of officers, men, telegraph clerks, and civilians, who, with unceasing kindness have passed beside my bed bringing news and cheering me up, I have heard but one impression, that this has been the dulllest and deadliest fortnight of the siege. There has been no attack, no very serious expectation of Buller’s arrival. The usual bombardment has gone wearily on. Sometimes six or seven big shells have thundered so close to this little chapel, that the special kind of torture to which I was being subjected had for a time to be interrupted. Really nothing worthy of note has happened, except the building by the Boers of an incomprehensible work beside the Klip at the foot of Bulwan. About 300 Kaffirs labour at it, with Boer superintendents. It is apparently a dam to stop the river and flood out the town. No doubt it is the result of that German specialist’s arrival, of which we heard.

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On coming to my first bit of bread to-day I found it uneatable. In the fortnight it has degenerated simply to ground mealies of maize—just the same mixture of grit and sticky dough as the peasants in Pindus starve upon. Even this—enough in itself to inflame any English stomach—is reduced to 1/2 lb. a day. As I stood at the gate this afternoon taking my first breath of air, I watched the weak-kneed, lantern-jawed soldiers going round from house to house begging in vain for anything to eat. Yet they say the health of the camp as a whole has improved. This they attribute to chevril.

During my illness, though I cannot fix the exact day, one of the saddest incidents of the siege has happened. My friend Major Doveton, of the Imperial Light Horse, a middle-aged professional man from Johannesburg, who had joined simply from patriotism, was badly wounded in the arm in the great attack of the 6th. Mrs. Doveton applied to Joubert for leave to cross the Boer lines to see her husband, and bring medical appliances and food. The leave was granted, and she came. But amputation was decided upon, and the poor fellow died from the shock. He was a fine soldier, as modest as brave. Often have I seen him out on the hillside with his men, quietly sharing in all their hardships and privations. I don't know why the incident of his wife's passage through the enemy's lines should make his death seem sadder. But it does. On Saturday night I drove away from the hospital in my cart, though still in great pain and hardly able to stand. I was unable to endure the depression of all the hospital sights and sounds and smells any longer. Perhaps the worst of all is the want of silence and darkness at night. The fever and pain both began to abate directly I got home to my old Scot.

[Illustration: GENERAL RT. HON. SIR REDVERS HENRY BULLER, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.M.G., K.C.B.]

CHAPTER XXI

RELIEVED AT LAST

Tuesday, February 27, 1900.

This is Majuba Day, and in the afternoon the garrison was cheered by the news that Roberts had surrounded Cronje and compelled him to surrender. For ourselves, relief seems as far off as ever, though it is said shells were seen bursting not far beyond Intombi Camp. The bread rations are cut down again to half, after a few days' rise; though, indeed, they can hardly be called bread rations, for the maize bread was so uneatable that none is made now. The ration is biscuits and three ounces of mealie meal for porridge.

Towards evening I went for my first drive through old familiar scenes that have come to look quite different now. The long drought has turned the country brown, and it is all the

barer for the immense amount of firewood that has been cut. It was decided about a week ago not to issue any more horse as rations till the very last of the oxen had been killed.

February 28, 1900.

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From early morning it was evident that the Boers were much disturbed in mind. Line after line of waggons with loose strings of mounted men kept moving from the direction of the Tugela heights above Colenso, steadily westward, across the top of Long Valley, past the foot of Hussar Hill, out into the main road along the Great Plain, over the Sandspruit Drift at the foot of Telegraph Hill, and so to the branching of the roads which might lead either to the Free State passes or to Pepworth Hill and the railway to the north. All day the procession went on. However incredible it seemed, it was evident that the "Great Trek" had begun at last.

Soon after midday a heliogram came through from Buller, saying he had severely defeated the enemy yesterday, and believed them to be in full retreat. Better still, about three the Naval guns on Cove Redoubt and Caesar's Camp (whither "Lady Anne" was removed three days ago) opened fire in rapid succession on the great Bulwan gun. The Boers were evidently removing him. They had struck a "shearlegs" or derrick upon the parapet. One of our first shots brought the whole machinery down, and all through the firing of the Naval guns was excellent.

About six I had driven out (being still enfeebled with fever) to King's Post, to see the tail-end of the Boer waggons disappear. On returning I found all the world running for all they were worth to the lower end of the High-street and shouting wildly. The cause was soon evident. Riding up just past the Anglican Church came a squadron of mounted infantry. They were not our own. Their horses were much too good, and they looked strange. Behind them came another and another. They had crossed the drift that leads to the road along the foot of Caesar's Camp past Intombi to Pieter's, and Colenso. There was no mistake about it. They were the advance of the relief column, and more were coming behind. It was Lord Dundonald's Irregulars—Imperial Light Horse, Natal Carbineers, Natal Police, and Border Mounted Rifles.

The road was crammed on both sides with cheering and yelling crowds—soldiers off duty, officers, townspeople, Kaffirs, and coolies, all one turmoil of excitement and joy. By the post office General White met them, and by common consent there was a pause. Most of his Staff were with him too. In a very few words he welcomed the first visible evidence of relief. He thanked his own garrison for their splendid service in the defence, and added that now he would never have to cut down their rations again, a thing that always went to his heart.

Then followed roar after roar of cheering—cheers for White, for Buller, for Ward, for many others. Then, all of a sudden, we found ourselves shouting the National Anthem in every possible key and pitch. Then more cheering and more again.

But it was getting dark. The General and Staff turned towards Headquarters. The new arrivals had to be settled in their quarters for the night. Most were taken in by the Imperial Light Horse—alas! there is plenty of room in their camp now! To right and left the squadrons wheeled, amid greetings and laughter and endless delight. By eight

o'clock the street was almost clear, and there was nothing to show how great a change had befallen us.



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About ten a tremendous explosion far away told that the Boers were blowing up the bridges behind them as they fled.

And so with to-night the long siege really ends. It is hardly credible yet. For 118 days we have been cut off from the world. All that time we have been more or less under fire, sometimes under terrible fire. What it will be to mix with the great world again and live each day in comparative security we can hardly imagine at present. But the peculiar episode called the Siege of Ladysmith is over.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

HOW LADYSMITH WAS FED

LADYSMITH, *March 23, 1900.*

Where all worked so well it would be a shame to say Ladysmith was saved by any particular branch of the service—the naval guns, the Army Service Corps, or the infantry soldier. But it is quite certain that without the strictest control on the food supply we could not have held out so long, and by the kindness of one whose authority is above question I am able to give the following account of how the town was fed for the seventeen weeks of the siege.

THE PROBLEM.

A celebrated French writer on military matters has said: “There are two words for war —*le pain et la poudre.*”

In a siege *le pain* is of even greater importance than *la poudre*, for “hunger is more cruel than the sword, and famine has ruined more armies than battle.” Feeding must go on at least three times a day, and every day, or the men become ineffective, and the hospitals filled.

At the beginning of November, 1899, Ladysmith, containing over 20,000 souls, with 9,800 horses and mules, and 2,500 oxen and a few hundred sheep, was cut off from the outer world, and nothing in the way of supplies was brought in for 119 days, except a few cattle which our guides looted at night from the besieging enemy. The problem was how to utilise the food supplies which were in the place, and those who had the misfortune (or, as some say, the good fortune) to go through that trying period will say that the problem was very satisfactorily solved in spite of the enormous difficulties the Army Service Corps had to contend with.

The two senior officers of that corps—Colonel E.W. D. Ward, C.B., and Lieut.-Colonel Stoneman—recognising the possibility of a siege, and also that a big margin is everything in army administration, had caused enormous quantities of supplies to be sent up from the base to Ladysmith. The articles were not even tallied or counted as received, in spite of the remonstrances of the consignors; but by means of Kaffir labourers, working night and day, the trucks were off-loaded as fast as possible, and again sent down the line to bring up more food.

STORES AT THE BEGINNING.

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The quantities of the various articles in hand at the beginning of November were as follows:—

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| lbs. | |
| Flour | 979,996 |
| Preserved Meat | 173,792 |
| Biscuits | 142,510 |
| Tea | 23,167 |
| Coffee | 9,483 |
| Sugar | 267,699 |
| Salt | 38,741 |
| Maize | 3,965,400 |
| Bran | 923,948 |
| Oats | 1,270,570 |
| Hay, &c. | 1,864,223 |

and a large amount of medical comforts, such as spirits, wines, arrowroot, sago, beef tea, &c.

In addition to the above we had rice, *ghi*, *goor*, *atta*, &c., for the natives of the Indian contingent. (*Ghi* is clarified butter; *goor*, unrefined sugar; *atta* is whole meal.)

At the beginning of the siege the scale of rations was as follows:—

Bread, 1-1/4 lb, or biscuit, 1 lb.
Meat (fresh), 1-1/4 lb., or preserved meat, 1 lb.
{ Coffee, 1 oz.,
{ or
{ Tea, 1/2 oz.
Sugar, 3 oz.
Salt, 1/2 oz.
Pepper, 1/36 oz.
{ Vegetables (compressed), 1 oz.,
{ or
{ Potatoes, 1/2 lb.

Cheese, bacon, and jams were frequently issued as an extra, in addition to the above.

REQUISITIONING.

The above quantities of articles, large as they appear, would not have sufficed to supply our wants for the long siege. The military authorities therefore very wisely determined at a very early date to make use of the Requisition. This power of seizing at a certain price from their owners all articles required by the troops has to be used very carefully and tactfully, as otherwise the people hide or bury their goods. A civilian, commanding the confidence of the people, was appointed by the local authorities to fix the prices in co-operation with a military officer, who represented the interests of her Majesty's Government. In this way a large quantity of food, &c., was obtained at a fair price. These quantities were:—

Cattle, 1,511.

Goats and sheep, 1,092.

Mealies or maize, 1,517,996 lbs.

Kaffir corn, or a kind of millet, 68,370 lbs.

Boer meal, or coarse wheat-meal, 108,739 lbs.

All spirits and wines were taken and a fair price paid.

In December, when the cases of enteric fever and dysentery began to be very numerous, it was determined to take possession of the milch cows, and to see that the milk was used for the sick alone. So under the supervision and control of Colonel Stoneman and Captain Thompson, a dairy farm was started, and the milk was issued to civilians and soldiers alike on medical certificate. Owing to the scarcity of milk, and to the great necessity for it in cases of enteric and dysentery, the dairy farm is still going (March 23, 1900), the owners of the cows being paid 1s. per quart; a careful account being kept of the milk produced.

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In connection with the requisitioning of cows by Colonel Stoneman, a quaint incident is recorded. A gentleman of Ladysmith of a stubborn temperament on receiving the requisition wrote to Colonel Stoneman in the following terms: "SIR,—Neither you nor any one else shall take my cow. If you want milk for your sick apply to Joubert for it. Get out with you, and get your milk from the Dutch." The cow was promptly taken.

POULTRY AND EGGS.

These soon became very scarce, and the price demanded for eggs was enormous. The highest price reached was L2 10s. for twelve eggs, but they were often sold at sums from 30s. to 44s. per dozen. As eggs were so important a food in the dietary of the sick, it was determined, under the authority of the Lieutenant-General commanding, to requisition the poultry and eggs of those persons who would not sell them at a reasonable rate. A good price was paid to the owners for their eggs and chickens, which were issued only on medical certificate.

A well-known official of the Natal Government Railway had thirty-six tins of condensed milk. At the auction which took place three times a week in the town, 6s. 6d. a tin was offered for this, but the unselfish and unsympathetic owner did not consider this price sufficient; he declined to sell under 7s. 6d. a tin. This fact being brought to the notice of Colonel Stoneman, he requisitioned the whole lot at 10d. a tin.

I have stated that 1,511 cattle were requisitioned from their owners for slaughter purposes. This was a great trial both to the officer who carried out this duty and to the owners. The Kaffir lady Ugumba did not want to part with her pet cow, which was the prop of her house, had been bred up amongst her children, and had lived in the back yard. The white owners discovered suddenly that their cattle were of the very highest breed, and had been specially imported from England or Holland at enormous cost. However, most of these cattle, except milch cows, had to be taken. The proprietors of high-bred stock were directed to claim compensation, over the meat value, from the "Invasion Losses Commission" now sitting.

FAIR SALE.

Colonels Ward and Stoneman having requisitioned considerable quantities of food-stuffs at the beginning of the siege, they determined to sell some of them, such as sugar, sardines, &c., &c., at the same price as was paid. One or two fathers with sick children were supplied with 4 oz. of brandy on medical certificate. There was no liquor to be had in the town, and the fathers with sick children grew in numbers with suspicious rapidity.

In the month of February the pinch began to be felt. Most men were without smiles, and most women were scarcely able to suppress their tears—tears of weakness and exhaustion. The scale of rations was then reduced to a fine point. Many a man begged for suitable food for his sick wife and little baby, many mothers asked for a little milk and sugar for their young children, and many sick men, both at Intombi and in Ladysmith, wrote, or caused to be written, pathetic letters for “anything in the way of food” that could be granted.

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The “Chevril” factory was started to supply soup, jellies, extracts, and even marrow bones made from horses; a sausage factory was instituted; and a biltong factory was run in order to utilise the flesh of horses which would have otherwise died from starvation. A grass-cutting labour gang was organised to go out and (under fire) cut grass and bring it in for our cattle and horses; a wood-cutting labour gang went out daily and cut wood for fuel—being “sniped at” by the Boers constantly; mills were worked by the A.S.C. for the purpose of grinding maize, &c., as food; arrangements were made by the A.S.C. for a pure water supply by means of condensation and filtration; coffee was made by roasting and grinding mealies; the gluten necessary to maize to make bread was supplied by Colman’s starch; and in short nothing was left undone that ingenuity could devise.

LOWEST RATIONS.

And yet, in spite, of all that human power could do, as the days dragged out the supplies grew shorter. The scale of rations, much to the sorrow of the lieutenant-general commanding, had been several times reduced, and once more, on February 27, it was again found necessary to cut them down, with a view to holding out until April if necessary. On that day the ration scale was as follows per man, per day, this being the extreme limit:—

For Whites—Biscuit, 1/4 lb.; Maize meal, 3 oz.

For Indians and Kaffirs—Maize meal, 8 oz.

Europeans—Fresh meat, 1 lb.

Kaffirs—Fresh meat, 1-1/4 lbs. (Chiefly horseflesh.)

For White men—Coffee or tea, 1/12 oz.; pepper, 1/64 oz.; salt, 1/3 oz.; sugar, 1 oz.; mustard, 1/20 oz.; Vinegar, 1/12 gill.

For Indians—a little rice.

The Indian, it will be observed, would have fared the worst, much against the will of the authorities, for he does not eat beef, much less horseflesh.

We had not, however, to spend the month of March on this scale of diet, for to our great joy, about midday on the 28th, we received the following message from General Buller: —“I beat the enemy thoroughly yesterday, and my cavalry is now pursuing as fast as bad roads will permit. I believe the enemy to be in full retreat.” The ration scale was at once doubled, and that evening Lord Dundonald’s cavalry arrived.

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[Illustration: SKETCH PLAN OF COUNTRY SOUTH & WEST OF LADYSMITH]